JOHN BELL--JACKSONIAN REBEL

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John Bell of Tennessee (1796-1869) was an important figure of the "middle period" of American history. Historians have given adequate treatment to Bell's career in the Senate and his campaign for President on the Constitutional Union ticket in 1860 but not to his years in the House of Representatives. This paper offers a study of Bell's earlier career in the House from 1827 to 1841. Bell entered the House as a Jacksonian, but during the course of the Jackson administration, he became alienated from the President. He was a major participant in the political revolt against Jackson in Tennessee, in which a sizable group of disgruntled Jacksonians bolted and joined the new Whig party. This paper investigates the many reasons why Bell split with the Democratic party and allied himself with the Whigs.

There is a conspicuous lack of contemporary information concerning Bell's political career and the motives for his revolt. Bell's personal correspondence and diary were destroyed during the Civil War, but there is a small collection of his correspondence at the Tennessee State Library. Pro-Bell Nashville newspapers of the period are readily available on microfilm to the researcher. The seven-volume collection of Andrew Jackson's correspondence in the *Correspondence of*
Andrew Jackson, ed., John Spencer Bassett (1926-1933), provides a hostile point of view. The microfilmed papers of Andrew Jackson and those of James K. Polk, Jackson's political ally during the Bell-Jackson split, supply additional primary information. A biography of Bell, John Bell of Tennessee by Joseph Parks, (1950) is a useful secondary work.

Bell opposed Felix Grundy, Jackson's hand-picked candidate, for the Seventh Congressional District in the 1826-1827 race and won the election. Even though he was not the administration choice, Bell was an active Jacksonian in the House. Bell voted with the administration on the major issues of the period. He could not, however, side with the President during Jackson's struggle to prevent the rechartering of the Second Bank of the United States. Bell, while following the pro-Bank sentiments of his constituency, fell victim to Jackson's uncompromising approach to the Bank issue. Jackson considered the pro-Bank men in Congress his political enemies and became highly critical of Bell, who tried to remain silent on the Bank.

Bell defeated James K. Polk for the post of Speaker of the House in 1834. Jackson and Polk accused Bell of bargaining with the opposition and the Bank men in the House to secure the speakership. Despite these attacks, Bell still professed to be a Jacksonian. However, in December of 1834, Bell made a move which he knew would seriously damage his position in the Democratic party. He decided to support
Hugh Lawson White, United States Senator from Tennessee, for President. This ran counter to Jackson's wish that Martin Van Buren be his successor. Infuriated by this action, Jackson swore to destroy Bell and White politically in Tennessee. Bell and White, under constant attack by the Jackson-Polk forces, abandoned the Jacksonian party and found their way into the Whig party. The struggle between Bell and Jackson had a profound effect on Tennessee politics. The state never voted a Democratic majority again during the remaining years of Jackson's life.

This study concludes that Bell's break with Jackson manifested a trend in the United States away from Jacksonianism. Bell was an astute and cautious politician. He sensed the trend away from Jacksonianism in Tennessee and mastered a complete political about-face and still remained popular in his home state.
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THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of the North Texas State University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

By

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Denton, Texas

August, 1972
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CHAPTER 1

OPEN, DIRECT AND INDEPENDENT

Few men in American history have inspired such unceasing loyalty and devotion from their friends, and at the same time, such bitter resentment from their foes as did Andrew Jackson. Jackson approached the presidency dogmatically, and he stubbornly demanded faithful support for his policies. The weak coalition of Jackson's early followers, which brought about his election in 1828, represented contradictory interests. The turbulent political developments of the first Jackson administration saw the crumbling of his coalition. Jackson's uncompromising approach to the questions of nullification, tariff and the struggle to recharter the Second Bank of the United States alienated many of his early supporters. During Jackson's presidency, the strongest anti-Jackson feelings emerged from Tennessee. Ironically, the leader of the political revolt in Tennessee was John Bell, who represented Jackson's home district, the Seventh Congressional District, in the House of Representatives. The clash of these two willful and stubborn men is an important development in the politics of the Jackson period. In it one may find the seeds of the organized opposition to Jackson on the national level and the beginnings of the Whig party.
John Bell of Tennessee was in many ways a typical Tennessee gentleman of the mid-nineteenth century. He was a state's rights advocate, a nationalist, westerner, landowner, and financier.¹ This ambitious and deliberate man rose to prominence as a member of both the United States House of Representatives and Senate. Although Bell's term in the Senate and candidacy for the presidency in 1860 stand out as the highlights of his political career, he contributed greatly to the politics of the "middle period" as a leader of the revolt against Andrew Jackson in the 1830's.

John Bell was the second of nine children born to Samuel Bell and Margaret Edminster Bell. Bell's father and grandfather had settled in an area of Davidson County, ten miles southeast of Nashville, on Mill Creek. John Bell was born on the Mill Creek farm on February 14, 1796. In 1810 he enrolled in Cumberland College, and after his graduation in 1814, he became a law student. At the age of twenty, Bell was admitted to the bar and went into partnership with J. J. White in Franklin, Tennessee. The next year Bell decided to go into politics and ran successfully for the state senate. During the session of 1817, Bell became interested in obtaining two 100,000 acre tracts of land for

establishment of colleges and academies. The measure was defeated largely because of the legislators' hesitancy to uproot the settlers. Bell realized, however, that he had entered politics too early in life, and he declined to run for re-election.²

Bell met and married Sarah L. Dickinson while residing in Franklin. Bell's new wife was the granddaughter of Hardee Murfree of Rutherford County. The Dicksons and the Murfrees were well-to-do families of the area and had substantial political strength. This marriage proved to be quite beneficial to Bell, especially when he re-entered politics in 1826.³ Bell then moved to Nashville and formed a new law partnership with Henry Crabb. From this point until his re-entry into politics, Bell enjoyed the life of a successful Tennessee lawyer and gentleman.

John Bell entered national politics in 1826 amid the interesting and fervid four-year campaign of Andrew Jackson for the presidency. Jackson's supporters in Tennessee were consumed with a desire to avenge the "corrupt bargain" of the 1824 election and defeat John Quincy Adams in 1828. During this campaign Sam Houston, the incumbent of the Seventh Congressional District, comprising Davidson, Rutherford, and Williamson counties, announced his plans

²Ibid., p. 230.
³Ibid., p. 231.
to run for Governor in 1826. The first candidate to announce his intentions to succeed Houston in the House was Felix Grundy.

The Nashville district had many strong political leaders, but except for Jackson, none were more popular or better known than Felix Grundy. Grundy had moved to Tennessee in 1807 from Kentucky and was elected to the House in 1810 and again in 1812. He was one of the famed "War Hawks" of 1812, and Federalist opponents attributed the War of 1812 to the "firm of Madison, Grundy, and the Devil." Grundy resigned from Congress after serving four years but was anxious to get back into the whirl of national politics. Andrew Jackson was an outspoken and avid supporter of Grundy's candidacy. 4

In a circular printed on September 25, 1826, John Bell declared that he was also a candidate for the Seventh Congressional District. In this open letter to the constituents of the district, Bell promised to support Jackson. He strongly condemned the "corrupt bargain" between Henry Clay and John Quincy Adams which had "cheated" Jackson out of the presidency in 1825. When the House elected Adams over Jackson, the "first and best principle of the Constitution was violated and trodden under foot." For the sake of national safety, Bell declared that the Adams administration

must be defeated. The intrigues of the recent election were like those of "minions and ministers of princes, whose thrones are supported by the prostitution of the public morals." It was fortunate that the people had a weapon in the form of Andrew Jackson to destroy the administration, for Jackson's "purposes are admitted to be always pure."

Bell believed that "to aid in placing such a man, from any part of the Union, at the head of affairs . . . is not only in accordance with my private inclinations, but would be felt to be part of my public duty." Bell promised that his political activity, should he be placed in the position of congressional leadership would be "open, direct, and independent." He stated that he did not wish to follow the path of those who were political manipulators: "The by-paths into which intrigue and management lead, I have never known, further than to avoid the snares set by those who pursue them."  

In the campaign Grundy's supporters often questioned Bell's friendship for Jackson and repeatedly branded Bell an Adams-Clay man. The charge was not well-founded, but Grundy knew that the most damaging stigma placed on any candidate for office in Tennessee was a hint or rumor that the man was friendly to the Adams administration.

Bell issued a second appeal for votes in March of 1827.

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5 John Bell, "To the Seventh Congressional District," 25 September 1826, James K. Polk Papers, on microfilm, North Texas State University, Denton, Texas. Hereinafter cited as NTSU.
In an open letter Bell again avowed his support for Jackson. He listed the political views which he had followed consistently throughout his long career in public service. He advocated a weak chief executive who should only serve one term. Bell opposed the President appointing Congressmen to office, and, as a strict interpreter of the Constitution, saw a need for a strong separation of powers. He opposed a high tariff and considered the "insatiable thirst and scramble for office" a terrible disease. As a staunch state's rights advocate, he called for the federal government to return its treasury surplus to the states for distribution.6

Bell also showed support for Jackson when he participated in a Jackson celebration in Nashville. A series of toasts enabled politicians to air their views. Bell joined in the toasts and directed his toast to the Grundy supporters: "The indignant murmurs which precede the distinct and full utterance of a free but insulted people's will—more terrible to the guilty statesman than the battle's din or tempest's roar."7

The electioneering continued, and the voting took place in August of 1827. Bell won by a majority of 1000 votes, drawing his heaviest majorities in Rutherford and Williamson

6 Nashville Republican and State Gazette, 31 March 1827, on microfilm, Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth, Texas.

7 National Banner and Nashville Whig, 7 July 1827, on microfilm, Amon Carter Museum.
Counties. Bell had lived in both of these counties and had close family ties there. He also carried Davidson County, Grundy's home county, but by only 150 votes. Bell probably won because he had the support of both William Carroll, a tremendously popular Governor of Tennessee who could not succeed himself, and Sam Houston, who was successful in his bid to follow Carroll. When Jackson went to the polls, he openly marked a ballot in favor of Felix Grundy for everyone to see. This made it quite obvious whom he supported. Jackson was somewhat foolish to show such a definite preference for Grundy. Either a Bell or Grundy victory would have put a Jacksonian into office. Jackson, however, although allowing his wishes to be known, did not cause the breach between Bell and himself at this time.

Bell's friends advised him again to show his support for Jackson because Adams' supporters were using the Tennessee congressional results to damage the Jackson campaign. They contended that Grundy's defeat indicated a lack of Jacksonian strength in Tennessee and a trend toward Adams. Bell spoke out against Adams by declaring that a continuation of the party in power "would be incompatible with the safety and well-being of our political institutions." Bell was highly laudatory of Jackson. He spoke of Jackson's exceptional administrative qualities, of his "patriotic and

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8Nashville Republican and State Gazette, 7, 23 August 1827.
incorruptible" spirit and of his constant willingness to let the public good overshadow his own private considerations. Nevertheless, a somewhat disgruntled Bell turned his attention to Washington and the new congressional session, probably nursing a wounded pride.

The Twentieth Congress, which convened on December 3, 1827, was busy with political activity. Bell joined the Tennessee delegation which contained James K. Polk, a friend of Felix Grundy, David Crockett, the celebrated frontiersman, and six nonentities. The first session was a constant political game between the pro-Jackson and pro-Adams members of the House. Each side wished to discredit the other. The players of this game used the workings of government to further their own ends.

The Adams men made the first move when John Sloane, an Adams-Clay supporter from Ohio, demanded that Congress hold an investigation of the execution of six Tennessee militiamen during the War of 1812. This affair involved some 200 Tennessee militiamen who were court-martialed in Mobile in December of 1814 for mutiny. Six of the ring-leaders were convicted and sentenced to death. Jackson received the court-martial proceedings en route to New Orleans. After studying them carefully, he sent a lengthy memorandum approving the sentences and ordered the executions

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9Ibid., 21 September 1827.
to go into effect. The incident had been revived in the election of 1824 in the infamous "Coffin Hand Bill." The handbill was designed to assassinate Jackson's character. Sloane was bringing up the issue again in an attempt to question the military career of Jackson and prove that Jackson had been incompetent in his handling of the affair.

Bell acted promptly to defend Jackson. He addressed the House by saying that the purpose of the Sloane resolution might be "to arraign the character of a distinguished citizen." Bell also felt a sense of duty to regard this as an unmerited and unjust attack. He did this for Jackson just as he would for any other citizen of his district who was not there to participate in his own defense. Bell went on to expose the resolution as a scheme to discredit Jackson.

Bell was not sympathetic with the attempts of Jackson's supporters to level blows at Adams. The Jacksonians tried to embarrass the administration by demanding an investigation and retrenchment of the administration to expose extravagance. Once again Bell addressed the House and declared that it was appropriate to investigate administrative expenditures, but it was clear that this action was merely a political move, not an honest show of concern over alleged extravagance.


Bell warned the House to refrain from this type of politicking and thus "make the floor an electioneering campus." Congress should not, according to Bell, degrade itself in this way "by consuming itself in the heat of the controversy, and vomit forth, through the channel of the newspapers, upon the people of this union, the poison of our own gall, to embitter and stir them up to a like useless rage."  

Bell participated extensively along with Representatives Polk and Crockett during the debate over a Tennessee land bill. The land claims of Tennessee went back to 1790 when North Carolina had ceded Tennessee to the United States. North Carolina still held an area in northern Tennessee to satisfy the land claims of her Revolutionary War veterans. In 1796, when Tennessee became a state, North Carolina was still issuing land grants in Tennessee. The matter was settled in 1806 when the federal government stepped in as arbiter and satisfied the claims of both sides. 

James K. Polk addressed the House at length about a problem that resulted from the earlier dispute. Because of mismanagement of this portion of the public domain, no lands had been set aside for public education. Polk wished to have Congress make up the 421,729 acre deficit in school lands by handing over unsold lands for education. Polk pointed out that cession of these lands was to satisfy a

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12Ibid., pp. 1246-51.
just claim and was not a donation. These were poor lands, but if carefully managed, they would produce enough revenue for public education.¹³

David Crockett also addressed the House concerning these lands. Crockett, who would later lose his life at the Alamo in Texas, was the Representative of certain poor western Tennessee farmers. He colorfully described the rocky, woody, hilly region of western Tennessee and the plight of poor farmers who worked the soil. Crockett believed that in this area, the $1.25 price per acre for the land was outrageous. The cession, in other words, would be wise because the price of the land could be lowered considerably after Tennessee acquired the land. Crockett wished to see a way for these lands to benefit public education, but he was more interested in the possibility that the lands could be sold at a "just price" to the poor settlers.¹⁴

Bell entered the debate by explaining that he had definite ideas about the subject of public education. He mentioned that the precedent for the land cession was set in the provisions of the Ordinance of 1787, in which "schools and the means of education should be forever encouraged." According to Bell, territory carved from the southwestern

¹³Ibid., pp. 2496-2500.
¹⁴Ibid., pp. 2518-20.
lands also came under this obligation. Since the United States government was bound to insure means of education in a territory, then the obligation remained until sufficient means of education could be proved. Bell pointed out that the provisions for public education in Tennessee were far inferior to any in the states founded after the original thirteen states ceded their western lands. He emphasized that since Tennessee had become a state, more than half the legislation passed by Congress for Tennessee had pertained to settling these land claims. The value of the remaining lands could not even compensate for the expense and time that Congress would have to devote to settling future land claims. The proper course, Bell suggested, would be to cede the lands to Tennessee so that they could be used in the interest of public education.\textsuperscript{15}

The debate over the Tennessee land claims continued with Polk and Bell stressing public education and Crockett siding with the poor settlers. Crockett had lost his enthusiasm for public schools by this time. The Tennessee delegation began bickering over technicalities within the land bill. The division of the Representatives ruined whatever chance Tennessee had of securing these lands. Crockett was alienated permanently from the Jacksonians and soon became a leading member of the opposition.

\textsuperscript{15}Ibid., pp. 2524-39.
The discussion of a bill to repair and maintain the Cumberland Road was concurrent with that over the Tennessee land bill. The bill, if enacted, would have set up toll gates for sufficient revenue to keep the road in good repair. Originally, the Cumberland Road was an important part of the system of federally-funded internal improvements. Since the War of 1812, some Republicans had favored Henry Clay's American System, but others remained loyal to the principle of strict construction of the Constitution. John Bell belonged to the latter group. He stated frankly: "If you grant the power to make the road, I see no constitutional impediment to the erection of toll gates." Bell continued to say that the error was in the notion that Congress originally had the power to construct the road. Those who favored internal improvements justified the Cumberland Road by claiming that Congress had the power to establish post roads. Bell declared that this argument could not be applied to the new bill.\(^{16}\)

Bell's first term in Congress ended, and in the eyes of many of his constituents, he had distinguished himself. He impressed those who anxiously followed his debates in the House which were reprinted in the Nashville press. His arguments on the Cumberland Road Bill must have seemed

\(^{16}\) Ibid., 20th Cong., 2nd Sess., 1828, pp. 339-50.
especially impressive. He returned home to busy himself with personal affairs and to campaign for a second term as Representative from Tennessee.
CHAPTER 2

RELUCTANT JACKSONIAN

Andrew Jackson became the seventh President of the United States in March of 1829. No one gave clearer evidence of support for the new President than did John Bell. Bell had shown this inclination earlier during his first term in Congress, when he consistently opposed legislative interference in presidential politics. Jackson must have reacted favorably to Bell’s vigorous opposition to the proposed investigation of the 1812 Mobile court-martial. The Jackson-Bell relationship was based on a weak foundation; Jackson needed congressional support, and Bell, as a young Congressman, needed prestige. This was the extent of their friendship, for Jackson never invited Bell into his circle of close friends and never consulted Bell on matters of policy or political patronage.¹

Bell’s first opportunity to gain national recognition as a Jacksonian was his rise to the chairmanship of the Committee on Indian Affairs. He held this position throughout the terms of Jackson and Martin Van Buren. As chairman of the Committee on Indian Affairs, Bell found himself

entangled in the great controversy surrounding the Indians of the Southeast. For three decades the United States government had been faced with the problem of two races trying to occupy land within the same area. The result was the highly controversial Indian Removal Bill which John Bell sponsored in the House of Representatives.

The government's Indian policy was largely formulated by the white man's attitude toward the Indians. At first the solution to the Indian question was to try to civilize the Indians by changing them from their nomadic life as hunters to the settled life of farmers. In this way Indians could be absorbed into American society. After the Indians learned domestic skills, the next task was to educate them and make them Christians. Protestant groups, with the aid of the government, set up successful missionary schools.  

This Christian spirit soon was dampened by the persistent greed of whites for land which generated the removal policy. The Jacksonians cannot be totally held responsible for the removal policy. For generations American frontiersmen had developed a hatred for the Indians. This hatred, coupled with avarice for the Indians' lands, brought about the suggestion that the Indians be removed to an area far away from white civilization. During the administrations of

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James Monroe and John Quincy Adams, the Committee on Indian Affairs tried unsuccessfully to secure passage of bills to remove the Indians to designated lands west of the Mississippi River.\(^3\)

Andrew Jackson saw the removal policy to a successful conclusion. Jackson considered the earlier Indian policy weak because the government was not strong enough to keep peace any other way. The Georgia-Cherokee controversy convinced Jackson that removal was the best solution to the Indian problem. In 1802 Georgia ceded her western lands to the United States in return for the assurance that the government would turn over the Cherokee lands to Georgia. Meanwhile, the Cherokee in Georgia had become highly civilized and were successful farmers. Finally on July 26, 1827, the Cherokee Nation adopted a constitution asserting that the Cherokee were sovereign and independent people. The Georgia legislature moved against the Cherokee and enacted its own laws designed to force the Cherokee off their land. A temporary settlement came in favor of the Cherokee in the Supreme Court decision *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia*. This decision declared that all treaties with the Indians were constitutional and that state laws in Indian affairs were unconstitutional. This suspended Georgia's activities against the Cherokee temporarily.\(^4\)

\(^3\)Ibid., pp. 224-33.

\(^4\)Ibid., pp. 227-28.
When Jackson became President, Georgia made a new move against the Cherokee. The Georgia legislature passed a law in late 1828 which added Cherokee lands to certain north-western Georgia counties. In June of 1830 Georgia passed laws declaring Cherokee laws and customs null and void. Jackson told Cherokee envoys that he supported Georgia's position. At Jackson's request, the federal government began its tragic policy of Indian removal.

In his first annual message to Congress, Jackson pointed to the existing conditions of the Indian tribes. He explained that the government's role had always been to expose the Indian to civilization "in hope of reclaiming them from a wandering life." The opposite had occurred during the past few years as the Indians had been pushed farther into the wilderness, and "retained their savage habits." According to Jackson, more civilized tribes like the Cherokee had attempted to set up independent nations in Georgia and Alabama. The government, therefore, warned these tribes either to migrate west of the Mississippi River or obey the laws of the two states. If the Indians decided to stay in those states, their subjection to white civilization would probably destroy their vigor. "Humanity and honor" then dictated that the government take steps to avoid such a disaster. Jackson then recommended that an

\[5\text{Ibid.}, \ p. \ 231.\]
area of land be designated west of the Mississippi for the Indians to settle on as long as they cared to do so. The Indians, therefore, had a choice either to migrate or stay and be subjected to the laws of the state in which they lived.6

Bell was not extremely bigoted toward Indians, but he did not feel that they had abstract rights. Nevertheless, he had to deal with the Indian problem when Jackson's message was referred to the Committee on Indian Affairs. As chairman, Bell submitted a report about the Indian problem to the House on February 24, 1830. The Committee on Indian Affairs stated that the British government had never given the Indian rights which had to be recognized by whites. This was also true of the colonial governments set up by the settlers. The whites had made treaties with the Indians because of a desire to create peace and trade agreements rather than to recognize Indian sovereignty. Furthermore, many tribes had recognized the sovereignty of Great Britain and had later agreed to become wards of the United States. Therefore, this voluntary submission to the United States government and the absence of Indian rights gave the committee its power to carry out Jackson's recommendations. The Committee agreed with Jackson that migration would be

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the best way for the Indians to obtain physical and moral improvement and reverse their apparent misery.  

Bell authored both the House report and the removal bill. The bill stipulated that land west of the Mississippi be divided into districts where different tribes could go after they agreed to exchange their eastern lands for the new lands. After the Indians had vacated these lands, they would be given back to the states. The United States would guarantee these western lands for the Indians and their successors as long as they occupied them. The land then would revert back to the United States if the Indians became extinct or abandoned the land. The government would provide protection and funds to support the Indians for one year after the migration. Finally, a superintendent would be appointed to supervise the settlements in the West.

The bill provoked a heated sectional controversy. Eastern and northwestern representatives denounced it as a product of the white man's greed rather than an honest attempt to help the Indian. The debate shattered party lines, as Pennsylvania Jacksonians completely deserted the administration. In a letter to his Tennessee friend, John Overton, Bell expressed grief over the controversy. "We are dreadfully troubled here by our division among ourselves.

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8Ibid., pp. 1133-36.
All is not right nor is likely to be so. Things do not go to please me, but still I shall do all I can do. To a great extent, Bell's management enabled the removal bill to finally pass the House on May 25, 1830, by a vote of 102 to 97. The bill had already passed the Senate on April 26 by a vote of 28 to 19. The miserable plight of the southern Indians was a frequent topic of discussion among the House members for several months. About a year later Edward Everett of Massachusetts tried unsuccessfully to get the House to repeal the bill. Bell, who apparently did not appreciate the red man's love for his native soil, answered the attacks of Everett on the removal policy. Bell erroneously insisted that the Cherokee of Georgia, for example, lived in a "most squalid and miserable condition; no further advanced in civilization, or in the arts of social life, than their ancestors of a century ago." The Indians were not and could not benefit from the white man's civilization. A few whites were even slithering into the confidence of the

\[9\] Bell to Overton, 27 December 1830, Claybrooke Collection of the John Overton Papers, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.


\[11\] Bell probably possessed some of this white man's greed, for he did some speculating himself in the ceded lands in Tennessee. Some of the Bell family already lived in Choctaw country. See Parks, John Bell of Tennessee, p. 40.
Indians and getting rich at their expense. The removal scheme still seemed to be the best answer to the problem.\textsuperscript{12}

At the same time as the debate over the removal policy, Congress was also discussing the question of investment of $150,000 in federal funds in the Maysville, Washington, Paris and Lexington Turnpike Road Company. The argument was over the question of whether the Constitution permitted such an expenditure of federal money. Advocates of the bill were not sure how Jackson stood, although he had questioned the government's right to encroach on state sovereignty. Jackson did veto the Maysville Road Bill on the grounds that it was definitely a local rather than national matter. In addition to that argument, Jackson pointed out that a great expenditure by the federal government on internal improvements required a substantial treasury surplus. If such a surplus occurred, it would seem to be in order to lower taxes. Nevertheless, Jackson emphasized that if the people wanted to spend federal money on improvements projects, then they should amend the Constitution to give Congress that power.\textsuperscript{13}

\textsuperscript{12}Register of Debates, House, 21st Cong., 2nd Sess., 1831, pp. 774-75.

\textsuperscript{13}Richardson, ed., Messages and Papers, 3:1046. Also see, Carlton Jackson, "The Internal Improvements Vetoes of Andrew Jackson," Tennessee Historical Quarterly 25(1966): 262-63, for an explanation of the political implications of the veto. The Maysville Road would run through Kentucky, and this, combined with Jackson's hatred of Henry Clay, prompted the veto.
Bell supported Jackson's veto in the House. If the people of the United States disapproved of Jackson's veto, they could use their vote in the next election to show this. Bell tried to convince the House that Jackson was not against all improvements, although the President was opposed to the "present unequal and distracting mode of appropriating the public treasure." Bell assured the Representatives that Jackson would support all improvement expenditures if Congress had the power to make improvement laws through the passage of an amendment to the Constitution.\textsuperscript{14}

An attempt by the House to override the Maysville Road veto resurrected the Indian removal controversy. William Stanbery of Ohio attacked Jackson's veto and declared that Jackson's move was "artfully contrived" to deceive the public. Stanbery called the veto a "low, electioneering document" and declared the whole affair to be reminiscent of the same pressure put on by the administration during debates over the Indian removal bill. Bell immediately answered the Ohioan's accusation by denying that the removal bill had political undertones. Actually, Jackson had "dared take the course he did, because he loved his country." Those who supported the bill did not do so under political pressure but for higher and nobler reasons. They considered

\textsuperscript{14}Register of Debates, House, 21st Cong., 1st Sess., 1830, pp. 1145-47.
the Indians' welfare and, above all other considerations, "the honor of the country."  

During these earlier days of the Jackson administration, certainly none of Jackson's friends nor Jackson himself could find fault with Bell's actions in Congress. Bell even remained loyal and uncommitted during a controversy which shattered the entire administration. When Jackson's Secretary of War, John Eaton, married the notorious Peggy O'Neale and tried to establish her in the ranks of the genteel ladies of Washington, a great dispute arose. The affair, which ended in the dissolution of the entire cabinet, was really an attempt by Calhoun to purge Eaton from the cabinet and only manifested the growing disunity of the already loose Jackson coalition. Bell made no recorded statement concerning this. One could only assume that he saw no desire to become involved in a matter which was dividing his friends. There is some evidence that Jackson might have considered Bell as a possible candidate to fill one of the recently-vacated cabinet posts. Hugh Lawson White of Tennessee declined Jackson's offer for the position of Secretary of War and recommended Bell for the post.

15Ibid., pp. 1140-47.

William B. Lewis, adviser to the President and resident of the White House, estimated that Bell would be offered the post of Attorney General.  

Bell did not receive a cabinet seat, but he was definitely a friend of the administration. He easily won re-election to the House in 1832 with no opposition. He returned to Washington for the Twenty-second Congress in an amiable mood. However, the introduction of the bill on January 9, 1832, to recharter the Second Bank of the United States soon dampened that mood.

The struggle to recharter the Second Bank of the United States was one of the most turbulent developments of the Jackson administration. Although possessing little sense of public finance, Jackson opposed the Bank and entered the controversy as part of a personal struggle with the Bank's president, Nicholas Biddle. Guided by hard money economics and fear of central banking operations, Jackson held to a personal campaign against "special privileges." To illustrate his ignorance of banking policy, in an audience with James A. Hamilton, Alexander Hamilton's son, Jackson

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17 Hugh Lawson White to William Vaulx et al, 22 August 1836, in Nashville Republican and State Gazette, 6 September 1836, on microfilm, Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth, Texas.

18 William B. Lewis to Amos Kendall, 25 May 1831, Amos Kendall-William B. Lewis Correspondence, Tennessee State Library.

19 Parks, John Bell of Tennessee, p. 46.

blurted out, "Colonel, your Father was not in favor of the Bank of the United States." Nevertheless, Jackson became alarmed by the inequities of the "monster" and close-minded to the idea of reform and outlined a course to kill the Bank. He did this with the same vigor and relentlessness that he might have pursued and killed an Indian or a Redcoat.

The National Bank had been chartered on May 10, 1816. The Bank suffered from mismanagement under the first two presidents, Captain William Jones and Langdon Cheves. In 1823 the Bank acquired a new president, Nicholas Biddle. Biddle saw the Bank's political and economic capabilities and used them shrewdly to battle the most powerful individual in the country, Andrew Jackson.22

Early in the conflict the Bank had been shrouded in rumors about corrupt management in individual branches. The Bank also was drawing criticism because of its occasionally ruthless practices. The pressure and power of the Bank could be felt in subtle ways. The Bank could single out any state chartered institution, and in the event that that bank was issuing too much paper money in ratio to specie available, the Bank would collect all of the state bank's notes and demand payment for them in gold. Since the state bank would never be able to pay such a lump sum, it would be forced to foreclose mortgages and call in loans and often go

21 Ibid., p. 49.
22 Ibid., pp. 22-27.
bankrupt. In late 1829 Jackson asked Congress to consider ways and means of curbing the Bank's power.\(^{23}\)

Biddle saw his beloved institution being attacked and refused to sit idly by and see it threatened. He was anxious for some confrontation with the President as a show of strength. Meanwhile, Jackson was not eager to have the Bank issue stirred up since the election year 1832 was approaching. Early in 1832 Biddle enlisted the help of the pro-Bank members of Congress to pass the bill to recharter the Bank which was not due to expire until 1836. Jackson vetoed the Bank bill on July 10, 1832, and Congress upheld Jackson's veto.\(^{24}\) Soon Jackson devised a scheme to remove all federal deposits from the Bank and deposit them into "pet banks."

The Bank issue ultimately caused a permanent rift between Jackson and Bell. Evidence seems to reveal that in the early months of the debate before the Bank veto, Bell probably favored the Second Bank. Nicholas Biddle remained in close touch with his confidant in Washington, Nicholas Cadwalader, about the attitude of several doubtful Congressmen. Cadwalader mentioned Bell in his correspondence with Biddle.\(^{25}\) On December 21, 1831, Cadwalader wrote that Bell

\(^{23}\)Ibid.

\(^{24}\)Richardson, ed., Messages and Papers, 3:1140-53.

"will vote with us if he can."

Bell probably realized that his role in administration prevented him from voting for the Bank and coming out against Jackson openly on the Bank issue. From the tone of Cadwalader’s remarks he probably understood this. Bell had to decide if he wanted to make a definite stand on the Bank question at this point. Soon he entered the debate in the House.

Before Congress could act on the Bank recharter, Bank opponents in the House stalled the measure by introducing a resolution which would lead to a thorough investigation of the Bank in its existing form. Augustin S. Clayton of Georgia introduced a resolution on February 23, 1832, calling for a committee to carry out the investigation. Clayton enumerated fifteen alleged abuses of the Bank, which, if proved, would be sufficient grounds to prevent a recharter. Clayton accused the Bank of not cashing its own notes, and he pointed out that there was not a free flow of notes from the mother bank to the branch banks and vice versa. This practice was bringing about an intolerable situation because the notes of the mother bank were discounted at many branch banks. This proves that the Bank was not providing "sound and uniform currency." Clayton also pointed out that there was an accumulation of proxies in the hands of a few to control the election of the Bank’s directors. The Bank apparently had too many debts and was issuing too many notes.

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26 Cadwalader to Biddle, 25 December 1831, ibid., p. 156.
on the public deposits. This created an unsound economic situation in the South and West because the gold and silver of these regions was being drawn to the East.\textsuperscript{27}

The Clayton Resolution prompted Bell to make his first speech on the Bank issue. He pointed out to the House that an investigation was both "proper and desirable" since it fulfilled the public's desire to learn the true condition of the Bank. He agreed that any abuses of the Bank should be made public. A new charter would be the ideal way to cure those abuses. In fact, if all of Clayton's charges "should be established, they would still not be conclusive against the recharter of the same bank, or of a new one." Bell further explained that he did not favor an investigation which was designed to destroy the Bank. He called the timing of the resolution inappropriate and expressed a desire that the whole matter be postponed until the next session of Congress. Bell made his sentiments known about the rechartering measure when he said that he favored the power of the government to correct "a vitiated, excessive, or fluctuating currency; and I hope that the proposition to recharter the present bank will assume such a shape that I can give my vote in favor of it."\textsuperscript{28}

\textsuperscript{27} Register of Debates, 22nd Cong., 1st Sess., 1832, p. 1845.

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., pp. 2076-87.
Bell said that he had listened to speakers on both sides of the debate attempt to analyze the position of Jackson as expressed in his messages to Congress. One group declared that Jackson would definitely oppose the recharter of the Bank in any form. The other seemed to think that Jackson would approve any bill that the Congress might pass. Jackson, on the other hand, had not really expressed his intentions and probably would act "under a full and solemn sense of his responsibility to the country—upon a deliberate consideration of all the great interests connected with the question, and in perfect consistency with his own character." Regardless of whatever stand Jackson took on the issue, the people would "still sustain him, upon the ground of their confidence in his integrity, and in the wisdom of his course in relation to other great interests of the country."²⁹

Bell continued by stating that a recharter four years in advance of the expiration date of 1836 was unwise. The Bank under its new charter written in 1832 might not be able to meet the economic demands of later years. It would be advantageous, therefore, to delay as long as possible a decision on the measure. In addition, Bell suggested that a postponement of the bill would give everyone time to hear the voices of the people uttered through the next

²⁹Ibid.
Congress. Both the proponents and opponents of the Bank might then receive the proof of a more definite public opinion.  

The Biddle forces decided to press on without delay and push the bill for recharter through the House and Senate. Largely through the management of Henry Clay and Daniel Webster, the Senate passed the bill by a vote of 28 to 20 on June 11, 1832. Three weeks later, the bill passed the House by a vote of 107 to 85. Bell voted against the recharter. Jackson confided in his political associate, Martin Van Buren, "The Bank is trying to kill me, but I will kill it." Jackson vetoed the bill in a fiery message and pledged to stand against "the advancement of the few at the expense of the many." 

At the same time that Clay and the National Republicans were pushing the Bank bill through Congress, they also were active in readjusting the tariff rates. The "abominable" Tariff of 1828 could scarcely be defended by the most rabid advocates of the protective system because the rates on certain goods were exorbitantly high. Van Buren had concocted

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30 Ibid.

31 Ibid., Senate, p. 1073; ibid., House, p. 3852.


33 Richardson, ed., Messages and Papers, 3:1140-54.
a tariff bill which was political in nature to get votes from the Northeast and Northwest for Jackson in 1828. By 1832 a new tariff law was desperately needed to relieve the high rates of the Tariff of Abominations.\(^{34}\)

Debates began in both the House and the Senate over the new tariff proposals. In the House John Quincy Adams of Massachusetts introduced a bill calling for high rates on items which were directly competitive to American-produced goods and low or no rates on non-competitive articles. This measure eventually became the tariff bill of 1832.

John Bell entered the tariff debates with the lengthiest speech of his congressional career. Bell expressed his fear for the safety of the Union if the proposal passed. A slight increase in profit from the sale of more American goods was not worth the consequences of this measure. Already, some areas of the country were discussing probable dissolution of the Union. Now the "domestic peace" of the nation and "liberty itself" was being threatened by the "thirst for accumulation and the desire of personal distinction, avarice, and ambition."\(^{35}\)

Bell described the struggle since the adoption of the Constitution in 1789 between the strict and loose constructionists. In every political battle over a valid interpretation

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\(^{34}\) Remini, _Andrew Jackson_, p. 103.

\(^{35}\) _Register of Debates_, 22nd Cong., 1st Sess., 1832, p. 3348.
of the Constitution, a group of moderates had always emerged to give the government a "spirit of moderation and compromise." Bell considered himself one of these moderates in the tariff debate. He opposed Clay's so-called "American System," of which protective tariff was a part. Bell declared that this system was in direct violation to the interests and principles of the United States. The true American policy should favor equality and attempt to shatter the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few. The "accumulation of overgrown individual fortunes," Bell continued, was a "positive national evil." Tariff laws promoted this "evil."  

Bell continued his address by tracing the development of the protective tariff since the War of 1812. The original petitions for the tariff called for moderate protection. The Panic of 1819 had seemed to indicate that additional protection would cure the nation's economic ills. This was a "disastrous day" for the United States. Since 1824, Bell explained, one section had profited "at the expense of the labor and capital of others." The government, therefore, had promoted a devastating sectional war rather than providing for the general welfare. In this war the North and East had emerged victorious with their luxurious cities. The Southwest was holding its own fairly well, but southern farmers were being ruined by exhausted soil, low farm prices, and high prices for northern industrial goods. Bell

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36 Ibid., pp. 3348-86.
maintained that the protective system had not furnished markets for farm products by stimulating the growth of factories and towns as protectionists had advocated. He concluded his remarks by saying that through the protective system, "the poor are made poorer and the rich richer. It is a false theory, a fatally false theory, which maintains that the tax imposed by the protective policy falls equally upon the capital and labor of the country."37

The Tariff of 1832 passed the House on June 28, 1832, by a vote of 122 to 65 and passed the Senate by an earlier vote of 32 to 16. The rates of the bill hovered near those imposed by the Tariff of 1828. It was not a low tariff, but it included several items on the free list that were not on the 1828 tariff list. Duties remained high on iron, wool, woolens, and hemp. Cotton, porcelain, sugar, salt, coal, and paper remained at the previous 57 per cent ad valorem rate.38

The tariff measure of 1832 did temper earlier tariff laws. Bell undoubtedly opposed the protective system, but nevertheless he voted for the 1832 bill.39 He was probably in favor of the bill because of the new items put on the free list, which gave some slight relief. The administration reacted favorably to Bell's activities in the tariff debate.

37 Ibid.
38 Ibid., Senate, pp. 1211-16; ibid., House, p. 3809.
39 Ibid., Senate, p. 1212. 
The official Jackson newspaper, the *Globe*, referred to his speech as "eloquent." 40

Bell also received praise on his speech from the eccentric Mrs. Anne Royall, a writer of the small newspaper, *Paul Pry*. Mrs. Royall was a frequent critic of the politicians of Washington, but Bell struck her fancy in the tariff debate. She called Bell the "champion of the people's rights" and an accomplished debater. His arguments were "convincing" and his reasoning was "clear and strong. . . . If he is not already, the time is near at hand when Mr. Bell will have few equals in the House. He improves every session. His fine appearance and his dignified manner command respect." 41

Bell returned home at the end of the first session of the Twenty-second Congress to be by the bedside of his wife who died on September 28, 1832, leaving five children. 42 At his return, Bell enjoyed the support and adoration of his constituents. He was quite popular at home, but his relationship with the President was beginning to be strained.

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40 *Washington Globe*, 11 June 1832, on microfilm, NTSU.

41 *Washington Paul Pry*, 4 August 1832, as quoted in Parks, *John Bell of Tennessee*, p. 56.

42 *Nashville Republican and State Gazette*, 3 October 1832.
CHAPTER 3

THE TARIFF, THE BANK, THE SPEAKERSHIP

AND A CAUTIOUS BELL

Andrew Jackson was overwhelmingly re-elected to the presidency in 1832 over Henry Clay and William Wirt. Jackson saw the election results as a vote of confidence for his views and administrative policies. National politics for the next four years would be as stormy as they had been during the previous four years. The Jackson political machine began to show signs of stress as one struggle after another tested administration strength.

One of the greatest tests of administration strength occurred shortly after Jackson's re-election. A South Carolina delegate convention, imbued with the philosophy of John C. Calhoun, issued its Ordinance of Nullification. This ordinance declared the Tariffs of 1828 and 1832 null and void and was the culmination of general grievances in the South against the protective tariff and fear of federal interference with slavery.¹ The tariff question had been a serious problem during the 1820's. In 1828 Calhoun wrote the Exposition and Protest in which he stated that the state

governments could nullify any federal law which the state considered unconstitutional. Daniel Webster and Robert Y. Hayne debated the doctrine of nullification before the Senate in January of 1830. Jackson remained silent on the issue until April, when he offered his momentous toast at the Jefferson Birthday Dinner—"Our Federal Union: it must be preserved." Jackson was obliged to fulfill his statement after the appearance of South Carolina's Ordinance of Nullification. In Jackson's Nullification Proclamation, he promised to enforce all federal laws in each state, believing this was the only way to preserve the Union.2

Nullification was a highly emotional issue. Many Jacksonians supported nullification, many did not. Some even opposed high tariffs but also opposed nullification. The issue cut across party lines. Jackson's policy toward nullification was an obvious assault against state's rights. There had to be a quick settlement or the nation might face the possible threat of dissolution and civil war.

Jackson's men in Congress began working on a compromise tariff. Gulian C. Verplanck of New York introduced a bill, drawn up with assistance of Secretary of the Treasury Louis McLane and other administration men. The bill was reported by the House Committee on Ways and Means on January 8, 1833.

The bill proposed immediate reductions in duties of 50 per cent by 1834.3

John Bell, quietly observing the nullification controversy, now confided in his friend, John Overton of Nashville, "What we shall do with the tariff I think uncertain, . . . as to the fate of the bill reported by the Committee on Ways and Means, the bill will not pass at least not in the shape it was reported." Bell explained that administration forces would probably not get enough support from the opposition to pass the bill. Even though a settlement was urgently needed, Bell observed that "political consideration and personal hate growing out of [previous] political contests supercede patriotic feelings."4

Meanwhile Jackson acted in defiance of the nullifiers by soliciting the help of Congress to enforce the tariff laws. On January 16, 1833, he sent a message to Congress asking its permission to use the army and navy in his efforts. The message was referred to the Judiciary Committees of both houses. At that time Bell was chairman of the House Judiciary Committee. The Senate committee handed down a Revenue Collection Bill, commonly known as the Force Bill. The House Committee report indicated some irresolution. Bell submitted


4Bell to Overton, 12 January 1833, Claybrooke Collection of the John Overton Papers, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.
the report which he pointed out represented a majority opinion but not a unanimous one. Bell himself was in the minority group. The report stated that force should only be used against South Carolina as a last resort. The report pointed out that the ideal solution would be to modify the tariff law so that it would be acceptable to South Carolina and would therefore eliminate the need for force.5

After the Force Bill passed the Senate, Bell became the sponsor of the bill in the House. Although Bell opposed the Force Bill in principle, he probably sponsored the bill to get back in Jackson's favor. He tried on two occasions to suspend the rules in order to print the Senate bill. Opponents of the Force Bill argued that this was a move by the administration to set aside debate on a new tariff proposal and push the Force Bill through. Bell was finally able to get the bill made the special order for February 26. Before then, however, the House passed a compromise tariff sponsored by Henry Clay which took the place of the Verplanck bill. This bill provided for gradual reductions, at intervals of two years, of all rates in the 1832 tariff which exceeded 20 per cent. The reductions would continue until July of 1842, when there would be a top-level duty rate of 20 per cent.6 The compromise tariff passed the House on

5U. S. Congress, House, Committee on the Judiciary, South Carolina: Revenue Collections, 22nd Cong., 2nd Sess., 8 February 1833, H. R. 85, p. 23.

February 26, 1833 by a vote of 119 to 85. The Senate passed the bill on March 1 by a vote of 29 to 16.\(^7\)

Administration forces were still determined to pass the Force Bill. A heated debate arose on February 26. It was even necessary to adjourn the House for a cooling off period. On the next day the bill passed the House by a vote of 111 to 40. The Senate passed the bill by a vote of 31 to 1.\(^8\) South Carolina promptly nullified the Force Bill but accepted the new tariff. The nation passed this crisis and the threat of civil war dissolved. Bell must have felt some satisfaction in his efforts. He seemed to be back in the good graces of the administration, at least until the Bank issue came up again.

Even though the Bank's charter was destined to expire, Jackson expressed his concern for the government deposits in the Bank. He recommended that there be an investigation of the Bank and that the government sell its remaining shares of the Bank's stock.\(^9\) Jackson secured James K. Polk's help to carry out his recommendations in the House Ways and Means Committee, of which Polk was chairman.\(^10\) The Committee on

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\(^7\)U. S. Congress, House, Register of Debates, 22nd Cong., 2nd Sess., pp. 808-09; ibid., Senate, pp. 1810-11.

\(^8\)Ibid., House, pp. 1766-72, 1811-12, 1817, 1898; ibid., Senate, p. 687.

\(^9\)Richardson, ed., Messages and Papers, 3:1162-63.

\(^10\)Andrew Jackson to James K. Polk, 16 December 1832, James K. Polk Papers, on microfilm, NTSU.
Ways and Means issued majority and minority reports. The House adopted the majority report and passed a resolution stating that the Bank deposits were safe. At the same time, the House voted down a measure sponsored by Polk which would have authorized the government's sale of its remaining Bank stock.\footnote{Register of Debates, 22nd Cong., 2nd Sess., 1833, p. 1936.}

Jackson apparently agreed with Polk's minority report which listed the Bank's shortcomings. In a cabinet meeting in November, Jackson said that he was convinced that the deposits of the government ought to be withdrawn and put into state banks. Attorney General Roger B. Taney approved of this suggestion, but Secretary of the Treasury Louis McLane saw no good reason for this step. Jackson shifted McLane to the State Department and appointed William J. Duane, a Philadelphia lawyer, as Secretary of the Treasury. Jackson took it for granted that Duane would fulfill Jackson's wishes, but Duane had just as much fear of state banks as he did of the National Bank, so he also refused. Duane argued that the House had overwhelmingly voted the deposits safe and that the state banks already had over-inflated currencies. Jackson ignored Duane's arguments, fired him, and appointed Taney as ad interim Secretary of the Treasury. Taney removed federal deposits from the Bank and put them
into "pet banks" in Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York, and Boston.¹²

Although he privately disagreed with Jackson's actions, Bell made no public statement about the Bank policy. There was no doubt concerning the Nashville business community's attitudes. Most of Bell's friends were pro-Bank men and relied heavily on the Bank's Nashville branch to stabilize local business. Polk's House report and Jackson's policy of removing the federal deposits prompted the Nashville businessmen to hold a protest meeting. They were adamant in their feelings that destruction of the Bank might bring the downfall of the state's economy.¹³

Bell definitely was caught in the middle of the struggle. The Bank issue was tugging at his loyalties. Bell could not support the President on the Bank issue, and he could not ignore the feelings of his friends and constituents in Nashville. This uncertainty silenced Bell throughout the long congressional session of 1833-1834. In contrast with his activity in earlier sessions, Bell did not make a single speech.

Jackson's correspondence during this time shows that he was interested in the reasons behind Bell's silence. Jackson wrote extensively to Vice President Martin Van Buren

¹²Van Deusen, The Jacksonian Era, p. 81.
¹³Nashville Banner, 30 April 1833, on microfilm, Memphis State University, Memphis Tennessee.
concerning Bell. The President declared that Bell's silence on the Bank issue hurt him at home politically. "He must come out boldly against a bank and the Bank or he is politically gone." A letter of August 16 related an incident involving a dinner that Jackson's friends in Nashville gave. Jackson proposed a toast:

The true constitutional currency, gold and silver---
It can cover and protect the labor of our country without aid of a national bank, an institution which [is] . . . hostile to the liberties of the people, because its tendency is to associate wealth with an undue power over the public interest.

In the same letter, Jackson remarked that the aforementioned toast was a blow to the Bank aristocracy and had as much impact as his famous toast against nullification at the Jefferson Day Dinner celebration. Jackson told Van Buren that his friends Felix Grundy, William Carroll, then Governor of Tennessee, and James K. Polk applauded the toast, but Bell's friends saw it as a death blow to Bell. Jackson said that this was not necessarily true because he was "Bell's political friend and he is mine, if he adopts the stable metallic currency and comes out against a bank and the Bank. . . .

If we burn the old Phenix and foster a young one from its ashes, the young one will grow as hateful and injurious

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15 Jackson to Van Buren, 16 August 1834, ibid., pp. 282-83.
as the old one." If Bell did not come over to the anti-Bank side, Jackson concluded, "he is politically destroyed."\(^{16}\)

A bitter rivalry between Bell and James K. Polk developed in June of 1834. The struggle between Bell and Polk for the speakership of the House widened the gap between Bell and the administration. Andrew Stevenson of Virginia, Speaker of the House, resigned his chair to become Minister to England. While Stevenson's plans to resign were still in the rumor stage, Polk began gathering support for his bid for the speakership. Polk learned from his brother-in-law and political confidant, James Walker, that Jackson had looked favorably upon Polk's plans.\(^{17}\) When the task came about for the House to fill the vacant Speaker's chair, the definite administration choice was Polk. No one doubted that Polk would be the next Speaker.

Twenty to thirty Jacksonians went against Jackson's wishes and voted for Bell instead of Polk. On the first ballot Polk received 42 votes, Bell 30, and the rest were widely scattered. Bell gained slowly until a stop-Polk rally gave Bell the lead on the ninth ballot. Bell received 114 votes on the tenth ballot (110 was required for election), and Polk received 75 votes with 20 scattered votes. Then John Quincy Adams and Richard M. Johnson escorted the new Speaker.

\(^{16}\)Ibid.

\(^{17}\)Walker to Polk, 22 October 1833, Polk Papers
Speaker to the chair. Bell then made a speech which the
Randolph, Tennessee Recorder called "humble." Bell attributed
his election to the "kindness" and "friendship" of the House
membership. He also invoked every member's assistance in
his endeavor so that he might conduct himself in the interest
of "constitutional government and freedom." Polk was furious over the election of Bell. "Young
Hickory" realized that he had received votes only from the
most loyal Jackson-Van Buren men. Bell had received votes
from administration men, state's rights Democrats and northern
anti-Jackson members of the House. Polk and his friends
then set out to expose possible efforts by Bell to solicit
votes from the opposition. James Walker immediately went
to Nashville to get help from the Nashville press to expose
Bell as a friend of the opposition. Walker got little
encouragement from the Nashville editors who refused to
print editorials against Bell. He finally persuaded
W. Hassell Hunt, owner of the Banner, to print some "communications" from Washington. Walker wrote Polk that it would be
difficult to destroy Bell's popularity in Nashville, for he

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18 Register of Debates, House, 23rd Cong., 1st Sess.,
1834, pp. 4371-73.

19 Randolph, Tennessee Recorder, 28 June 1834, on micro-
film, Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth, Texas.

20 St. George L. Sioussat, ed., "Correspondence of John
Bell and Willie Mangum, 1835," Tennessee Historical Magazine
had "many warm and powerful friends." The task would be difficult but possible. Later Walker realized that the "communications" were too mild and ineffective in their assault upon Bell. He intimated to Polk, "I suppose that the Nashville editors cannot be induced to publish anything that they feel will affect Mr. Bell." Walker suspended the Banner attacks.

A series of letters between Bell and Willie P. Mangum, United States Senator from North Carolina (1831-1836, 1839-1855) concerning the race for Speaker is still extant. Although there is no evidence of Bell's activities to gain enough support to be elected Speaker, the Bell-Mangum correspondence disproves Polk's charges that Bell bargained with the opposition. By February of 1835, the Polk-Bell feud was becoming heated. Bell wished to have some ammunition to use against Polk, so he wrote to Mangum on February 25, 1835. He explained that he had been accused of bringing about a rift within the Jacksonian ranks when he ran for Speaker. Bell accused Polk of being his main adversary because of "Young Hickory's" charges concerning Bell's alleged deal with the opposition. Polk was responsible for circulating reports of this nature throughout Tennessee in order to damage Bell politically. Bell stated that the purpose of his letter was

21 Walker to Polk, 24 June 1834, Polk Papers.
22 Ibid., 30 June 1834.
for Mangum to state frankly to what extent the charges were true and how the rumors must have started among Polk and his friends.\textsuperscript{23}

Mangum answered Bell on June 15. He began by saying that he had no knowledge or reason to believe that Bell or any of his friends ever had held a meeting with the state's rights faction of the Jacksonian party.\textsuperscript{24} Since Mangum was one of the accepted leaders of the state's rights men, he was in a good position to make this conclusion. Although several personal friends of Bell's among the state's rights group had voted for Bell, Mangum indicated that most of them had actually opposed his election. Mangum said that most of the party regulars had voted for Richard Henry Wilde and then for Polk since Wilde's chances looked slim. Mangum believed that Bell would not co-operate with the state's righters in resisting Van Buren's succession to the presidency in 1836. Mangum believed, however, that the Polk faction might co-operate against Van Buren.\textsuperscript{25}

During the balloting, Mangum explained, Polk was drawing near to victory, and when a friend told Van Buren

\textsuperscript{23}Bell to Mangum, 25 February 1835, "Correspondence of John Bell and Willie Mangum," p. 197.

\textsuperscript{24}By 1834 the state's righters had ceased to be Jacksonians and were considered major opponents. They formally adopted the name "Whig" in 1836.

\textsuperscript{25}Mangum to Bell, 15 June 1835, "Correspondence of John Bell and Willie Mangum," p. 199
this in the Senate, he seemed pleased. Even though he was fifteen to twenty feet away and heard nothing, Van Buren's apparent pleasure prompted Mangum to rush to the House and urge his state's rights friends not to vote for Polk again. Mangum also said that he knew of no advances of Bell's friends to enact a deal. Baillie Peyton, a political associate of Bell's, did visit John Fulton of Virginia, Mangum recalled, at the state's rights "mess" on the day before the election. Mangum overheard the discussion in which Peyton only said that Bell would continue to give his cordial support to the administration while awarding all parties their parliamentary rights.26

After Congress adjourned and Bell was back in Nashville, a few of his friends held a public dinner in his honor in July of 1834. Such dinners were often political in nature and were designed to show support for certain personalities. Bell was grateful to the Nashville community for this display of confidence, but he had to decline the invitation.27 Bell, nevertheless, was able to defend himself against Polk's attacks at Murfreesboro in October.

The only record of Bell's Murfreesboro speech that is extant appeared in a hostile report in the Murfreesboro Central Monitor. The report said that Bell was outwardly

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26 Ibid., pp. 199-200.

27 Nashville Republican and State Gazette, 31 July 1834, on microfilm, Amon Carter Museum.
nervous and on the defensive. Bell began in his speech by denying any expressed preference on Jackson's part for the new Speaker. Bell also pointed out that he was truly a supporter of the administration because he had voted with the administration on several occasions at the expense of his own principles. Bell did not deny that he had received votes from the opposition. This was a result of his courteous treatment of all members of the House.

Bell made his first public statement concerning the Bank at this point. He said that he was willing to let the President's experiment with the "pet banks" reach either a successful or disastrous conclusion. If the experiment should fail, Bell believed that there would be sufficient public support for a new bank. A bank would be necessary to stabilize the currency of the country.

As the Polk-Bell rivalry continued, each man saw the importance of allying himself with the local press. Political intrigue haunted the pages of the Nashville Banner. In September of 1834, W. Hassell Hunt fired his editor, Samuel H. Laughlin. Laughlin had been a Polk "spy" in this Bell stronghold. Laughlin wrote to Polk that he had been fired because Hunt opposed his support for Jackson in his editorials. Polk learned from John W. Childress of Murfreesboro

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28 Murfreesboro Central Monitor, 11 October 1834, on microfilm, Amon Carter Museum.

29 Ibid.
that Hunt had fired Laughlin because of constant drunkenness.\textsuperscript{30} Before his dismissal, Laughlin indicated that the Banner was firm in its support of Bell.\textsuperscript{31} Laughlin asked Polk to secure enough money to buy the Republican and State Gazette from Allen A. Hall and set it up as the Jackson-Polk organ in Nashville. Laughlin was convinced that there was no press in Nashville sympathetic to Polk.\textsuperscript{32} Laughlin could not acquire the Republican and State Gazette and finally had to settle on the Columbia Observer. This was virtually the only newspaper in Tennessee which was firmly a Polk paper, and was, of course, located in Polk's hometown. The main points of attack against Bell were his silence on the Bank issue and his dealings with the opposition to acquire the speakership. The pro-Bell Nashville press always answered the charges immediately.

Meanwhile, Jackson wisely remained silent about the Bell-Polk controversy. Bell's friends denied any ill-feelings between Bell and Jackson. Jackson was preoccupied with the Bank issue. This is evident by his correspondence in the summer and autumn of 1834. Jackson had no reason to consider Bell anything but an administration ally, except on the Bank issue. As Jackson became more adamant about the

\textsuperscript{30} Childress to Polk, 16 September 1834, Polk Papers.
\textsuperscript{31} Laughlin to Polk, 6 September 1834, ibid.
\textsuperscript{32} Laughlin to Polk, 20 October 1834, ibid.
Bank, he tolerated less disagreement. It was virtually inevitable that Bell would split with Jackson completely over the Bank for their views were too far apart. Bell was undoubtedly troubled over the Bank issue. His clash with Polk also must have been disheartening. Bell could only report back to Washington for the short session and attempt to be the fairest and most impartial of Speakers.

As Speaker, Bell still showed his preference for Jackson because he gave the chairmanship of each committee to a Jackson man. Polk even remained chairman of the Committee on Ways and Means. Although his term as Speaker was brief, Bell impressed a newspaper reporter from Baltimore who wrote,

I have closely watched Mr. Bell's manner throughout the session, and a more courteous, prompt and decisive Speaker could not be chosen from the House. His enunciation of the forms is perfect, and the tone and manner in which they are given, are more eloquent to my ear than a greater part of the magnificent flourishes pronounced upon the floor.33

33 *Nashville Republican and State Gazette*, 19 March 1835.
CHAPTER 4

POLITICAL REVOLT IN TENNESSEE

In December of 1834, John Bell made a move which he knew would mean a permanent break between himself and Andrew Jackson. He decided to support Hugh Lawson White, Senator from Tennessee, for President. This was in direct violation to Jackson's known wish that Martin Van Buren be his successor. Jackson had voiced this wish as early as 1831. While Van Buren was unpopular in Tennessee, White, next to Jackson, was the most popular man in Tennessee.

According to White, he had received many letters during the spring of 1834 from his friends in Tennessee urging him to become a candidate. He had given his friends little encouragement. In August at the Tennessee constitutional convention, there was a slight movement to nominate White for President. Jackson made his wishes irrevocably known then that he would not support White's candidacy, and if White accepted the nomination, Jackson would make White's name "odious" in Tennessee. Jackson's challenge made White

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2White to Polk, 26 August 1835, ibid., p. 254.
more receptive to the suggestions and persuasions of his friends that he run for President.

A group of Tennessee Representatives met in December to discuss the possibility of White being a presidential candidate. The plan for the Tennessee caucus seemed to have originated with James Standifer of Bedford County. He had ascertained in private conversations with his fellow Congressmen from Tennessee that most of them were in favor of seeing White succeed Jackson as President. He suggested that the Tennessee delegation meet on December 22 to discuss the possibility of nominating White. On the 22nd Standifer approached Bell while walking down Pennsylvania Avenue on his way to the Capitol and mentioned the proposed meeting. Standifer insisted that Bell attend. Standifer believed that Bell appeared hesitant and "spoke with caution, and seemed to measure his words," but Bell finally agreed to attend. Standifer approached Polk on the same day in the Ways and Means Committee room. Polk immediately inquired of Bell's plans. When Polk learned that Bell planned to

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attend, he declined because of the ill-feelings between himself and Bell since his defeat for the speakership.  

Bell presided at the caucus, which met in the Washington apartment of Baillie Peyton. For the next two days the Congressmen from Tennessee met to nominate White for President. The most notable personality present besides Bell was David Crockett. Crockett was now a staunch Jackson foe, and he was soon to become disgusted with national politics and move to the frontier to help the people of Texas fight for their independence. A week later the delegation, without James K. Polk, Felix Grundy, and Cave M. Johnson, addressed a formal letter to White asking if he would accept the nomination. White replied that he was most willing to run.

This meeting had a profound influence on Tennessee politics. It precisely linked the political fortunes of Bell and White. For the next two years, state politics comprised the struggle between the Bell-White forces and the Jackson-Polk forces. The quarrel between Bell and Polk concerning Bell's election to the speakership over Polk became synonymous with the dispute between Jackson and

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5Felix Grundy, then United States Senator from Tennessee and a staunch Jackson supporter, and Cave M. Johnson had allied themselves with Polk in the Polk-Bell controversy.

6Standifer to Cave M. Johnson, 1 January 1835, Scott, ed., A Memoir of Hugh Lawson White, pp. 259-60.
White over the latter's candidacy for the presidency. This fusion of the Bell and White forces completely split the Jackson party in Tennessee. It paved the way for the rise of the Whig party in that state and brought Bell to the fore as a leader of the local revolt against Jackson.

White had always been a devoted Jacksonian. He had served the public for several years as a judge, Senator, and even President Pro Tem of the Senate. White was not a particularly ambitious politician. He had been a symbol of virtue and efficiency in his public life. White turned down Jackson's offers twice to enter the cabinet. Between 1825 and 1831 White suffered the grief of losing eight grown children and his wife.

In 1832 White remarried. Thomas Hart Benton of Missouri, writing in his Thirty Year's View, ascribed White's candidacy to the intrigues of designing politicians, who were playing on the vanity of his new wife. "In his advanced age," Benton wrote, White "did the act which, with old men, is an experiment, and, with most of them, an unlucky one." White married again "and his wife having made an immense stride from the

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7Ironically, White had expressed after the speakership race that he did not want to get involved in the Bell-Polk rivalry. He said, "I fear want of kind feelings between them may grow out of the canvass, and be the means of dividing, at home, those who now pass for friends. Both are to me like children; therefore I took no part in the contest." See ibid., p. 253.

head of a boarding house table to the head of a Senator's table, could see no reason why she should not take one step more, and that comparatively short, and arrive at the head of the President's table." Benton also quoted Henry Clay who said, "Judge White is on the track, running gayly, [sic] and won't come off; and if he would, his wife won't let him." It was very probable that White's wife, the former Ann Peyton of Washington, had aspirations to become the first lady, but it is almost certain that White had desires to become President long before he married Mrs. Peyton.

Jackson blamed Bell for White's nomination at the December caucus. Jackson wrote to Alfred Balch, a Nashville lawyer, that White was merely a tool and that Bell was the real leader of the rebellion against Van Buren. Jackson also wrote that he really did not mind that White was a candidate. He did believe, however, that the real object of the White supporters, was not to elect White, but "to divide and conquer" so that Henry Clay could win. Jackson accused Bell of masterminding the whole plot and declared that Bell was willing to sacrifice White to destroy the administration. To attack Bell further, Jackson intimated that Bell had, during all of his career in the House, secretly worked against the administration to promote his own interests.

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9Benton, Thirty Year's View, 2:185.
Jackson believed that Bell had always been a Bank man at heart and would "tomorrow vote for its recharter." In another letter to Joseph Guild, a Gallatin, Tennessee lawyer, Jackson expressed this same belief that Bell was the villain. Jackson accorded White's candidacy to the "cunning and management of Mr. Bell." To be elected Speaker of the House, Bell had called upon the opposition and twenty friends of the administration, whom he had tricked to make them believe that he would be true to the administration if they helped him be elected. Jackson declared that Bell could not fulfill his obligations to both friends and foes of the administration, so he developed a scheme to split the Jacksonian party and retain his seat as Speaker. Bell had seduced White for this purpose, hoping that elections in Virginia, North Carolina, Alabama, Tennessee, and the sectional preference of their Representatives for White would bring twenty or thirty new members into the House to retain him as Speaker. For sacrificing White in this way, Jackson believed that Bell's "political sun has set in Congress; he will not get one Republican vote for Speaker, this you may rely upon." There is no proof to justify Jackson's accusations that Bell was "using" White to further his own ends. Bell's feud


12 Jackson to Guild, 24 April 1835, ibid., p. 538.
with Polk did not put him in an enviable position politically by 1835. Bell was disgruntled over the course of events surrounding the Bank issue and the controversy over the race for the speakership. He was being driven by Jackson and Polk into the opposition. Bell saw White's candidacy as an opportunity to make a smooth transition to the opposition and remain popular. He definitely wished to remain as Speaker, but he had no ambition to become the leader of a new party. He did not originate the White presidential movement, and he must have been aware of the consequences of his support for White instead of for Van Buren.\(^1\) Jackson and Polk were probably correct in their assumption that Bell was the key man at the Tennessee caucus in December. Bell was an extremely cautious and astute politician. When the White movement gained popularity in Tennessee, he immediately stepped in and became White's campaign manager.\(^2\) This would almost assure Bell of his congressional seat as long as he wanted it.

Jackson’s political organization was determined to prevent Bell from being re-elected Speaker. Jackson was also sure that Bell was the culprit in the revolt in Tennessee. He instructed Francis P. Blair, editor of the Washington Globe, to use his newspaper as a vehicle to level

\(^1\)Actually White's candidacy had been discussed in the Tennessee press since 1832.

\(^2\)Parks, *John Bell of Tennessee*, p. 90.
blows at White and Bell. An article on April 2, 1835, accused White of seeking to divide and destroy the work of the Democratic party. White's vote against the Force Bill made his patriotism and loyalty questionable. This vote made White appear to be a half-disguised friend of the opposition. The attacks against Bell in the Globe were extremely devastating. Blair produced a new set of editorials to inform the public of Bell's activities. "The public ought to know," Blair explained, "that there has been a great selling out, and buying up of the Tennessee press, since Messrs. the Bank, Bell and Co. have entered upon the scheme of playing a new game for the Presidency—the Speaker-ship—and a recharter."

The editorials began with an article on April 15 entitled "The Nomination of Judge White." This article echoed the

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15 It seems unusual that Jackson would use the Globe in state politics. The White-Bell forces had captured the entire press in Tennessee. The Nashville Union had been formed by Joseph Laughlin and was on the verge of bankruptcy. The Memphis Intelligencer was overshadowed by the White-Bell paper, the Memphis Enquirer. All of the Nashville press was active in the Bell-White cause. The Globe was the only answer. Polk would distribute the articles against Bell and White in Tennessee. The lack of administration press in Tennessee was the main reason for Van Buren's loss in that state. See Powell Moore, "The Revolt Against Jackson in Tennessee, 1835-1836," The Journal of Southern History 2(1936): 341.

16 Washington Globe, 2 April 1835, on microfilm, NTSU.

17 Ibid., 22 May 1835.
sentiments of Jackson that White's nomination was a scheme to divide the party and the nation. The Globe charged that John C. Calhoun and Bell were promoting White's candidacy. Calhoun and Bell had failed to get Richard M. Johnson of Kentucky to run, so they plotted to make White their "stool pigeon." Bell had promoted the White movement after being "soured with the President" and was using White's popularity to gain the speakership again. The Globe continued by asserting not only that White's supporters were friendly to the nullifiers but also that they were working in co-operation with the Bank men. Blair alleged that in November of 1834, White and Bell had come to Philadelphia to visit White's son-in-law, Samuel Jaudon, a cashier of the Bank, and the three men made plans for White's candidacy. Bell was to secure White's nomination, and the Bank men would support White in return for a new charter. Bell's reward for his activities would be for the Bank men in the House to re-elect him Speaker.¹⁸

Bell answered the Globe's charges in a letter to the editor of the Republican and State Gazette. He denied most of the charges, although he did admit to having participated in the effort to nominate White. Bell said that the Globe had given him too much credit for his activities in the White nomination. He pointed out that he had noticed the beginnings

¹⁸Ibid., 15 April 1835.
of the White movement as early as December of 1833. Bell had not wished to come out in favor of White at that time, but since then, he had often said that he would support White in a White-Van Buren contest. Concerning the Tennessee caucus, Bell said that he had had no prior knowledge of the caucus until the actual day of the meeting. Bell continued by admitting that he had written a letter to Richard M. Johnson, but he had no recollection of the letter's contents. His language became stronger as Bell emphatically denied making any agreements with Jaudon. Bell said that he and White had never been to Philadelphia together, and they had never discussed the Bank. Bell finally explained that the Bank had never given him any special favors, and he had never been indebted to the Bank beyond his "ability to discharge at any time." 19

Jackson read Bell's answer to the Globe carefully. He sent a copy of the Republican and State Gazette to Blair with the sections marked that he wished Blair to attack next. He told Blair, "... you must answer it soon, ... he [Bell] has opened a field for your reply to settle all matters with and prostrate him." 20 Blair immediately took up the assault again and wrote another article entitled, "Mr. Bell and the...

19 John Bell to Editor, 4 May 1835, Nashville Republican and State Gazette, 9 May 1835, on microfilm, Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth, Texas.
20 Jackson to Blair, 19 May 1835, Correspondence of Andrew Jackson, ed., Bassett, 5:349.
Speakership." Blair accused Bell of conspiring with the New England Whigs to gain the speakership. The editor declared that Bell had approached Speaker Stevenson and notified him that the Webster forces in the Senate would vote to ratify his nomination as Minister to England if he would resign. Bell had tricked Stevenson because the Whigs in the Senate voted against his appointment. The Whigs in the House cleverly voted for Richard Wilde first and then for Bell to cover up the Bell-Webster conspiracy.\textsuperscript{21}

Bell was able to defend himself again publicly in a speech he delivered on May 23. Bell addressed a partisan group of about 200 people at the exclusive Vauxhall Garden resort on the south side of Nashville. It was an enthusiastic gathering which cheered at an introduction by the Attorney General of Tennessee, George S. Yerger:

Our distinguished guest the Hon. John Bell--A native of Tennessee and a noble specimen of her firmness, independence and republican principles--he has proudly sustained her character in his political course, and the slanders of his enemies cannot take from him the confidence and approbation of his countrymen.

With raised glass, Yerger offered this toast: "The Bell of Democracy" which was ringing out the "death knell of personal slanders at home, and political vituperation abroad."\textsuperscript{22}

\textsuperscript{21}Globe, 28 May 1835.

\textsuperscript{22}Nashville Republican and State Gazette, 25 May 1835.
Bell designed his speech to carry out two purposes: first, to negate the attacks by the *Globe* on himself, and secondly, to keynote White's campaign for President. Bell began by trying to make the public believe that White was a better Jacksonian than Van Buren. Bell spoke of party factions and stated that some factions could strengthen the party against evil men who sought the spoils of power. Bell defended his own record as a Jacksonian and accused his enemies of creating the breach between himself and Jackson. The President was, said Bell, "a man towards whom I have never failed in showing a proper respect, and whose administration I have faithfully supported."  

In the speech Bell explained that the race between White and Van Buren was a contest between two of Jackson's friends. However, White had been more consistent than Van Buren in his support of Jackson. Bell pledged that White's friends would continue to support Jackson's administration. The claim that White's candidacy was dangerous to party unity was false. The Jackson party had always been united except on one issue, the Bank. Bell defended his position on the Bank and warned against party excesses with these words: "When party is the watchdog and ensign of those who fight for the spoils, the warning voice of patriotism says to every free

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man, every White man, inscribe your COUNTRY on your banner, and **in hoc vince!**\(^\text{24}\)

Bell's speech appeared in the **Nashville Banner** and in the **Niles Register** for national consumption. Despite Bell's denial that White's candidacy was an attempt to split the Democratic party, the vehement attacks against Bell continued in the Jackson press. Blair continued his attacks against Bell in the **Globe** with his article, "Mr. Bell and the Bank Press." Blair stated that out of all the newspapers available for printing the Vauxhall Garden speech, Bell's response to the **Globe** first appeared in the Nashville Banner. Blair concluded that since the **Banner** was "notoriously now the most corrupt and dishonest press in the Union, since it had come under Bank influence," the sentiments of Bell were quite obvious.\(^\text{25}\) The **Globe** attacks continued with articles entitled "Mr. Bell and Judge White," "Mr. Bell and the Bank," "Mr. Bell and His Bank Facilities," "The Result of Mr. Bell's Machinations," "John Bell and Davy Crockett," and "Mr. Bell's Preparation to Bargain Off Judge White's Party in the House of Representatives."\(^\text{26}\)

The titles of these articles indicate that Blair's chief point of attack was Bell's apparent pro-Bank sentiments.

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\(^{24}\)Ibid., pp. 330-36.

\(^{25}\)Globe, 1 June 1835.

\(^{26}\)Ibid., 30 May, 2, 3, 4 June, 10 July, 21 August 1835.
Blair accused Bell of conspiring with Secretary of the Treasury Louis McLane to prevent the Bank from becoming an issue in the 1832 elections. Blair pointed out that Bell had refused to support Jackson when he was severely criticized by his enemies on the Bank issue. It was Bell's duty to defend the President for the sake of his friends and neighbors at home. By making a speech in favor of a bank and staying silent during the peak of Jackson's criticism, Bell appeared to be with the opposition, at least in spirit. Bell probably did not vote in favor of the Bank's rechartering measure "under species of duress." 27

According to the Globe, the Bank forces elected Bell Speaker of the House as a reward for his silence on the Bank issue. Blair also charged that Bell and his brother James had done some extensive land speculation on money borrowed from the Bank. Bell's debt of $60,000, according to Blair, must have tied Bell politically to the Bank. 28

Up until the middle of June, none of Blair's charges had been substantiated with facts. Then Blair learned from T. J. Pew, editor of the Lexington, Kentucky Gazette, that Pew had seen an incriminating letter from Bell to Richard M. Johnson. Blair printed Pew's letter which said that Bell

27 Ibid., 2 June 1835.
28 Ibid., 3 June 1835.
had approached Johnson to come out in favor of the Bank and had urged him to run for the presidency against Van Buren.  

Polk and his associates exposed another incriminating letter between Bell and Charles Cassedy of Bedford County, Tennessee. Cassedy had written Bell asking for an explanation of White's position on the Bank. Bell's reply indicated that White would veto a bill to recharter the Bank. Bell boldly stated that Polk's and Cave Johnson's only interest in the White-Bell movement was "to defeat me for the Speaker's chair."  

Polk obtained a copy of the Cassedy letter from a friend who had seen the letter and copied it. The letter appeared in the Nashville Union on June 26, 1835, as well as in the Globe. This letter definitely branded Bell as a Bank man. Jackson, who was in Tennessee for the summer, wrote to Polk that he was pleased about the Cassedy letter. The letter was the "finishing stroke" to Bell's political intrigues. Jackson said that finally Bell had been exposed "to all men of all parties." He erroneously prophesied that Bell's "political sun has set in Congress."  

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29 Pew to Blair, 15 May 1835, in Globe, 2 June 1835.

30 This was Polk's interpretation of Bell's statement, "It would be most unprecedented and do him [White], and very justly too, a great injury, to be declared beforehand, that he would put his veto upon any measure whatever."!

31 Bell to Cassedy, 11 May 1835, in Globe, 8 July 1835.

32 Jackson to Polk, 3 August 1835, in Correspondence of Andrew Jackson, ed., Bassett, 5:357.
The Jackson-Van Buren-Polk men in Tennessee were confident that the Cassedy letter would be sufficient to defeat Bell in the congressional race. They approached Robert M. Burton of Williamson County to run against Bell. He refused to run even though his chances improved when the Cassedy letter appeared. Burton was dropped as a challenger to Bell after he disgraced himself in a fist fight at Lebanon, Tennessee. That summer Bell ran unopposed for Congress and won.\(^\text{33}\) Jackson could not understand how the people of Bell's district could vote for him since

> the great object of Mr. Bell and Co. were [sic] to destroy me, and all the effects of my administration, and hand me down to posterity as an old dotard, ruled by corrupt office holders and corrupt office seekers whilst he was sacrificing all principle, for the sake of the speakers [sic] chair and his private facilities from the U. States Bank.\(^\text{34}\)

Jackson was not able to prevent Bell's re-election. He still believed that he had a weapon to use against the Bell-White movement, that being the Democratic convention. Jackson was determined that the candidate chosen by the Democrats at the Baltimore Convention would be the official candidate. By the summer of 1835, Jackson realized that the White movement was extremely popular in Tennessee and that


\(^{34}\) Jackson to Andrew Jackson Hutchings, 30 June 1835, in *Correspondence of Andrew Jackson*, ed., Bassett, 5:544-45. Date erroneously given in Bassett as 1838.
an open quarrel with White might eventually split the party in his own state. He preferred to use the convention to quell the White movement. He conducted a personal campaign to have the people of Tennessee pledge to support the nominee of the convention. Jackson wrote a letter to the Reverend James Gwin which he intended for publication. The letter was an appeal to the people to support the Baltimore nominee, and, in a sense, was a challenge to the White forces to risk political ruin if they dared oppose him. Jackson displayed more pity than anger toward White. He believed that White was being victimized by evil associates.

Much to Jackson's dismay, as time grew nearer to the convention it became apparent that Tennessee would not send a delegation. He wrote to Blair, "my heart bleeds, to think that my native state . . . [is] unrepresented." Jackson believed that the convention would have chosen White as the vice-presidential candidate if Bell had not led him astray.

Jackson suffered another defeat in August of 1835, when his hand-picked gubernatorial candidate, the incumbent

36 Jackson to Reverend James Gwin, 23 February 1835, in Globe, 4 July 1835.
38 Jackson to Blair, 19 May 1835, ibid., p. 349.
39 Jackson to Felix Grundy, 5 October 1835, Andrew Jackson Papers, on microfilm, NTSU.
William Carroll, lost to a White supporter, Newton Cannon. Jackson then directed his energies to try to persuade the legislature to defeat White, who was running for re-election to the Senate. When the legislature unanimously re-elected White, Jackson finally realized that he had lost his influence in Tennessee. He was quite forlorn when he wrote to Felix Grundy in October: "It would give me more satisfaction to unmask the daring usurpation of the people's sovereign rights by the self-created caucus of Mr. Bell, Crockett, and Co., than any act of my life." Tennessee again demonstrated her independent will on October 16, 1835, when the legislature passed a resolution formally nominating Hugh Lawson White for President. The resolution denounced the Baltimore Convention and leveled a blow at Jackson when it called for freedom of elections. This part of the resolution referred to Jackson's interference in the election of White to the Senate. The resolution ended on an ironic note by stating that the legislature approved the general principles and policies "of our present distinguished chief magistrate, General Andrew Jackson."41

The White-Bell forces during the campaign of 1836 were careful not to connect themselves with any of the national political parties. At that point it would have been

40 Andrew Jackson to Grundy, 5 October 1835, in Correspondence of Andrew Jackson, ed., Bassett, 5:371-72.

dangerous to the success of the movement to become associated with either the Whigs or with Calhoun's Nullifiers.\textsuperscript{42} The strategy of the White-Bell supporters was to refer to themselves as an independent party adhering to the old Jacksonian principles, while opposing Van Buren's candidacy. White declared in the campaign, "My course must be an individual one, as I am not in the confidence of any party."\textsuperscript{43}

The leaders of the White movement were anxious to point out that the contest was one between White and Van Buren, not White and Jackson. They insisted that they were loyal to Jackson. The Nashville Republican and State Gazette declared that a voter's loyalty to both Jackson and White was quite logical:

The independent voter supports Andrew Jackson because he opposes the tariff, but Judge White opposes the tariff. . . . General Jackson opposes internal improvements by the general government, so does Judge White. . . . General Jackson is opposed to nullification, so is Judge White. Now if political principles . . . be the only national ground for the support of any candidate, how is it that the friends of Judge White must be the enemies of Jackson.\textsuperscript{44}

In a later editorial the Republican and State Gazette denounced the policy of the Jackson leaders who were trying

\textsuperscript{42}Even though Jackson constantly referred to White and Bell as "Whigs" or "New Whigs," they were not labeled as such at this time. It was not until 1839 that Bell himself was willing to use the name Whig.

\textsuperscript{43}White to Churchwell, 3 January 1836, in Scott, ed., A Memoir of Hugh Lawson White, p. 344.

\textsuperscript{44}Nashville Republican and State Gazette, 4 January 1836.
to make the election a contest between Jackson and White. The editorial justified the candidacy of White by claiming that Van Buren was highly unpopular in Tennessee.  

Jackson used the Globe in the presidential campaign to offset White's influence in Tennessee. The Globe devoted more space to White's candidacy than to the campaigns of William Henry Harrison and Daniel Webster combined. Blair continued to attack Bell, whom he blamed for the revolt in Tennessee. The attacks were similar in nature to the 1834 articles. Bell was portrayed as an agent of the Bank who used White to further his own ambitions.

Jackson campaigned actively for Van Buren in the summer of 1836. The President was honored with public dinners throughout Tennessee. At Nashville he was entertained at a barbeque to which "all creation was invited." Jackson delivered a speech in which he called White a "red Federalist." He offered this crushing toast. "Republican Tennessee. Her motto, principles not men— She will never abandon her good old Jeffersonian democratic-republican principles which

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46 The election of 1836 basically was a race between four men. Van Buren ran as a Democrat. The Whigs held no convention, but ran Harrison of Ohio, and Webster of Massachusetts to take advantage of sectional hostility to Van Buren.

47 Globe, 18 January 1836.

48 Joseph Laughlin to Polk, 8 August 1836, in James K. Polk Papers, on microfilm, NTSU.
she has so long maintained and practiced, to throw herself
(on any occasion) into the embraces of the federalists, the
nullifiers or the new born Whigs."

Meanwhile, White, Bell, Ephraim Foster, and Peyton
campaigned in Tennessee. White answered Jackson's toast on
August 30 at Knoxville when he delivered a toast: "The
Republicans in Tennessee are now what they were in 1828,
Jacksonians. . . . Should this entitle them to a 'new born'
name, they care not; . . . They would rather have even a bad
name with good principles, than bad principles under a good
name."  

John Bell actively campaigned throughout the state and,
according to the hostile Nashville Union, led a "Grand
Political Caravan and Eating Menagerie," over most of the
state while speaking to large rallies. He remained closely
associated with the White movement in other states. Even
though Van Buren was elected President in 1836, the results
of the election in Tennessee were decisive. The popular

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49Baltimore Niles Weekly Register, 51(1836):17.

50White's Speech at Knoxville, 31 August 1836, in Scott,

51Norman L. Parks, "The Career of John Bell as Congressman
from Tennessee, 1827-1841," Tennessee Historical Quarterly
1(1942):244.

52Van Buren won by a comfortable but by no means over-
whelming margin. He won 170 electoral votes to 124 for all
other candidates combined. The popular vote majority was
only 25,688 out of 1,505,290 votes cast. The vote indicated
a strong but unorganized Whig movement. See Glyndon G.
vote for the White electors was 36,168. Van Buren received 26,129 votes. White carried forty-four out of sixty-three counties and even carried Jackson's home precinct. It is likely that many voters in Tennessee chose not to vote in 1836. A White vote would show opposition to Jackson, and a vote for Van Buren indicated opposition to one of the best loved men in Tennessee, who still professed to be a Jackson man. White also carried Georgia, and came close to carrying Arkansas, Mississippi, and North Carolina.

Because of Van Buren's loss in Tennessee, Jackson could not enjoy the national victory of his predecessor. Jackson expressed great distress over the election results in Tennessee in a letter to the Reverend Harvey Cryer:

> Nothing but falsehoods appears to be the weapons of our modern, new-born White Whigs of Tennessee in the late political crusade. White, Bell, ... and Co. appear to have abandoned truth. ... I now believe that Judge White has been acting the hypocrite of politics all his life, and individually to me: that he is unprincipled and vindictive I have full proof: that he will wilfully lie, his Knoxville speech amply shows. I can forgive, and will, but I never can forget the hypocrisy, or the individual, capable of it. There is no character I abhor more than a liar and hypocrite.  

> Never again during Jackson's lifetime did he see the Democratic party carry Tennessee in a presidential election.

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James K. Polk did not even carry Tennessee when he was elected in 1844. The split of the Democratic party when the White-Bell forces rebelled in the 1830's was partially Jackson's fault. His treatment of Bell and White ruined Van Buren's chances in Tennessee and permanently drove Bell to the side of the opposition.
CHAPTER 5

FROM POLITICAL "APOSTATE" TO WHIG LEADER

"Big Bell has lost the clapper shure [sic] enough!"

This was the cry of the Polk supporters when James K. Polk defeated John Bell for the speakership of the House of Representatives in December of 1835.¹ Polk's victory over Bell could not overshadow the realization that a decisive split in the Jacksonian party had occurred in Tennessee. A sizable group of faithful Jacksonians had abandoned Martin Van Buren and the Democrats. Bell had led a successful revolution in Tennessee and brought together dissatisfied Democrats to support Hugh Lawson White for President in 1836. Bell then, no longer professing to be a loyal Jacksonian, led these Democrats into the southern wing of the Whig party. For his role in the rebellion, Jackson labeled Bell the "Tennessee Brutus" and a political "apostate."² Bell never regained the speakership again or the favor of the

¹James McKisick to Polk, 23 December 1835, in James K. Polk Papers, on microfilm, NTSU.

Democratic party, but he remained extremely popular in Tennessee.³

No story of Bell's political revolt against Jackson would be complete without mentioning his second marriage to Mrs. Jane Erwin Yeatman. She was the wealthy widow of Thomas Yeatman, a Nashville entrepreneur who had amassed a fortune of over a million dollars in iron manufacturing and banking.⁴ Mrs. Yeatman's late husband had been an Adams supporter in 1828, and her own family had been hostile to Jackson for many years. Bell had charmed Mrs. Yeatman when he delivered his Vauxhall Garden Speech in May of 1835. Mrs. Yeatman had never seen Bell before but had long admired him politically. After his speech she whispered to a friend, "Though I never before thought of marrying a second time, I do not know how I should be able to refuse a nuptial offer from such an orator and patriot." Bell and Mrs. Yeatman were married five months later, and through this marriage, Bell became

³An elegant dinner was given for Bell in Nashville at the Pleasant Grove Seminary in September of 1836. The procession to the dinner was one and a half miles long and there were an estimated 4,000 guests. It was reputed to be the largest assemblage in the entire state's history. A participant remarked, "This day must have repaid Mr. Bell for all the calumnies, and abuse that have been poured upon him for the last eighteen months." See Nashville Republican and State Gazette, 3 September 1836, on microfilm, Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth, Texas.

⁴Ibid., 27 October 1835.
a member of the most powerful banking family in Tennessee. 5

Bell was a powerful Whig leader in the House from 1836 until 1841 when he entered William Henry Harrison's cabinet. In the second session of the Twenty-fourth Congress, during Jackson's last year as President, Bell did the best he could to unify a badly divided Whig party. The Jackson party controlled the House with outstanding majorities in all of the committees, and Polk held the Speaker's chair. 6

In view of the overwhelming Democratic majority in the House, Bell, when he spoke, confined his remarks largely to his own political philosophy. In his speeches Bell indicated that he was a true conservative. He now admitted that he had always opposed the ends and nature of Jacksonianism. At one point he discussed the end of Jacksonianism which would bring about "popular government." Bell pointed out that the abuses of government had increased under the Jackson administration. Bell asked why these abuses had increased "under an administration so decidedly popular and powerful?" The true answer is because the administration is such because it is popular." Popular government, according


to Bell, was one of the "most fallacious and insidious doctrines that can be started in a free government. . . . Why, sir, if the people may, at any time, err, why have a constitution." Bell concluded, "If whatever the people may, at any time, approve, must be right, . . . the constitution is an idle piece of state mummery."\(^7\)

In January of 1837 Bell introduced a political patronage bill which showed his deep resentment of the Democratic party. The preamble of the bill called for the immediate removal of certain individuals from office who had been appointed "upon political grounds." Bell declared that the federal patronage system had been reduced to a system in which federal office holders were meddling in state elections to retain their jobs. A continuation of this practice, according to Bell, would "speedily destroy the purity and freedom of the elective franchise."\(^8\)

The bill itself provided that no person holding a federal office should contribute to the campaign funds of someone seeking office, use his franking privilege to distribute literature for or against any candidate, threaten, harass or use coercion against other officials or citizens, or in any way meddle in state or federal elections. Bell advocated

\(^7\)U. S. Congress, House, Register of Debates, 24th Cong., 1st Sess., 1836, pp. 2817-61, 4391-4447.
\(^8\)Register of Debates, House, 24th Cong., 2nd Sess., pp. 1455-78.
that violators of this law should be fined $1,000. If the violator happened to be the President, Vice-President, or a federal judge, he would be removed from office.\textsuperscript{9}

In support of his bill, Bell enumerated some ways that the Jackson administration had violated the proposed legislation. Bell believed that a "malignant distemper has seized upon, and now deeply affects, our political system." He explained that dictatorial power had been wielded in the name of the people. The people on several occasions had asked their friends what their Representatives would likely do in a certain matter when they should have asked what Andrew Jackson would do. Whatever decisions Jackson had made, the Congress had conformed. This fact alone, Bell declared, was "sufficient to stamp the present as the period of transition from popular representative Government to the Government of an elective Presidency—of a political chief."\textsuperscript{10}

Bell explained further that the Senate, the body which was supposed to advise and counsel the President, had been "reduced to a state of absolute submission, given over to the guidance of every popular gale, blown up by the artifices of as unprincipled and reckless a class of men as ever made their appearance in any age or country." The President had

\textsuperscript{9}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{10}Ibid.
used his veto frequently while the Senate's veto on appoint-
ments had been "abrogated, rescinded, expunged, practically,
from the Constitution and trampled under foot."Bell attacked the Democratic press by asserting that it had become so polluted that it no longer performed its duty of improving society's morals. The leader of the press was the Globe, which Bell concluded was a "pensioned engine of falsehood and calumny." Democratic editors had abandoned truth and decency and had lowered themselves to slander and libel.

Bell attributed these violations of the public trust to the misuse of patronage. This "Pandora's box" had generated other evils of the times. Andrew Jackson was the perpetrator of these "evils." Bell condemned Jackson's interference in the recent election of Martin Van Buren when he said:

When, sir, the practice of official interference has arrived at this height; when rewards are openly bestowed for open apostasy and treachery to party engagements; when corruption walks abroad through the land in her own nakedness, without veil or a mantle to cover her native deformity; when neither regard for principle nor the honor of the country can restrain such practices, so far, at least as to preserve the semblance of purity; when disguises are rejected as unnecessary; is it not time to sound the alarm to the sleeping sentinels, and call every patriot to his post.

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11 Ibid.
12 Ibid.
13 Ibid.
Bell did not expect his bill to pass or even come to a vote. It died with the expiration of the Twenty-fourth Congress on March 3, 1837. It served its purpose, however, for Bell was able to vent his feelings which he had kept partially concealed for many years.

In 1837 Polk again defeated Bell for Speaker. In the autumn of 1837, Bell toured New England extensively to try to unite the northern and southern anti-Jackson forces. In New York he attended an elaborate dinner attended by administration men from all sections. These men informally pledged to oppose Van Burenism, and, at that moment, Bell "joined" the Whig party.  

Bell's break with Jackson manifested a general trend away from Jacksonianism. This trend culminated in the rise of the Whig party. It is difficult to speculate concerning the many reasons why Bell split with the Democratic party and switched to the Whig party. This difficulty is attributed to the conspicuous lack of correspondence by Bell and contemporary information concerning his political motives. One must conclude that the inevitable Bell-Jackson split was more than a mere assumption that Bell grew tired of Jackson's abuse. A careful study of the events since the beginning of Bell's congressional career in 1827 reveal certain key factors in the split. In addition to the events, political developments and personalities involved are some important

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considerations. The primary consideration, however, is that Bell was a master politician. He followed the political trends of the "middle period" artfully, and this enabled him to execute a political about-face while remaining popular. That Bell out-maneuvered Andrew Jackson, the most powerful politician of the period, is, in itself, amazing.

Bell's political views were conservative. He had outlined these views, especially with regard to the presidency, in the circular he authored when he ran for the Seventh Congressional District in 1827. He then advocated a weak executive and a strong separation of powers. During the presidency of Andrew Jackson, Bell observed the "demagogic" manipulations of the executive branch with great apprehension. The movement of Jacksonianism toward a powerful executive and the manner in which Jackson tried to influence the politics of Tennessee contributed to Bell's antagonism toward Jackson. Bell undoubtedly believed that Jackson was too powerful. He had promised the voters that he would be "open, direct, and independent." This proved to be impossible, for Jackson tolerated no "independence" among his congressional following.

Bell was the victim of Jackson's dictatorial will at various times during his congressional career. Isolated incidents wounded Bell's pride and drove him closer to the opposition. Jackson could not resist showing his preference for Felix Grundy in the 1826-27 congressional campaign. Jackson's preference for Grundy angered Bell early in his
career. Bell's friends urged him on two occasions in 1827, after he had been elected to the House, to avow his loyalty to Jackson. Bell took his friends' advice when it would have seemed more appropriate for Jackson to make the gesture toward Bell.

Bell was a dutiful Jacksonian and fought for the administration during the tariff and Indian removal struggles. He could not and would not, however, join the anti-Bank forces. The Bank was the crucial issue between Bell and Jackson. Bell remained cautious and uncommitted as long as he could concerning the Bank issue. It was true that if Bell came out in opposition to the Bank, he would have been opposing the dominant sentiments of his district. When he finally decided to come out in favor of the Bank, Bell made the shrewdest political move of his career. A friend of Polk's in Nashville admitted that Bell was strongly supported by the "mercantile of this blessed town," because Nashville was "a most wretchedly bank ridden population." The pro-Bank Nashville district continued to hold Bell in their esteem through every phase of his public career. Bell was further intimidated during the Polk-Bell rivalry. Bell knew that Jackson favored Polk for the speakership. The bitter Polk-Bell feud which ensued in the Tennessee press drove Bell closer to the opposition.

15James Walker to Polk, 24 June 1834, and Samuel H. Laughlin to Polk, 6 September 1834, in Polk Papers.
Jackson was furious over Bell's stand on the Bank and his support of Hugh Lawson White for President in 1836. Jackson swore he would do everything possible to ruin Bell and White politically. The tone of the Globe's attacks against Bell in 1834 and 1836 were impassioned and slanderous. Bell stood firm against the attacks and still insisted that he was a friend of the administration. The Globe's attacks had little effect on Bell's popularity, but they must have done irreparable damage to his pride.

Bell decided to support White in order to save himself from political disaster after his feud with Polk. He became the leader of the White forces in Tennessee, not so much because he admired White, but because he knew his own political future was involved in the struggle. He had nowhere to go, for the Bank question had finished him in the Democratic party, and he was keenly aware of this. Bell had sensed the attitudes of the Tennessee electorate when he supported White instead of Van Buren. The people would not sit idly by and allow Jackson to force an unpopular candidate on them. Jackson immediately assumed that the White presidential movement was hostile. Jackson men in Tennessee insisted that there could be no middle ground, "no nullifying--Union party,--no Federal Democrats,--no White Jacksonians." 16 This was characteristic of Jackson's personal and political life--there could be no middle ground.

16 Nashville Union, 24 April 1835, on microfilm, Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth, Texas.
Jackson's dogmatic approach to the presidency and his unyielding stand on the issues of the Bank and White's candidacy were the major causes of the split with Bell. Bell abandoned the Democratic party, and with him, he took three distinct groups of former Jacksonians. First, there were the political theorists who opposed the Democratic party because it had been built around a personality and had consequently become subject to the stubborn and prejudiced will of one man. Bell certainly was a member of this group. Jackson openly favored Felix Grundy and James K. Polk, while White and Bell never received the confidence of the administration.¹⁷ This show of favoritism by Jackson resulted in rivalries and jealousies that permeated the second group of Jacksonians who had never been justly rewarded for their efforts. There were also the personal enemies of Jackson. These men were numerous and influential. A deep antagonism arose in these men against Jackson over the heated issues of the era and Jackson's uncompromising actions concerning them. Bell eventually became one of Jackson's personal enemies.¹⁸

The third group represented those who, like Bell, embraced an economic philosophy which was in opposition to

¹⁷ There is no correspondence between Bell and Jackson and Bell and Polk in the collections of these men. This is the principal evidence that the administration never consulted Bell on political or personal matters.

to the fiscal policies of the administration. This group included the business community of Nashville. These businessmen demanded sound currency and banking facilities and mistrusted the "popular" tendencies of the party.19 These three elements coalesced into the southern wing of the Whig party and later into a national party which would in 1840 elect William Henry Harrison and John Tyler to our nation's highest offices.

In 1841 Bell was rewarded for his work as a Whig by being chosen as Harrison's Secretary of War. This was purely a political gesture since Bell had never served in any military capacity in his life. After Harrison's death and John Tyler's succession to the presidency, Bell resigned with the other cabinet members. A struggle for party control had ensued between Tyler and Henry Clay which resulted in a number of the Whigs in Congress becoming alienated from Tyler. Most of the cabinet members had been Clay partisans and resigned after Tyler vetoed a bill sponsored by Clay to charter a national bank.20 When Bell left the cabinet, he was offered a Senate seat by the Whig majority in the Tennessee General Assembly. He declined in favor of Ephraim Foster since a Foster-Bell contest might jeopardize Whig chances to elect a Senator from that party. Bell returned

19Ibid.

to private life in Nashville until 1847, when he became a state senator. A week later that body chose Bell to represent Tennessee in the United States Senate. He served in the Senate until 1860, when he ran for President on the Constitutional Union ticket. The Constitutional Union party was comprised of mainly old guard Whigs who had not joined the Republican or Democratic parties. They had not made a strong stand against slavery, but they strove to keep the Union together and enforce the laws of the land. Bell and his Vice Presidential running mate, Edward Everett of Massachusetts, received the electoral votes of Virginia, Kentucky, and Tennessee. When Lincoln became President, Bell called for the preservation of the Union, but after Lincoln put out the call for troops, Bell advocated secession. Bell was not active politically or militarily during the Civil War, and he engaged in business until his death in 1869.21

After 1835 Bell and Jackson never reconciled their differences, but Polk and Bell were able to become friendly. David Saffrons from Gallatin, Tennessee, made overtures to Polk, when the latter became President, to mend the Bell-Polk rift. Bell agreed with Polk on the Mexican War and tariff questions and wished to call on Polk in January of 1848. Polk assured Saffrons that he did not feel unkindly toward Bell, and he believed that all should be forgotten.

Polk planned to retire to Nashville, and he hoped to be friendly with all of his neighbors including Bell. Bell called on Polk at the White House on January 4, and, as Polk later recalled in his diary, Bell was embarrassed at first, but Polk put him at ease. The two men had not spoken since 1835, and Polk wrote that the "contest between us had been violent and even bitter for years." With this meeting one of the most bitter political feuds in Tennessee history came to an end.

John Bell is one of the more obscure personalities in American political history, but his personal struggle with Andrew Jackson and James K. Polk had a profound effect on Tennessee history and led to the development of the Whig party in that state. His long career in public service exemplified the period of political unrest prior to the Civil War. He survived two great political battles during his career. He was successful in his fierce battle against Jackson. He was defeated in his futile attempt to hold the Union together in 1860. His personality was not bold and vociferous like that of Henry Clay or John C. Calhoun, but he had a sharp mind. He did not have the great popular appeal of Andrew Jackson, but he was a pragmatic philosopher and an astute politician, who possessed the ability to survive.

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