

JACKSON MEN WITH FEET OF CLAY

By  
CHARLES GRIER SELLERS, JR.

REPRINTED FROM THE  
AMERICAN HISTORICAL REVIEW

VOL. LXII, No. 3

April, 1957

## Jackson Men with Feet of Clay

CHARLES GRIER SELLERS, JR.

THE contagious enthusiasm for General Andrew Jackson that in 1824 swept thousands of voters for the first time out of their accustomed tutelage to the established leaders demands careful study as a major phenomenon in the history of political democracy. It demands study also as an example of the frequently neglected influence of local political maneuvers on national developments. Though a few historians have intimated that Old Hickory's popularity could not have been converted into an electoral plurality without the aid of disgruntled politicians pursuing conventional factional and personal advantages in the various states,<sup>1</sup> little attention has been paid to the Tennessee politicians who brought him before the country in the first place.

The accepted interpretation assumes that the men behind Jackson's candidacy—principally Judge John Overton, Senator John H. Eaton, Felix Grundy, and Major William B. Lewis—were moved by sincere admiration and affection for their friend. They are also credited with a shrewd perception that the ground swell of democratic discontent building up beneath the surface of American politics might be mobilized to make the popular general President.<sup>2</sup> A close scrutiny of the events of 1821-1823 in Tennessee reveals, however, that the objectives of Judge Overton and most of his associates were by no means so large and disinterested. There is evidence to show that Jackson was nominated for the presidency only in order that specific local political advantages could be achieved and that "the original Jackson men" actually favored other nominees.

When General Jackson retired to private life in the winter of 1821-1822, seven years had elapsed since his victory over the British at New Orleans had made him a national hero. The sporadic talk that he might be a presidential possibility had never been entertained seriously in any responsible quarter, and Jackson himself had never taken it seriously. President-making was still left exclusively to the political leaders, and they were already grooming more

<sup>1</sup> See especially Philip S. Klein, *Pennsylvania Politics 1817-1832: A Game without Rules* (Philadelphia, 1940), pp. 117-24.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. James Parton, *Life of Andrew Jackson* (New York, 1861), III, 11-23; John Spencer Bassett, *The Life of Andrew Jackson* (New York, 1911), I, 326-29; Marquis James, *The Life of Andrew Jackson* (Indianapolis, 1938), pp. 335-53.

than enough entries for the presidential sweepstakes of 1824. Already in the field, or soon to be there, were the major contenders: President Monroe's Secretary of State, John Quincy Adams of Massachusetts; the Secretary of the Treasury, William H. Crawford of Georgia; the Secretary of War, John C. Calhoun of South Carolina; and the Speaker of the national House of Representatives, Henry Clay of Kentucky. Among the long shots being mentioned were Congressman William Lowndes of South Carolina, soon to be removed by death, and Governor DeWitt Clinton, leader of the opposition to Martin Van Buren's pro-Crawford Bucktail faction in New York.

Jackson's attitude toward these candidates was dictated mainly by personal considerations. Grateful to Adams and Calhoun for their defense of his violent incursion into Spanish Florida in 1818, he was hostile to Crawford and Clay, whose friends had attacked the Florida expedition in Congress. Crawford was slated by the old-line Republican leaders to receive the nomination of the regular congressional caucus, but Jackson declared that he "would support the Devil first."<sup>3</sup> The Georgian had earlier impugned some of Jackson's Indian treaties, and he was being supported by the general's personal and political enemies in Tennessee.

The exigencies of factional politics largely controlled the attitudes of Tennesseans generally toward the presidential candidates. Overton, Eaton, and Lewis were associated with a faction that had dominated Tennessee for most of its history. Founded by William Blount, the architect of a fabulous land speculation involving most of the acreage in the state, this faction had been concerned primarily with making good its land claims and later with exploiting the possibilities of the banking business. Jackson had worked with this loosely knit group in his early days of political activity, and he was still personally intimate with Overton, now its unofficial leader, Eaton, Lewis, and their principal allies in East Tennessee, Overton's brother-in-law, Hugh Lawson White, and Pleasant M. Miller, a son-in-law of William Blount.

John Sevier had led the opposition to the Blount-Overton faction in the state's first years; more recently his mantle had fallen on a group of vigorous men who were all deadly personal enemies of Andrew Jackson. They included Senator John Williams and several congressmen, while their principal strategist was a Middle Tennessee planter and land speculator, Colonel Andrew Erwin, with whom Jackson was, in 1822, engaged in a bitter litigation that brought Erwin to the brink of financial ruin.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Jackson to James Gadsden, Dec. 6, 1821, draft copy, Andrew Jackson Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>4</sup> Charles G. Sellers, Jr., "Banking and Politics in Jackson's Tennessee, 1817-1827," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, XLI (June, 1954).

Since Erwin and his friends were solidly in the Crawford camp, the Blount-Overton men were certain to be anti-Crawford, and Jackson undoubtedly hoped to line them up behind Adams or Calhoun. This hope was threatened, however, when Henry Clay entered the presidential competition as the first western candidate in the history of the office, attracting strong support that cut across factional lines in Tennessee. Judge Overton had visited Clay in the summer of 1821, and as soon as the Kentuckian became a candidate, the judge promised him Tennessee's electoral votes. Clay got additional support from another important Tennessee politician, Felix Grundy, who a decade before had worked closely with him as one of the congressional War Hawks in precipitating the War of 1812. Grundy, like Overton, had been in communication with Clay during 1821, urging him to become a candidate and assuring him of Tennessee's support. Still another Clay backer was Governor William Carroll.<sup>5</sup>

Overton, Grundy, and Carroll spanned the political spectrum in Tennessee, and a union of their followers for the Kentuckian would have ensured his success in the state. Overton and his faction had been in eclipse since the Panic of 1819, which had generated a storm of public resentment against the banks they operated. Grundy, the only important Tennessee politician not identified with either major faction, had shrewdly capitalized on this popular discontent to become the dominant figure in the legislature, while veering back and forth between the two factions. Carroll was the ultimate beneficiary of the panic-generated discontent. Running as the Erwin faction's candidate for governor in 1821, he won a smashing victory over the Blount-Overton candidate. It was, in fact, the Overton men's desperate efforts to regain their ascendancy that led to Jackson's nomination for President.

The accounts left by Major Lewis and Judge Overton both indicate that the movement to nominate Jackson developed in the winter of 1821-1822, hard on the heels of Carroll's election. According to Lewis, the general's friends around Nashville "began now to speak of him as a candidate and, in *good earnest*, to take the necessary steps to place his name prominently before the country." The first public manifestation of the movement, Lewis continues, was an article in one of the Nashville newspapers in January, 1822, and soon afterward the Nashville *Gazette*, organ of the Blount-Overton faction, "took the field openly and boldly for the General."<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Overton to Clay, Jan. 16, 1822, Henry Clay Papers, Library of Congress; Nashville *Constitutional Advocate*, Sept. 17, 1822.

<sup>6</sup> Lewis to Gov. Lewis Cass, undated letter, probably written in the 1840's, in the Henry L. Huntington Library.

of 1824. Already in the  
s: President Monroe's  
ssets; the Secretary of  
Secretary of War, John  
the national House of  
long shots being men-  
h Carolina, soon to be  
ader of the opposition  
in New York.

ted mainly by personal  
r their defense of his  
as hostile to Crawford  
xpedition in Congress.  
rs to receive the nomi-  
kson declared that he  
rlier impugned some of  
d by the general's per-

rolled the attitudes of  
dates. Overton, Eaton,  
minated Tennessee for  
architect of a fabulous  
: state, this faction had  
l claims and later with  
:kson had worked with  
ctivity, and he was still  
leader, Eaton, Lewis,  
s brother-in-law, Hugh  
of William Blount.

Overton faction in the  
on a group of vigorous  
rew Jackson. They in-  
n, while their principal  
nd speculator, Colonel  
gaged in a bitter litiga-  
in.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Jackson Papers, Library of  
essee, 1817-1827," *Mississippi*

Overton's account is similar, but he claims credit for originating the movement. Early in 1822, says the judge, "it forcibly struck me that he [Jackson] ought to be the next President and by proper means might be made so." Overton goes on to recall that he had "praises thrown out" in the *Nashville Gazette*. "They were lightly thought of," he says, "but that made no difference with me."<sup>7</sup>

Contemporary evidence makes it clear, however, that Overton was not the first to envision Jackson as a presidential candidate. Indeed, even after the Jackson talk had started, the judge preferred another. In a letter of January 16, 1822, he assured Clay that "as far as I know the public mind, you will get all the votes in Tennessee in preference to any man whose name has been mentioned." Though Overton reported "some whispering conversation here that Jackson would suffer himself to be run," he was "almost certain that he will not, and my information is derived from good authority." The judge added that Jackson could probably "beat you himself" in Tennessee, but that the general could not induce the voters to prefer Adams or Calhoun over Clay. Overton particularly requested Clay to keep his remarks confidential. "Inasmuch as I, and our family have always been friendly with Jackson," he wrote, "I should not like him to know of any interposition of mine on this subject."<sup>8</sup>

The apparent conflicts in the foregoing evidence are not irreconcilable. It would seem that the Jackson-for-President talk actually started with a group of politically ineffectual men around the general, most notably Major Lewis, that Overton was converted to the idea shortly after he wrote to Clay, and that Overton then instructed the *Gazette's* editor to launch the public campaign. If things happened this way, Overton's claim that he initiated the movement is essentially valid, since without his support it would never have gotten beyond the stage of talk. At any rate, the movement was certainly being pushed "in good earnest" by February, when Jackson's wife complained that "Major Eaton, General Carroll, the Doctor and even the Parson and I can't tell how many others—all of his friends who come here—talk everlastingly about his being President."<sup>9</sup>

Why did Overton throw his great influence behind the Jackson movement?

<sup>7</sup> Overton to his nephew, Feb. 23, 1824, quoted in a sketch of Overton by Judge John M. Lea, a newspaper clipping in the Overton Papers on microfilm at the Joint University Library, Nashville. In the letter, Overton dates these events in early 1821, but this is an obvious slip, since he speaks of them as immediately preceding the legislature's nomination of Jackson, which did not occur until 1822.

<sup>8</sup> Overton to Clay, Jan. 16, 1822, Clay Papers.

<sup>9</sup> Augustus C. Buell, *History of Andrew Jackson: Pioneer, Patriot, Soldier, Politician, President* (New York, 1904), II, 157-58.

Much of the answer to this question may be found in a letter he received about the time he must have been making his decision. On January 27, Pleasant M. Miller of Knoxville, leader of the Blount-Overton forces in the lower house of the legislature, wrote to the judge suggesting that Jackson should be run for governor in 1823.<sup>10</sup> Though Miller's epistolary style was highly ambiguous, the most casual reader could hardly miss his reiterated suggestions that Jackson's popularity might be used to effect certain local political objectives. Overton would have had no trouble understanding Miller's intimations that Governor Carroll, whose overwhelming strength was the chief obstacle to a Blount-Overton comeback, might thus be defeated at the state elections of 1823, that a new legislature purged of Jackson's enemies from the Erwin-Carroll faction might be elected at the same time, and that the various legislative purposes of the Blount-Overton men might thus be achieved.<sup>11</sup>

A single paragraph of Miller's long letter will sufficiently suggest its tone:

Is there any man whose personal popularity is so likely to assist in fixing the seat of government permanently at any given point as Andrew Jackson, if so why should he not be the next governor, or why should this not be wish[ed] for by those who desire this result. I am satisfied that this cannot be done with the present legislature.

A more reliable legislature could be elected along with Jackson in 1823, Miller was suggesting. Even in Bedford County, Andrew Erwin's stronghold, Miller was confident the Jackson question would be potent enough to ensure the right kind of representation. In addition, Senator John Williams, whose term was expiring, could be replaced by a reliable Blount-Overton man. Miller had himself in mind for this position, as subsequently appeared.

At the time Miller wrote, there was talk of calling a special session of the legislature to meet during the summer. This legislature, having been elected along with Carroll the previous year, was untrustworthy from the Blount-Overton point of view. Hence Miller was anxious to prevent a special session, or if it were called, to keep it from acting on the matters he mentioned.

Miller had got wind of the talk about running Jackson for President, and he was by no means opposed to the idea, his comments implying that the

<sup>10</sup> Miller to Overton, Jan. 27, 1822, John Overton Papers, Claybrooke Collection, Tennessee Historical Society, Nashville.

<sup>11</sup> Among the issues to which Miller alluded were the location of the state capital and a proposed penitentiary, land legislation in which the speculators were vitally interested, and revision of the state judiciary. The judicial question was related to the land issue, the state supreme court having recently made a ruling disastrous to the speculators, and Overton was anxious to return to the supreme bench for the purpose of rectifying matters (see Patrick H. Darby to Jackson, July 4, 1821, Jackson Papers).

t for originating the  
y struck me that he  
oper means might be  
is thrown out" in the  
says, "but that made

at Overton was not  
e. Indeed, even after  
er. In a letter of Jan-  
the public mind, you  
man whose name has  
ispering conversation  
was "almost certain  
good authority." The  
elf" in Tennessee, but  
ams or Calhoun over  
remarks confidential.  
lly with Jackson," he  
ition of mine on this

not irreconcilable. It  
started with a group  
otably Major Lewis,  
e wrote to Clay, and  
nch the public cam-  
that he initiated the  
it would never have  
ement was certainly  
on's wife complained  
en the Parson and I  
me here—talk ever-

Jackson movement?

on by Judge John M. Lea,  
University Library, Nash-  
: an obvious slip, since he  
f Jackson, which did not

*Soldier, Politician, Presi-*

general had no chance to be elected, but that his candidacy might yield certain collateral advantages. Miller was reported to favor Adams for the presidency about this time,<sup>12</sup> and though his meaning is obscure, his letter of January 27 seems to suggest that Tennessee and other southern states cooperate with the smaller northeastern states in electing the New England candidate. Jackson's nomination would actually help Adams in the electoral college by depriving Crawford and Clay of votes from Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana, in most of which the New Englander had no chance anyhow. Crawford's defeat would aid in prostrating the Erwin-Carroll faction in Tennessee. Miller knew that Grundy "has different views at the called session," which doubtless meant a plan to nominate Clay. But, he told Overton, "I know that if you fall in with my notions that you will know how to act." He particularly urged the judge to "take time to consider of these matters so far as they concern our local affairs & ascertain how far certain persons will act on them," and concluded by promising to visit Nashville in March, when "we can converse more freely."

Overton's desertion of Clay and endorsement of the Jackson movement was substantially a fulfillment of Miller's hope that the judge would "fall in with my notions." The project of running Jackson for governor was found impracticable, but his nomination for President was to serve the same purposes. Although it was Miller who actually conceived the essential strategy first, Overton was doubtless responsible for abandoning the plan to run Jackson for governor and concentrating on his presidential candidacy. Early in the spring, Miller made his promised trip west to concert strategy with Overton. The special session had now been called for July, and it was agreed that this body should nominate Tennessee's hero formally.

Miller's subsequent letters to Overton throw further light on the motives of Jackson's two principal managers. "I have Jackson's interest deeply at heart," he wrote on June 8.<sup>13</sup> "I think I know how bringing him forward is to operate upon the next congressional election &c. &c. I should not have went to the west when I did but with this view, & I think the effects of my visit will shew itself in some shape." The time had come, he thought, "for the papers to come directly forward" and call on the legislature to nominate Jackson at the special session. "Tell Jackson to come up Wednesday of the first week while people are all in a good humour—ask his friends to see him," Miller advised. "He can say he feels proud he has once returned to private

<sup>12</sup> Statement of Hugh Lawson White, in the *Nashville Union*, Sept. 25, 1835.

<sup>13</sup> Miller to Overton, June 8, 1822, Overton Papers.

life. If he has any redgmental coat were it, put on little milletary dress &c. You know more I need say no more."

Miller did not hesitate to admit that "I have motives for this matter." Jackson's nomination was the best way of frustrating Senator Williams' plan to win reelection at the special session. "There ought not to be an election for Senator at this time," Miller insisted, "—these good people must be held in check & this is all the hold we have—in a state of excitement publick opinion will keep them down unless that election is over." Should Williams be re-elected, he predicted, there would be "a prodigious struggle" to realign Tennessee's congressional districts so as to favor Erwinite congressmen who "will in caucus vote for you knowho [Crawford]. I believe however I understand this matter tolerable well & expect to frustrate these views," Miller continued. "If I fail it will be the first time[.] keep your eye on [the] fidler & work even a head & let me alone for the rest." Almost parenthetically he reported talk that "I am a candidate for the Senate, & that my visit to the west was to promote that view."

Several weeks later, Miller wrote again,<sup>14</sup> in terms indicating that he and Overton were working closely together toward mutually agreeable objectives. "I have rec[eive]d your two letters," he told the judge, "& things will be attended to to your satisfaction in part or in whole. I am using all my exertions to bring old hickory to view during the approaching session."

Meanwhile Overton and Miller had acquired an important recruit. Felix Grundy had become estranged from the Erwin-Carroll men and, in danger of political isolation, was ready to jump aboard any band wagon that happened along. The Jackson movement offered him a perfect opportunity to reinstate himself in the good graces of the Blount-Overton faction, and he did not hesitate. It was Grundy who on June 27 signed the note asking Jackson whether he had any objection to the proposed nomination.<sup>15</sup> Jackson seems not to have replied, but silence was as good as open assent.

The last possible obstacle removed, Overton, Miller, and Grundy now made their final preparations, and the Nashville newspapers endorsed the plan for a legislative nomination. State pride kept even the Erwin-Carroll men from opposing Jackson publicly,<sup>16</sup> though the editorial of endorsement in their organ, the Nashville *Clarion*, had a sarcastic ring. When the special ses-

<sup>14</sup> Miller to Overton, June 25, 1822, *ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Grundy to Jackson, June 27, 1822, Jackson Papers. Grundy was probably enlisted during Miller's visit to Nashville in the spring. Miller had even foreseen Grundy's cooperation, having informed Overton in his letter of January 27 that Grundy had "abandoned the head of department at Nashville [Governor Carroll] & said that he would stick to me."

<sup>16</sup> Andrew Hynes (an associate of Carroll) to Henry Clay, June 30, 1822, Clay Papers; James, *Jackson*, p. 351.

lacy might yield certain  
ams for the presidency  
his letter of January 27  
ates cooperate with the  
nd candidate. Jackson's  
al college by depriving  
ama, Mississippi, and  
ad no chance anyhow.  
win-Carroll faction in  
it views at the called  
lay. But, he told Over-  
you will know how to  
e to consider of these  
ertain how far certain  
ag to visit Nashville in

the Jackson movement  
the judge would "fall  
or governor was found  
to serve the same pur-  
d the essential strategy  
g the plan to run Jack-  
ial candidacy. Early in  
concert strategy with  
July, and it was agreed  
ally.

er light on the motives  
on's interest deeply at  
ringing him forward is  
&c. I should not have  
think the effects of my  
come, he thought, "for  
legislature to nominate  
up Wednesday of the  
his friends to see him,"  
ace returned to private

sion assembled on July 22, Miller was able to push his nominating resolutions through the lower house promptly, though the Erwin-Carroll men delayed action in the senate for two weeks.<sup>17</sup>

The reactions to Jackson's nomination by well-informed politicians outside the circle of Jackson managers were significant. All the comments that have been discovered agree in predicting that Jackson would not remain in the race as a serious contender. A month before the nomination, one of Governor Carroll's associates, Colonel Andrew Hynes, had informed Clay that Jackson had no hope of being elected and that he was being brought forward "not so much with view of promoting his own elevation, as to subserve an Eastern or Northern interest."<sup>18</sup> The same explanation was advanced as late as the summer of 1823 by that astute politician, Thomas Hart Benton, following a two-month tour of Tennessee in the interest of Clay. "Jackson out of the way the state will go for you," Benton told the Kentuckian, "and there is hardly anyone who thinks he has any chance, and many see in his offering nothing but a diversion in favor of Adams."<sup>19</sup>

During the special session of 1822, Colonel Hynes discovered an additional explanation for the nomination. According to a "secret rumor that is afloat in the air," he informed Clay, Jackson's nomination was designed mainly to affect the senatorial election.<sup>20</sup> This was corroborated by a Colonel McClung, one of the leading citizens of Knoxville, who asserted that Pleasant Miller had "played off this manouvre to bring Jackson's name to bear, & make a point in the election of Senator." McClung was confident that Williams would be reelected by the special session despite the Jackson movement and that "so soon as the election of Senator is over, we shall hear no more of a Tenn. candidate for the office of President."<sup>21</sup> McClung's judgment was wrong, for Miller's strategy succeeded in blocking Williams' reelection at the special session, and the senatorial election was postponed to the regular session of 1823.

Meanwhile, Governor Carroll was spreading reports that Jackson would probably not remain long in the running and telling Clay that he still had a

<sup>17</sup> James, *Jackson*, pp. 352-53. Though inaccurate in details, Overton's account, cited in fn. 7 above, illuminates the roles of the principals. "The Legislature met," says the judge, "and then I communicated to a leading member my views which he gave into, communicated them to Grundy, who at first seemed a little surprised, but gave into the measure of recommending him by our Legislature which was done unanimously. The resolutions were preceded by a speech which I wrote for a member." Most of these negotiations took place, as we have seen, some time before the legislature met. The "leading member" was unquestionably Miller.

<sup>18</sup> Hynes to Clay, June 30, 1822, Clay Papers.

<sup>19</sup> Benton to Clay, July 23, 1823, *ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Hynes to Clay, July 31, 1822, *ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> McClung's remarks were reported by one of Clay's correspondents, George C. Thompson, Thompson to Clay, Aug. 12, 1822, *ibid.*

good chance for Tennessee. The governor also informed the Kentuckian that Grundy had promised to support him "if the prospects of Jackson became hopeless . . . and that he would endeavour to have you nominated at the next meeting of our legislature."<sup>22</sup> About the same time, Colonel Hynes was in New Orleans assuring the Louisiana politicians that Tennessee would ultimately go for Clay.<sup>23</sup>

Skepticism about the seriousness of Jackson's candidacy was also expressed by one of his sincere admirers. "Whatever may be the estimate in which he is held by the people of this State (and surely even here he is very differently estimated)," wrote Thomas Claiborne to a friend in Virginia, "I confess that I fear he will not be likely to unite sufficient strength in other States to secure his election. There are too many great men in other States to suffer a man from the young & small State of Tennessee at the present day to be made President of the United States."<sup>24</sup>

Whatever their ultimate purposes or expectations, Miller and his allies did everything they could to raise a Jackson excitement in the state campaign of 1823. Meetings to endorse Jackson were organized all over the state; pro-Jackson candidates for Congress and the legislature were put up in most districts; office seekers were called upon to say whether they would vote against Williams for senator and for Jackson in the presidential election; and an unsuccessful effort was made to induce Jackson to aid his supporters by touring East Tennessee.<sup>25</sup>

One of the hottest contests was in the Knoxville district, home of Williams, Miller, and Judge Hugh Lawson White, where Miller had entered a Doctor Wiatt as the pro-Jackson candidate for the legislature against the senator's brother, Thomas L. Williams.<sup>26</sup> This placed Judge White in a particularly embarrassing position. One of Jackson's oldest friends, a brother-in-law of Overton, and long a leader of the Blount-Overton faction, White was also related to Senator Williams and reluctant to oppose him. When he took the Williams' side in the Knoxville legislative campaign, he and his sons became involved in such a bitter personal broil with the Miller-Wiatt party that several duels were barely averted.

<sup>22</sup> Carroll to Clay, Feb. 1, 1823, *ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*; Isaac L. Baker to Jackson, Mar. 3, 1823, Jackson Papers.

<sup>24</sup> Claiborne to David Campbell, Sept. 9, 1822, David Campbell Papers, Duke University Library.

<sup>25</sup> Samuel Martin to Jackson, June 17, 1823, Jackson Papers; John Williams to Rufus King, Nov. 19, 1823, Rufus King Papers, New York Historical Society; James Campbell to David Campbell, Apr. 3, 1823 [misplaced 1825], Campbell Papers.

<sup>26</sup> J. G. M. Ramsey to Francis P. Blair, Oct. 5, 1835, Blair-Lee Papers, Princeton University Library.

ating resolutions  
oll men delayed

oliticians outside  
ements that have  
ot remain in the  
2, one of Govern-  
rmed Clay that  
brought forward  
s to subserve an  
was advanced as  
as Hart Benton,  
f Clay. "Jackson  
Kentuckian, "and  
many see in his

red an additional  
eor that is afloat  
signed mainly to  
olonel McClung,  
asant Miller had  
: make a point in  
lliams would be  
ent and that "so  
more of a Tenn.  
t was wrong, for  
n at the special  
egular session of

at Jackson would  
hat he still had a

ccount, cited in fn. 7  
e judge, "and then I  
mmunicated them to  
f recommending him  
preceded by a speech  
have seen, some time  
r.

George C. Thompson,

But Jackson's candidacy might still be killed. John Williams' reelection to the Senate would indicate that Jackson did not control his own state and keep worried politicians in states like Pennsylvania from jumping aboard the Jackson band wagon. Even Tennessee might be held for Clay after all.

The crucial importance of the Tennessee senatorial election was appreciated far beyond the borders of the state. Senator Ninian Edwards came down from Illinois to represent Calhoun's interests, while Thomas Hart Benton of Missouri spent several months in Tennessee on a similar mission for Clay.<sup>36</sup> When the legislature assembled at Murfreesborough in September, the little village was crowded with "extra members," who had flocked in from every part of the state to influence the legislators in the senatorial election. Judge White had come from Knoxville to "spread himself against Jackson,"<sup>37</sup> and was frequently seen with Senator Williams "in deep consultation on the woodpiles about the square."<sup>38</sup> The pro-Jackson delegation on hand to ensure Williams' downfall included Senator Eaton, Major Lewis, Thomas Claiborne, fresh from his defeat for the legislature on the anti-Grundy ticket, and Sam Houston, the dashing young lawyer who had just won a seat in Congress as Jackson's protégé.

During the preceding weeks, John Williams had been touring the state to line up his supporters, and despite Miller's active campaign the senator reached Murfreesborough with the assurance of a comfortable majority over the announced opposition. Much of his advantage arose from the fact that Miller was not the only politician hoping to ride into the Senate on Jackson's coattails. William G. Blount, son of the great speculator and a former congressman from East Tennessee, threatened to enter the race, while Jackson's old crony, the veteran East Tennessee politician, John Rhea, had actually abandoned his seat in Congress to offer as a candidate. Neither Miller nor Rhea would withdraw, and the Jackson men were forced into desperate efforts to stave off the election until they could unite on one of their two candidates. The least division would ensure the election of Jackson's notorious enemy and almost certainly destroy his presidential prospects.<sup>39</sup>

There is strong evidence that Overton and Grundy were now working for

<sup>36</sup> Elihu B. Washburne, ed., *The Edwards Papers* (Chicago, 1884), p. 207; John Williams to Rufus King, Nov. 19, 1823, King Papers; Benton to Clay, July 23, 1823, Clay Papers; Jackson to [Eaton?], Oct. 4, 1823, draft copy, Jackson Papers.

<sup>37</sup> J. G. M. Ramsey to F. P. Blair, Oct. 5, 1835, Blair-Lee Papers.

<sup>38</sup> *Nashville Union*, Sept. 22, 1836.

<sup>39</sup> John Rhea to Jackson, June 18, 1823, Jackson Papers; R. G. Dunlap to Jackson, July 2, 1823, *ibid.*; John Williams to Rufus King, Nov. 19, 1823, King Papers; *Correspondence of Andrew Jackson*, III, 201n.; *Tenn. House Journal*, 1823, pp. 20, 76-77; *Tenn. Senate Journal*, 1823, pp. 29-30, 37, 59-60.

Williams' reelection to  
of his own state and  
from jumping aboard  
held for Clay after all.  
The election was ap-  
linian Edwards came  
while Thomas Hart  
on a similar mission  
rough in September,  
who had flocked in  
in the senatorial elec-  
read himself against  
Williams "in deep con-  
o-Jackson delegation  
Eaton, Major Lewis,  
islature on the anti-  
lawyer who had just

en touring the state  
ampaign the senator  
ortable majority over  
e from the fact that  
Senate on Jackson's  
r and a former con-  
race, while Jackson's  
Rhea, had actually  
. Neither Miller nor  
rced into desperate  
on one of their two  
f Jackson's notorious  
pects.<sup>39</sup>

ere now working for

p. 207; John Williams to  
1823, Clay Papers; Jackson

unlap to Jackson, July 2,  
'Correspondence of Andrew  
Senate Journal, 1823, pp.

just this result, with the important assistance of Judge White. Since January, Senator Williams had been writing familiarly to Overton about his chances,<sup>40</sup> and now Thomas L. Williams implored Overton to come to Murfreesborough and help his brother. "As the friends of our opponents assemble to influence members and to promote the views of their favourite I think ours should be permitted an equal liberty," he wrote, betraying not the slightest doubt of Overton's sympathy. "Will you come up next week."<sup>41</sup>

Grundy, meanwhile, was leading the fight to bring on the election at once. "His vote had been firmly fixed from shortly after his arrival here," a newspaper reported him as saying in debate; "previous to that time a difficulty had existed with him on the subject which but one man [John Williams] could remove; and he now could say that the difficulty had been removed fully and satisfactorily, and he was now ready to give his vote."<sup>42</sup> This was merely part of a concerted effort to convince members that Williams was not unfriendly to Jackson and would not oppose his presidential aspirations. Simultaneously, Grundy introduced resolutions instructing Tennessee's senators to do their best to prevent the congressional nominating caucus. All of this convinced Jackson's friends that Grundy was leading the Williams forces and had introduced his caucus resolutions to obviate the most serious objection to Williams, the expectation that he would attend the caucus and help nominate Crawford.<sup>43</sup>

The suspicious Jackson men now sent a delegation to question Williams on his attitude toward the general, and when he equivocated, they dispatched a messenger urging Jackson to hasten to Murfreesborough and save the situation. Jackson refused to come, but he did insist on Williams' defeat and denounced Grundy and the other "schemers of the opposition."<sup>44</sup> By this time, as Governor Carroll reported to Clay, the situation was extremely "strange and uncertain."<sup>45</sup> When it became clear that Miller had too many personal enemies to overcome the well-organized Williams forces, the Jackson men persuaded the general to endorse Rhea, but even this left them three votes short of a majority. Jackson again refused to come personally to their aid, and the election could be staved off no longer.

Finally, in desperation, Eaton and Lewis had Jackson's name placed before the legislature as Williams' competitor for the Senate. When the messenger

<sup>40</sup> John Williams to Overton, Jan. 14, 1823, Overton Papers.

<sup>41</sup> Thomas L. Williams to Overton, Sept. 20, 1823, *ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> Nashville *Whig*, Sept. 22, 1823.

<sup>43</sup> William Brady and Thomas Williamson to Jackson, Sept. 20, 1823, Jackson Papers.

<sup>44</sup> Jackson [to William Brady and Thomas Williamson], Sept. 27, 1823, draft copy, *ibid.*; Nashville *Union*, Sept. 22, 1836.

<sup>45</sup> Carroll to Clay, Oct. 1, 1823, Clay Papers.

bearing this news reached the Hermitage, Jackson mounted up and left post-haste for Murfreesborough, arriving in the middle of the night preceding the election. Even with Jackson as a candidate and present at the election, Williams was beaten and Jackson elected senator by a vote of only thirty-five to twenty-five.

In Washington the following winter, Senator Jackson charmed friend and foe alike. Pennsylvania soon endorsed Tennessee's hero, most of Calhoun's support shifted to Jackson when the South Carolinian was forced to withdraw, and everywhere the popular enthusiasm for Old Hickory mounted.

Though Grundy, Overton, Miller, and White now joined Lewis and Eaton in the five-year campaign that carried Jackson into the White House, their situation was ironical. A movement started by obscure Tennessee politicians for their own local purposes had unexpectedly been caught up by a deep ground swell of democratic aspiration. The original Jackson promoters found themselves uncomfortably astride a whirlwind of their own devising.

None of these conservative men were fundamentally sympathetic to Jackson's social philosophy, as it began to manifest itself in the 1820's or as it was implemented in the 1830's. Old Hickory was hardly inaugurated before Miller went into opposition. Overton and Eaton evidenced their discomfort by trying to block Van Buren's vice presidential nomination in 1832. Overton died shortly afterward, while Eaton opposed the Jackson party covertly in 1836 and openly in 1840. Major Lewis dissembled from about 1833 on, professing friendship to Jackson but actually aiding his enemies. Judge White ran for President against the Jackson party's candidate in 1836. Only the adaptable Grundy, acutely sensitive to Old Hickory's popularity, managed to remain loyal until his death in 1840.

Since the foregoing account depends at some points on inference from rather ambiguous documents, it has been necessary to present much of the evidence in relatively raw form. This evidence each reader may evaluate for himself; but to the writer the following conclusions are clearly indicated:

1. Major Lewis and a few other politically inconsequential personal friends were the first Tennesseans to think seriously of making Jackson President, and these men could never have initiated the Jackson movement by themselves.
2. Jackson's nomination by the Tennessee legislature in 1822 was the work of Pleasant M. Miller, John Overton, and Felix Grundy, none of whom preferred Jackson personally and none of whom thought he had a chance to

be elected, or even to be a major contender. Miller seems to have favored John Quincy Adams, while Overton and Grundy hoped ultimately to carry Tennessee for Henry Clay.

3. The primary motive of these "original Jackson men" was to use Jackson's popularity to achieve certain local political advantages. Miller, who apparently sold this strategy to Overton in January, 1822, was particularly motivated by a desire to succeed John Williams in the United States Senate.

4. Overton and Grundy, surprised by the ground swell of Jackson sentiment outside Tennessee and dismayed by Jackson's increasingly manifest social philosophy, sought to kill his presidential candidacy by securing John Williams' reelection to the Senate in 1823.

American history is full of ironies, but surely few are more striking than the situation of these conservative Tennesseans as they unwittingly launched the movement that carried popular democracy to victory in national politics. The episode in itself is hardly more than a fascinating footnote to the Jackson story, yet for historians it is significantly representative. Scholarly indifference to the local and particular ends that are often the springs of political behavior has shrouded much of our political history in a pervasive unreality. The Jackson movement originated in a curious amalgam of local machinations by obscure politicians and of broad national developments. The political system thus imposed on the country has continued to rest on just such an amalgam. We shall never understand that system and its history adequately so long as able scholars confine themselves to congressional and cabinet level materials, while regarding investigations at the base of political life as work for inferior talents.

*Princeton University*