

“Mysteries in Politik”: The Second Congressional Elections in the Districts of Worcester  
and Maine

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## ABSTRACT

### “MYSTERIES IN POLITIKS”: THE SECOND CONGRESSIONAL ELECTIONS IN WORCESTER AND MAINE

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This thesis is a study of the Congressional elections in two districts of Massachusetts, Maine and Worcester, in 1790. Massachusetts election law required a candidate to receive 50 percent of the cast ballots to be declared winner. When no candidate reached this threshold, another election would be held. In both Worcester and Maine multiple canvasses were necessary to produce a winner. Although the second Congressional races were the first time that voters had an opportunity to express their opinions on how the new national government was taking shape, the newspaper campaigns leading up to these elections lacked an substantial discussion of national issues. The major pieces of legislation passed in the First Congress did not seem to factor into people's decision. Instead, the focus was on the candidate's background, personality, and relatively obscure pieces of legislation. The debates surrounding these elections do, however, foreshadow some of the issues that would divide the nation between Federalists and Republicans.

## 1. Introduction

In the fall of 1790, American voters had their first opportunity to express their opinions on their new government. When they had gone to the polls in 1788, nobody knew exactly what to look for in a representative. The only issue to base a decision on was whether the candidate originally supported ratification of the Constitution; beyond that, people voted according to speculation on how the candidates would act in Congress. Two years later, the American public had had the opportunity to see their government and their representatives in action. Legislators in the First Federal Congress had been forced to take positions on some consequential and controversial legislation. They had passed amendments to the Constitution, created the federal judiciary, established a source of revenue, agreed on a permanent location for the seat of federal government, and agreed on legislation assuming various states' debts. In short, the First Congress had established a track record for both the form of government and for the candidates themselves. In some areas the second congressional elections passed without much fanfare, but in others the elections were hotly contested.

In Massachusetts, the second election for the House of Representatives resulted in a series of run-offs in four out of the eight districts.<sup>1</sup> Massachusetts law stipulated that a candidate must receive a majority of cast ballots to win. When a decision was reached, it was often by the slimmest of margins. The election returns show a deeply divided electorate. A study of the elections of two of the districts that required run-offs—Worcester and Maine—demonstrates that national issues were not at the root of these contested elections. Newspapers and other contemporary documents reveal no debate over the major issues faced by the First Congress. Instead, the elections hinged on matters of character, personality, and, rarely a now obscure vote in Congress. The topics that historians of the Federal Period have found to be significant did not seem to matter to the electors.

One difficulty Massachusetts voters faced in selecting a representative stemmed from the lack of organized political parties and the absence of an orderly system for nominating men for office. Before parties began nominating candidates, supporters generally put a candidate's name forward. Electioneering for one's self was seen as untoward, and a candidate was expected to feign indifference to being chosen. Although there is no sign of organized parties in these competitive early elections, evidence exists of the divisions that would later separate the nation into two major parties. Fundamental

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<sup>1</sup> Worcester, Maine, Suffolk, Berkshire-Hampshire, the Bristol-Islands district, and Plymouth-Barnstable.

disagreements over the relationship between the people and their government, along with cleavage along economic and social lines, contributed to the competitive nature of these contests. Because the campaigns in Worcester and Maine are devoid of a discussion of the national issues that might have caused such splits, these divisions appear to have developed locally and independently from what took place at the federal seat.

Scholars of the Early Republic examine and reexamine the period after the ratification of the Constitution to find evidence of parties. To date no real consensus has been reached as to when or how parties first appeared. Historians such as Jackson Turner Main and H. James Henderson argue that parties existed before the Constitution was adopted.<sup>2</sup> Noble E. Cunningham, Jr. and David Waldstreicher find that parties first appeared in the 1790s as a response to the French Revolution and Jay Treaty.<sup>3</sup> Other scholars do not believe that parties existed at all in the Early Republic. Ronald Formisano and Richard Hofstadter find that true parties did not exist until the Jacksonian

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<sup>2</sup> Jackson Turner Main, *Political Parties before the Constitution* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 1973); Henderson, H. James, *Party Politics in the Continental Congress* (New York, N.Y.: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1974). See also Charles A. Beard, *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution* (New York, N.Y.: The Macmillan Company, 1913).

<sup>3</sup> Noble E. Cunningham, Jr. *The Jeffersonian Republicans: The Formation of Party Organization, 1789-1801* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 1957); David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776-1820* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997). Two other works that argue that political parties came into existence in the 1790s and will be discussed later are John J. Brooke, *The Heart of the Commonwealth: Society and Political Culture in Worcester County, Massachusetts, 1713-1861* (New York, N.Y.: Cambridge University Press, 1989) and Alan Taylor, *Liberty Men and Great Proprietors: The Revolutionary Settlement on the Maine Frontier, 1760-1820* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 1990). See also Joseph Charles, *The Origins of the American Party System* (New York, N.Y.: Harper Torchbooks, 1956)



Era.<sup>4</sup> Joanne Freeman opposes the very notion of trying to find a precise moment when the American political party was invented, arguing instead that it was a “gradual process that took place one decision at a time.”<sup>5</sup>

Further disagreement occurs over how parties developed. Cunningham, Freeman, Hofstadter and David Hackett Fisher examine the era from a nationwide perspective that results in the conclusion that parties formed from the top down.<sup>6</sup> Cabinet secretaries, Congress and local elites formed the nucleus of early parties. On the other side of the debate are historians Formisano, James Banner and Paul Goodman who believe that national parties were an extension of local coalitions.<sup>7</sup>

Some of the disagreement between historians results from differing opinions as to what constituted a “party.” This explains some of the controversy, but there is more to this debate than semantics. Each of the scholars mentioned would agree that there was interplay between the masses, local elites, Congress and the Executive Branch; the disagreement is over where the emphasis should be placed.

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<sup>4</sup> Ronald P. Formisano, *The Transformation of Political Culture: Massachusetts Parties, 1790s-1840s* (New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1983); Richard Hofstadter, *The Idea of a Party System: The Rise of Legitimate Opposition in the United States, 1780-1840* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1969).

<sup>5</sup> Joanne Freeman, *Affairs of Honor: National Politics in the New Republic* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2001).

<sup>6</sup> David Hackett Fisher, *The Revolution of American Conservatism: The Federalist Party in Era of Jeffersonian Democracy* (New York, N.Y.: Harper Torchbooks, 1965).

<sup>7</sup> James M. Banner, Jr. *To the Hartford Convention* (New York, N.Y.: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970); Paul Goodman, *The Democratic-Republicans of Massachusetts: Politics in a Young Republic* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1964).

A relationship exists between conclusions as to when and how parties developed and the historian's approach to the question. Those that study localities, or states, find that parties developed from the bottom-up. Scholars who start at the national level, looking at the "Founding Fathers," conclude that parties developed from the top down. There are also those who look to Congress for guidance. Studying Congressional voting patterns seems to suggest that parties developed in the mid-1790s. Because the starting point of their research is Congress, their conclusion is that parties first came into existence in Congress is not surprising. In keeping with this pattern, this study begins at the local level and concludes that local interests are the most important factor in early politics.

In *Political Parties before the Constitution*, Main argues that, while modern political parties are an invention of the twentieth century, enough evidence exists to conclude that, by 1788, politics in Massachusetts and elsewhere had divided into “two clearly identifiable sides that usually lacked definition or organization but that did conduct ad hoc campaigns.”<sup>8</sup> Main finds this sufficient evidence to conclude that there was indeed some form of parties. The Revolution had “cut athwart previous political alignments in Massachusetts.”<sup>9</sup> The war united Patriots against Loyalists and, when the Loyalists were forced to flee, created a virtually party-less state. Despite the political calm, contentious economic issues cropped up. Questions of monetary policy, public and

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<sup>8</sup> Main, p. 119.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p. 83.

private debts, and taxation were put off until the war's conclusion. When they were again considered under the new Massachusetts Constitution of 1780, partisan passions flared.

Heavily in debt for its Revolutionary War appropriations and in need of money, the General Court passed the Tender Act in 1782. Paper money, generally favored by farmers and debtors, was rejected in favor of specie. The question divided the state between the eastern mercantilists and creditors and western farmers and debtors. The farmer/debtor opposition was not enough to stop the measure passing, but Main finds that “the vote forecast the later [political] alignment: delegates who presently formed part of the western, or Localist, group, favoring repeal, 14-2, while their future opponents [Cosmopolitans] voted, 7-2, against the attempt.”<sup>10</sup>

The only other issue to divide the Massachusetts House in the early 1780s was how to treat former Loyalists. Voting on this measure showed a split along nearly the same lines as the Tender Act. Measures proposed in the General Court during the latter part of the 1780s exacerbated these differences. On almost every vote of any significance, Main finds lawyers, merchants, the wealthy, and printers aligned against farmers, those of humble or average social origins, and men of moderate means and/or little to no education. From 1780 to 1788, he concludes, “the men who, through analysis

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p. 88. See also Morse, Anson Ely *The Federalist Party in Massachusetts to the Year 1800*, (Princeton, N.J.: The University Library Press, 1909). pp. 34-37.

of [their] votes, have been identified as forming two legislative parties demonstrated strikingly consistent political behavior.”<sup>11</sup> Though these blocs lacked strong organization, the consistency of their voting patterns suggests that Massachusetts political parties came into being after the Revolutionary War and before the Constitution.

Henderson is even more emphatic that political parties existed in America before the Constitution. Henderson identifies the Continental and Confederation Congresses as the “genesis” of parties. “From the first Continental Congress to the time when the Articles of Confederation were replaced by the new Constitution, congressional politics was marked by partisan alignments which, if judged by behavior rather than motive or admission, took the shape of legislative parties.”<sup>12</sup> Despite strong anti-party rhetoric and a belief that a republic needed consensus to survive, partisanship ran rampant. The First Federal Congress was a blossoming of the earlier parties and, by the Second Congress, “firm alignments were evident to any who cared to scrutinize its proceedings.”<sup>13</sup> According to Henderson, these parties were based on sectional disagreements. The Federalists were basically the party of the Northeast and Republicans a party of southern interests.

To get at the root of these sectional disagreements, Henderson looked back at various sections’ colonial pasts. New Englanders who would later embrace Federalism

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<sup>11</sup> Maine, p. 106.

<sup>12</sup> Henderson p. 430.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p. 432.

“settled in towns, had lived in close proximity, and had developed churches and schools centered about the town as a corporate unit.” Theirs was an orderly settlement based on religion and discipline. “In the South the land was fertile, the climate less formidable, the attraction of quick wealth from rapid occupation of the land more alluring, the opportunity for economic gain through the use of slave labor seemingly irresistible, and the sense of community in the diffuse, expanding population less keenly present.”<sup>14</sup> The customs of the South put more emphasis on the (white) individual and lacked strong centralizing tendencies. From these inherent differences between the two regions stem all later disagreements. It was not, however, until the monarchy had been cast off in favor of a republic that they resulted in parties. The Continental Congress’s attempts at establishing a working federal government to hold the country together during the war with Great Britain exposed the inherent differences between the various states’ interests and led to the gestation of political parties. Henderson concludes that “the Constitution created a new national stage for the Republic, but workable government was possible only as a result of a partial transformation of the kinds of political alignments that had characterized the partisan politics of the Continental Congress and the early Federal Congresses.”<sup>15</sup>

Cunningham agrees that political conflict existed in the pre-Constitutional era but concludes that the critical point in party development was in the 1790s. He believes that

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p. 439, 350-378.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p. 444.

party formation took place in Congress, that national parties were not extensions of local ones, and that no real parties existed before the election of 1796. According to Cunningham, elections in the early 1790s “were, for the most part, decided on a personal basis.”<sup>16</sup> A candidate was not chosen because of his association with a particular party. Once in Congress, politicians continued to act independently and their votes show no signs of party allegiance. A survey of the voting behaviors in the Second Congress shows that while some members tended to vote either with or against Madison (whom Cunningham identifies as the Jeffersonian leader in Congress), the majority of members followed no pattern. Cunningham identifies “emergent party groupings” by 1793 but there was still an “absence of clear party labels” within Congress. Men like Madison and Jefferson attempted to create some type of unified opposition but were unable to establish much party discipline.

With George Washington’s decision to step down from the presidency, the election of 1796 presented national party builders with a unique opportunity to establish the basis for permanent parties. The French Revolution and debates over the Jay Treaty had further polarized Congress, but while the allegedly non-partisan Washington was President, party development was stifled. During the presidential election of 1796, which pitted Federalist John Adams against Republican Thomas Jefferson, “party lines tightened, party spirit rose to new heights, and political parties became a more

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<sup>16</sup> Cunningham, p. 249.

ineradicable part of American political life than ever before.”<sup>17</sup> Statesmen found it difficult to remain above the fray. By 1797, party lines had been firmly established, and Congressional voting patterns show that very few men chose to break ranks. The culmination of Cunningham’s study is the election of 1800 and the ultimate “triumph of party.”

Waldstreicher is another historian who has identified the 1790s as the critical period of party formation. In his book, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes*, Waldstreicher argues that true national political parties could not have existed before 1790 because there was no nation. Americans had to develop a sense of nationalism before they could begin to construct a political party. *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes* looks at politics of the Early Republic through festivals, parades, holidays, feast and fast days, election sermons, speeches, toasts, and other public rituals. Through the study of “the relationship of nationalist ideology to political practice in the United States,” Waldstreicher concludes that the first national parties came into existence in response to the French Revolution.<sup>18</sup>

Waldstreicher believes that “parties emerged because the new federal government, its functionaries, and its local allies clothed themselves in the rhetoric and the rituals of nation.”<sup>19</sup> There were factions in the pre-Constitutional era, but without national cohesion their scope was limited. Furthermore, many statesmen feared that

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p. 94.

<sup>18</sup> Waldstreicher, p. 3.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, p. 113.

partisan rancor would tear the county apart. However, fundamental disagreements existed over the “relationship of the people—the national polity—to the government.”<sup>20</sup>

At first people genuinely believed that the George Washington could see the county through the early years without these disagreements ripening into parties. This proved too difficult a task for even the great George Washington. Domestic legislation, such as Hamilton’s fiscal plan, helped push the opposition toward creating a party, but with the outbreak of the French Revolution the “would-be national consensus” broke down.<sup>21</sup>

Supporters saw the events in France as an extension of their own liberal experiment, while opponents feared that it would destabilize trade and lead to anarchy. Each side battled for support in print and in public. Republican Francophiles joined together in clubs and organized festivals and parades in support of the French Republic.

Waldstreicher believes that “these celebrations were surely partisan: they helped mobilize the first national opposition party.”<sup>22</sup> By 1800 the country had divided into two clearly identifiable political parties. Each cloaked itself in nationalism and denounced its opponents as evil and harbingers of doom.

Another group of historians rejects the concept of the first party system. In *The Transformation of Political Culture*, Formisano agrees with Cunningham that there was significant political conflict in the 1790s, but finds insufficient evidence of the existence

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p. 126.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, p. 129.



of parties. Formisano writes that “In the 1790s political acrimony spread throughout society, but not even the shadow of organized parties existed.”<sup>23</sup> True parties did not come into being until well after the first generation of American politicians had retired or passed away. His conclusions rest on the belief that the existence of “party spirit” was not proof of parties. The fact that voters became passionate about particular issues and at times joined together in coalitions does not prove the existence of political parties. To buttress his argument, Formisano includes an analysis of early voting patterns. He finds that “the quantitative evidence bearing on the issue of whether the Federalists and Republicans constituted a ‘first party system’ has turned out to be somewhat inconclusive.”<sup>24</sup>

Formisano argues that in the period before 1824, politics in Massachusetts was still based on deference and strong anti-party sentiment. Though “the eighteenth century’s deferential style of politics did not end suddenly,” small voter turn-out and the frequency with which men from the upper echelons of society and those who occupied “the Revolutionary Center” were chosen for political offices suggests that it was still prevalent into the nineteenth century.<sup>25</sup> The men of “the Revolutionary Center” occupied a special and ultimately non-partisan position in Massachusetts politics because of their identification with the Revolutionary War. Both Federalists and Republicans viewed

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<sup>23</sup> Formisano, p. 108.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, p. 53.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p. 128.

themselves as heirs to the Revolution, and those whose service during the War was unimpeachable were popular candidates. As long as men who served in the Revolutionary War were elected, no true parties formed. The rhetoric of this period also shows a disapproval of parties, although this may be merely talk and not practice. Massachusetts leaders feared that the formation of political parties would result in the destruction of the republic. Although Formisano would agree that a politician's actions did not always match his words, the resistance to embracing parties stunted their growth. This situation began to change in the mid-1820s. The rise in voter turnout, accompanied by the advances in communication, created an environment where parties could thrive.

Hofstadter reaches similar conclusions in his work *The Idea of the Party System*. He begins with an evaluation of “certain observable paradoxes in thought and practice of the Founding Fathers.” Chief among these is “that they did not believe in political parties as such, scorned those that they were conscious of as historical models, had a keen terror of party spirit and its evil consequences, and yet, almost as soon as their national government was in operation, found it necessary to establish parties.”<sup>26</sup> Like Formisano, Hofstadter believes that anti-party sentiment prevented the founding generation from taking the necessary steps to establish organized parties. Instead, the first “quarter century” was more about developing a concept of a “legitimate opposition” than creating and developing political parties.

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<sup>26</sup> Hofstadter, p. viii.

Hofstadter acknowledges the existence of oppositional factions in the pre-Jacksonian era, but believes their purpose and rationale separates them from true parties. The Constitution was an anti-party document. The framers, according to Hofstadter, had designed the new government specifically to guard against the rise of parties. Parties began to form in the 1790s because each side believed that the future of the republic was at stake. Federalists and Republicans refused to accept each other as legitimate ideologies and sought to completely destroy each other. Jefferson and Madison believed that they represented the true sentiments of the Revolution and were freeing the people from the grips of an elite group of would-be aristocrats. Only in the wake of the Republican victory over the Federalists and after a decade of one-party rule did true parties come into existence. Personified by Martin Van Buren, the second party system was a “much broader and fully articulated rationale for a two-party system.”<sup>27</sup> Because the first generation of statesmen refused to accept the party system, no true political parties came into being. They may have laid the groundwork, but nothing more.

Finally, some historians reject the idea that an exact moment can be identified as the birth of parties. Instead, these historians focus on the dynamic political culture of the Early Republic, without getting stuck in when and how organized political parties came into being. In her book *Affairs of Honor*, Freeman presents politics in the Early Republic as an intensely personal affair and claims that, for this reason, attempting to classify

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid, p. x, pp. 212-271.

parties is futile. “National politics was personal,” she writes, “alliances were unpredictable, and victory went to those who trusted the right people at the right time in the right way. This was politics of shifting coalitions and unknown loyalties, where an ally could become an opponent at the drop of a hat.” Factions formed and Freeman acknowledges some fundamental differences between the men who became Republicans and those who adopted Federalism, but it was an unstable and fluid environment. “Tempting as it is to see a two-party system in the clash of Federalists and Republicans, national politics had no such clarity to men in the trenches.”<sup>28</sup>

Her work is organized around a series of studies of political actors in the Early Republic. Beginning with Senator William Maclay of Pennsylvania, who served in the First Senate, and ending with Senator William Plummer of New Hampshire, who was elected to the Senate in 1802, Freeman shows how important issues of character and, most importantly, the code of honor were to early political figures. Hers is a study of the language of political behavior and what it can tell us about the Early Republic. The conclusions she draws are that the intensity and passions expressed by Federalists and Republicans throughout the 1790s and cumulating with the election of 1800 were not the result of a clash of parties. Instead, they resulted from the personal nature of politics, where a politician’s character and political principles were bound together. National politicians at this time believed that “politics was about friendship, not party; it involved

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<sup>28</sup> Freeman, p. xviii-xix.

honor as much as ideology; it relied on bonds of personal loyalty, not partisanship; and it was fueled by a concern for the public good, not by party spirit.”<sup>29</sup>

Freeman believes that “national politicians did not march into party formation with their eyes open” but “backed their way into it one decision at a time . . .”<sup>30</sup> Parties slowly evolved throughout the Early Republic. As the country grew in size and population and new advances in communication and travel made national coalitions possible, men tried to expand their spheres of influence. Honor and personality was still at the heart of politics, but a changing political landscape demanded that national figures adopt some form of organization. Focusing on culture, Freeman “reveals a new political world” that had been overlooked by other historians.<sup>31</sup>

In addition to disagreeing over when political parties formed, scholars debate where they came into being. Again, a strong correlation appears between the way historians approach the question and their conclusions. Freeman’s work is a study of political elites and their relationships with each other. Although she identifies with cultural historians, the culture she examines is that of the few, not the many. Freeman acknowledges the importance of crowds and public approval but it was the relationships between national figures such as Jefferson, Adams, Hamilton, and Aaron Burr that budded into political parties. Hofstadter also looked at the creation of political parties

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid, p. 260.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, p. 285.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, p. xxiv.

through the eyes and actions of national figures. His book revolved around Jefferson, Madison, Monroe, and Van Buren. These are the men of consequence in the early history of parties. Without their work, parties would not have come into existence. They built parties from the top down—parties radiated out from the capital to the states.

Cunningham's focus is on Congress, and he finds that parties first arose in Congress. There were "no ready-made state parties" that Jefferson and Madison could use to create a national party. "In some instances (e.g., New York) the new party built upon existing state factions, and elsewhere it attracted various old elements of the political power in the several states. But the Republican Party was a new growth that sprang from the divisions in Congress and the national government; it was the product of national rather than state politics."<sup>32</sup> Madison, Jefferson, Monroe, and a handful of other Congressmen built parties in Congress. Only after they were formed at the federal level did parties begin to appear at the state level. Politicians did not become party-men until they entered Congress. Cunningham sees a relationship between local and national interests but clearly finds that national figures and national issues were behind the first party system.

Fisher's work *The Revolution of American Conservatism* is a study of the Federalist Party during the Jeffersonian era. The focus of his book is not how the

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<sup>32</sup> Cunningham, p. 356.

Federalist Party first came into existence, but rather how it changed and adapted as a minority party during the period 1800-1816. He does, however, make it clear that he believes parties first formed on the national stage. Like Cunningham, Fisher sees Congress as the partisan laboratory. He writes that “Only in Congress, where the parties had first appeared, were men either Federalist or Jeffersonians. During the 1790s, party rivalry spread slowly outward from Philadelphia, like ripples on the surface of a pond, sweeping first through the middle states, then into New England and the southern states.” He argues that the level of partisanship was “roughly proportional to the rate of travel and the density of the population.”<sup>33</sup> Fisher reached this conclusion after a broad, national study of some of the Federalist Party’s most influential men.

Studies that have taken a regional approach to the development of political parties tend to disagree with Fisher’s theory that parties developed centrally and radiated out. Formisano, for example, uses an in-depth study of the changing attitudes toward parties in Massachusetts to draw conclusions about the development of national parties. He finds that whatever national organizations came into being were built on existing divisions within the state. Although he does not believe that actual political parties came into existence until the late 1820s, he does believe that they were the creation of local and state politicians. Two other works, *To the Hartford Convention* by Banner and *The*

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<sup>33</sup> Fisher, p. 202.

*Democratic-Republicans of Massachusetts* by Goodman, use Massachusetts as the lens for national events and conclude that parties first appeared at the local level.

Massachusetts was the hub of the Federalist Party, and Banner believes that it is here that one can get at the root of its early development. What he finds is a “clear continuity of attitude and action within the entire half-century after 1765. What agitated most Americans in the 1770’s continued to agitate them in 1810 . . .”<sup>34</sup> Parties did not actually coalesce, according to Banner, until the 1790s, but when they did it was due to the “outcome of many forces—among them the actions of the opposition, the legal context of voting and representation, and the follow of foreign and domestic events.”<sup>35</sup> The way in which men responded to these changes depended on where they were from. Banner agrees with historians who cite the French Revolution as a major factor in party development, but the people’s response to the Jay Treaty and the Genet Affair had everything to do with local concerns. Massachusetts’s men tended to side with the British and against the French because of trade relations with Great Britain and an active clergy that feared the spread of deism. These factors were specific to Massachusetts and even varied greatly within the state. Because voters still identified with their state and local government more than with the national one, more emphasis was placed on local elections. Men organized first to elect local and state-wide politicians and only later turned their focus to national elections.

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<sup>34</sup> Banner, p. xi.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, p. 216.



In *The Democratic-Republicans of Massachusetts*, Goodman reaches similar conclusions, although his focus is the rise of the opposition to Federalism. Goodman finds that “the social sources of party were far more complex and less homogeneous” than many scholars have been willing to admit.<sup>36</sup> To use national party labels on the local level misses this complexity. Early parties were simply “loose and unstable collections of local forces.”<sup>37</sup> Goodman believes that, early in the 1780s, “many farmers, artisans, merchants, and public creditors began to perceive that they shared common problems with similarly situated groups elsewhere in the Union.”<sup>38</sup> These groups also began to realize that local government was not always capable of promoting their interests. Not until the French Revolution did these groups actually began to mobilize on a national level. By that time, local parties had already been formed. National politicians did not need to create political parties; they simply needed to find a way to unite local parties for a common purpose.

To the extent that political parties existed in Maine and Worcester, they were rooted in local interests and issues specific to each locality. Too much focus on the creation of national parties obscures the significance of the individual nature of each congressional district. The development and rise of parties was complicated and took many different shapes. Voters made their decision between supporting an Anti-federalist

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<sup>36</sup> Goodman, p. xi.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, p. 65.

or Federalist candidate for any number of reasons. Understanding these early elections requires taking into consideration a wide variety of factors including a region's history, religion, economic composition, and location. Although congressional elections would have ramifications on national policy, the evidence presented here suggests that voters were most concerned with local interests.

Because the scope of this thesis is limited to two congressional districts within one state, Massachusetts, I make no attempt to draw larger conclusions about when and how national parties formed. The suggestion is, however, that sweeping generalizations about party development across the entire country over-simplifies politics of the Early Republic. As the second congressional races in Worcester and Massachusetts show, early congressional elections were decided based on a number of local and often overlooked factors. In Worcester, voters focused on selecting the right type of person and whether their current representative had spoken enough in Congress. The election of Artemas Ward and what appears to be a major change in Worcester's politics can only be explained by reviewing the county's history. In Maine, Representative George Thatcher's religion, a local newspaper war, and Fredrick Stueben's pension were central during the elections. The particular local factors differed, but in neither election were the prominent national issues discussed in detail.

## Massachusetts Election Law

A resolution passed in the Massachusetts legislature on June 18, 1790, set Monday, October 4, as the date for the second congressional elections. According to the Massachusetts Constitution of 1780, voting in state-wide elections was open to “any adult male who had been a resident of the town in which he voted for at least one year prior to the elections and who possessed a freehold estate which yielded either 3 pounds annually in the new silver currency or any kind of property, real or personal, valued at a minimum of 60 pounds.” Towns often interpreted the law to mean an income of 3 pounds from any source and “one year’s residency to mean one’s presence in the town on two successive election days.” The loose interpretation resulted in the enfranchisement of the vast majority of adult males. “Only paupers, shiftless migrant laborers, and young men still living with their families had trouble gaining the ballot.” However, a majority of eligible men did not vote out of deference, ignorance, or apathy. Voter turnout rarely surpassed one-quarter of the eligible population.<sup>39</sup>

Although voting patterns in each town differed slightly, votes were typically cast by writing a candidate’s name on a slip of paper and giving the paper to the local selectman. The law stipulated that the ballot must be handwritten, preventing any candidate from printing and passing out ballots. A candidate or his supporters could,

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<sup>39</sup> Banner, p. 269.

however, handwrite a number of ballots and pass them out at the polling location. It was the selectman's job to ensure that nobody voted twice or that improper ballots were not counted. Voting was open and usually took place at a town meeting. Local elites and poll watchers could therefore easily influence the process.

Although the congressional elections in 1790 were set for October, the typical time for state-wide electioneering was in the late winter and spring. Ballots for governor, lieutenant governor, and state senators were cast “annually in town meetings on the first Monday in April.” General Election Day, when elections for the House of Representatives took place, occurred “at least ten days before the last Wednesday in May.” Congressional elections, which were set in the fall because of the schedule of the national Congress, meant there was one more day that men would have to travel into town to vote. Throughout the year, people would have to come in to vote at least three times and because multiple-elections were often needed to produce a winner, residents were potentially voting upwards of ten times a year.<sup>40</sup>

Between Worcester and Maine there would be a total of six elections to select two representatives. Throughout the process, numerous charges of electoral fraud and other voting irregularities were made. Having at least a basic understanding of the election laws is therefore helpful when navigating the twists and turns of these elections.

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<sup>40</sup>Formisano, p. 86; J.R. Pole “Suffrage and Representation in Massachusetts” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, Vol. 14, No.4 (Oct., 1957).

## 2. “Experience in the school of politicks”: Worcester

In the fall of 1790, the District of Worcester voted out former Anti-federalist and opponent of centralization Jonathan Grout in favor of Federalist Artemas Ward.<sup>1</sup> The change from Grout to Ward was drastic and could be reasonably expected to reflect a significant shift in the district’s political mood. Grout was a steadfast Anti-federalist and Ward proved to be an ardent Federalist. Except on a few issues dear to his constituents, such as the assumption of state debts, Grout consistently sided with the Anti-federalists in the First Federal Congress. Ward was a military man with a strong belief in order and discipline. He was also a conspicuous figure in opposition to the insurgents during Shays’s Rebellion. After a first balloting failed to produce a winner, Ward defeated Grout in a run-off election in November. The newspaper campaign lacked a substantial discussion of either candidate’s positions on major issues and there is little evidence of a change in the opinions of the electorate. However, a review of the history of the county, with a particular focus on events that helped shape its political character, helps explain Worcester’s seemingly abrupt shift away from Anti-federalism. It was a breakdown in

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<sup>1</sup> The terms “Anti-federalist” and “Federalist” are not meant to reflect organized parties. This election took place before Congress split into the Federalists and Republicans. Anti-federalists are those who had not supported ratification of the Constitution and were hostile to the central government. Federalists supported ratification and generally favored a stronger central government.

the alliance between economic individualists, religious dissenters, and disaffected farmers that led to Grout's defeat and a decade of Federalist preeminence.

There are two events in the first half of the eighteenth century that would have a profound impact on the politics of Worcester County for many years: the conflict over a Land Bank and the Great Awakening. Both occurrences served to reinforce existing divisions between the Popular and Court parties and established a tradition in oppositional politics. The Land Bank, or "Manufactory Scheme," was a private bank that would issue legal tender in exchange for mortgages on land. Established in 1739 and renewed in 1740, the Bank served as a way of alleviating chronic shortages of paper money. Settlers and those looking to improve land tended to favor paper money because specie was difficult for anyone in Worcester to obtain and almost impossible for the poorer citizens. However, large proprietors and men associated with the Court party did not trust paper money. They were often creditors and believed that the only way to ensure full payment of debts was through specie. But, there were more farmers and small landholders than wealthy men who owned large tracts of land. Thus, Worcester's delegates to the General Court supported legislation establishing the Land Bank 90 percent of the time.

## The Land Bank

The Land Bank “presented a potent challenge to the governor in his constitutional role as the agent of the crown.”<sup>2</sup> In 1739, the governor had strictly forbidden the state from issuing any form of paper money. Not only did the General Court simply ignore this command, but it had established a Bank whose mere existence helped undermine the existing political structure. As historian John Brooke puts it, “the assumptions of the land bank project pointed to a liberal order of plural, private interests, rather than a corporate order defined by an overarching public interest.”<sup>3</sup> The governor’s response was to dissolve General Court in 1741. Well aware of the scheme’s potential for subversion, Parliament extended the Bubble Act of 1720, which outlawed unchartered private corporations such as the Land Bank, to Massachusetts. The governor then turned on those who had subscribed to the Bank. Men who held civil or military positions lost their jobs and others were harassed. The governor’s reactionary measures made life particularly difficult for local politicians who relied on their government positions for income. If they admitted they supported the Land Bank, they could lose their office, but if they denied it they could lose favor with the people. Thus the local politicians were forced “to choose between loyalty to the governor or to the people.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> John J. Brooke, *The Heart of the Commonwealth: Society and Political Culture in Worcester County, Massachusetts, 1713-1861* (New York, N.Y.: Cambridge University Press, 1989) p. 61.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Brooke, p. 105.

The leading Land Bank towns were primarily located in the Blackstone Valley in the southeastern part of the county, although a number of residents from Lunenburg and Harvard which are in the northwestern corner near Middlesex County also took part in the scheme. The main Land Bank towns themselves were well settled and relatively prosperous. The men that participated in the Land Bank were usually yeomen or husbandmen. Some gentlemen joined but they were the vast minority. Typically, Land Bankers carried a significant amount of debt to men from neighboring towns. They were “venturesome in their economic dealing,” and willing to take risks—including defying the crown.

By 1743 the Land Bank insurrection was over. Though there had been some rumors that violence could be imminent, the governor managed to prevent any armed uprising. As a protest against the outlawing of the Land Bank and harsh measures imposed on subscribers some towns refused to elect justices, but by 1744 the same number of justices were being elected as had been prior to 1739. Despite the fact that the crisis proved short-lived and did not result in any violence, Worcester’s experiment with a Land Bank had significant consequences. Divisions between the Court and Popular parties became more pronounced and some areas gained significant experience in oppositional politics. Years later, John Adams would reflect that “the act to destroy the



Land Bank scheme raised a greater ferment in the province than the Stamp Act did.”<sup>5</sup>

This was Worcester’s first real experience in taking a stand against the established order.

## **The Great Awakening**

There is a general consensus that religion was the most important factor in the lives of colonial New Englanders. Anson Ely Morse argued that religion “permeated...life in all its relations, civil as well as personal,” and that “the significance and consequence of this feeling cannot be overestimated.”<sup>6</sup> By 1774, much of New England was in the midst of a religious revolution. Since 1774, a revival called the New Light Stir had been sweeping from the towns to the backcountry. Fostering the rise of new evangelical religious sects such as the Separate Baptists, Freewill Baptists, Universalists, Methodists, and Shakers, the New Light Stir upset the established church leadership. Because of the influence the Church had over the State, this revival had important political ramifications. Communities divided in both the way they worshiped and the way they prayed. Men who attended the traditional Congregationalist Church tended to vote Federalist, while those who joined the new sects often favored the Anti-

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<sup>5</sup> Quoted in Brooke p. 137.

<sup>6</sup> Anson Ely Morse, *The Federalist Party in Massachusetts to the Year 1800* (Princeton, N.J.: The University Library, 1909) p. 5.

federalists. Differences in religion meshed with differences in politics setting the stage for dogmatic political battles.

The Great Awakening was welcomed into Worcester by the most powerful and influential men in the county and state. Jonathan Belcher, the Governor of Massachusetts, personally welcomed Reverend George Whitefield to Worcester and became one of his first converts. From the governor, the movement quickly spread throughout the county. At first, the men of wealth and power saw the religious revival as a way to bring harmony and order to the countryside after the Land Bank crisis. While this may have been the case for a few years, the undertones and implications of the dissenting societies proved to be far more dangerous to the established order than the Land Bank. “In their insistence on a voluntaristic relationship between an unpaid, unlearned preacher and a gathered church, the dissenters threatened to undermine the educated and established minister’s role as ‘the salt of the earth,’ as the people’s sole defense against ‘corruption.’”<sup>7</sup> This challenge to the relationship between a congregation and its minister had important implications for the relationship between subjects and sovereign. The turn away from state sanctioned churches broke the chain of authority that led from the king to the people.

The Great Awakening did not affect all of Worcester to the same degree. The southern part of the county was home to the largest and oldest dissenting societies.

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<sup>7</sup> Brooke, p. 80.

Towns that supported the Land Bank were more likely to have a New Light church. Although it is “clear that Land Bankers did not move as a bloc into separatism and organized dissent . . . Most Land Bankers would be drawn into the Awakening.”<sup>8</sup> Towns in the northern part of the county that had no experience with the Land Bank participated to some degree in the Awakening, but not to the same extent as those in the southern.<sup>9</sup>

By 1760, there were obvious differences between regions of the county based upon experience with the Popular party, the Land Bank, and the Awakening. In a study of Worcester County’s legislative politics between 1726 and 1764, Brooke found that the towns that most often voted in opposition were “significantly associated with the Land Bank, dissenting societies, New Light orthodoxy, and, to a lesser extent, the entire eastern region.”<sup>10</sup> The Blackstone Valley in the southeast was the oldest and had the largest proportion of Land Bank towns. It also had the highest number of New Light ministers and dissenting society. The southwestern part of the county had not taken as much of an interest in the Land Bank but had a number of New Light and dissenting churches. Overall, men in the south participated in issues that “had taken them outside the confines of the corporate framework toward the beginnings of a Lockean social order.”<sup>11</sup>

The “pluralistic institutional structures of the older and more densely settled Blackstone towns” were in stark contrast to “the unitary corporatism of new townships to

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p. 84.

<sup>9</sup> See Appendix I.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p. 124.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p. 119.

the northwest, most just being carved out of wildlands.”<sup>12</sup> These areas, along with the town of Worcester, were the strongest supporters of the governor and predominantly Old Light. The politics in the northwest was deferential and associated with the Court party. The gentry dominated these areas, leaving the majority of the people ignorant of politics. Though exceptions existed, the county would remain polarized for years.

## **The Revolution in Worcester**

The residents of Worcester were mixed in their response to the opening salvos of the American Revolution. The Stamp Act was met with condemnation but few supported the Boston rioters. Residents were far more concerned with the reemergence of the Land Bank issue. In September 1763 a list of delinquent Land Bank subscribers was published, thrusting the issue back into the limelight. This could not have come at a worse time. The county, along with the rest of the state, was in the grips of a post-war depression that made it difficult to get by, let alone pay back debts. Then came the Townshend Acts in 1767. Great Britain’s tough economic measures threatened to ruin the delinquent subscribers. It should be no surprise then that the towns that were centers of the Land Bank became hotbeds for Revolutionary fervor.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

Not until after word of Great Britain's draconian response to the Boston Tea Party reached Worcester did the people truly mobilize. Joining the Land Bankers in the Popular party in supporting the Revolution were a number of New Lights and members of dissenting societies; which tended to be more democratic and resented the established British church. This meant that the main support for the Revolution was located in the southern part of the county centered around the Blackstone Valley. "Loyalists were concentrated in the court town of Worcester and the northern half of the county, particularly in Lancaster, Rutland, and Hardwick, towns that had seen little lasting influence of the Great Awakening."<sup>13</sup>

The Revolution resulted in the destruction of the Court party and the departure of many Loyalists. Passions ran high during the war and those who openly sided, or were suspected of siding, with the British were constantly harassed. Loyalists tended to be men of economic and political stature. Particularly in the northern part of the county, these men had been controlling local government for years. But, they now faced an armed and hostile countryside and almost constant danger. When the British abandoned Boston in March of 1776, many remaining Loyalists fled the county, leaving a political void in areas where they had been dominant.

The Revolution also provided the people of Massachusetts with the opportunity to draft their own constitution. During the debates over the form the new government should

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p. 149.

take, a fault opened up between the Land Bankers and dissenters. Although it did not result in an immediate destruction of the coalition, it would have important ramifications in the years to come. The split came over the clauses protecting individual freedom and rights. Baptists and other separatists believed the Constitution needed to provide explicit protection of individual rights and wanted to disestablish the Congregationalist church. Land Bankers, who had always sided with the Popular party primarily owing to economic concerns, were more concerned with the “governmental structuring of economic relations.” Though some overlap existed between men who took part in the Land Bank scheme and joined a dissenting society, the split between the groups was clear. These disagreements foreshadowed some of the political battles the 1790s.<sup>14</sup>

## **Shays’s Rebellion**

Massachusetts issued great sums of paper money to finance the Revolutionary War. In 1780, the new state Constitution abolished paper money as legal tender. The state then proceeded to refinance the debt by allowing it to be exchanged for “consolidated notes” that would be redeemed at current market value as opposed to the depreciated value speculators had paid to purchase them. Around the same time, the state imposed large taxes to pay down the debt from the war. Worcester County took the lead in protesting these measures. “Of thirty-two towns petitioning against the sudden change

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p.158-188.

in financial policy, seventeen were in Worcester County; of these the old Popular part and Land Bank towns of the Blackstone Valley were particularly conspicuous.”<sup>15</sup>

A major economic downturn followed the end of hostilities with Great Britain and compounded the effects of this economic legislation. In much of the middle part of the state, “trade came to a paralytic halt, labor could find no employment, and entire communities found themselves reduced to the level of barter.”<sup>16</sup> With the return of peace, old lines of credit and debt were reestablished and many private debts were called in. The number of personal suits brought against debtors reached almost four times the pre-war level. When the debtor could not pay, the court seized his property and/or threw him into debtor’s prison. By 1785, the county jail was packed with men without the means to pay their debts. Despondent and in fear of losing everything, people at first turned to their newly established representative government. In the spring elections of 1786, a number of representatives who sided with the debtors were elected to the House. But, when the legislature adjourned in July without providing any relief, debtors took matters into their own hands.

The county’s response to these conditions came in the form of an armed uprising. After Regulators (as the insurgents called themselves) in Hampshire County closed courts

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p 193.

<sup>16</sup> Charles Martyn, *The Life of Artemas Ward: The First Commander-in-Chief of the American Revolution*. (New York, N.Y.: Artemas Ward, 1921) p. 274.

in Northampton on August 29, 1786, Capt. Adam Wheeler<sup>17</sup> gathered a force and prepared to close the Worcester courts. Their rationale was simple: if the courts could not open, debtors would not have to pay. On the morning of September 6, the Chief Justice of the Worcester County Court of Common Pleas Artemas Ward slowly made his way through the crowds of men to the courthouse. Ward, a Revolutionary War General, was committed to see the court open. Despite being warned by a sentry stationed on the outskirts of the crowd to turn around or risk danger, Ward and his fellow justices pushed their way to the steps of the courthouse. A row of men with fixed bayonets met them at the door. Ward made an attempt to address the crowd but one of the insurgent officers immediately cut him off and declared that they had not come to listen to speeches but to close the court and that they had the necessary force to do so. Ward refused to move. “The drum was beat, and the guard ordered to charge. The soldiers advanced, until the points of their bayonets pressed hard upon the breast of the Chief Justice, who stood as an immovable statue, without stirring a limb, or yielding an inch though the steel in the hands of the desperate men penetrated his dress.”<sup>18</sup> Struck by Ward’s courage, the insurgents fell back and allowed Ward to address the crowd.

In a two hour speech, Ward argued that by closing the courts the men were only harming themselves. He “explained the dangerous tendency of their rash measures; admonished them that they were placing in peril the liberty acquired by the efforts and

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<sup>17</sup> Adam Wheeler (1732-1802) of Hubbardston served as a Captain during the Revolutionary War. He and Daniel Shays were to become the most well known of the Regulators.

<sup>18</sup> William Lincoln, *History of Worcester, Massachusetts* (Worcester, Mass.: Charles Hersey, 1862) p. 119.



suffering of years, plunging the country in civil war . . . that the measures they had taken must defeat their own wishes; for the government would never yield that to force, which would be readily accorded to respectful representations.”<sup>19</sup> Ward concluded by telling Captain Wheeler “that he had better take his men away; that they were waging war, which was treason; and that the consequence would be (here he made a short pause, and then added in a strong voice) the Gallows.”<sup>20</sup> Ward and the other justices made no other attempt to enter the courthouse and retired to a nearby tavern. Overnight and the next day, the insurgents added another 200 men to their ranks. The justices had no other choice but to adjourn the court until the winter term.

Over the next few weeks, the Regulation, or Shays’s Rebellion, spread throughout western Massachusetts. Brooke identifies nine “core” Regulator towns: Spencer, Oakham, Barre, Ward, Princeton, Paxton, Templeton, Hubbardston, and Harvard. These towns “were primarily located in the northwest uplands, typically small to orthodox,” voted against allowing Tories to return after the war, and who had been petitioning the General Court to offer debt relief for years. For the most part they had not taken part in the Land Bank scheme nor had they witnessed much religious dissent. Historically, these towns had been dominated by the Court party, and suffered from “a vacuum of political leadership and experience” after the departure of the Loyalists. As opposed to what one might assume, the towns with a strong Popular party tradition not only refrained from

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> *Massachusetts Centinel*, 9 September, 1786 quoted in Martyn, 285.

extralegal action but supplied the government with many of the men who would march against Shays's men. Likewise, areas with strong presences of dissenting societies such as the Baptists or Universalists tended to side with the government rather than with the Regulators. This does not mean that they approved of the economic situation. The core Land Bank towns in the Blackstone Valley spearheaded a convention movement in the months before the Regulation. Leaders experienced in oppositional politics sought to address the problems in an orderly manner and the people seemed willing let the process take its course. In the areas where there was no tradition of opposition and no experienced political leaders, the people took things into their own hands.<sup>21</sup>

The Regulation captured the attention of the entire country. Many, including George Washington, feared that the British were somehow behind the rebellion and planned to attack while the county was weak. After some hesitation, Governor James Bowdoin ordered the enlistment of 4,400 men. In January 1787, General Benjamin Lincoln led 3,200 men to Worcester. Clearly outmatched, the rebels made no attempt to hold onto the town. Instead, they marched on Springfield where they hoped to seize an arsenal. Lincoln had already stationed 1,000 men in Springfield to guard against just such an attack. When the rebels made an attempt to take the arsenal, Lincoln's men attacked, killing four, and sending the rest of the band running. The leaders of the uprising, including Daniel Shays, were apprehended, found guilty of treason and sentenced to death.

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<sup>21</sup> See Appendix I.

The Regulation shook the political world. In 1785, the popular John Hancock resigned the governorship owing to health problems. Unable to usher in his hand-picked successor, Hancock saw his long-time opponent James Bowdoin elected. Brooke estimates that only about 13 percent of eligible voters in Worcester turned out in the two elections before the uprising. Shays' Rebellion had a dramatic impact on the voters of Worcester County and Massachusetts as a whole. Governor Bowdoin's suspension of habeas-corpus and the disenfranchisement of hundreds of Regulators drove many moderates who might otherwise stay home, to vote. Van Beck Hall has identified the election of 1787 as a "revolution in the membership of the legislature."<sup>22</sup> Forty percent of the eligible population cast votes and John Hancock handily defeated Bowdoin. Over half of the House of Representatives and 19 out of 40 Senators lost their seats. Almost every town in Worcester County sent a representative to the General Court. Despite the fact that former Regulators could not vote, "at least nine Worcester County towns sent accused Regulators as representatives, many sent known sympathizers, and few if any sent open Friends of Government."<sup>23</sup> Upon his return to office, Hancock pardoned all members of the rebellion. He never directly addressed the issues that caused the rebellion in the first place but his conciliatory stance calmed the state.

The election of 1787 was a significant turning point in Worcester politics. "The electorate was not only more involved in politics; it also began to support political

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<sup>22</sup> Van Beck Hall, *Politics without Parties: Massachusetts, 1780-1791*. (Pittsburg, Pa.: University of Pittsburg Press, 1972) p, 227.

<sup>23</sup> Brooke, p. 225.

factions because of their positions on issues rather than because of the popularity of the candidates . . . for the first time the lineup of political factions had begun to be consistent with the underlying political differences within the commonwealth.”<sup>24</sup> Supporters of Hancock portrayed him as a moderate and argued that Bowdoin had gone too far in his repression of the Regulation. Commercial interests responded that Hancock would let the state slip into anarchy. Moderate measures taken by the General Court and Hancock relieved much of the tension, but the fault lines between commercial interests/creditors and farmers/debtors had been exposed.

## **Ratification of the Federal Constitution**

Shays’s Rebellion and the election of 1787 had important ramifications for the future of Massachusetts and the United States. Throughout the country, and particularly in Massachusetts, the rebellion convinced men of power and money that the federal government could not protect their interests from the masses. Many Massachusetts state leaders had traditionally viewed centralized power with suspicion. Although they supported sending money to the federal government under the Articles of Confederation, they refused to support the efforts of men like James Madison to change the Articles in order to establish a stronger central government. The anarchy unleashed in the

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<sup>24</sup> Hall, p. 228.

backcountry convinced them otherwise. Hall has identified the towns that participated in the Regulation as being the “least commercial-cosmopolitan.” These towns were adamantly opposed to the new Constitution and sent some of the most vocal Anti-federalists to the Convention. Though some of the moderates who made up the “less commercial-cosmopolitan” towns supported the rebels’ original cause, they did not support the forced closing of courts or the use of violence. As a result, many of the moderates formed an alliance with the “most commercial-cosmopolitan” towns and joined the rapidly growing centralist camp. When Hancock handily defeated Bowdoin, the commercial-cosmopolitan candidate for governor in the election of 1787, it just provided more evidence that there needed to be a strong federal government that could protect commercial interests from abuse at the hands of the state.<sup>25</sup>

Representatives from all over Massachusetts met on January 8, 1788 to decide whether or not to ratify the new Federal Constitution. All indications were that it was going to be an uphill battle for the state’s Federalists. At the opening of the convention, it appeared that the Anti-federalists outnumbered the Federalists by about 40 delegates. Edward Bangs, a lawyer from Worcester, observed that most of the 50 delegates from Worcester County “entertain such a dread of arbitrary power, that they are afraid even of

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid, pp. 227-255.

limited authority.” He added that “some of them are good men—Not all insurgents I assure you.”<sup>26</sup> The delegation did in fact include at least nine Regulators.

Anti-federalists dominated Worcester politics and some of the most vocal opponents of the Constitution came from its delegation. Martin Kinsley of Hardwick objected to the establishment of a “federal city” suggesting that it would be used as a way to keep the people from knowing what happened in the government.<sup>27</sup> John Taylor from Douglas took issue with the proposed House of Representatives. He believed that there needed to be annual elections, that the proposed size was too small to possibly represent all Americans, and that the federal government’s control of the voting process would lead to abuse and election fraud. Amos Singletary of Sutton rejected the Federalists’ claim that there would be no “dry taxes” under the new Constitution. There was no way, he claimed, the government would be able to raise enough money on impost, and would inevitably end up taxing the land. As a result, the men with money will control the government “and then they will swallow all us little folks, like the great leviathan, Mr. President; yes, just as the whale swallowed Jonah.”<sup>28</sup> In the end, 43 of Worcester’s 50 delegates voted against ratification. The majority of the least commercial-cosmopolitan towns voted against the Constitution, while the most commercial-cosmopolitan towns supported ratification. The areas classified as being less commercial-cosmopolitan

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<sup>26</sup> Quoted in Brooke, p. 227.

<sup>27</sup> The term “federal city” was coined by Anti-federalists to spread fear.

<sup>28</sup> Bradford K. Pierce et al., eds. *Debates and Proceedings of the Convention of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Held in the Year 1788* (Boston, Mass.: William White 1856) quoted in Brooke p. 228.

divided. Across Massachusetts, some of these towns joined with the most commercial-cosmopolitan in supporting the Constitution in reaction to Shays's Rebellion and the elections of 1787. But in Worcester, the less commercial-cosmopolitan towns joined the Anti-federalists. Hall believes this stemmed from "their fears of aristocratic plots and their suspicion that the entire job was sponsored by [the] most commercial-cosmopolitan interests to undermine their local power."<sup>29</sup> These towns were not as ideologically committed to Anti-federalism as the least commercial-cosmopolitan towns, and the coalition between the two proved to be short lived. Despite Worcester's unified objection to the new government, supporters of the Constitution found enough support to eke out a victory 187 to 168.

## **The First Federal Election in Worcester**

With the Constitution ratified, both opponents of the Constitution and its supporters geared up for the first elections under the new government. Although the battle over ratification had been won by the Federalists, many questions remained unresolved. Anti-federalists hoped to elect enough like-minded men to ensure prompt passage of amendments and set precedents limiting federal power. Well aware of the Anti-federalists' intentions, Federalists focused on electing enough Federalists to have control over the establishment of commercial regulations and a judiciary system. But in

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<sup>29</sup> Hall, p. 258.

the Congressional district of Worcester, the few election articles that were published largely ignored these pending national debates.

Worcester's election was set for December 18, 1788. The two newspapers published in the area, the *Massachusetts Spy* and the *American Herald*, largely ignored the election, indicating that little campaigning occurred. Of the four pieces that addressed the subject, three came out the week before the election and consisted of endorsements that did not touch on the candidates' politics. "A Friend to the County," wrote that he did "not know of a person more likely to give general satisfaction than the Hon. Timothy Paine, Esq.," "A Federalist of Worcester County" argued that Jonathan Grout was "likely to give general satisfaction," and T.W. proclaimed that Moses Gill possessed "undisputed integrity, useful knowledge, and long experience in governmental matters" and would make the best representative. The pseudonym "A Federalist of Worcester County" might suggest the author was a Federalist, but he endorsed the Anti-federalist Jonathan Grout. The author may either have been trying to fool true Federalist into believing that Grout was a friend of the new Constitution or it was a reference to the fact that some Anti-federalists believed the label federalist better described their views.<sup>30</sup>

The only article that delved into the specific issues, written by "A True Federalist to the Free Electors of the County of Worcester," appeared on December 4. Here, the

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<sup>30</sup>"A Friend to the County," *Massachusetts Spy*, 4 December 1789 from Jensen, Merrill and Robert A. Becker ed. *The Documentary History of the First Federal Elections, 1788-1790*, Vol. I. (Madison, Wis.: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1976) pp. 601-602 (Hereafter *DHFFE*); "A Federalist of Worcester County," *Massachusetts Spy*, 18 December 1789, from *DHFFE*.



pseudonym likely refers to the debate over party labels. The article's lead went directly to the heart of the matter, stating that "We have now arrived to a critical period of our political existence; and we are soon to determine (and we must determine for ourselves) whether we are to be a free, happy people under our government or not." The author pointed out the election would also determine whether the Constitution was perfect "or, whether it would *possibly* admit some amendments." It would settle "whether the *balance* of government is fixed on its proper basis; and whether the powers delegated are properly *checked*, etc." Because the system existed only as an "embryo; and all depends upon the first impressions" the writer argued, voters must make their decision with the utmost care.<sup>31</sup>

The emphasized words in the article—"balanced" and "checked"—along with a warning that if the wrong men were chosen the country would "degenerate into a *baleful aristocracy*" suggest the author sided with the Anti-federalists who worried that the Constitution granted too much power to the executive and contained insufficient checks to prevent the abuse of power. The promise of amendments made ratifying the Constitution more palatable to some members of the Massachusetts ratifying convention, particularly for those who worried that the Constitution lacked enough protections against encroachments on the people's liberties. Besides this one article, the newspapers did not carry any election pieces that dealt with national issues.

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<sup>31</sup> "A True Federalist to the Free Electors of the County of Worcester," *American Herald*, 4 December 1788 from *DHFFE* Vol. I pp. 601-602.

The December 18 election failed to produce a winner, possibly because so few voters understood the issues, or perhaps because of the sheer volume of candidates. Campaigning, which forced candidates to publicly define their position, would have eliminated candidates whose views were unpopular or that too closely mimicked another candidate. Nineteen different men received at least one vote, reducing the likelihood that any candidate would reach the necessary threshold of 50 percent. Jonathan Grout received the highest number of votes, followed by Timothy Paine and Artemas Ward. Another election was needed; most likely, the final run-off would be between these three men.<sup>32</sup>

Jonathan Grout was born on July 23, 1737 in Lunenburg, Worcester County, Massachusetts. Not much is known of Grout's life and career. He served in the Seven Years' War, fighting against the French in Canada between 1757 and 1760. In 1760 he married Sara Page, a first cousin. After settling in Petersham, Grout studied law and began a local law practice. By 1771 he had made a name for himself and had been elected to a series of local offices. In 1775 he was elected to the Provincial Congress and became a Minute Man company commander. Between 1781 and 1784, Grout served as the representative from Petersham in the state House of Representatives. During Shays's Rebellion, he sided with the insurgents, although no evidence exists that he actually fought. Despite the defeat of the rebels, the people of Petersham reelected Grout to the state house in 1787 and then the state senate in 1788. As a leader in his community, he

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<sup>32</sup>“Official Election Returns, 18 December 1789, *DHFFE* Vol. I pp. 618-619.

was selected to attend the state ratification committee. Like most delegates from western Massachusetts, Grout strongly opposed the new federal Constitution and voted against its ratification.<sup>33</sup>

Timothy Paine was also a familiar figure in Worcester politics. Born in Bristol in 1730 and raised by his stepfather, John Chandler of Worcester, Paine attended Harvard and graduated in 1748. He was elected to a number of local offices including assessor, clerk, selectman and moderator. He was also appointed clerk of the courts, justice of the peace, register of probate, and registrar of deeds. Paine served six terms in the Massachusetts House as well. After being appointed *mandamus councillor* by the British Crown in 1774, Paine became one of Worcester's most prominent Tories. On August 22, 1774 a mob of nearly 300 men descended on the county town of Worcester and demanded Paine's resignation because of his affinity for the Crown. He acquiesced and the mob forced him to read his resignation bareheaded (a severe humiliation). Paine fled to Malden, Massachusetts in 1775 while troops quartered in his house. At the end of the war, the community accepted Paine back in its midst and elected him moderator of the Worcester town meeting in 1785 and then to the state legislature in 1788.<sup>34</sup>

Although Artemas Ward had not sided with the British, he had his own problems with the community during the Regulation. Ward was born in Shrewsbury in 1727 and

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<sup>33</sup> Linda Grant de Pauw, et al. ed. *Documentary History of the First Federal Congress of the United States of America*, Vol. XIV (Baltimore, Md.: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995) pp. 628-630. Hereafter *DHFFC*; Brooke p. 235; *DHFFE* Vol. I p. 751.

<sup>34</sup> James Henry Stark *The Loyalists of Massachusetts and the Other Side of the American Revolution*. (Salem, Mass: The Salem Press Co., 1910). pp. 384-385; *DHFFE* Vol. I pp. 755-756.

graduated from Harvard in the same class as Timothy Paine. Ward's father had been a successful man with a variety of talents. Though bright, Ward struggled to find a suitable vocation. He taught school in Groton and then opened a general store in his hometown in 1750. That same year he married Sarah Trowbridge, the daughter of a minister. In 1751 Ward was elected as the township assessor for the county—the first of a long string of local political offices he was to hold. During the Seven Years' War, Ward found his true calling. Noted for bravery and valor in combat, he made colonel in 1757. At the end of the war, he returned to Shrewsbury and named to the Court of Common Pleas. Ward quickly established a reputation as a talented orator and critic of the British tax policies vociferous enough to draw censure: Governor Francis Bernard canceled Ward's military commission and vetoed his appointment to the Worcester Court of Common Pleas because of his attacks on Parliament. The governor's actions only made Ward more popular in the eyes of the people.

After Thomas Gage abolished the colonial assembly, Massachusetts towns got together and formed a Committee of Safety. One of their first acts was to name Artemas Ward commander-in-chief of the colony's militia. Ward oversaw the battles at Lexington, Concord and Bunker Hill. He also served as member in the First and Second Provincial Congresses. When the Continental Congress formed its army, placing George Washington in command, Ward became second-in command, a position he was not pleased with and quickly resigned. Ward adamantly believed he should have remained in charge of the army and resented Washington for the rest of his life. After leaving the

battlefield, Ward returned to his political career and was elected to the Continental Congress in 1780 and 1781. He was also elected to the Massachusetts House of Representatives continually from 1779 to 1785. In 1785 he served as Speaker of the House. Ward also served as Chief Justice of the Court of Common Pleas and developed a reputation for stern rulings. It was in his position as Justice that Ward met Cpt. Adam Wheeler on the steps of the court house at the beginning of the Regulation.<sup>35</sup>

The second attempt at electing a representative was set for January 29, 1789. Anti-federalist Jonathan Grout had a real shot at winning, a fact that caused displeasure in some quarters. In a private letter to George Washington, Benjamin Lincoln wrote that “The struggle will be, I think, between Mr. Paine who was one of the mandamus councillors, a gentleman of abilities and a good Federalist, and a Colonel Grout of a different character.”<sup>36</sup> “A Voter for Worcester District” published a piece on January 22 asking those who voted for “the Hon. Timothy Paine, Artemas Ward, Moses Gill, and John Sprague” to unite behind Paine. Paine, Ward, Gill, and Sprague are all Federalists and the author was sure “that no person who gave his vote for either of the above gentleman” would have a problem if any one of them were elected. Everyone, he insinuated, would have a problem if Grout were elected. Grout’s open hostility to the central government along with his reputation for siding with debtors made many of Worcester’s “better sort” wary of sending him to Congress. The opinion was, anybody is

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<sup>35</sup>See pp. 35-36; Marrtyn *The Life of Artemas Ward*; *DHFFE* Vol. I p. 761.

<sup>36</sup> Benjamin Lincoln to George Washington, Boston, 4 January 1789 from *DHFFE* Vol. I p. 662.

better than Grout. Because Paine received the most votes, the author reasoned, it was only fair that supporters of others should unite behind the most popular candidate. Paine had been a former Tory, but he seemed to represent economic stability. The excitement over ideas of liberty and equality that had been unleashed during the Revolution and then partially reignited during Shays's Rebellion were fading fast.<sup>37</sup>

Although a sufficient number of men did rally behind Paine to put him in first place, he did not receive enough votes to win the race. Paine received 1,040 votes, almost 600 more than in the first contest. Grout came in second with 956, an increase of 190. Ward garnered 258, thirty fewer than in the previous contest. About 500 more people voted in the second contest, which explains some of the increase totals secured by Paine and Grout, but far fewer votes were cast for anyone other than the top three. Most of the candidates who had only received a handful of votes in the first trial were Federalists. Therefore, it is fair to assume that a number of men took the advice of "A Voter for Worcester District" and voted for one of the top two Federalists.<sup>38</sup>

By the time the county was gearing up for the third contest, set for March 2, 1789, passions were running high. Whereas in the previous two contests the newspapers had been relatively devoid of election pieces and those that did appear were civil and refrained from attacks, the articles published prior to the March 2 election were personal and animated. In a letter entitled "Lancaster to the Respectable Citizens of the District of

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<sup>37</sup> "A Voter for Worcester District," *Massachusetts Spy*, 22 January 1789 from *DHFFE* Vol. I p. 663.

<sup>38</sup> Official Election Returns, 7 February 1789, *DHFFE* Vol. I pp. 665-666.

Worcester” the author began by stating that, despite the fact that anyone could win, the contest was really between Paine and Grout. The author praised Paine as someone who “wishes for an efficient government, a government adequate to the purposes of protecting each individual” and one “who will be a warm advocate for the proposed amendments.” He has a liberal education, a good moral compass, had served in public assemblies, and “he is a man of large landed property, and which lands are in the commonwealth of Massachusetts, and mostly in your district.” The author evaluated Grout, pointing out that “Grout’s advantages, in the early part of life, were by no means equal to Mr. Paine’s. No one will deny that Mr. Grout is a man of good natural capacity; but to say that he is a man of real science would be doubted.” According to the author, Grout not only lacked intellectual abilities, he may have also lacked loyalty to Massachusetts since he owned and managed large tracts of land in Vermont and New Hampshire and only visited Massachusetts to attend the Legislature.<sup>39</sup>

“Politicus” responded to this piece a week later, attacking the editor for printing such a biased article and for publishing pro-Paine pieces the day of the last election. “Politicus” then went after Paine. In response to the claim that Paine was qualified to serve as representative because he has held a number of public offices, Politicus sarcastically pointed out that Paine “held the office of clerk of Court of Common Pleas, and of the Sessions, by which he must have been acquainted with the sheriffs and lawyers

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<sup>39</sup> “Lancaster to the Respectable Citizens of the District of Worcester,” *Massachusetts Spy*, 19 February 1789 from *DHFFE* Vol. I pp. 676-677.

of the county” and must be thoroughly acquainted “with the business of filing and recording deeds, and minuting defaults.” As for the property, “Politicus” claimed that Grout’s “small” farm in Petersham is actually much larger than Paine’s “large” farm in Worcester. The fact that Grout owns property in other parts of the county has contributed to his liberal education, given him the opportunity to see more of the country, and enabled him to become familiar with some of the national issues that a Federal Representative could encounter.<sup>40</sup>

An article printed in the *Massachusetts Spy* on February 26 discussed Grout, Ward and Paine’s positions in relation to the Federalist and Anti-federalist parties. The author claimed to be “informed that several over-zealous Federalists (who, if the report be true, are not acquainted with the general disposition of the honest yeomanry of the district) are aiming to set up Mr. Ward.” The writer, who identified himself as a moderate, stated that “if these hot Federalists persist in bringing forward and forcing down Mr. Ward” then he and others who had given their vote to Paine would support Grout. But, “If the friends of Mr. Ward will meet us half way, and give their votes for Mr. Paine” they will be able to “prevent farther trouble to the county, and ill will amongst individuals.” Ward appears to have been the candidate of the high Federalists while Paine was considered a more moderate Federalist, and Grout was seen as the embodiment

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<sup>40</sup> “Polliticus to the Printer,” *Massachusetts Spy*, 26 February 1789 from *DHFFE* Vol. I pp.678-679.



of the evil Anti-federalists who would undermine the Constitution and usher in economic anarchy.<sup>41</sup>

Despite the support Paine received in the press, Grout managed a victory in the third round of elections. It is possible that all the support Paine had been receiving in the papers mobilized Grout's supporter to turn-out. Isaiah Thomas, the editor of *The Massachusetts Spy*, was an avid Federalist and his electioneering may also have turned-off some would-be Paine voters. Brooke theorizes that whenever a large number of people showed up at the polls, Anti-federalists were at a significant advantage. When citizens remained apathetic or deferential with their votes, Federalists generally won. This seems to have been the case in Worcester where 3,484 votes were cast in the final contest. The number of votes had almost doubled between the first and third ballots. Although Grout had won the first contest by a small margin, the total percentage of votes for Federalist candidates dwarfed the Anti-federalist candidate's 35 percent. The combined votes of Federalists Artemas Ward, Timothy Paine, Jonathan Sprague and Moses Gill accounted for 54 percent of the vote. In the January 29 vote, with a slightly higher turnout than the December 18 contest, Grout increased his share to 42 percent, but Timothy Paine alone garnered 46 percent and Artemas Ward received 11 percent. In the final contest, with a massive turnout, Grout won handily with 1,968 votes, or 56 percent. Paine's share decreased to 35 percent (1,241) and Ward managed to win only seven percent (256). As there is no evidence in the newspapers of a shift in opinion, turnout

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<sup>41</sup> "A Yeomen of Worcester District," *Massachusetts Spy*, 26 February 1789 from *DHFFE* Vol. I p. 681.

seems to be the factor that made the difference, although the coverage of the election certainly contributed to the turnout.<sup>42</sup>

Grout polled best in the northwestern part of the county. He did particularly well in areas that sided with the Regulators, winning 99 percent of the vote in the Regulator town of Hubbardston, 91 percent in Oakham, 84 percent in Spencer, and 69 percent in Barre. Grout also carried the majority of towns in the older southeastern part of the county. In Sutton, which boasted a particularly high voter turnout, he received 72 percent of the votes. He also won the towns of Grafton, Uxbridge, Upton, Ward, and Westborough. The greatest increase in votes between the first and last contests came in the towns that supported Grout.<sup>43</sup>

Grout's victory was the result of a coalition of the Land Bank towns, members of the Popular party, and the former Regulators—the same men who had been most likely opposed to the Constitution. The Federalist candidates Paine and Ward did the best in the northeast, where there had been strong support for the Constitution, and “in the southwest, where progovernment gentry had entered the political arena in the contest over the framing of the state constitution.”<sup>44</sup> Grout received between 40 and 60 percent

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<sup>42</sup>*DHFFE* Vol I. pp. 618-619, 666-667.

<sup>43</sup>“Official Election Returns,” *DHFFE* Vol. I pp. 682-683.

<sup>44</sup> Brooke, pp. 234-235.

in the towns that had voted against the Constitution and under 20 percent in those that voted for ratification.<sup>45</sup>

Though Grout won with a respectable majority, the coalition between Land Bank towns and men associated with the Regulation was tenuous at best. The two movements had very different motives, “one pluralist and one corporate.” Added to this was a conflict within the Popular party between voters primarily concerned with the economy and members of the dissenting sects over whether to focus economic matters or personal liberties. Grout and the Anti-federalists could celebrate their victory, but warning signs indicated that their hold over Worcester was slipping.<sup>46</sup>

## The First Federal Congress

Grout’s record in the First Congress is decidedly unimpressive. He served on only two committees during the entire Congress and the sole recorded occasion of him rising to speak was to unsuccessfully oppose an increase to the tax on salt. One known letter survives from his time in Congress — a note to the *Massachusetts Spy* requesting a continuation of his subscription. As a result, Grout’s position on issues must be tracked through his voting record. According to the editors of the *Documentary History of the First Federal Congress*, Grout’s votes “indicate that he consistently opposed legislation

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<sup>45</sup> Hall, p. 314.

<sup>46</sup> Brooke, pp. 234-235.

that tended to promote a strong, assertive federal government.”<sup>47</sup> In light of his record of siding with the Regulators and opposing the ratification of the Constitution, this position does not come as a surprise. He sided with Anti-federalists against the passage of the Judiciary Act [S-1], the Salaries-Executive Act [HR-21], and the Foreign Affairs Act [HR-8] “with its implicit acknowledgment of the president’s power of removal.” Grout’s position on amendments also demonstrated his continued suspicion of a strong central government. He supported all proposed amendments to limit the powers of the federal government.

Grout broke with the Anti-federalists on two significant votes, demonstrating that he put sectionalism in front of partisanship. Like his fellow Massachusetts Anti-federalist, Elbridge Gerry, Grout backed the federal assumption of state debts and sought to block the locating the seat of federal government on the Potomac. Massachusetts’s oppressive war debt made it virtually impossible to vote against assumption, and the new economic policies might relieve some of the burden imposed on former Regulators who had voted Grout into office. Assumption was anathematic to the Anti-federalist ideology because it resulted in more centralization and more power in the hands of the federal government. But Grout knew that a vote against assumption would be paramount to political suicide. The location of the seat of federal government further south was supported by many Anti-federalists (who just happened to be from the South) but Grout could not bring himself to vote for locating it so far away from his state.

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<sup>47</sup> *DHFFC* Vol. XIV pp. 628-630.

Other than these two votes, Grout consistently found common ground with Anti-federalists from southern states such as Virginia. He was the only northern representative to vote against the Bank Act [S-15] and the seating of Federalist Representative William L. Smith of South Carolina. But when forced to choose between support of ideology or the pursuit of local and sectional interests, the latter won out.<sup>48</sup>

Grout's one speech in Congress also offers insight into his politics. The fact that he spoke on the impost bill in August of 1790, two months before the election, suggests that he was aware that his silence could be a political liability. Grout's stance was that if the federal government needed money, taxes should be levied on luxuries, not on necessities such as salt. He stated "that any tax which takes a farthing from a citizen, when his absolutely necessary expenses to support life exceeds or is equal to all his service and income, this citizen is injured, and the government is weakened in the same proportion which that citizen bears with the whole community: and whenever taxes are thus levied upon a majority of the whole citizens, government will thereby become weak and debilitated, without energy or resources."

He continued on to argue that such a tax would be particularly burdensome on those who lived inland (such as Worcester County). In the western part of the state:

the citizens eat almost altogether salted provisions, their cattle will not flourish without salt, one creature will require near twice the quantity to make him fatten that it takes to support a person. In short, the general increase of the consumption

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

of salt may, with some propriety, be said to be in proportion to the distance advanced from the shore, and increased in proportion as wealth is diminished. These casualties may cause the interior citizens to consume from ten to fifteen times as much salt as one on the sea shore, who in every other respect is in similar circumstances. Is this an equal tax? Surly not.<sup>49</sup>

This brief speech demonstrated Grout's hostility toward the federal government and conviction that the government would be weakened if it passed legislation detrimental to the people's well being. He clearly portrayed himself as an ally of the people in a fight against the wealthy. The speech also showed his concern for his constituents. Charles Adams commented to his brother John Quincy Adams that "I suppose Grout's orations upon salt have secured his election."<sup>50</sup> Grout was not lacking in political talent, but a lot had happened since his election and many of the people's fears of the new government had been alleviated. The second federal election was going to be a challenge.

## **The First Trial: October 6, 1790**

Federal election season in Worcester began early in 1790, with the first newspaper pieces discussing the upcoming congressional race appearing in mid-July. This timing is particularly interesting when compared to the dearth of electoral coverage during the election in 1788/1789. From the start, the editorial focus was on the doctrine

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<sup>49</sup> *DHFFC*, Vol. XIII, pp. 1741-4.

<sup>50</sup> Charles Adams to John Quincy Adams, 21 October 1790, ALS Adams Family Papers, MHS.

of rotation and the need to preserve a balance between the northern/eastern states and the southern states. The articles indicate a significant amount of concern that the union between the North and South was fragile, and that it would take great men to ensure that neither side dominated the other and that both could prosper. The doctrine of rotation would be a subject of debate in this election and in many others. The Constitution's lack of term limits had been a point of contention during the ratification debates. The argument in favor of term limits stated that an incumbent would be so difficult to dislodge that men in Congress might essentially serve for life. The concern was that, once in office, Representatives would pursue selfish goals and lose touch with the common man.

The first piece, signed by "X.X." came out on July 15. The author identified himself as someone who had been Grout's "supporter before." He wrote, "I ever esteemed him as a man of full natural capacity from his being long in the Legislature of Massachusetts. I supposed he possessed a competent share of political information to answer the purpose." He suggested that, despite his reverence for Grout, "many people in the district have said that Mr. Grout will not be reelected." X.X. did not necessarily believe Grout's days in Congress were nearly over, but was "much in favor of rotation in republican government, it being a lesson for every man who holds an elective office to learn his dependence on the people." Rotation, he believed, is "the secret of all government being to prevent the dissolution of it; as every government, like the human

body, carries within it that morbid matter which sooner or later must inevitable destroy it.”

Without specifically endorsing a candidate, X.X explained that it was of utmost importance that only the best men be sent to Congress. Those who serve must be “able to assert, maintain and support the rights of the northern or eastern states” because “we know the interests of the southern States are very different from ours—our habits and our views—our customs and education are different—great men only can reconcile us.” X.X. also warned his fellow citizens that “there are wolves amongst us in sheep’s clothing, who pretend that they can save millions to the people if they could be at the helm . . . when in fact they are as ignorant as they are impudent, and wish for nothing but to vault into the political saddle; and once having got seated you hear no more of them.” The piece closed with the assertion that people must be extra careful because “there are but a few, very few, persons in our district who are fit to represent us.”<sup>51</sup>

Two election articles appeared in the *Massachusetts Spy* on July 29. The first, addressed “To the Free Electors of Worcester District,” is unsigned, but its content and style closely resemble those of X.X. The author reminded the people of Worcester how important it is to elect the “right” person. He hoped that “every vote which may be given on the day appointed for this purpose, ought to be the result of a previous and deliberate consideration.” The qualities that one should be looking for are not whether the

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<sup>51</sup> X.X., “To the free Electors of Worcester District,” *Massachusetts Spy*, 15 July 1790 p.2.



candidate “has ever been a member of any College, or a member of any Legislative Body . . . The point therefore to be attended to with regard to the man to be elected is this: Is he qualified?—Has he those natural and acquired abilities, &c. whereby he will be likely to do honour to himself, to his constitutions, and to mankind?” The author refrained from suggesting that Grout should be replaced, but if the people chose to do so they should make sure the new Representative is “equally qualified.” Taking the same pessimistic view of the possible candidates that X.X did, the author finds “but a few equal to the business.” However, he knew of one such man who possessed all the qualities needed to serve the people. “Who is more likely, faithfully and advantageously to attend the duties of that office, and to meet the approbation of the district, than the Hon. LEVI LINCOLN, Esq?” Lincoln was a local probate judge and Revolutionary War hero who had wide name recognition and would be a formidable opponent.

The author of the election piece added that he did “not mention Mr. Lincoln from any particular personal attachment to the man, but simply from a desire for the good of the district, and the general prosperity of the union.” Overt electioneering for office was frowned upon so candidates wanted to be viewed as virtuous and above the fray. The disclaimer that the author had no attachment to Lincoln personally assured the readers that Lincoln is not organizing his friends to get him elected, i.e. is not campaigning. However, the fact that the piece did not carry a signature reduces its significance.

Attaching a name to the article would have legitimized what was written—particularly if the author was a man of good standing.<sup>52</sup>

The second article in the July 29 *Massachusetts Spy*, signed by “Philo,” specifically addressed “the business of electioneering for a Federal Representative.” Philo was “very happy” that “the business [of nominating candidates] has been introduced with so much moderation and candour: And I most sincerely wish that your useful paper may not be stained with slander or defamation on the subject.” It was his hope “as an Elector, that we may now look about us without prejudice and without any party spirit, and find the best man for the place.”<sup>53</sup> Elections should be a gentlemanly affair. As this process began, Philo believed that it was important “to consider that our elections are the check we have on the people on the new Constitution; and that rotation seems to be the distinguishing characteristic of a republican government; and that even one election will perhaps give a clear profit of two thousand dollars to a member.”

Like the previous authors, Philo declined to say anything negative about Grout. He simply believed it was important that the people have a choice. He therefore listed the names of “gentlemen mentioned as candidates, viz. Mr. [Timothy] Paine, Mr. [Artemas] Ward, Mr. [John] Sprague, Mr. [Levi] Lincoln, and Mr. [Martin] Kinsley.” Despite hearing these names as possible candidates, Philo. reported that Paine “is in a

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<sup>52</sup> “In the choice of a Federal Representative,” *Massachusetts Spy* 29 July 1790, p. 3. For a discussion of the importance of a signature affixed to newspaper pieces see Joanne Freeman. *Affairs of Honor: National Politics in the New Republic*. (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2001). pp. 127-131.

<sup>53</sup> The term “party spirit” was commonly used in the 1790s to describe unprincipled motives for supporting a candidate and did not refer to organized political parties. See Formisano ch. 4.

declining state of health”—a fact that the paper’s editor Isaiah Thomas denied in a sentence at the end of the article—and that “Messrs. Ward, Sprague and Lincoln are provided for in departments which they fill with dignity to themselves, and honour and satisfaction to the country.” Were one of these men elected, Philo argued that it would difficult to find qualified men to serve their posts. Apparently, it was easier to find a man qualified for Congress than qualified to serve as a judge. This left Kingsley as the only possible candidate. Philo found Kingsley to be qualified based on his “liberal education,” the number of years he served as a respectable and influential member of the General Court, and because he “has traveled to the southern States on publick business and . . . is well acquainted with the relative state of their politicks and government.” Again, the qualities of a good education, experience in politics, and the ability to work with the southern delegates to avoid a breakdown are listed as being the most important attributes of a good Congressman.<sup>54</sup>

The *Massachusetts Spy* did not print another election piece for more than a month. In the interim, the newspaper continued to cover events in Congress, paying particular attention to speeches made by Massachusetts Representatives. Lacking, however, was the single speech that Grout made. As far as the residents of Worcester County were concerned, their Congressman had never spoken in Congress. As election day neared, the tone of the articles changed. They were still, for the most part, cordial and polite, but authors began to question whether Grout had actually been a good representative.

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<sup>54</sup> Philo, “I find by one of your late papers...” *Massachusetts Spy* 29 July 1790.

In a September 9 article “An Independent Elector,” covered a wide range of topics, including what he believed to be a major deficiency in Grout’s performance during the First Congress. He was also the only author to touch upon a candidate’s position on one of the major pieces of legislation passed in the First Congress. This writer declared that he was “not overly fond of electioneering publications in general, especially when they are calculated to promote a party spirit, to defame the worthy, or advance the undeserving: But when so many distinct and separate corporations are too united in the choice of one member” it may be for the better good that newspapers print nominations. Like the previous authors, An Independent Elector reminded readers of the importance of electing the best possible men to fight for Worcester’s needs. He also believed it was vital to have talented men in Congress to counter the southerners. An Independent Elector did not seem as concerned with electing a man who can find a way to work with the southern delegation; his interest is rather promoting one who will be able to push through a northern agenda. He believed that the southern members of Congress cared little for compromise or for the well-being of northern states. “This assertion is fully established by the close and interesting debates on the question of the assumption of state debts, and several others that may be mentioned.”

An Independent Elector went on to evaluate the field of candidates, saying of Grout that “the only thing that I would suggest to his disadvantage is, his silence on the great question above mentioned [assumption] . . . I trust that all will agree with me on this point, that a person’s being once elected gives him no claim to a preference in the next

election.” As for Martin Kinsley, An Independent Elector believed him to be a man of integrity “but it may be doubted whether he has sufficient experience in the school of politicks to enable him to take an active part in the great assembly of the nation.” The two candidates that An Independent Elector found suitable were Levi Lincoln, whose “knowledge and powers of eloquence are too well known to need any observations upon them”, and Dwight Foster, “a gentleman duly qualified to fill the office with respectability, whose character for penetration, veracity, and independence of mind, stands unimpeachable.”

But Levi Lincoln and Dwight Foster were lawyers, and many people did not look favorably on lawyers, who were considered money-hungry, mischievous, and generally lacking in integrity. Antipathy toward attorneys became even more intense in the time surrounding the Regulation because lawyers were blamed for making debtors pay their debts. An Independent Elector disregarded these criticisms. “However weighty” the objections to lawyers serving “may be with regard to the state legislature, it can have no weight here. The superior eloquence and exertion of a Sedgwick and an Ames, in measures already passed, have had happy effects.” Massachusetts Representatives Theodore Sedgwick [Hampshire-Berkshire] and Fisher Ames [Suffolk] were both attorneys and had been integral in getting the assumption bill passed. An Independent Elector is suggesting that on the national stage, the importance of having men who understand law and are eloquent and persuasive speakers outweighs negative stereotypes,

and that voters should look past their prejudices and select the candidate who is best for Worcester.<sup>55</sup>

By September 23, the campaign was in full swing. An unsigned piece appearing in the *Massachusetts Spy* claimed John Sprague the most worthy candidate. After acknowledging that “we cannot expect that Mr. *Sprague*’s decency of character will suffer him to set himself up as a candidate” the author promised that if elected “Mr. *Sprague* would not hesitate instantly to resign his office and to serve the district in Congress.” No state or federal law prohibited one man from holding both a local and a federal office, and fear existed in some quarters that a small group of men would monopolize government positions. Although the debate over holding multiple offices did not play a central part in the Worcester election, this issue was significant in other Massachusetts elections.<sup>56</sup>

In the same piece, the author proclaimed he is “informed, from good authority,” that Levi Lincoln “is so generously explicit as to tell his friends, that he should not accept if chosen, and that he wishes to prevent any votes for him, which might prevent a majority in favour of any one and put the county to all the trouble and expense of a second trial. All those, I am sure then, who would be for Mr. *Lincoln*, will not fail to join for Mr. *Sprague*.” The author’s claim is difficult to substantiate, particularly because the

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<sup>55</sup> An Independent Elector, “The approaching return of the season...” *Massachusetts Spy* 9 September 1790, p.1.

<sup>56</sup> Representative George Leonard (Bristol) was forced to resign from Congress because he was also register of probate. In 1790 the General Court had voted to bar federal officers from sitting in the state legislature. See Hall p. 326.

piece did not include a signature. Rumors and reports that one candidate had dropped out, or would not accept if chosen, appear to have been a standard part of newspaper electioneering. Whether or not these reports were based in fact, enough voters relied on the newspaper as their source of news and information that such claims could have an impact on the election's outcome.<sup>57</sup>

The September 23 *Massachusetts Spy* also carried the only explicitly pro-Grout piece published before the election. "Thoughtful" addressed the argument that Grout should be voted out in the spirit of rotation. This writer found the ability to vote on a representative every two years an important provision of the Constitution; "it learns the Representatives their dependence on the people, and that their reelection depends on their constant endeavours, not only to maintain the interest of their constituents, but also to guard against such unsalutary laws, as, in their operation, may prove injurious to the people at large." But the right to vote in a new representative every two years was not the same as a mandate to elect a new representative on a regular basis. In fact, if a representative knew his tenure lasted only one term "he would have no occasion to remember his dependence upon the people, and if governed by selfish motives, and having a political life of only two years to live, the temptation to accumulate a fortune in that time, by excessive wages or otherwise, would be almost insurmountable."

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<sup>57</sup> "No one is more sensible of the impropriety..." 23 September 1790.

Thoughtful then asked, if the principle of rotation was so important, why “do you not constantly choose new Representative to our General Court, and a new Selectmen in your respective towns, &c. &c.?” His question had merit. Voters in Worcester tended to reelect the same men to local offices and to send the same representatives to the General Court year after year. Thoughtful believed the reason for this “is obvious; because it is safer to trust those of whose experience and fidelity you are already convinced, than to repose your trust in other hands.” The voters know Grout, he reasoned, and should not gamble by electing someone else.

As for voters displeased with how few times Grout spoke in Congress, Thoughtful claimed that “the chief of the speeches” in Congress “are made by about ten, or at most, fifteen members—some of whose impetuous harangues have no influence upon the other members who have penetration to discover their designs, and resolution to prevent any ill consequences that might arise from them.” Thus the fact that Grout barely participated was actually a virtue! Thoughtful concluded by asking that voters “let all frivolous, groundless and party prejudices subside . . . and preserve your rights, liberties, and properties” by returning Grout to Congress.<sup>58</sup>

The final issue of the *Massachusetts Spy* to appear before the October 4 election contained only one article dealing with the election. Signed by “Z.Z.,” it was a response to the article by An Independent Elector. In reference to the charge that Grout was silent

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<sup>58</sup> Thoughtful, *Massachusetts Spy* 23 September 1790.



on the matter of assumption, Z.Z. penned his conviction “that the *Independent Elector*’s information is not good; for I find in the decision of every important question on that subject, Mr. *Grout* was uniformly in favour of assumption.” Z.Z. was also confused by An Independent Elector’s reasoning regarding electing lawyers to Congress. If An Independent Elector could acknowledge that there were good reasons for not sending lawyers to the General Court, how could he justify sending them to Congress? Z.Z. found “the objection against their going to Congress, is greater, in proportion as the powers vested in Congress are greater than those powers which are vested in the State Legislature.” Z.Z. believed the election could be boiled down to “whether the Farmers or the Lawyers in the county shall be represented.” Though he did not expressly articulate it, Z.Z.’s skepticism of lawyers suggests that he is a supporter of the Farmers’ candidate, which among the names mentioned as candidates, could only be Grout. If enough farmers and opponents of a strong federal government voted, Grout could expect to be serving another term.<sup>59</sup>

Turnout, however, was not as heavy as Grout may have wanted. Voters cast 2,241 votes—more than 1,000 fewer than the last contest in 1789. The vote was extremely close. Grout received 800 votes and Ward secured 798. John Sprague came in third with 297, or 13 percent, and the remaining 350 ballots were spread between 13 men.

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<sup>59</sup> Z.Z. “I Would wish to make a few observations...” *Massachusetts Spy* 30 September 1790 p.2.

Because both Grout and Ward garnered only 36 percent of the vote, another election needed to be held.<sup>60</sup>

Even though Grout had actually received the most votes in the first canvass, close reading of the returns indicated Grout was in trouble. If Sprague's supporters made a deal with Ward, or simply decided to support the Federalist candidate most likely to win, Grout would lose. The majority of the other 13 men who received votes were also Federalists, and their supporters would likely choose Ward over Grout in a head-to-head contest. Grout had lost ground in every area of the county. His strongest support was in the northwest, where he won 45 percent of the vote. But this showing was a significant decrease from the first federal election, where he had received 65 percent. In the old Land Bank towns of the southeast, where he had won 60 percent of the vote in 1789, Grout experienced a drop to 35 percent in 1790. Ward fared the best in the northeast, where he won 70 percent of the cast votes. The coalition between voters in the northwest and southeast that had elected Grout appeared to be splintering. The fact that no direct tax had been passed in the First Congress, and the state's debts were going to be assumed was quite popular among the traditional Land Bankers in the southeast. The Bill of Rights also offered some protections against violations of citizen's liberties and may have convinced some dissenting societies to support the new government. But, pockets of voters, mostly located in the northeast, still resented centralized authority and were

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<sup>60</sup> Unless otherwise stated, all election returns taken from Massachusetts State Archives: SC5/series 196, Registers of Votes for National and State Officers and Constitutional Amendments.

jealous of their freedoms. They comprised Grout's base and would be the last to turn away from the Anti-federalist tradition.

## **The Second Trial: November 29, 1790**

The next contest was set for November 29, and supporters of Ward and Grout turned their attention to building coalitions and/or increasing turnout. Because the results from the last election had not been certified until late October, scant time remained for electioneering. "An Elector" published a pro-Ward piece on November 11 pleading that people "lay aside all prejudice and party spirit, and be united in the choice of one good able politician to serve them"—Artemas Ward. This writer listed Ward's qualities as being a supporter of the people's rights and liberties through "the time of Barnard and Hutchinson's administrations." He reminded readers that Ward had "been a member of the late Congress in our most gloomy times," and countered a criticism levied against Ward that he is "too severe in the Courts of Justice where he presides." The author's defense of Ward leaves no doubt that An Elector was a Federalist, and his opinions mimic those of other Ward supporters. "I wish," he wrote, "people to consider the dissipation of manners and corruption of morals, too prevalent at this day, and the absolute need there is of drawing the reins of government with a tight hand, and putting the laws into execution with force and energy; otherwise, there will be no lining in society, and our lives, liberties and property will be as unsafe as among the

Barbarians.”<sup>61</sup> Federalist rhetoric at this time was full of warnings of the dangers of too much democracy. It would take an energetic and proactive government to prevent the country from slipping into anarchy. Worcester Federalists were not unique in this fear but the experience of Shays’s Rebellion undoubtedly made them all the more pertinent.

Grout’s friends included their own piece in the following issue of the *Massachusetts Spy*. The unsigned piece expressed the hope that “the electors will not, [in] the ensuing election, be so very inattentive to the matter as they were at the last meeting—as there were only about two thousand votes returned for this extensive county.” Grout and his friends were well aware that a higher turnout meant a higher chance of winning. The article praised Grout for eschewing private concerns “as to give his whole attention to the publick service.” It reminded readers that Grout has only been in office for one term, which is but “a short apprenticeship, by which he is now in a degree qualified to act.” The First Congress was just the beginning and the people should refrain from passing judgment until Grout’s work was finished. Representatives, the article argued, “which have begun the business, and completed one half of it to such universal satisfaction” should return to office “to finish the *Mighty Fabrick*, and complete the *Political Dome*.”

The piece “acknowledged that [Grout] has not been one of those noisy kind of declaimers, which have amused the galleries, filled the newspapers, and retarded publick

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<sup>61</sup> An Elector, “As it appears there was no choice...,” *Massachusetts Spy* 11 November 1790.

business.” This article claimed, however, that Grout “has repeatedly spoken, and spoken with applause, particularly upon the subject of a very heavy tax upon salt . . . also on government and the extravagant grants made to Baron *Steuben*, ‘&c. ‘&c.” These speeches allegedly were printed in New York papers, and the piece’s writer claimed to have some of these papers in his possession. However, none of the New York papers nor any other records of Congressional debates contain any evidence that Grout gave more than the previously discussed speech on salt.<sup>62</sup>

The fact that Grout’s friends printed lies suggests they knew he was in trouble. Unfortunately, most voters could not disprove the article’s claim about Grout’s activity in Congress because their access to Congressional debates was usually limited to the *Massachusetts Spy* and the occasional paper from Boston or New York. Despite the fact that a major road from Boston to New York went through Worcester, the vast majority of constituents had very little access to information about what their representatives did at the seat of federal government.

Grout’s allies were using other tactics to cover-up their candidate’s quiescence in Congress. A rumor circulated that Isaiah Thomas, editor of the *Massachusetts Spy*, purposely refrained from Grout’s congressional speeches. Thomas was a known Federalist and editors often slanted their papers. On November 24, Thomas issued a statement denying that he had been withholding information and explaining why Grout’s

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<sup>62</sup> “It appears by the returns made...” *Massachusetts Spy* 18 November 1790 p.3.

lone speech had not been published. Writing in the third-person, Thomas explained that he published few speeches because printing them all would subsume the entire paper. Instead, he published “the Doings and Proceedings of Congress daily.” He wrote that, “Respecting Mr. Grout’s Speeches, he never saw but one in print, which was published in a Newyork daily paper, and that paper he never saw until after Congress had adjourned, consequently not in season for republication.” As for “the assertion that the Printer, through design to injure Mr. Grout, refused to publish said speech, is as base as it is false, and was, without doubt, fabricated for an electioneering purpose.”<sup>63</sup>

While factions debated over how much Grout had spoken in Congress, the only actual issue discussed in the papers was assumption; even this argument revolved primarily around whether Grout had been vocal in his support of the bill. Grout was one of the most consistently voting northern Anti-federalists in the First Congress, yet no mention is made of his hostility toward the administration and centralization.<sup>64</sup> Likewise, none of Ward’s supporters argued that he should be elected because of his views or political opinions. Articles debated the merits of the doctrine of rotation and whether lawyers were suited to serve in the national legislature but not whether Grout’s voting record had adequately represented his constituents. Arguments were proffered that the next Representative needed to be able to stand against possible encroachments on

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<sup>63</sup>“The Printer has been informed...” *Massachusetts Spy* 24 November 1790.

<sup>64</sup> Voting data based on John Hoadley “The Emergence of Political Parties in Congress, 1789-1803” in Lance Banning, ed., *After the Constitution: Party Conflict in the New Republic* (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1989).

northern interests by the southern delegation, but nobody discussed whether a Federalist or Anti-federalist was best suited for this task.

Turnout for the November 26 vote was only slightly larger than the previous balloting. Even then, “voter turnout had dropped by a third since the final vote in 1789.”<sup>65</sup> The final vote tally was 2,413, meaning that a candidate needed at least 1,207 votes to win. This time, the Federalist voters rallied around Artemas Ward instead of spreading their vote among other candidates and dealt the Anti-federalists in Massachusetts a decisive blow. Ward won with 52 percent of the vote (1,248). Hall argues that Grout lost the election “because Ward cut into his former majorities in the Antifederalist communities.” The division between Anti-federalist and Federalist towns appears to have disappeared by 1790. While every community that had supported the Constitution in 1788 backed Ward by large margins in 1790, many of the areas that had voted against the Constitution also cast votes for Ward over Grout.<sup>66</sup>

Grout managed to improve his percentage share of the vote over the first trial in October, but it was still below his 1789 level. Grout won in the northwest orthodox, Regulator towns, but lost the northeast by a huge margin. The crucial southeastern part of the county was split with Ward winning 44 percent of the vote and Grout taking 43 percent. The “large pluralist towns of the Blackstone Valley, particularly in the old Land Bank Centers” that had been so important to Grout’s victory in 1789, no longer feared the

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<sup>65</sup> Brooke, p. 235.

<sup>66</sup> Hall, p. 344.

central government and turned on Grout. Originally, opposition to the Constitution “united orthodox Regulators and men of the plural Popular towns,” but the passage of a Bill of Rights, the assumption of state debts, and the agreement not to levy direct taxes converted many former Anti-federalists to Federalists. The Land Bankers had always been most concerned with fiscal matters, and when their fears failed to materialize, they had little trouble supporting a strong central government.<sup>67</sup>

Although the newspapers had focused on issues of personality and whether Grout spoke enough in Congress, the results suggest that economic interests factored heavily in voter’s decision. That the vast majority of men who voted for Federalist candidates other than Ward in the first contest sided with him over Grout in November suggests that the people had knowledge of the candidates’ politics. When Worcester’s history is taken into account, it is clear that people voted on more than just personality. After the federal government assumed state debts and did not levy direct taxes, the Land Bankers quickly joined the Federalist column. The former Regulators in the northwest who resented any centralized authority were not so easily pacified and continued to support Grout. Partisan differences may not have been prevalent in the newspaper articles leading up to the election, but they had a demonstrable impact on the final result.

Artemas Ward would remain in Congress for two terms (1791-1795) where he became one of the most adamant defenders of the Federalist agenda, or “New England

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<sup>67</sup> Brooke, pp. 235-237.



Politics” as he sometimes called it. Although he never warmed to George Washington as a person, Ward supported Washington’s administration in every way possible. While in Congress, Ward also became wary of the southern representatives and wrote often of the need to keep the South at bay. A combination of old age and poor health forced him to decline to run for a third term. He did, however, return to the Court of Common Pleas and served as a judge until 1798. He died in 1800, convinced that his Federalist Party would triumph over the Jeffersonian Republicans.<sup>68</sup>

Not much is known about the rest of Grout’s life. He was nominated as a Republican to the state senate in 1801 but did not win. In 1803 he moved to Lunenburg, Vermont, where he owned some property. He died in Dover, New Hampshire while attending court at the age of 70.

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<sup>68</sup> Martyn, pp.303-320

### 3. A Particularly “Warm Canvass”: Maine

The second congressional election in Maine marked the beginning of a new era in politics for the remote Massachusetts outpost. Whereas the first elections had passed with relatively little fanfare, the election for a federal representative in 1790 sparked a newspaper war, resulted in four runoff elections, saw a lawyer run out of town, and led a newspaper editor's life to be threatened. The election pitted merchants against lawyers, landed interest against commercial, the secular against the religious, and the new residents against established ones. As had been the case in Worcester, the contest did not hinge on national issues. The candidates' position on amendments, the judiciary system, assumption of state debts, or the location of the seat of federal government did not seem that important. Besides the tax on molasses and salt, Fredrick Steuben's pension, and a small discussion of titles, substantive debate on national issues did not occur. Instead, the focus was on personal issues of character such as incumbent George Thatcher's religion and whether he was biased towards land owners at the expense of merchants.

Many of the issues that were raised and debated in this election foreshadowed subsequent divisions between Federalists and Jeffersonians in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Jefferson's Republican Party believed in a limited federal

government, found most of its support among artisans, laborers, and farmers, and had an aversion to anything British. The tensions between land owners and tenants, and between farmers and merchants, were especially important in the 1790s and helped fuel the rise of the Maine Republican Party. During the campaign of 1790 and 1791, the candidates' relation to these groups was a subject of constant discussion.

The intensity of the campaign also foreshadowed issues and emotions that arose in later campaigns. William Wills, a nineteenth century historian of Maine, had this to say about the contest: "There were at the time no party lines of division like those of the present day, but differences grew out of the local situation and individual character of candidates, which caused excitement as violent as those founded on different political sentiment." Wills describes the second congressional election as being a particularly "warm canvass" and claimed "there has never been, since that time, more personal abuse during any canvass, than that election excited."<sup>1</sup> Like Worcester, Maine lacked political parties to bring order to the process. The result was a chaotic election marred by threats of violence and controversy.

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<sup>1</sup> William Willis, *The History of Portland from 1632 to 1864* (Portland, Maine: Bailey and Noyes, 1865) pp.597-598.

## Maine in the Eighteenth Century

Maine was not a popular place to settle for most of the eighteenth century. Its remoteness, harsh climate, and the almost constant warfare kept all but the most dedicated or desperate settlers away. The area was particularly hard hit during the Seven Year's War, when settlers saw their property destroyed by both the French and the Native Americans. The population in 1750 was 10,000 —only slightly higher than a century earlier. It increased briefly after the cessation of hostilities with the French, but the struggle with the British put a halt to the growth.<sup>2</sup> During the Revolutionary War, Maine, although isolated from the major scenes of fighting, continued to experience a depression owing to high taxes and a shortage of markets.

The American victory at Yorktown and the Treaty of Paris sparked an explosion in Maine's population. Many Americans sought to exercise their new independence by claiming their own piece of land. A relatively liberal land policy and the opening of an estimated seventeen million acres in 1783 made Maine a particularly appealing location. Between 1780 and 1820, the population of Maine grew from 56,000 to 300,000, an increase of 450 percent.<sup>3</sup> Between 1783 and 1790 alone, the population grew by over

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<sup>2</sup> Ronald F. Banks, *Maine Becomes A State: The Movement to Separate Maine From Massachusetts, 1785-1820* (Middletown, Conn: Wesleyan University Press, 1970), p. 5.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

40,000.<sup>4</sup> Maine was not just the largest Congressional District in Massachusetts in land mass and population, but was easily the fastest growing. Only about a third of this growth can be attributed to the natural increase in population. The rest was due to migration. Settlers came from all over New England and included speculators and wealthy men, as well as poor squatters attracted to the open space and men looking to start over or escape debt. According to one contemporary observer, the District served as little more than “an asylum for people to come and settle that could not live anywhere else.”<sup>5</sup>

As had been the case in Worcester, the Great Awakening had a profound impact on Maine. Even after the Revolutionary War, Congregationalism was the legally recognized religion in Maine, as in Worcester and much of New England, meaning that tax money supported the Congregationalist Church. This resulted in a significant disadvantage for breakaway sects.<sup>6</sup> In 1780, the Church had organized 38 different parishes — more than double the number of divided or challenging sects. The situation changed throughout the 1780s. As more people began to flood the District, new ideas gained traction. By 1790, Congregationalism still dominated, but was outpaced in terms of both membership and new churches. During the decade 1770 to 1780, thirty-five Congregationalist Churches started. The years 1780 to 1790 saw the addition of only twelve. In contrast, Separate Baptists added three in the 1770s and twelve in the 1780s.

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<sup>4</sup> David C. Smith, “Maine’s Changing Landscape to 1820,” in *Maine in the Early Republic: From Revolution to Statehood*, ed. Charles E. Clark, James S. Leamon, and Karen Bowden (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1988) p. 7.

<sup>5</sup> Alan Taylor, *Liberty Men and Great Proprietors: The Revolutionary Settlement on the Maine Frontier, 1760-1820*, (Chapel Hill, N.C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 1990) p.63.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. p. 120.

The fastest growing denomination between 1780 and 1790 was the Freewill Baptists, which added sixteen churches.<sup>7</sup> The rapidly growing inland communities, where Congregationalism had never really been established, made up for the majority of new churches.<sup>8</sup> Still, even with the addition of these new sects, Maine lacked established churches. “In 1790, only a third of mid-Maine’s communities had any organized church. Most settlers lived without religion or participated in informal seekers meetings.”<sup>9</sup>

The growth in dissenting sects also affected the area’s politics. Breakaway churches were more likely to challenge the established leadership and tended to align with Anti-federalists during the debate over ratification of the Constitution. Therefore, smaller towns in the interior, where the New Light Stir had significant impact, were more likely to favor independent thought and oppose a powerful central government. These towns would later make up the backbone of the Jeffersonian movement in Maine. In contrast, “the older coastal settlements continued to sustain both Congregationalist religion and Federalist politics.” The settlers in these areas were happy with the status quo and were wary of too much democracy. These religious divisions played a significant role in virtually every political debate.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> In 1790, only one of the twenty-four backcountry communities surveyed supported a Congregationalist Church. Stephen A. Marini, “Religious Revolution in the District of Maine” in *Maine in the Early Republic* pp. 118-145.

<sup>9</sup> Taylor p. 139.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. p. 118, ch. 8.

The most important political movement local to Maine during this time period was a campaign to break off from Massachusetts and establish a new state. Since 1691, Maine had been under the control of Massachusetts. For the most part it was a happy union. Maine enjoyed significant representation in the Massachusetts House, even though towns often failed to send delegates. Massachusetts provided Maine with protection and markets for items such as timber. The men and women who lived in the District of Maine were usually deferential to their brethren in the lower part of the state. The flood of new people and ideas changed this. During the Revolutionary War, a small segment of the population floated the idea of signing a separate peace treaty with Great Britain. Maine felt exposed to the British and under-protected. The movement to sign it marked the first truly organized political movement in the state. Even with the end of the war, some local elites remained upset with their subservience to Massachusetts. The Revolutionary War had radicalized some men who now looked beyond issues of war and peace to justify separation.<sup>11</sup>

A group of leading citizens in Portland spearheaded a renewed separation movement beginning in 1785. Benjamin Titcomb Jr. and Thomas Wait established Maine's first newspaper, *The Falmouth Gazette and Weekly Advertiser*,<sup>12</sup> in 1785 for the purpose of promoting separation. The elites in and around Portland found allies in their

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<sup>11</sup> Banks pp. 1-25; James S. Leamon, "Revolution and Separation: Maine's First Efforts at Statehood," in *Maine in the Early Republic*, pp. 83-99.

<sup>12</sup> In 1786, after the town of Portland was incorporated *The Falmouth Gazette and Weekly Advertiser* changed its name to *The Cumberland Gazette*. Benjamin Titcomb left the paper between 1788 and 1789.

cause with the backcountry settlers. However, it was a tenuous alliance that proved poisonous for the movement. The men in Portland who supported separation did so because they believed it would help them get better representation at the federal level, thus enabling them to make their own laws regarding trade. The men in the backcountry were more likely to support the split because it might abolish debt or muddle land titles, which were already confused. Squatters and small landholders resented all types of authority, especially those located in far-away Boston. Speculators and elites viewed squatters and small landholders as potential agitators or sources of trouble. Shays's Rebellion had proved to many elites that too much democracy can lead to chaos. The men of property were not about to allow a similar uprising in their back yard.<sup>13</sup>

The Federal Constitutional Convention further divided the separatist movement. Some separatists, such as Thomas Wait, urged the adoption of the Constitution because they believed it was the most natural way to achieve independence from Massachusetts. Others argued that unless the Constitution specifically provided for Maine to become a new state, they would permanently remain part of Massachusetts. According to one historian, support for the Constitution came primarily from the "commercial centers along the coast where traders, merchants, and shipbuilders — even lawyers and preachers — eagerly anticipated the benefits from a more highly centralized, effective national government." The further inland towns, where the newer religious denominations were

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<sup>13</sup> Philip Marsh, "Maine's First Newspaper Editor: Thomas Wait," *The New England Quarterly* Vol. 28 No.4 (Dec., 1955) pp.519-535. For more information on early publications in Maine see Henry E. Dunnack, *The Maine Book* (Augusta, Maine: Henry E. Dunnack, 1920) pp. 147-155



strongest, feared the new government would be too large, located too far away, and run by the rich. Though the majority of separatists and non-separatists would come together after the ratification of the Constitution, divisions between the District's rich and poor and between the coast and inland remained.<sup>14</sup>

## **Maine in the First Federal Congress**

The first congressional election in the District of Maine, held on October 4, 1788, was calm and orderly, particularly in comparison to the second. The easy favorite was George Thatcher of Biddeford, who had been appointed to serve as the District's delegate to the Confederation Congress.

Thatcher was born on April 12, 1754, on Cape Cod, in Yarmouth, Massachusetts. He graduated from Harvard in 1776 and managed to avoid any real action during the Revolutionary War. After a failed attempt to establish a law firm in Yarmouth, Thatcher decided to start over. Confusing land titles and fast growing communities made Maine a particularly appealing option. He settled in Biddeford in 1782, where he would assume the practice of James Sullivan, who had been elected to the Confederation Congress (although he failed to attend any meetings). As the community's only lawyer, Thatcher

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<sup>14</sup>Leamon, *Maine in the Early Republic* p. 93

quickly established himself as one of its leading citizens. Not surprisingly, Thatcher was chosen as a delegate to the Congress in 1787.<sup>15</sup>

Because no newspaper coverage of the election exists, ascertaining the issues in the first congressional elections, or indeed whether there were any, is difficult. Yet, surviving letters written about the time of the election make it clear that Thatcher did have at least one major liability: his religion. Thatcher was a deist. No organized deist church existed and beliefs were determined by the individual practitioner. Thatcher acknowledged the existence of a “prime-mover,” but often mocked people who believed in a punishing God. He “advocated cheerfulness in religion,” and “did not believe in the existence of a soul apart from the body.” Except when with a few close friends, he remained coy about his religious beliefs, but just about everyone in Portland knew Thatcher did not adhere to any established denomination. Even though Thatcher was a deist, and deists tended to be Antifederalists/Republicans, he was an avowed Federalist. Parties were still in their infancy and Thatcher’s religion is evidence that no set relationship existed between religion and politics.

Thatcher’s contemporaries and some modern historians believe that Thatcher was the author of a series of articles appearing in Thomas Wait’s *Cumberland Gazette* under the signature “Crazy Jonathan.” “Jonathan” argued for secular as opposed to religious education, and stated that religion should not factor into a voter’s decision on whom was

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<sup>15</sup> Dumas Malone, et al. ed. *Dictionary of American Biography* Vol. 18 (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1936) pp. 386-387.

best to represent them. He concluded that “even Atheists, or such as are by very religious people deemed Atheists, have demonstrated that they are governed by principles of integrity, and love of truth . . .” This was a radical statement for time, and there were few voters who would have agreed with Thatcher’s sentiments. Even if Thatcher was not the author of the “Crazy Jonathan” pieces, his friends worried that his refusal to attend church would cost him the election.<sup>16</sup>

One of Thatcher’s friends, Samuel Nasson, lectured him on the virtues of worshipping in a public manner. Pointing out that the public loves to see their politicians pray, Nasson note explained that “They [voters] praise your President to me for all his virtues but none more than for his attendance on public worship; for this they almost adore him and I join with them and could almost fill a volume with his virtues . . . It is the other way with your Mr. G. Thatcher. He never goes to meeting more than twice in one year; nay, he opposed having a chaplain.” Nasson went on to warn Thatcher that if “you don’t reform it will be against you, for they say that you slight or pretend to slight all revealed religion.” Thatcher’s religion did not seem to be a major issue in the 1788 campaign, but it was already being noted as one of his primary weaknesses.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> “Crazy Jonathan” *The Cumberland Gazette* 15 January 1789 from Jensen, Merrill and Robert A. Becker ed. *The Documentary History of the First Federal Elections, 1788-1790*, Vol. I. (Madison, Wis.: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1976) p578 (Hereafter *DHFFE*) For evidence that George Thatcher was the author of the Crazy Jonathan pieces see Thomas B. Wait to George Thatcher 8 January 1788, ALS, Chamberlain Collection, Thatcher Family Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society (hereafter TFP).

<sup>17</sup> Samuel Nasson to George Thatcher, Sanford, Maine, 9 July 1788 *DHFFE* pp. 582-583.

Election day was set for October 4, 1788. Out of Maine's population of over 90,000, only 948 votes were cast. Even taking into consideration that only a small number of the inhabitants could vote (probably around 20,000), this number is low. The state's largest town, Portland, which had over 2,000 residents in 1790, only returned 54 votes. Out of the total votes cast, George Thatcher received 588. His two closest opponents, Josiah Thacher and Nathaniel Wells, received 255 votes between them. The remaining 105 votes were spread out among ten different candidates.<sup>18</sup>

As had been the case since Maine held its first elections, the majority of newer, small towns did not even bother to vote in 1788. Towns isolated in the interior and further east, like Machias, were far from the capital and often times did not know when an election took place. Some towns, like Cape Elizabeth, located near the coast either did not vote or were unable to return their results in time to be certified. Of the towns that did report, the majority cast all their votes in favor of a single candidate (George Thatcher). The opposition candidates did best in and around Portland. Josiah Thacher actually bested George Thatcher in Portland itself (28 to 23).

Thatcher diligently attended to business in the First Federal Congress. He missed only six roll calls the entire first Congress. For the most part, he took a moderate-Federalist stance. He supported a strong judiciary but was of two minds about a strong executive. When it came to amendments, Thatcher joined with the Federalists in voting

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<sup>18</sup> *DHFFE*. pp. 611-612..

against considering all the amendments proposed by the states and against an amendment that would limit Congress's ability to levy direct taxes. He did, however, support the Anti-federalists in the battle over the wording of the tenth amendment. He agreed that the federal government's powers should be limited to those "expressly" contained in the Constitution.<sup>19</sup>

Thatcher was particularly upset about the Residence Act [S-12]. He feared that placing the federal government so far from his district would lessen his, and the people of Maine's, ability to influence federal policy. Throughout the debate, Thatcher warned of the growing sectional tensions between the north and south. But by July 1790, Thatcher had resigned himself to locating the seat of government on the Potomac River. The agreement that in exchange for locating it in the south, the states' war debts would be assumed by the federal government certainly softened the blow.<sup>20</sup>

Thatcher never lost sight of his constituents—and the fact that he was going to be up for reelection. He played an integral part in getting the Portland Head Light House Act [HR-97] passed, routinely forwarded the President suggestions on who should fill federal offices in the District, attempted to get more post and custom offices, and tried to secure local contractors for federal projects. Thatcher also spent countless hours writing letters to men and women in Maine. Not everything Thatcher did in Congress was

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<sup>19</sup> Linda Grant De Pauw, et al. eds. *The Documentary History of the First Federal Congress*. (Baltimore, Md.: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972-). (Hereafter) *DHFFC* Vol. XIV p. 644.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* p 645.

popular with his constituents though; for example, his choice for Penobscot collector of revenue was poorly received.<sup>21</sup>

Thatcher also struggled to keep the support of some of the merchants in Portland. In January of 1790 a group of Portland Merchants got together to draw up a petition expressing their objections to recent legislation dealing with the importing and exporting of goods. Under normal circumstances, petitions were sent directly to the signers' representative, in this case Thatcher, who would then introduce it to Congress. However, the Portland merchants voted to send their petition to Fisher Ames, the representative from Suffolk County. When Benjamin Wait heard about the meeting, he dashed off a letter describing the situation to Thatcher. He wrote that after the merchants agreed to a set of grievances, "the meeting was then dissolved, voting to forward the Petition to Fisher Ames: Which last measure was adopted in consequence of an assertion made of Capt. Jo. McLellan that you paid no attention to the traders of Portland—that you had heretofore neglected to answer their letters &c. and which was backed by similar observation from pacing Stephen Esq." Although the petition ended up being sent to Thatcher (with an accompanying note requesting that he *must* consult with Ames), it was clear that Thatcher had some work to do to win over certain groups of constituents.<sup>22</sup>

Overall, Thatcher had good reason to be confident in his reelection. He had done his best to serve the people of Maine well and had a record to prove it. His biggest

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid. p 646.

<sup>22</sup> *DHFFC*, Vol. XIII, pp. 414-415.

weakness was still his unorthodox religion, but that had not kept him out of the First Congress. Still, Thatcher was aware that forces were organizing against him. To protect himself in case of an upset, Thatcher prepared to resume his legal practice. Even with this fall-back position, Thatcher was not planning to lose without a fight.<sup>23</sup>

## **The First Trial: October 4, 1790**

The resolution providing for the second congressional election divided Massachusetts into the same eight districts that had been used in 1788. Maine, which now consisted of the counties of York, Cumberland, Lincoln, Washington, and Hancock, remained the largest district by a significant factor.<sup>24</sup> For a period, the second congressional elections seemed as uneventful as the first. But in the middle of September, election pieces began appearing the District's only newspaper, *The Cumberland Gazette*. Most historians who study this period tend to focus on the great national issues that had divided Congress—amending the Constitution, location of the federal seat of government, the assumption of state debts, and the establishment of a national bank. However, these concerns played a small role in the Maine election. Instead local concerns, personal feuds, a candidate's service in the Revolutionary War, and Thatcher's personal life were the issues being discussed before the election.

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<sup>23</sup> *DHFFC*, Vol. XIV, p. 646.

<sup>24</sup> See Appendix II

One of the first articles dealing with the election appeared on September 13. The author reported rumors that William Lithgow, Jr. would be challenging George Thatcher. “I mean not to disparage the abilities of any gentleman who may be a candidate; but let us reason together,” the author mused. “Is a fresh man then so eligible (all other things being equal) as one with the qualification, and advantage” of having served before?” George Thatcher, he concluded, is known to the people and has done a good job and therefore should be reelected. The author also posited another interesting argument for why Thatcher should be returned. The South, he claimed, will no doubt return the same members to Congress. If the North did not also send men with experience, the Southerners would “be apt to destroy the balance of interests to the disadvantage of the northern states.” Without attacking William Lithgow, the author simply suggested that experience in Congress was important to ensure proper representation for Maine. As had been the case in Worcester, voters in Maine were acutely aware of the differences between the northern and southern states.<sup>25</sup>

The first sign of what might be in store for the campaign was an article by “Consistency” printed on September 30. The author was “much surprised and mortified” to hear that “*Mr. [William] Martin*, of North-Yarmouth, an *Englishman*, who has been but a short time in America, is a candidate, and likely to be chosen” to represent Maine. The Constitution required seven years of United States citizenship prior to serving in

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<sup>25</sup> “The time approaches for the choice of a Federal Representative...” *The Cumberland Gazette*, 13 September 1790, p. 3.



Congress. Consistency claimed that this “*London shopkeeper*, who first arrived in America, about *five years since*” was a foreigner and not even qualified to run. “As to his abilities,” Consistency continued, “they are certainly not eminent.” The author concluded that either Thatcher or Lithgow would make much better representatives because they were from Massachusetts. Character attacks and procedural challenges would become commonplace in following months.<sup>26</sup>

A few days before the election, Thomas Wait, the editor of *The Cumberland Gazette* and close friend of George Thatcher, began circulating a letter of support for Thatcher’s reelection. “It is well known,” it read “that Mr. Thatcher has been uniformly opposed to every measure of Congress which has been contrary to the wishes of his Constituents—He was violently opposed to the duties on Salt and Molasses; and also to the high compensations to the servants of Government—particularly to the enormous pay of the members of Congress.” Wait then argued that the Merchants of Portland have no reason to oppose Thatcher, other than the fact that he was in favor of “the debts and defraying the expenses of Government by duties on trade—by imposts on excises and on all articles of luxury and extravagance . . .” The circular concluded with Wait calling on Thatcher’s supporters “and every person of influence . . . who has the interest of the

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<sup>26</sup> Consistency, “I was much surprised . . .” *The Independent Chronicle* 30 September 1790, p.3.

district at heart, to attend the town meeting punctually—carry a number of written votes, and make as general a distribution of them as possible.”<sup>27</sup>

The letter caused an uproar in Portland. There had been no electioneering in the 1788 election and some saw Wait’s letter as an unethical attempt to sway voters. Any public action that resembled attempts to influence the electorate was viewed with suspicion. On Tuesday, September 22, twenty-two men opposed to Wait’s letter met at Greele’s tavern. The “committee of consulters” (as Wait would refer to them) selected Wait’s old publishing partner Deacon Benjamin Titcomb as chairman. The assembled were asked to write down whom they would like to be chosen as the next representative. Nathaniel Wells was easily selected. Wells had been a delegate to the state ratification convention and had voted in favor of adopting the Constitution. Next, the committee prepared a rival handbill to Wait’s circular letter and plastered it around town.

Addressed to “Brethren & Fellow Citizens,” the handbill attacked Wait and promoted Wells as the better candidate. “We wish not to trouble you with our sentiments on the present occasion,” the handbill read, “but the officiousness of Thomas B. Wait constrains us to acquaint you, that the general sentiment of this town, as expressed in a late respectable meeting of inhabitants a few days past, appeared to be, that a change of Federal Representative was expedient:--That NATHANIEL WELLS, Esq. of the county

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<sup>27</sup> Thomas B. Wait, “To Mr. B—D—, of Capelizabeth,” *The Cumberland Gazette*, 4 October 1790, p.2.

of York . . . would be capable of rendering the District essential service; and we shall accordingly give him our suffrages.”<sup>28</sup>

In response, Wait published a copy of his circular letter addressed to Mr. B—D— of Cape Elizabeth as well as the rival handbill on the day of the elections<sup>29</sup>. To ensure that his readers supported his position, Wait included a harangue on the “Committee of Consulters.” “It is for you, *Fellow citizens*” Wait wrote, “to determine whether the opinion of *Thirteen Consulters*, in nocturnal Caucus assembled, may, or may not be said to be the ‘*general sentiment of the town*’—or whether the assembling together of twenty two of said *Consulters* (who, like the Warriors of Chevy Chase, *were picked and chosen every one*) and that met at Greele’s tavern, in the night time, may, or may not be said to be ‘*a respectable meeting of the inhabitants*.’” Wait concluded by asking whether or not the Committee was “*guilty of an officious, a malicious, and an atrocious FALSEHOOD!!!*” Though Wait included a small note at the bottom of the page claiming that he had nothing but respect for the men who made up the committee, such public attacks on character and honor were not taken lightly. Wait had timed his attack perfectly. A response piece (which Wait had promised to publish if received) would not

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<sup>28</sup> “Brethren & Fellow Citizens...” *The Cumberland Gazette*, 4 October 1790.

<sup>29</sup> The 1790 census for Cape Elizabeth showed two possible B—D—s, Benjamin Dyer and Bezilla Delano. Benjamin Dyer was listed as being under the age of 16, therefore the letter was most likely addressed to Bezilla Delano.

reach the public until after the election. He would have the last say before the voters cast their ballots.<sup>30</sup>

Thatcher relied on friends throughout the District to keep him apprised of the developments. While waiting for the official returns to be announced, an anxious Jeremiah Barker wrote to Thatcher, warning him that there was a growing division between “the holders of landed interest” who were “content for the present member” and “those concerned in navigation” who “urge the necessity of change.” Competition between the land and mercantile interests would figure predominantly in this, and many other elections into the nineteenth century. Barker also mentioned encountering men who stressed the “necessity of a *Rotation* in office” that would keep bad representatives from serving too long and allow other, equally qualified men, a chance to serve. Despite finding plenty of men concerned with the election, Barker concluded that there was an overall “strange negligence that attends people, in matter of such consequence as appears by there not generally attending meetings relative to this business.” A small number of men may have been passionate about the election, but the majority apparently did not even bother to vote.<sup>31</sup>

On October 8, Wait reported early returns indicating “that in the Eastern counties the votes will be equally divided between Mr. Geo. Thatcher and Mr. Lithgow—that in the county of York, Mr. Geo. Thatcher will have a pretty handsome majority; and that in

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<sup>30</sup> Thomas B. Wait, “Of the above *Circular*...” *The Cumberland Gazette*, 4 October 1790.

<sup>31</sup> Jeremiah Barker to George Thatcher, 11 October 1790, TFP.

this country [Cumberland] he will have quite as many as any other Candidate. Hence we may fairly conclude, that if Mr. Thatcher has not now a majority, he will have a clear plurality of the votes; and that finally he will be chosen.” Although it would take longer than Wait anticipated, this prediction proved surprisingly accurate.<sup>32</sup>

The final results for the October 4 election were: George Thatcher—609, Nathaniel Wells—263, William Lithgow, Jr.—364, and Josiah Thacher—150. A total of 1,636 votes were cast. Because no candidate got over 50 percent of the vote, there would be an automatic run-off election. Because Wells and Lithgow received a significant number of votes, it was likely that they would again challenge Thatcher. While the voters and candidates knew that there would ultimately be another contest, they had to wait until the Massachusetts legislature set a date. The election could be held any time from the next month to three or four months later. In the interim, Thatcher, Wells, and Lithgow would likely be searching for ways to capture more votes.<sup>33</sup>

The three top candidates—Thatcher, Lithgow, and Wells—were all Federalists. William Lithgow, Jr, from Georgetown, Maine, had been appointed as the Attorney for the District of Maine and elected to the Massachusetts General Court. Nathaniel Wells of Wells, Maine participated in the Massachusetts Federal Ratification Convention and voted to ratify the Constitution. He was also elected to the Massachusetts Senate from

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<sup>32</sup> “Portland” *The Cumberland Gazette*, 11 October 1790, p.3

<sup>33</sup> Unless otherwise stated, all election returns taken from Massachusetts State Archives: SC5/series 196, Registers of Votes for National and State Officers and Constitutional Amendments.

1782-1797. At the time of the second congressional election he was serving as judge of the York County Court of Common Pleas. Although Maine would develop a strong opposition party in the late 1790s, there were no viable Anti-federalist candidates at this time.<sup>34</sup>

While waiting for the word on the timing of the next election, a significant development in the race occurred: the first issue of a new newspaper, *The Gazette of Maine*. Benjamin Titcomb, Jr., Wait's former colleague and the chair of what had become the infamous "committee of consulters" was the paper's editor. Titcomb was a deacon and Philip Marsh has described him as "probably a religious fundamentalist."<sup>35</sup> The timing of the paper's establishment leaves little doubt that it was meant to serve as a political and theological counterpoint to Wait's *Cumberland Gazette*. Titcomb was going to do everything in his power to keep the non-believer from being reelected. In the days leading up to the October 4 election, Wait (and therefore Thatcher) had a monopoly on the press. The situation would be different for the run-off election set for November 26.

## **The Second Trial: November 26, 1790**

Upon hearing the news that he had failed to garner enough votes, Thatcher moved quickly to find a scapegoat. Rumors circulated about irregularities at the polls. Thatcher

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<sup>34</sup> *DHFFC* Vol. II p.508; *DHFFC* Vol. XVII p. 1903.

<sup>35</sup> Marsh, p. 520

heard substantiated reports that a selectman at one of the polls “permitted persons to send in their votes when they were absent.” Proxy votes were not generally accepted and the idea that one selectman allowed them suggested corruption. These proxy votes, he was told, went to Nathaniel Wells. If the votes had not been counted at all, the number of votes needed to have a majority would have been smaller—possibly making Thatcher the winner.<sup>36</sup>

On the other side, Wait’s circular letter and election day coverage earned him a scathing attack in *The Gazette of Maine*. “How insulting to the understanding of Mr. B. D. [of the published circular letter],” read an October 22 article, “that you Thomas B. Wait, Printer, should take upon yourself such *airs*—have the audacity to determine the momentous question, viz. who should represent the District of Maine after the next election, in the Congress of the United States!” The article asked Wait: “Is this the way you wish to introduce your friend to office, by *art* and *chicanery*, and thus *early* to corrupt our elections?”<sup>37</sup>

Since the Revolutionary War, printers were generally accepted as political figures. Although engaged in a dirty and difficult profession and considered part of the artisan class, printers were often well read and up to date with news from across the country.<sup>38</sup> By this point, Wait’s readers had become accustomed to the partisan nature of

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<sup>36</sup> George Thatcher to Thomas B. Wait, 25 October 1790, TFP.

<sup>37</sup> “Remarks upon Thomas B. Wait’s Statement of Facts!!” *The Gazette of Maine*, 22 October 1790, p.3.

<sup>38</sup> Jeff Pasley *The Tyranny of the Printers: Newspaper politics in the Early American Republic*, (Charlottesville, Va.: The University of Virginia Press, 2001).

his work. After all, the paper had been founded to rally support for a political cause—secession from Massachusetts. This did not mean that people would take lightly his attempts to pressure voters. Residents of Maine viewed themselves as fiercely independent and treasured the democratic nature of elections. Thatcher's opponents resented that the editor of the only newspaper (at the time of the first trial) worked so diligently to see Thatcher reelected. They viewed the circular as another example of Wait not letting the people speak for themselves.

Sparked by the election, the newspaper war that broke out between *The Gazette of Maine* and *The Cumberland Gazette* became as much a battle between Wait and Titcomb as one over issues or candidates. For example, in response to the nasty article mentioned above, Wait published an article written by "SMILE" which mixed personal attacks on Titcomb with the issue of a direct tax. SMILE claimed that "That Deacon Benjamin Titcomb, Chairman of the late Caucus, does wish for taxes upon polls and estates," observing that Titcomb had "accosted the Hon. George Thatcher in the street" in an attempt to get Thatcher to support it. Of course, SMILE continued, Thatcher rejected the idea outright. SMILE then suggested that the aim of the Committee of Consulters was to nominate a candidate who would support direct taxation. Intertwined throughout



the article is a tone of fake pity, as though SMILE was sympathetic to the fact that Titcomb had lost his mind.<sup>39</sup>

Titcomb's response appeared on November 11. After directly addressing a few of SMILE's criticisms, he launched into an attack charging SMILE with a "misrepresentation of facts to answer his own purposes." The article continued, "The *mock pity* which he entertains for the Printer of the Gazette of Maine, expresses in flaming characters the *features* of his mind, distorted with baleful *Envy* and deep-rooted malice . . ." As this round of attacks demonstrates, the newspaper war was about more than the election. The editors were on trial along with the candidates.<sup>40</sup>

During the interval between the first and second contests, Wait's *Cumberland Gazette* also carried a number of articles dealing with rotation in office. Whether or not rotation in office constituted a necessary check against the possible abuses of power had been debated in Worcester as well. With the Republic still fragile and in its infancy, voters across the country were deeply concerned about how best to protect their liberties. These early elections would serve as precedents and it was important to lay a strong foundation. Thatcher's supporters worried that people would be prejudiced against the incumbent, so they published extended diatribes against unnecessary change. The essays, signed by "Decius," argued that as long as people are virtuous, simply having the ability to vote an officer out is sufficient enough guard against corruption. Decius offered

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<sup>39</sup> Smile, "Then comes the following plain question..." *The Cumberland Gazette*, 8 November 1790, p.3.

<sup>40</sup> "A piece signed 'Smile'..." *The Gazette of Maine*, 11 November 1790, p.3.

suggestions for when to exercise the right to replace a representative: “The publik mind being once determined to a preference in favour of one man cannot change without some efficient cause.” A “reasonable cause” must exist to vote against an incumbent. Wanting a new representative for the sake of change was not a reasonable cause.<sup>41</sup> Decius also issued warnings about the repercussions of voters not applying the “reasonable cause” method. He felt constant change created an opportunity for corrupt men to exercise “improper influence” over voters. If a new candidate were chosen every two years, the result would be intense campaigns that could only be decided by making back-room deals. Decius concluded “with the sincere hope, that in this election, my fellow citizens will be guided by that enlightened independence of sentiment peculiar to the American nation” and not vote unjustifiably for a change.<sup>42</sup>

Hidden between campaign articles was the announcement that the High Sheriff had recently sent a message that “the selectmen are directed to cause the freeholders and other inhabitants of their respective towns to assemble on Friday, the 26<sup>th</sup> day of November, to give their votes for a person to represent this District in the Congress of the United States.” This message appeared on November 15, leaving eleven days for the District to organize for the next election. Because of the amount of time needed to get certified results from the first election and then to hear back from the Massachusetts

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<sup>41</sup> Decius, “Of Rotation,” 12 November 1790, *The Cumberland Gazette*, 15 November 1790, p.2. “Decius” is a reference to Gaius Messius Quintus Decius, Emperor of Rome from 249-251. He was infamous for his persecution of Christians.

<sup>42</sup> Decius, “Of Rotation No. II” *The Cumberland Gazette*, 22 November 1790, p.2.

Secretary of State about the date of the second trial, the District was forced to rush preparations and hope that notice of the election would reach the rural areas in time.<sup>43</sup>

The last *Cumberland Gazette* printed before the election was tame in comparison to the one published the day of the prior election. The most controversial piece was an *Extract of a letter from a gentleman in the country, to his friend in Portland, Dated November 18*. The extract opened with the gentleman in the country expressing his surprise that George Thatcher had received almost twice the number of votes as any of his challengers. The gentleman in the country had “been repeatedly told in Portland that [Thatcher] was generally disliked; and that scarcely any body would vote for him. And on this account [he] voted for another person, and so did several of [his] neighbors.” The implication being that Thatcher may have won the last election if there had not been this idea that he was unpopular in Portland. The letter concluded with the statement that Thatcher had been a good friend to the farmers as well as the merchants and that there should be “no doubt but that he will have a very large majority.”<sup>44</sup>

*The Gazette of Maine* had the luxury of printing on election day this time. The edition contained a letter promoting retired Revolutionary War veteran Hon. William Lithgow. Lithgow held the office of attorney for the state of Massachusetts and had the benefit of wide name recognition. The author reported that those who had previously voted for Nathaniel Wells and Josiah Thatcher were now backing Lithgow. He believed

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<sup>43</sup> “By last Thursday’s mail...” *The Cumberland Gazette*, 15 November 1790, p.3.

<sup>44</sup> “Extract of a letter from a gentleman...” 18 November 1790, *The Cumberland Gazette*, 22 November 1790, p.3.

that Lithgow would find support in every corner of the District and would be Maine's next Congressman. Whether this announcement reflected an actual agreement made by former supporters of Wells and Josiah Thatcher is not clear. Real or not, this announcement was certainly an effective campaign maneuver. "I suspect," concluded the writer, "the man who has fought and bled and has been maimed in the *cause* of his country, will again be employed in rendering them essential service." Lithgow's name recognition and service in the Revolutionary War made him Thatcher's greatest threat.<sup>45</sup>

*The Cumberland Gazette* was the first paper to print after the election. The Nov. 29 issue reported the votes for Portland as 79 for William Lithgow Jr., and 29 for George Thatcher. Wait gloated that Nathaniel Wells had not received a single vote: "And how many votes for Judge Wells?—NOT ONE!—On the contrary—By those men, who but a few weeks since attempted to *influence the District* on his behalf—by those very men is the Judge now totally neglected and abandoned." This suggests that there had indeed been a deal struck whereby Wells's supporters had switched their votes to Lithgow. The article also reported some voter irregularity: in Wells, Maine, 73 proxy votes were counted in an election where only 85 men showed up to vote.<sup>46</sup>

Next to the election piece, Wait placed a small article signed by "A Whip of Small Cords" under the banner "A Card." It quickly caused a stir between the two camps. "A CERTAIN poet Thumper of the 'Drum ecclesiastick' is reminded," the piece

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<sup>45</sup> "Though I live in the country..." *The Gazette of Maine*, 26 November 1790, p.3.

<sup>46</sup> "Federal Representative" *The Cumberland Gazette*, 29 November 1790, p.3.

began, “that the Temple of the living God. Is not the proper Form for electioneering Philippics: And that they who thus sacrilegiously violate the sanctity of that place, deserve the same punishment that his blessed Master inflicted on the Money Changers in the Temple of Jerusalem!” This article was in response to attacks on Thatcher from the pulpit. Well aware of his nontraditional religious beliefs, members of the clergy often portrayed Thatcher as unfit public office. Wait responded that any member of the clergy who engaged in overt politics should be removed from his position, although Massachusetts had a long tradition of ministerial involvement in politics.<sup>47</sup>

*The Gazette of Maine*, which also reported incomplete returns, replied to the Card with a piece signed by “Scrub” in its next issue. Scrub mocked the Card’s wit and argued that someone who defended Thatcher automatically became an “Atheist, and Infidel or a mocker of the religion of his country” himself. Insinuating that the author of the Card was a man of public office, Scrub warned “that a ‘Whip of Small Cords’” has been prepared for the piece’s author “which, will be *decently* laid on [his back] before the next General Election.” The newspaper war continued to heat up with letters and articles

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<sup>47</sup> A Whip of Small Cords, “A Card” *The Cumberland Gazette*, 29 November 1790, p.3; For a discussion on ministerial involvement in Massachusetts politics during this time see Dale S. Kuehne *Massachusetts Congregationalist Political Thought, 1760-1790* (Columbia, Mo.: The University of Columbia Press, 1996). The pseudonym “A Whip of Small Cords” is a biblical reference. Upon finding merchants and traders conducting business inside a temple, Jesus made “a whip out of cords” and “drove them out of out of the temple, including the sheep and the cattle.” John 2:15.

printed on both sides. Threats appeared on the pages of both papers and violence seemed imminent.<sup>48</sup>

“Ultimatum,” the acknowledged author of the Card, shot back at Scrub from *The Cumberland Gazette* on December 6. After lamenting the fact that some men “cannot differ in opinion upon political subjects, without transferring that public dissent to private life” Ultimatum explained that he had nothing against religion itself. His problem was with “a young clergyman” who “has commenced the skermish of publick abuse from the pulpit.” Enraged by the attacks made from the pulpit against Thatcher, Ultimatum declared that he could not reply in a way that would be fit to publish. He “shall therefore make no reply; and am willing to consign my pen to inactivity on *this occasion*” and remain “Alike prepar’d for peace, or armed for war.” Just in case Scrub and other potential critics did not get the message, Ultimatum mentioned that he had prepared seven character sketches of Scrub’s friends. They covered topics such as “An Essay on Hypocrisy—upon the dignity of the President of a Caucus” (no doubt referring to Titcomb’s leading of the Committee of Consulters) and “the advantage of obstinacy in desperate arguments.” Ultimatum concluded that “it lies with the writers in Mr. Titcomb’s paper to determine upon Peace or War.”<sup>49</sup>

In the midst of these attacks, the results from the November 26 election trickled in, and it became evident that some of the more rural towns had not received the message

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<sup>48</sup> Scrub, “Answer to the Card published in Mr. Wait’s Paper” *The Gazette of Maine*, 2 December 1790, p.3.

<sup>49</sup> Ultimatum, “Nothing tends more to the general...” *The Cumberland Gazette*, 6 December 1790, p.3.

that they were supposed to have voted. *The Gazette of Maine* reported on December 2 that “Many towns in the lower Counties, did not vote, by reason of their not having received Precepts for that purpose seasonably.” Both sides argued that the other kept the orders from getting to the rural towns in order to deny their candidate votes. While some sort of sabotage is possible, a more likely scenario is that orders were delayed because of the inefficient and poorly organized post offices. Maine was, after all, the frontier and the postal system was in its infancy.<sup>50</sup>

At this point in the election—when early returns suggested the likelihood that no candidate would have the necessary majority—Thatcher’s friends began to challenge the practice of accepting proxy votes. No provision in the federal or Massachusetts Constitution allowed for absentee ballots, but in the previous two elections, at least one polling location had allowed them. Thatcher and his friends focused on these votes because the vast majority of them were for other candidates. “A Free Elector” published an in-depth essay in *The Cumberland Gazette* exploring the practice of proxy voting. He pointed out that the election law clearly states that eligible voters are to “assemble” on election day, meaning that they had to be present to vote. Next, he indicated words in the election law indicating the voter must “give in” their vote. “To *give in*, and to *send in*, are words that convey very different ideas; and therefore *sending* in votes is very little nearer complying with the words of the act *assembling by staying at home*.” As to the

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<sup>50</sup> “We have not been able to ascertain...” *The Gazette of Maine*, 2 December 1790, p. 3. For more information on the early postal system see Richard J. John *Spreading the News: The American Postal System from Franklin to Morse*, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1995).

argument that the selectman in each district would be able to recognize the handwriting of the proxy votes and therefore determine if they were valid, A Free Elector asked “how selectmen can be competent judges, of the hand writing of 75 to 100 townsmen, by a cursory view of the names, endorsed on small strips of paper?”<sup>51</sup>

While the people of Maine waited for the official results, Thatcher’s religion remained controversial. The most prominent piece was a sermon given on Thanksgiving and later reprinted in *The Cumberland Gazette*. Without mentioning Thatcher by name, the sermon left little doubt about whom it was written. “It is a fixed principal with me,” it read, “that Ministers ought to shew their people sin and danger; and when they are liked to be deceived into the measure of putting themselves under the government of *wicked men*.” The author made a thinly veiled reference to Thatcher as one of the “*atheists* and the *mockers* of religion.” Far from overstepping their authority, as Ultimatum had suggested, the sermon declared that “Ministers are *sacredly bound* to sound the alarm when a *common enemy* invades.” Massachusetts was a religious place. If the majority of people could be convinced that Thatcher was an “atheist” and a “mockers of religion” he could be in for trouble.<sup>52</sup>

Meanwhile, Thomas Wait, no stranger to controversy, was being harassed for printing the Ultimatum piece. On Saturday December 11, five days after the article appeared, Wait was “waited upon by two respectable Citizens of this town” who warned

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<sup>51</sup> A Free Election, “The right of voting by proxy...” *The Cumberland Gazette*, 6 December 1790, p.2.

<sup>52</sup> “Thanksgiving Sermon” printed in *The Cumberland Gazette*, 20 December 1790, p.3.



him that the Ultimatum could be dangerous to public safety, Wait “at once acknowledged that he was wrong in giving it a place” and that he would issue an apology immediately. Throughout the same day, other men visited Wait’s house, informing him that “publishing the piece signed Ultimatum was not the only cause of offense; but that he had treated some political measures with severity; and that he had warmly exerted himself in favour of Mr. Thatcher’s election. It was therefore in their opinion, *that the life of the Editor was in danger* and he was advised *immediately to leave the town!*” Wait responded that the only way he would ever leave the town was as a corpse. The group dispersed and it appeared the confrontation over.

Then, at “about four o’clock in the afternoon, a person, on horse back, made his appearance near the door of the Printing Office [of the *Cumberland Gazette*]. He was dressed in a disguised manner; a mark on his face; his hands colored black; in one of which was a book, and in the other a Speaking Trumpet.” The individual announced that Wait had 48 hours to leave town. From Wait’s office, the man rode to the office of Major Samuel C. Johonnot, the author of the “Ultimatum” piece, and repeated the same warning. Johonnot, an accomplished lawyer, took the charge to heart and left town shortly thereafter. The masked man on horseback also threatened Daniel George, who was charged with laughing at something that was “no laughing matter” and Daniel Davis, who was a frequent contributor to the *Cumberland Gazette*. Wait, George and Davis chose to remain in Portland but were no doubt shaken by the incident. This mix of pageantry and intimidation underscores how heated the contest had become. The election

of 1788 had received little newspaper coverage, and certainly had not led to threats. Clearly, the issues, personalities, and/or social climate had changed dramatically.<sup>53</sup>

Wait soon published another piece by Johnnot signed “The Writer of the Card and of the piece signed Ultimatum.” After dissecting the Thanksgiving Sermon, refuting certain points, the author concluded that the “‘Extract’ is as harmless as most of the Author’s writings and sayings.” The article took a few jabs at the Benjamin Titcomb and *The Gazette of Maine*, but focused on the author of the Thanksgiving Sermon. This time though, Johnnot refrained from outlandish statements and, while he still disagreed with the Thanksgiving Sermon, he did not include inflammatory statements. The threats against Wait and his friends seemed to have caused Johnnot to rethink his rhetoric.<sup>54</sup>

Because Thatcher remained in Philadelphia attending to his Congressional duties, he had little control over what his campaign on the ground looked like. After reading the Thanksgiving Sermon (which did not arrive until early January) Thatcher wrote his reactions to his friend Jeremiah Hill. Thatcher saw “no reason to censure the preacher. . . He had undoubtedly been told, by some of his religious parishioners, there were among the candidates for federal Representatives, some deists, or irreligious persons,” which his religion would find threatening. But, Thatcher pointed out, “He never once thought it was necessary to ascertain the fact, whether there were Atheists, deists or irreligious

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<sup>53</sup> T.B.W. “The Place published in the last Cumberland Gazette...” *The Cumberland Gazette*, 13 December 1790, p. 3. For another version of the incident see *The Gazette of Maine* 16 December 1790, p.3. Willis also mentions it on p. 598 of *The History of Portland*.

<sup>54</sup> “The Writer of the Card and of the piece signed Ultimatum,” “Convinced that vice or imprudence...” *The Cumberland Gazette*, 27 December 1790, p.3.

characters among the supposed Candidates. This might spoil his intended harangue, & disoblige many of his flock, whose religion consisted in paying Tithes of mint, annis, & cumin.”<sup>55</sup> Thatcher’s position that religion should not factor into a political election may have been principled but this was undoubtedly a minority position in Massachusetts.

Around this time, the official election results were announced. George Thatcher—421, Nathaniel Wells—262, Josiah Thatcher—22, and William Lithgow—125. No candidate had received the necessary majority, and yet another run-off would need to be held.<sup>56</sup> Thatcher had failed to secure reelection by two votes. Hundreds, if not thousands, of rural residents had been denied the chance to vote because they never got the precepts. According to *The Gazette of Maine* the precepts “had not reached the hands of Sheriff of *Lincoln* on the 24<sup>th</sup> [two days before election day] and therefore that no town in that county could possibly go to Election this trial.”<sup>57</sup> To avoid this situation recurring, both papers printed announcements about the next election at the same time the results were announced. Meanwhile, Thatcher worried that the contest might cause even more unrest. Upon hearing the final results, he wrote that “what passions & combinations of parties are like to be formed I cannot conjecture with any probability.”<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> George Thatcher to Jeremiah Hill, 6 January 1791, TFP

<sup>56</sup> Massachusetts State Archives

<sup>57</sup>Portland, *The Gazette of Maine* 16 December 1790, p. 3

<sup>58</sup> George Thatcher to Jeremiah Hill, 6 January 1791, TFP.

## The Third Trial: January 25, 1791

The next election-related fight erupted in the newspapers within a matter of days. It began with a small piece originally printed in Boston's *Columbian Centinel* on November 24, 1790. An author signing "Lincolnshire" asserted that Thatcher voted in favor of Fredrick Steuben's salary of \$2,500 a year. According to Lincolnshire, Steuben, a major figure in the Revolutionary War, had received only minor injuries while in service and had already been compensated. In a state where the people were wary of spending tax money on salaries, Lincolnshire surely knew this accusation would infuriate Maine voters. Because of the amount of time it took for news to reach Portland, Thatcher's constituents did not hear about this article until late December. But when they did hear, the issue of whether Thatcher voted for Steuben's salary became a deciding factor for many voters.<sup>59</sup>

Fredrick Wilhelm Ludolf Gerhard Augustin, or Baron von Steuben, was one George Washington's most important generals.<sup>60</sup> Born in 1730 in Prussia, Steuben fought with notary under Fredrick the Great during the Seven Year's War. After spending a few years as a mercenary for various European countries, Steuben volunteered his services to the Continental Army. His leadership and knowledge of European drill

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<sup>59</sup> Lincolnshire, "The Steuben Pension," *The Columbian Centinel* 24 November 1790. Lincolnshire also charged that Representative Theodore Sedgwick [Hampshire/Berkshire] had supported Steuben's pension. Lincolnshire would publish three more letters on the same topic. See *The Columbian Centinel* 15 January 1791, 19 January 1791, and 9 March 1791. "Lincolnshire" most likely refers to the town of Lincoln, Suffolk Co.

<sup>60</sup> Steuben adopted the title "baron" in 1769 under a falsified family lineage supplied by his father.

methods proved invaluable to the poorly trained army. He quickly rose to become General Washington's Inspector General. Steuben resigned from the army in 1784 and was granted citizenship by the Pennsylvania legislature. He also began a long campaign to secure financial compensation for his service. Despite the indispensable role he played in the war, Steuben struggled to receive a proper reward. In 1781 the Confederation Congress agreed to grant Steuben \$10,000, but deferred payment because "it was suggested that finances were utterly deranged, and that Congress would be embarrassed by a number of foreign officers then at Philadelphia, who might be induced to increase their demands, on such generous treatment being given to Steuben."<sup>61</sup> However, Congress never followed through. Steuben sought, and received, help from the recently retired Washington, Alexander Hamilton, and other high profile friends. Steuben finally received \$7,000 in 1784 but this money did not last. Some of Steuben's friends in Congress attempted to secure more money but failed to persuade the body to act. The matter remained unresolved when Confederation Congress broke up in November of 1788. Thankfully, the state of New York, where Steuben had taken up residence, had granted Steuben a 16,000 acre land grant in 1786.

Steuben did not handle his money well. He engaged in extensive land speculation and lived lavishly. Steuben was constantly on the verge of financial ruin. After the ratification of the Constitution, Steuben turned to the new federal government for

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<sup>61</sup>Friedrich Kapp, *The Life of Frederick William von Steuben*, (New York, N.Y.: Mason Brothers, 1859) p. 536

assistance. Although few would debate his meritorious service, Steuben's spending habits, European heritage, and adopted title of "Baron" made him a controversial figure. Even Steuben's friends in Congress recognized that it was going to be difficult to explain to their poor constituents why tax money was going to such a man. After much lobbying and pleading from Steuben and his supporters, Congress reached a compromise on May 10, 1790. The final act read "That in order to make fill an adequate compensation to Frederick William de Steuben, as well for the sacrifices and eminent services made and rendered to the United States during the late War . . . there is to be paid to the said Frederick William de Steuben, the sum of seven thousand dollars . . . and also an annuity of two thousand dollars during life . . ." A month later, Steuben's annuity would be upped to \$2,500. Neither of these sums was high enough for Steuben, but he could live with them.<sup>62</sup>

Although copies of the Congressional debates would contain definitive proof about how Thatcher voted on the Steuben pension, it would take weeks for them to be printed and sent to in Portland. In the meantime, Thatcher's enemies proceeded without proof to portray that their representative was a spendthrift with their hard-earned taxes. After seeing the accusation in one of the papers, George Thatcher angrily penned a letter to his friend Daniel Cony. "I have no doubt," wrote Thatcher, "but the author had the piece published about the time it made its appearance in order to disaffect the good

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<sup>62</sup> John McAuley Palmer, *General Von Steuben*, (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1937); *DHFFC* Vol. VII pp. 201-246; quote from Steuben Bill [HR-60] p. 245.

people of Main district against me at the late election . . . ” Thatcher held little back, calling the author a liar, rascal, and scoundrel.<sup>63</sup>

Steuben’s pension and Thatcher’s religion proved to be the longest lasting issues of the campaign. Steuben fired peoples’ imaginations. He was portrayed as a European aristocrat, already living like a noble, seeking more money while thousands of poor settlers, many of them also veterans, received nothing. For their military service, these men received little money and were paid primarily in securities that many sold to speculators at a heavily depreciated rate. It only made matters more frustrating for the settlers to see that the speculators were now getting rich off the securities. The First Congress was flooded with petitions for aid from Revolutionary veterans and their families. Those who were lucky enough to obtain support could not hope for anything close to what Steuben received. Religious beliefs aroused as many passions as economic discrepancies. That Thatcher’s religion was so integral to this election is evidence for how important religion was to Massachusetts residents. Society was built around the church, and both religion and society were interwoven into politics.

Those subjects led to contentious discussions of Thatcher’s views, but there were other, less inflammatory, analyses of Thatcher’s positions in the First Congress. Beginning in late December 1790, a series of articles in the two papers presented opposing views on Thatcher’s opinion of titles. The debate over titles was an important

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<sup>63</sup> George Thatcher to Daniel Coney, 13 December 1790 TFP.

issue at the opening of the First Federal Congress. Interestingly, in presaged the development of Congressional political parties. Future Republicans generally opposed titles as being anathema to a republican government while Federalists argued that they were necessary to establish the dignity of office. The First Congress exhaustively debated whether a title should be granted to the President of the United States. At the heart of the matter was whether the President should play the role of monarch or first citizen. “A Real Republican” published a piece in the Boston *Independent Chronicle* claiming that Thatcher had “uniformly opposed” titles in any form. In the First Congress, A Real Republican argued, Thatcher “has appeared a strong friend of republican principals—and has treated the people’s character, in all his debates and speeches, as worthy of freedom.” Whether or not Thatcher had opposed the use of official titles for members of the government, an article from *The Gazette of Maine* claimed that his friends were attempting to influence voters through the use of titles. The article claimed that Thomas Wait attached the title “Esq.” to Thatcher’s name in even the “most trivial of occasions,” while never doing so for any of the rival candidates. Thatcher may not have wanted the President to have a title, but he was more than happy to use one himself—or at least to have his friends do it for him.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> “A Real Republican” from the *Independent Chronicle*, 30 December 1790 printed in *The Cumberland Gazette* 3 January 1791, p.2; A Citizen “The liberty of the Press is...” *The Gazette of Maine*, 20 January 1790, p.2. For more information on the debate over titles in the First Congress see, Charlene Bangs Bickford and Kenneth R. Bowling, *Birth of the Nation: The First Federal Congress, 1789-1791*, (Madison, Wis.: Madison House 1989).



After two trials, the issues of most concern to Maine voters were coming into focus. Lurking behind many of the debates lay the issue of social status or rank. Revolutionary rhetoric of liberty and equality was taken by some to mean a complete destruction of class distinctions. This was particularly the case in Maine, where many men had come to establish themselves as independent landholders where they would be answerable to no one and on an equal political footing with their neighbors. To men of “the better sort,” talk of social equality was tantamount to talk of anarchy. Large landholders, whom Alan Taylor has labeled “The Great Proprietors,” were horrified with what they believed to be a perversion of Revolutionary values. Men like Henry Knox believed that the goal had been to establish an equality of opportunity, not perfect equality. In their minds, the wealthy, educated, and successful should hold the reins of power. But in a republican form of government, everyone’s vote counted the same. This set the stage for a constant political struggle between the wealthy merchants, large landholders, and educated men on one hand and the artisans, squatters, subsistence farmers, and laborers on the other.<sup>65</sup>

The battle between social ranks in Maine would become more pronounced in the middle of the 1790s and helped foster the Jeffersonian movement, but its influence can also be seen in the second congressional election. Salt was the first necessity to be taxed, and the poor would bear much of the burden. Steuben’s pension became a significant

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<sup>65</sup> Gordon S. Wood *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York, N.Y.: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992) pp. 229-303.

issue because he was portrayed as living a lavish life style at the expense of ordinary Americans. Artisans and merchants resented Thatcher's ties to wealthy land owners and his profession as a lawyer. To win this election Thatcher needed to convince enough farmers, artisans, and laborers that he was their friend and would fight for them in Congress. If Thatcher's opponents could convince enough voters that he was biased the "Great Proprietors," the outcome would be a new representative from Maine in the Second Congress.<sup>66</sup>

In the weeks before the third trial, the supporters of George Thatcher and William Lithgow made their final pitch to voters. Pensions and the use of revenue raised through taxation remained the central issues throughout the month of January. Even the Boston papers addressed Thatcher's stance on Steuben's pension. In *The Columbian Centinel* "Agumenticus" claimed to have been "present in the Gallery at Newyork, when the vote was finally taken" and witnessed Thatcher's opposition to Steuben's pension. Another article from *The Cumberland Gazette* claimed Thatcher had been opposed to the bill from the beginning, but had "voted to *commit* a report which was in favor of it." This was done to "*save the feelings of the Baron . . . [and] was supposed to be the most easy and delicate mode of getting rid of the business.*" Conceding that Thatcher may not have actually supported the final bill, his rivals began to switch tactics. *The Gazette of Maine* published a piece by "A Countryman" that acknowledged it was unclear whether

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<sup>66</sup> For more information on issues of class and land in Maine see Alan Taylor *Liberty Men and Great Proprietors* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 1990)

Thatcher supported high salaries for Congressmen or the Steuben pension, but pointed out that Thatcher “enjoys [a salary] himself.” A Countryman asserted that Thatcher favored the wealthy landed interest and cared little for the people of Portland or those without large tracts of land.<sup>67</sup>

The closer the election came, the more intense the rhetoric became. An article signed “Seventy Five” appeared in *The Gazette of Maine* claiming that, during the previous contest, “*sixty* votes for the Hon. Mr. Lithgow did not reach the Secretary’s office” and that the votes from Lincoln Country were never sent. Seventy Five claimed that if these votes had been counted, Lithgow would have won. The article’s author then listed the sacrifices Lithgow had made to his country, including being crippled and risking his life for his country during the Revolutionary War. “Eighty Nine and Ninety” responded in *The Cumberland Gazette* on January 17, claiming that Thatcher actually “had nearly 300 *votes* which arrived at the Secretary’s office too late to be counted—otherwise he would have been chosen by a very large majority.” As for the alleged great sacrifices Lithgow had made for the country, Eighty Nine and Ninety wrote that Lithgow had indeed served as a Major in the Continental regiment, but that he had only been

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<sup>67</sup>Agumenticus, from *The Columbian Centinel* 15 January 1791, *The Cumberland Gazette*, 17 January 1791, p.2; A Countryman, “While reading the last Cumberland Gazette...”*The Gazette of Maine*, 20 January 1791, p.2. Agumenticus is a Native American word for mountain and the area that would become York was originally called Agumenticus. A second piece written by Agumenticus, also originally from *The Columbian Centinel*, was printed in *The Cumberland Gazette* on 21 February 1791.

wounded in the arm. As compensation for that trifling wound, Lithgow had demanded, and received, a “PENSION DURING LIFE !”<sup>68</sup>

From *The Cumberland Gazette*, “A Farmer” ridiculed the supporters of Lithgow for their abandonment of Nathaniel Wells. A Farmer had been told not to vote for Thatcher because he was a lawyer whereas Wells, a merchant seemed more likely to be in tune with a farmer’s needs. But “those very men who were before friendly to Mr. Wells, gave him up and deserted him entirely” and instead “gave all their votes for Gen. Lithgow, who is not only a Lawyer, but an Attorney for the United States, and receives a large salary from Congress.” Lithgow, he asserted, received both a salary and a pension from the Federal Government. In the opinion of A Farmer, the only man fit to represent the District of Maine was George Thatcher.<sup>69</sup>

The turnout for the January 25 election dwarfed the previous two trials. A total of 2,380 people voted. Two hundred forty-five people turned out in Portland alone. The ongoing newspaper war had clearly agitated the electorate. Early returns showed Lithgow crushing Thatcher in the large towns, and Thatcher easily winning the majority of smaller towns. By February 10, Lithgow appeared to be on his way to victory. He led Thatcher by 326 votes, and it was unclear how many more towns were going to send in votes. Unable to believe that their candidate may have been beaten, Thatcher’s

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<sup>68</sup> Eighty Nine and Ninety, “I have noticed a piece in Mr. Titcomb’s...” *The Cumberland Gazette*, 17 January 1791, p.3. “Eighty Nine and Ninety” is probably a reference to the years Thatcher served in Congress: 1789 and 1790.

<sup>69</sup> A Farmer, “I live in the Country and am a plain man...” *The Cumberland Gazette*, 17 January 1791, p.3.

supporters quickly claimed fraud. Voters in Wells confirmed that “Not a Proxy Vote was admitted, although several were offered,” so Thatcher’s supporters believed Lithgow’s followers must have stole the election some other way.<sup>70</sup>

On January 31, six days after the election, *The Cumberland Gazette* published letters claiming that a number of violations had occurred during the recent vote. According to one correspondent, “persons were permitted to vote—some of whom were worth nothing—some of who were actually supported or assisted by the town.” One of the men claimed that he was not a legal voter, but nonetheless given the opportunity to vote by “an opulent mercantile character” if he pledged himself for Lithgow. Another man, who does not “possess property to the amount of one farthing—who has resided in the town but a few months—and whose moral character is infamous” was brought to the polls by one of Lithgow’s biggest supporters. Thatcher’s friends were not above fanning the flames of class conflict by suggesting the poor and ignorant supported Lithgow (with the assistance of some shady merchants). “X.Y.” asked readers “Can any one deserve the character of a gentleman, or in any case be depended on as a man of honour, who at the election of a person to a place of trust, not only uses undue influence to induce those who *are voters* to give in their votes according to their wishes—but will condescend to lug in those whom *he knows* have *no right to vote*?” Directly questioning a man’s honor and insinuating that he was not a true gentleman were serious accusations. Another article, penned by “A friend to Justice” claimed people had been “sent out by a person in

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<sup>70</sup> Portland *The Cumberland Gazette*, 31 January 1791, p.3.

N.Y. to *purchase* Votes.” Thatcher’s supporters were desperately trying to cast doubt on the legitimacy of the election. Meanwhile, *The Gazette of Maine* remained silent except for publishing the election returns (which were painful enough for Thatcher’s partisans to read).<sup>71</sup>

The news began to swing in Thatcher’s favor by the end of February. On February 28, *The Cumberland Gazette* carried a letter written by another member of the Massachusetts congressional delegation. It began by mentioning recent claims that Thatcher had been in support of the Steuben’s pension: “What might have been [Thatcher’s] conduct in the Old Congress, I do not pretend to say; but in the present, he has uniformly voted and acted against the grant, both in publik and private.” Although some of Thatcher’s enemies might discount the account as biased, the support of a member of Congress who could prove he was in New York certainly helped Thatcher’s case.<sup>72</sup>

The final results from the January 25 election appeared March 3. Despite losing Portland and a number of other towns by substantial margins, Thatcher proved the only candidate who had at least some support in every area of the state. Even in the towns he lost, he secured a few votes. By the final count, Thatcher had bested Lithgow 1,137 to 919. Although Thatcher could celebrate that he managed to win more votes, he was still

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<sup>71</sup> “At the town meeting on Tuesday...” *The Cumberland Gazette*, 31 January p.3; X. Y., “An Elector in the District of Maine...” *The Cumberland Gazette*, 31 January 1791; “The Selectmen of the several towns...” *The Cumberland Gazette*, 31 January p. 3. See *The Gazette of Maine* 27 January 1791.

<sup>72</sup> “Extract from a letter from one of...” Boston March, 2, *The Cumberland Gazette*, 28 February 1791, p.3

short 64 votes of a majority. Another trial was needed. With passions reaching near fever pitch in the months of December and January, the campaign was likely to become even more dramatic.<sup>73</sup>

## **The Fourth Trial: April 4, 1791**

While the congressional election remained undecided, some Maine residents returned to the idea of separating from Massachusetts to form a new state. The federal census conducted in 1790 and made public in early 1791 proved that Maine was being underrepresented at the national level. Maine had a higher population than Rhode Island, Delaware, and Georgia yet was allowed only one federal representative and no senators. A group of state senators and representatives from the District of Maine attempted to raise this issue in the General Court. After being turned out because they were not deemed to represent the people of Maine, the delegation angrily penned a letter to selectmen back home. They urged the selectmen to call upon people to vote in May on whether to instruct their representatives to petition the state legislature for Maine's secession. Though the voting would not take place until after the next attempt to elect a

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<sup>73</sup> Massachusetts State Archives

congressman, the people knew that the next national representative from Maine would likely play an important role in whatever decision was reached.<sup>74</sup>

Once another contest was definite, the campaign for the District's federal representative picked up where it had left off. In a piece from *The Gazette of Maine*, "An Old Soldier" condemned anyone who tried to deny that Lithgow was a national hero. Lithgow had been "personally concerned in most of the considerable actions which happened at the northward." As for Lithgow's wound that A Farmer considered minor, "it was occasioned by a musket ball, which by penetrating the elbow-joint, shattered the right arm in a shocking manner" and confined him to bed for months. An Old Soldier conceded that Lithgow received a pension for his wounds and service, but argued it "amounts to no more than one quarter part of his pay as a Major." Contrary to what A Farmer insinuated, An Old Soldier claimed that Lithgow had been severely disabled as a result of his injury. The pain often prevented him from writing, which hampered his ability to perform his duties as a state attorney. An Old Soldier also sought to discredit claims made by Eighty-Nine and Ninety that Lithgow discriminated against landholders by pointing out that Lithgow himself was a "considerable landholder himself."<sup>75</sup>

While the two sides continued to argue about Lithgow's wounds, George Thatcher decided it was time to put an end to the debate over his role in the Steuben pension. He penned a detailed description of what took place in the halls of Congress

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<sup>74</sup> Banks, pp.5-15.

<sup>75</sup> An Old Soldier, "When a man is once considered..." *The Gazette of Maine*, 17 March 1791, pp.2-3



with regards to Steuben's pension. Printed in *The Gazette of Maine* on March 17 under the name "A Subscriber," the piece effectively put an end to the controversy. Apparently Thatcher, along with every other Congressman, had indeed voted to send the bill to committee. When the bill returned to the House floor, Thatcher voted against it twice and left the chamber. While he was out, two additional votes ensured that Steuben would not receive the pension he was requesting. Thatcher must have realized that not being present to vote against the bill the final two times was a tactical error because he later tried to convince the Clerk of the House to alter the Journal so that he would go down on record as voting against the higher pension. Coming from the pages of *The Gazette of Maine*, Thatcher's defense left his critics with little room to argue.<sup>76</sup>

The next trial was set for April 4. Unlike the previous two, this one would occur on the date of a previously scheduled town meeting. As a result, people who may not have participated in the previous contests might do so in this election because they were already planning to be in town. Thatcher had won the most votes in each of the previous elections, but his opponents remained confident that a right mixture of attacks and pro-Lithgow electioneering could tip the scales. With Steuben's pension no longer a relevant issue, partisans returned to debating class, religion, and rotation of office. A March 24 article in *The Gazette of Maine* touched on all three of these points. "Fair Play" claimed that while "Mr. T—r will not allow that there are any mysteries in religion, he will, I conclude, allow for mysteries in politiks." The author claimed that Thatcher could not

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<sup>76</sup> A Customer, *The Gazette of Maine*, 17 March 1791.

properly explain lavish gifts passed out to influential friends prior to the last election. The claim that Thatcher was a friend of the poor and of farmers was dismissed as a scam by wealthy landowners. Fair Play then lambasted the idea that just because Thatcher served in the First Congress, he should serve in the Second. This, the author claimed, is a “*most dangerous sentiment!*” Appealing to the democratic nature of the voters, Fair Play pointed out that such thought could lead to a life term.<sup>77</sup>

Thatcher’s critics also claimed that he and his friends had been engaging in improper electioneering. Acknowledging that questions existed about the admittance of proxy votes in support of other candidates, “Retort” claimed to be “well informed” that much more egregious tactics were employed to help Thatcher. Allegedly, at certain meetings, Thatcher’s friends were “offering a good smart drink, and opening a house of entertainment for those who would vote for the Hon. G— T— Esq.” These acts were the result of “overheated zeal of certain persons in favor not of their country, but of their individual friends.” At this time, laws on the books that regulated the passing out of alcohol during elections were rarely observed. However, not all citizens condoned this behavior. Some viewed it as another example of how Thatcher and his supporters were attempting to thwart the true will of the people.<sup>78</sup>

In the final days of the campaign, both *The Cumberland Gazette* and *The Gazette of Maine* were filled with articles arguing for one candidate and discounting another. For

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<sup>77</sup> Fair Play, “The Federal Staff...” *The Gazette of Maine*, 24 March 1791, p.3.

<sup>78</sup> Retort, “It is with pleasure I observe...” *The Gazette of Maine*, 24 March 1791, p.3.

the most part, the pieces restated points that had already been made. However, the April 1 *Gazette of Maine* contained three new and potentially damaging charges. The first accused Thatcher of not fully applied himself as a legislator in the First Congress. “Plain Dealing” wrote that Thatcher had “a general and striking inattention to public business, even of the most important kinds.” Lithgow, the author asserted, had proved his concern for the common people while an officer in the army, and his work as an attorney demonstrated attention to detail. The fact that this was the first time the candidate’s abilities as a legislator were broached suggests that prior service records would not normally be of concern to voters. By this point though, Thatcher’s opponents were looking for anything to convince voters to bring him home.<sup>79</sup>

The second new charge dealt with the appointment of a former Tory to a local office. According to “A Freeholder” Thatcher had appointed John Lee, a former Tory and privateer, to the position of Collector of the port at Penobscot. Allegedly Lee had secured the position by “being a particular connection of Mr. T—’s” and now “enjoys a handsome salary from Congress in addition to emoluments of his office.” The role former Tories would play in the new government was a point of contention throughout the country. Many of the country’s colonial bureaucrats had been loyal to the British

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<sup>79</sup> Plain Dealing, “We are now on the eve of a fourth trial...” *The Gazette of Maine*, 1 April 1791, p.2.

Crown. Once the war ended, their experience was needed. Still, they had been on the wrong side, and many Americans viewed even reformed Tories with great suspicion.<sup>80</sup>

The final accusation stated that Thatcher sought a more powerful federal government at the expense of state and local ones. According to the unsigned piece, Thatcher favored “consolidating the State governments” and “enslaving his brethren by swallowing up the Governments of the individual States, in the Government of the United States, and thereby investing ALL POWER in the members of Congress, of which he *would be one!!*” The fear of an overbearing federal government led many Americans to oppose the Constitution during the ratification debates and people still disagreed over the proper relationship between the states and the national government. Together these new charges portrayed Thatcher as being anti-democratic, anti-republican, and an ineffective advocate for the people of Maine. With only three days until the next election, Thatcher did not have a chance to refute these charges.<sup>81</sup>

Even more people turned out to vote on April 4 than had on January 25. All of the major towns and many of the smaller ones reported votes. By April 7, only three days after the election, *The Gazette of Maine* reported the results for 2,121 votes—more than the final number of votes cast in the first two elections. These early results showed Thatcher in the lead with 1,214 to Lithgow’s 550. Portland again went to Lithgow, but his margin of victory had decreased significantly. The unprecedented turnout in pro-

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<sup>80</sup> A Freeholder, “Who the writer of that address was is immaterial...” *The Gazette of Maine*, 1 April 1791, p.2.

<sup>81</sup> B., “What a pity it is, that Mr. T—...” *The Gazette of Maine* 1 April 1791, p.3.

Thatcher towns such as Falmouth, Buxton, and North Yarmouth helped Thatcher establish this commanding lead.<sup>82</sup>

*The Gazette of Maine*'s next report on the vote appeared on April 21 and showed Lithgow now on top 1688 to 1394. Since April 7, more rural towns such as Hallowell, located inland, and Georgetown, in the northern part of the District, had reported their results. In these areas, William Lithgow handily beat Thatcher. The charges that Thatcher was too close to large land proprietors and did not truly care for small farmers appeared to have had an effect. For the time being, it appeared that Thatcher had lost. However, less than a week later, *The Cumberland Gazette* reported its own tally from the election, indicating Thatcher not only up in the count but receiving sufficient votes to actually win. Either *The Gazette of Maine* had overlooked some reports or Wait had better access to the official elections returns, because *The Cumberland Gazette*'s count proved to be almost the same as the final, certified results.<sup>83</sup>

George Thatcher had finally managed to win enough votes to keep his seat in Congress. The certified results show 5,343 votes cast, Thatcher with 2,738 or 51 percent and Lithgow with 2,155 or 40 percent. Nathaniel Wells received 347 votes, almost all of which came from his home town of Wells, and the rest of the votes were scattered among other candidates. A close look at the returns show that Thatcher's greatest support came from areas in mid-sized towns in Cumberland and York Counties. Lithgow was more

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<sup>82</sup> "Account of Votes for Federal Representative" *The Gazette of Maine*, 7 April 1791, p.3.

<sup>83</sup> "In the Gazette of April 7..." 21 April 1791 *The Gazette of Maine*, 28 April 1791, p.2.

popular along the coast and in the back country, but both candidates found support across the District. For example, Thatcher won in Winthrop, a rural town near Hallowell, and Lithgow bested Thatcher in Bath, a medium sized coastal town. These results suggest that while geography played a role in the election, it was not the only factor. Similarly, the support of merchants and farmers played a role but not a decisive one. Lithgow, after all, received a large number of votes in both mercantile towns such as Cape Elizabeth and farming towns like Hallowell. As had been the case throughout, most towns gave the vast majority of their votes to one candidate. Only a few towns split evenly and for the most part either Thatcher or Lithgow received almost all of the votes.

On May 5, *The Gazette of Maine* carried an article penned by William Lithgow addressed “To the free and unbiased Electors of the District of Maine.” This letter could easily be mistaken for a modern-day concession speech that leaves the door open for a future campaign. After reminding readers that he had never wanted to run in the first place, Lithgow thanked his supporters. “I have experienced the friendly countenance and support of my fellow Citizens, in a manner which, as far transcended my expectations, as they exceeded my merits; and I felicitate myself on the opportunity which now presents, of thus publickly returning them my warmest acknowledgments, and most cordial thanks for those repeated and for those repeated and flattering instances of their approbation.” Lithgow proceeded to congratulate Thatcher, whom he described as “an honorable and worthy Candidate, whose talents I respect, and whose virtues I esteem.” He then addressed the slanderous statements made about him during the campaign,

indicating his belief that they resulted from “the zeal of party” and were designed “in order to deter people conferring their suffrages on [him].” In response to the charge that he was too close to the mercantile interests and opposed to the landed interests, he pointed out that “without the Farmer, the Merchant could not exist, and were it not for the Merchant, the farmer would be exposed to hardships almost intolerable.” To forestall any future allegations that he sided with one interest over the other, Lithgow claimed that he was for *both* Farmer and Merchant. He admitted to being a pensioner, but said he had never known that being injured in the line of duty “was ever considered by my Countrymen as a circumstance of disqualification for public employment.” Finally, Lithgow addressed the charge that he did not own any land, which some had suggested should disqualify him for office. There were no property qualifications for holding a federal office but the Massachusetts Constitution did set requirements for holding a state office.

Again demonstrating his political skill, Lithgow portrayed his lack of wealth as a virtue. “The virtues and charms of opulence are not mine” he stated, yet in the United States, “we all stand upon equal ground, and the poorest farmer or mechanic, provided he possesses honesty and a competent share of information, has as good a claim to the unbiased suffrage of the people, as the richest merchant or statesman in the land.” After taking the moral high ground, Lithgow pointed out that he did, in fact, own “some

thousands of acres of land in this District; a part of which is in a state of decent and profitable cultivation.”<sup>84</sup>

Despite possessing ample political talent, William Lithgow, Jr. would rise no higher in stature than his position as a state attorney. George Thatcher would return to Congress and remain there until the election of 1800 when he chose not to run. He returned home and accepted an appointment as associate judge of the supreme judicial court of Massachusetts. In 1824, after a long and remarkably successful career, Thatcher finally retired from public life. The separation movement that reemerged in the spring of 1791 faltered and Maine would remain a part of Massachusetts until 1820. Some of the grievances cited as justification for separation were addressed when Maine, following the 1790 census, was split into two congressional districts for the third congressional elections in 1792. Although it would be some time before there was another election that aroused so much passion, Maine would remain a politically polarized area throughout the 1790s.

The drama of the second congressional election would be hard to match. It had taken the people of Maine four trials spanning six months to choose a federal representative. The campaign revealed deep divisions in the District and foreshadowed the contentious political battles of the late 1790s and early 1800s. Arguments over religion, class, taxes, pensions, and campaign techniques filled the local newspapers. In

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<sup>84</sup> William Lithgow, Jr. “To the free and unbiased electors of the District of Maine,” 22 April 1791, *The Gazette of Maine*, 5 May 1791, p.2.



the process a new paper was established, the editor of *The Cumberland Gazette* threatened, and a prominent lawyer run out of town. Everyone from the minister of a local church to the poor farmer weighed in during the campaign resulting in an array of different opinions and arguments.

It is important to note that the central issues debated during Maine's second congressional election had little relation to national politics. Hot topics in the First Federal Congress such as the location of the federal seat of government, amendments, assumption of state debts, and a national bank were not even mentioned. The only issue from the First Congress that seemed to be of any major significance was Frederick Steuben's pension. Other national issues such as the tax on salt and molasses, and titles were mentioned but topics such as George Thatcher's religion, a personal feud between Benjamin Titcomb and Thomas Wait, and the relationship between merchants and landholders dominated the campaign. However, these same issues of social class and status did not go away and would split Federalists and Jeffersonians in subsequent years.

#### 4. Conclusion

1790 was a banner year for Federalists across the country. Amendments to the Constitution recommended by Congress the year before managed to mollify public opinion without significantly altering the original plan of government. Much to the chagrin of small farmers and states' rights men, much of Hamilton's fiscal plan had been adopted. Under the Federalists' watch, the country prospered. To the extent that the second congressional elections could be viewed as a referendum on either the Federalist or Anti-federalist vision of the future, the Federalists came out the clear winners. Across Massachusetts, representatives who had been critical of the federal government failed to get reelected or chose not to run.

The 1790 election marked the end of the Anti-federalists in Worcester County. For the rest of the 1790s, Worcester stayed firmly in the Federalist column. Whatever hostility that had existed toward the Constitution disappeared. Edward Bangs, a resident of Worcester who warned in 1788 of the "county's dread of arbitrary power," struck a different chord in the local Fourth of July address in 1791. Addressing "jealousy" and fear of unchecked power, Bangs declared "we have more room for *confidence*, and less for *jealousy*, than any other people, ancient or modern." As long as the right people were elected, Bangs believed that there was no place for the type of "jealousy [once]

considered a political virtue.”<sup>1</sup> Although some of the former Regulator towns maintained an oppositional stance, it was a weak form of dissent at best. But the social tensions that existed in Worcester did not disappear with the election of Artemas Ward. By 1800, political jealousy ran rampant in Worcester and across the country.

With the rise of the Jeffersonians, the towns in the southeast part of the county shed their Federalist ties. Conversely, the Regulator towns in the northwest abandoned their populist attitude and returned to their roots with the Court party. John Brooke finds that “oppositional politics was continuous in the southeast except in 1786 and its acceptance of the Federalist consensus in the 1790s, while “court” politics prevailed in the northwest with the exception on the Regulator and Anti-federalist politics of the 1780s and 1790s.”<sup>2</sup> The northwest, which had a long tradition of deferential politics, became the most consistently voting Federalist part of the county. In the southwest, the economic individualists who had decided to support the federal government after fears of heavy taxes failed to materialize, found Republican promises of individual liberty and hands-off federal government attractive. Dissenters, who originally looked to the Federalists to protect their rights, came to see the Republicans as more tolerant and reunited with the Land Bankers in opposition to the Federalists. The political demography of the county returned to state similar to what it had been before the Revolution, with a conservative party (the Federalist) in control of the northwest and larger towns, and an opposition centered in the Blackstone Valley. Grout’s election to

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<sup>1</sup> Edward Bangs, *An Oration, Delivered at Worcester, on the Fourth of July, 1791* (Worcester, Mass 1791).

<sup>2</sup> Brooke, p. 252.

the First Federal Congress was the product of a brief coalition between two different parts of the county that normally were on opposite ends of the political spectrum.<sup>3</sup>

The social antagonism in Maine reached new levels during the 1790s. As more “Great Proprietors” used their influence in the General Court to secure property titles, settlers who had been living off this land for years were forced to give up their homes and land they had tilled. Both groups knew that large tracts of unimproved land had little value. Settlers claimed that the Great Proprietors purposely waited until significant improvements were made to the land to make their claims. Some Maine settlers rebelled, donning Native American clothes and paint calling themselves “White Indians.” White Indians ravaged the countryside, striking fear into surveyors or anyone else associated with the Great Proprietors. They organized their own community that “expressed the settlers’ sense that they too were a persecuted people at odds with the most powerful whites.”<sup>4</sup>

The White Indians committed atrocities that caught people’s attention, but the approach ultimately proved to be an ineffective way to effect change. Jeffersonians seized on the social unrest and took up the people’s banner, and the Republicans developed an active and politically powerful organization in Maine. These new “politicians procured limited land reforms from the Court,” and won the people’s votes.<sup>5</sup>

The concept of national politics was still new for voters in 1790. The majority of voters of Worcester and Maine seemed to view the first congressional elections as little

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<sup>3</sup> Brooke, pp. 234-268.

<sup>4</sup> Taylor, p. 189.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. p. 206.

more than another vote for or against the Constitution. The second elections, however, raised a new set of questions. Why should a man be reelected? How important was the incumbent's track record? Did he represent the district well in the last Congress? What positions did he plan to take on future issues? Although these questions might seem obvious to today's voters, evidence indicates that voters in two Massachusetts districts were concerned with only a few of them. People discussed the doctrine of rotation and who was capable of preventing the southern congressmen from dominating the proceedings. But the rest of the focus was on whether Grout talked enough in Congress, what religious beliefs Thatcher held, and on the now-forgotten Steuben pension act.

As the study of Worcester County shows, historical local coalitions were a major factor in these early elections. To understand Grout's election to the First Congress and his subsequent loss to Ward, Worcester must be studied at a micro-level. When looking at the election in Maine, the personal feud between the editors of *The Gazette of Maine* and *The Cumberland Gazette* must be considered. These papers sensationalized the election and are responsible for the threats of violence. The unique relationship between the Great Proprietors, small land holders, merchants, and lawyers must also be taken into account. Overall, these districts, although in the same state, have very different histories, economic interests, relationships with the General Court, and were occupied by different types of people. Every election in every district is unique; investigations conducted at the macro-level fail to account for these local dynamics, and can lead to an incomplete picture of the political dynamics of the time.

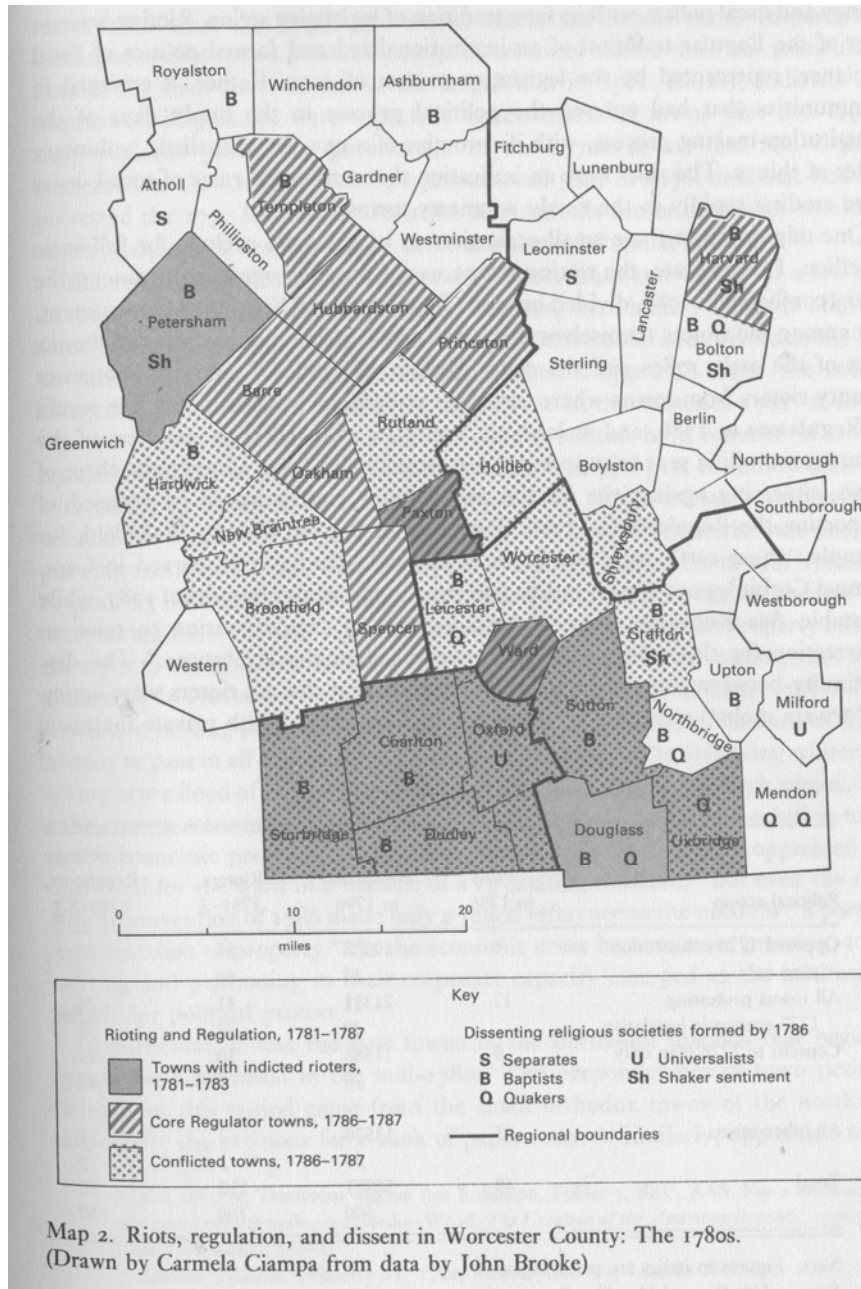
Despite the differences between the two districts, a few issues were common to both. Most prominently, voters in both districts debated rotation at length. No doubt part of this discussion stemmed from challengers seeking justification for removing an incumbent from office, but to dismiss the doctrine of rotation as a partisan ploy discards the deeper issue of people's relationship to their government. The Constitution was an experiment, and the people feared for the young republic's future. The concept of a national legislature was new, and no definition of the process for choosing representatives had been set. Historical evidence suggested that representative government inevitably degenerated into aristocracies or worse, and Americans constantly guarded against possible encroachments on their liberties.

The other topics touched on in both elections dealt with relationships between socio-economic groups and professions. In Grout's only speech in Congress, he opposed the salt tax on the basis that it discriminated against farmers, the poor, and men in the interior of the country. Salt was also a factor in Maine, but the heated exchange over how Thatcher had voted on the Steuben pension is stronger evidence of class tensions. The conflict between the interior parts (landed interests) of the state and those near the water (merchants) was a major part of Maine campaign. Antipathy toward lawyers can also be seen in both elections. Lawyers, in both areas, were seen as tools of the wealthy to oppress the poor and resented for making men pay their debts.

The focus of this thesis has not been on the early formation of the Republican Party, but both Worcester and Maine would develop strong Republican parties in the late 1790s and early 1800s. Although many factors contributed to the rise of the

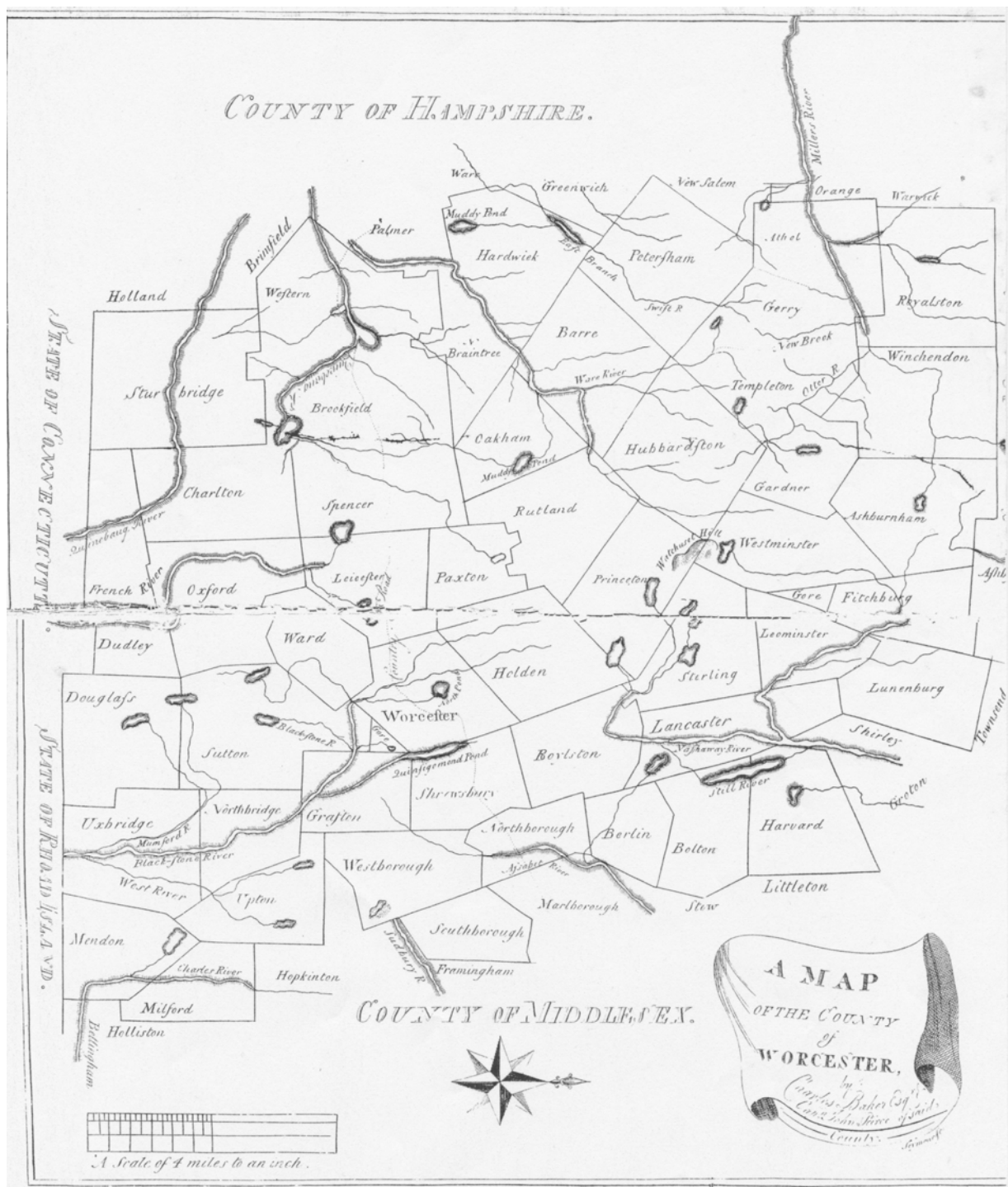
Jeffersonians, the issues that were common to both Worcester and Maine elections in 1790 became central to the development of the Party. No national organization existed to unite the people of Worcester and Maine in a common purpose but the issues that would later serve this purpose already existed at the local level.

## APPENDIX I: MAPS OF WORCESTER



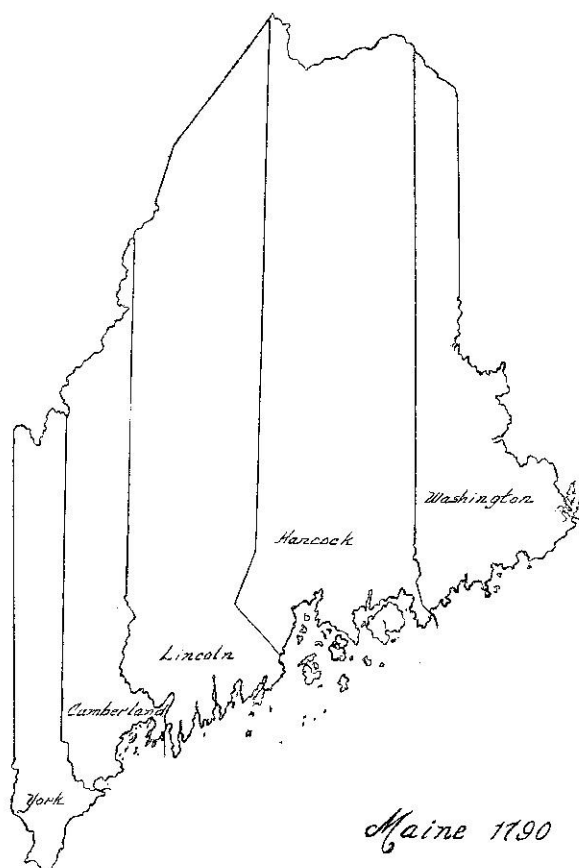
Worcester County, Map of Regulation & Dissenting Societies  
Brooke, p. 205





Map by Charles Baker and John Pierce in Peter Whitney's *The History of the County of Worcester, in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts* (Worcester, MA: Isaiah Thomas, 1792)

## APPENDIX II: MAPS OF MAINE



Counties of Maine, 1790.

<http://www.library.umaine.edu/census/images/me1790.jpg> (assessed 4/24/2009)



The District of Maine by Joseph Scott, 1795  
 The United States Gazetteer  
 Taken from <http://www.mainememory.net/bin/Detail?ln=9359> (4/25/09)

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## CURRICULUM VITAE

David Houpt is a native of Salt Lake City Utah and a graduate of West High School. He attended The George Washington University in 2001 with a major in history and a minor in political science. He graduated *magna cum laude* 2005. Along the way he worked in a number of different political campaigns helping lay the groundwork for a fantastic victory in 2008. After graduation he moved to Santa Fe, NM, got a tattoo of Thomas Jefferson's signature, moved to Boston, and then returned to the D.C. area in 2007 to work on his Masters at George Mason. He was awarded the Extended Chancellors Fellowship and will begin work on his PhD at the City University of New York in the fall of 2009.