GEORGE M. DALLAS

Pennsylvania politics in the Jacksonian period, as historian Philip Klein has described, was "a game without rules." The bitter struggle among the followers of "Old Hickory," the Anti-masons, and the Whigs (National Republicans) in the 1820s and the 1830s left the state in political chaos by 1840. Despite the fact that the Democrats had emerged the most consistent winners, and had elected Martin Van Buren over Whig William Henry Harrison in the 1836 presidential race and David R. Porter over Anti-mason Joseph Ritner in 1838 for governor, the party was deeply divided.

Two problems, power politics and economics, jeopardized the future of the Pennsylvania Democracy in the 1840s. Those Democrats aligned with United States Senator James Buchanan had strong influence with the state administration and claimed much of the federal patronage. They were opposed across the Commonwealth by the supporters of former congressman, and present minister to Austria, Henry Muhlenberg. A third faction, led by ex-Senator George Mifflin Dallas, maintained a powerful but geographically limited influence over Philadelphia.¹

Strong pressure had been exerted on President Van Buren in 1836-37 for a cabinet post for Pennsylvania. The Keystone State had been victorious for the "Little Magician" over very difficult odds

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¹Results of presidential elections in Pennsylvania:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Candidate</th>
<th>Votes</th>
<th>Opponent</th>
<th>Votes</th>
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<tr>
<td>1832</td>
<td>Andrew Jackson</td>
<td>90,983</td>
<td>Anti-Jackson (Henry Clay)</td>
<td>66,716</td>
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<tr>
<td>1836</td>
<td>Martin Van Buren</td>
<td>91,475</td>
<td>William H. Harrison</td>
<td>87,111</td>
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(particularly Van Buren’s personal unpopularity), and many party leaders expected a sizeable political reward. Van Buren, however, ever conscious of the heated factional rivalries, rejected a cabinet plum for the Pennsylvanians. Instead, he gave patronage to Buchanan, the Austrian mission to Muhlenberg, and the Russian post to Dallas. This pleased nobody completely. In 1840 the New Yorker’s lack of charisma, combined with the disastrous impact of the Panic of 1837 on Pennsylvania industry, lost him the state in November. By a slim 350 margin out of 300,000 ballots cast, Harrison took the Commonwealth and ultimately the nation. Philadelphia was safe for the Democracy—if only barely—but many areas, including Buchanan’s home county which voted 2-1 for “Tippecanoe,” went heavily Whig. Dallas wrote to Van Buren after the election and attempted to console him by describing the victory as “a monstrous cheat,” the result of fraudulent suffrage. “Louis Phillippe has a much fairer title to the crown of France than General Harrison to the Presidency.” While election irregularities may have cost Van Buren some votes, the reasons for his defeat were much more subtle, extending to internal divisions within his party.2

The economic forces dividing the state party were the bank and the financial problems resulting from the Panic of 1837. Pennsylvania had an extensive program of internal improvements, and the Commonwealth was in severe financial distress because of overexpenditures on them. By January, 1842, the state was in its worst financial position since the crash. Governor Porter and the legislature moved to rectify the situation in a responsible manner. Resolutions were passed rejecting repudiation of the state debt, and a banking act was endorsed which provided for gradual resumption of specie payments. By the end of the year Nicholas Biddle’s state Bank of Pennsylvania was dead, and President John Tyler had vetoed a new Whig-sponsored national bank. The removal of the bank as an issue and a compromise on resumption of payments of debts helped reunite the factious Democracy. The elimination of the

2The Dallas-Buchanan struggle carried over to the vice presidential contest in 1840. Buchanan pushed W. R. King of Alabama and Dallas urged Secretary of State John Forsyth. Buchanan hoped to use King as a steppingstone for his own presidential ambitions in 1844, while Forsyth was the center of an anti-Buchanan movement. The plans of neither side prevailed, since the incumbent, Richard M. Johnson, was renominated. Philip S. Klein, President James Buchanan (University Park, Pa., 1962), 131, 135, 137; Snyder, Jacksonian Heritage, 146; Dallas to Van Buren, February 26, 1841, Van Buren MSS, Library of Congress (LC), University of Nebraska (microfilm).
bank—an issue which had divided Jacksonians since 1832—and the sweeping Democratic victories in the state in 1841 were a portent of better things to come. The Jacksonians had rebounded from the shocking Whig triumph of 1840 to re-elect Porter by a wide majority in November, 1841. They now moved cautiously to select a candidate for the grand prize—the presidential race in 1844.3

The 1844 presidential race began when William Henry Harrison was buried. President Tyler, former President Van Buren, Senators Thomas Hart Benton, John C. Calhoun, and James Buchanan, Richard Johnson as well as Lewis Cass of Michigan, United States Minister to France, were all ambitious contenders for the Democratic nod.

In January, 1843, Buchanan had been re-elected to the Senate and immediately began a campaign for a favorite son endorsement. In the fight to win delegate support, “Old Buck” made rapid progress against the weak opposition of the Van Buren forces from the interior of the state. Then in the spring Van Buren’s candidacy began to develop in other states, and he moved closer to the national nomination. In April the “Little Magician’s” past appointees to office in Philadelphia—Dallas, Henry Gilpin, Henry Horn, John Kane, and others—took the lead in reactivating the “Old Hickory Club” which had supported Jackson originally in the 1820s. The Van Buren men were too weak in the central and western parts of the Commonwealth to retrieve the state from Buchanan, but they were in a position of some strength and could afford to wait. Buchanan’s support outside Pennsylvania never materialized, and in December he withdrew from the race. This did not throw the state into the Van Buren camp (barely half of the Keystone delegation going to the Baltimore convention could be called Van Buren men). But Buchanan was eliminated from the contest, and this was Dallas’s primary goal. If Van Buren received the nomination and won in November, Dallas would gain control of the state Democracy.

3Snyder, Jacksonian Heritage, 160-161; Klein, Buchanan, 135, 138, 151. Klein indicates that Dallas’s faction was the pro-bank party and that it was decidedly weakened by the bank’s demise in 1841. This not only removed the clique’s source of funds but also a major issue which had been constantly used to create dissension. This may be true, but Dallas personally did not claim to be pro-bank. Dallas was frequently asked to speak at Democratic anti-bank rallies (Invitation from Allegheny County Democrats, December 22, 1843, Dallas MSS, Historical Society of Pennsylvania [HSP]) and responded to numerous inquiries about his position by referring to his advocacy of the repeal of the 1836 charter of the state bank by constitutional amendment. Dallas to Wm. McDonald, December 24, 1842, Dallas MSS, HSP.
Buchanan had taken a large gamble and lost. He no longer controlled the state administration, Philadelphia was totally independent, and only a fraction of the party was committed to him. Buchanan remained a regular, however, and vowed to support Van Buren to avoid a party split, even though he felt the New Yorker would lose.4

Buchanan was not the only Democrat to withdraw in December, 1843. John C. Calhoun also decided to quit the contest, just at the time his friends were in Washington joining the other anti-Van Buren forces. Only Richard Johnson and Lewis Cass remained as serious challengers to Van Buren. In December Dallas began his break from the New Yorker. The Philadelphian was strongly allied with a congressional cadre headed by Robert John Walker of Mississippi and Aaron Brown of Tennessee that supported Van Buren and the "re-annexation of Texas." Texas, independent since 1836, desired to become a state, and a sizeable body of Congressmen, mostly expansionist-minded Southerners, wanted immediate annexation. This group was becoming increasingly skeptical about the "Little Magician's" position on Texas. They began to investigate the possibilities of another candidate in the event that Van Buren committed himself against annexation before the convention. Between December and May Dallas flirted with a variety of candidates. In December he was in Washington campaigning for the Cass men at the party caucus to select officers of the House of Representatives. Lewis Cass was by far the strongest alternative to Van Buren. Walker advised the Michigan veteran about the posture he should assume on Texas throughout the spring of 1844. Meanwhile, Walker's Pennsylvania allies in the Dallas clique began a boom for their fellow Philadelphian, Commodore Charles Stewart. Thus, the pro-Texas men bounced back and forth among a multiplicity of candidates trying to locate a suitable alternative to the uncommitted Van Buren. On April 27, 1844, one month before the convention, the New Yorker took his stand. A letter against the recent Tyler-Calhoun Treaty and immediate annexation was published in the Washington *Globe*. The views contained in this note ruined Van Buren's presidential hopes, which only days before had been almost assured of success. The crisis that Walker, Dallas,

and the other pro-Texas men feared had come to pass. They now moved to block Van Buren and select a man they could trust.  

On May 27, 1844, the Democratic Convention opened in Baltimore. The anti-Van Buren, pro-Texas forces immediately proceeded to halt the New Yorker by moving that a two-thirds vote was needed for nomination. This placed the Pennsylvania delegation in a quandary. They had been instructed to vote for Van Buren. Many of the delegates—especially a strong contingent from the Philadelphia area—would do so, but others from the interior could still be swayed. The delegation was divided among Cass, Tyler, Buchanan, and Johnson supporters. Because of the split in the state delegation, half of them voted for the two-thirds rule that killed Van Buren's hopes of victory. They then turned around and voted for him en masse on the first ballot. On May 28 the battle for the presidential nomination continued between Van Buren and Cass, with the Keystone delegation switching over to Buchanan. Between the eighth and ninth ballots Van Buren withdrew, opening the way for the nomination of "dark horse" candidate James K. Polk of Tennessee, a former Speaker of the House and a Texas annexationist.  

Once Polk had been nominated, the pro-Texas men, led by Walker, moved to quiet the disgruntled Van Buren supporters. Walker himself placed Van Buren's loyal follower, Senator Silas Wright of New York, in nomination for the vice presidency. This would, of course, placate the Empire State representatives and win them over to the ticket. No one was placed in opposition to Wright and on the first ballot he was selected. With their work finished, the delegates then prepared to leave Baltimore. They were disappointed to learn that Wright declined the nomination, even after a committee of five was sent to persuade him to change his mind. After the

5Charles Sellers, *James K. Polk: Continentalist, 1843-1846* (Princeton, 1966), 55, 78-79, 229; Dallas to Richard Rush, December 5, 1843, Richard Rush MSS, Princeton University (PU). The drive for Commodore Stewart was ridiculous, but many Pennsylvanians, including Buchanan, took it seriously for a time. Klein, *Buchanan*, 139. Robert John Walker, an intelligent and ambitious Pennsylvanian, moved to Mississippi in his youth and became a successful land speculator. In the 1840s he was one of the bright young Senators in Congress and soon would be a moving force in the Polk administration. His career had been aided by his marriage to Mary Bache in 1825. This was Walker's entrance into one of the most tightly knit families in the United States. Alexander James Dallas was Mary Bache's grandfather. James P. Shenton, *Robert John Walker* (New York, 1961), 9-10.

6Sellers, *Polk*, 79; Snyder, *Jacksonian Heritage*, 177; Klein, *Buchanan*, 159-160. Polk was not a dark horse within the party, since he had been considered a leading contender for the vice presidential spot in 1844. His elevation to the first position on the ticket, however, was the result of luck and some brilliant political management.
way the convention had treated their champion, no Van Burenite from New York would accept the post. On May 30 the convention began again the task of choosing a vice-presidential candidate. A man from New England or Pennsylvania was needed to provide a geographical balance to Polk. The Maine delegation promptly responded by naming James Buchanan, but the Keystone contingent (acting under Buchanan's orders) withdrew his name. Then Levi Woodbury of New Hampshire, Marcus Morton of Massachusetts, Governor John Fairfield of Maine, General Cass, and Colonel Johnson were nominated. Governor Fairfield was the solid leader (106 votes) on the first ballot but was short of a majority. Some Pennsylvania men turned to George M. Dallas, who garnered thirteen votes. Immediately, Walker gained the floor and spoke in Dallas's behalf. He specifically referred to Dallas's views on the bank and Texas which were in accord with Polk's. Dallas was not in Baltimore and had kept his pre-convention activities against Van Buren so quiet that he was still acceptable to his followers. The Philadelphian was identified with eastern Pennsylvania and the commercial classes where he could secure a large segment of the state Democracy. He also would guard the northern protective tariff against any Southern onslaughts. The convention was stampeded, and on the second ballot Dallas was selected by a large majority (220-30) over Fairfield.\(^7\)

When Dallas's nomination was confirmed on May 30, Walker jubilantly left Baltimore for Philadelphia to inform his relative. He was joined by a formal Democratic committee led by Fairfield that arrived in the Quaker City at about three o'clock in the morning. Knocks on the front door brought Dallas to the chamber window. He recognized Walker at the door. Fearing that his daughter, who was in Washington, was ill, he hastened down the stairs, half dressed and in his slippers. Sixty men, two by two, marched past the amazed Dallas into his front parlor, all maintaining absolute silence. Dallas, who had no idea what was taking place, stood thunderstruck. Led by Walker into the back parlor, Dallas nervously asked what was happening. After waiting a moment, the folding doors between the two

parlors were thrown open, and Dallas was greeted by a semicircle of applauding men. Governor Fairfield then stepped forward and informed Dallas of the convention's action. The surprised candidate recovered quickly and thanked the committee, promising to reply more formally to the offer. Dallas then opened his sideboard, and everyone joined in pledging success to the ticket, as the elated and tipsy Walker whooped through a war dance in the parlor. 8

Dallas's nomination was met with a wide variety of reactions in and out of the Democracy. Polk was promptly informed about Dallas from a number of personal and political friends. Cave Johnson told the Tennessean that Dallas will "perhaps [be] a better Vice than Wright and will add more to our strength." Gideon Pillow traveled to Philadelphia and after a conference with Dallas wrote Polk, "He is very talented [sic] and popular and most captivating in his address." George Crockett eagerly declared, "Dallas seems to be more acceptable than Wright and places Pennsylvania beyond a doubt." This attitude was commonplace among Polk's correspondents. Most of them seemed pleased with the selection of Dallas, especially because of his posture on Texas. There are no letters indicating the Philadelphian was a poor choice. 9 Other Democrats who viewed the situation in national terms were equally pleased. John Fairfield reported that the nominations of both Polk and Dallas were received with enthusiasm in Maine. John C. Calhoun reportedly thought the nomination of Polk was the best that could be made under the circumstances. He was pleased because the party was freed from the tyranny of the New York dynasty. "I was much gratified with Mr. Dallas' nomination. My friends everywhere will give the ticket a hearty support." 10

8This is the account of Dallas's receiving word of his nomination as recorded in Benjamin Perley Poore's *Perley's Reminiscences*. Staples, ed., *Fairfield Letters*, 374. Fairfield, however, perhaps out of fear of his wife's reaction, denied being in Philadelphia that night, saying he was snugly in bed in Washington dreaming of his wife, children, and home. Fairfield to his wife, June 9, 1844, *ibid.*, 341-342; R. J. Walker to Polk, Philadelphia, May 31, 1844; Cave Johnson to Polk, Washington, June 3, 1844, Polk MSS, LC; Shenton, *Walker*, 48.

9Cave Johnson to Polk, Washington, May 31, 1844; Gideon Pillow to Polk, Philadelphia, June 2, 1844; B. Crockett to Polk, Washington, June 3, 1844; W. C. Dunlap to Polk, Raleigh, N.C., June 7, 1844; John Hamm to Polk, Zanesville, Ohio, June 7, 1844, Polk MSS, LC.

10Fairfield to Polk, June 2, 1844, *ibid.*; Calhoun to F. Wharton, Philadelphia, July 14, 1844, J. Franklin Jameson, ed., *Correspondence of John C. Calhoun* (American Historical Association *Annual Report* for 1899, XI) (Washington, 1900), 601. Dallas still thought highly of Calhoun in 1844. Wharton reported to the South Carolinian,
There were, of course, those who were disappointed or resentful over the selection of the candidates. Some New York politicians feared that the failure to place Wright on the ticket would cost them the state and perhaps the election. Van Burens undoubtedly realized the attitude of his followers was not one which would promote harmony, and he soon began to write letters to his backers urging that they remain loyal. Besides the obvious problems in New York, there were also difficulties in Pennsylvania. Many Buchanan supporters, unsuccessful in attaining the presidency for their leader, had also to swallow the bitter pill of the vice presidency for George M. Dallas. Governor Robert Letcher of Kentucky wrote to Buchanan in July, "'Polk! Great God, what a nomination! I do really think the Democratic convention ought to be damned to all eternity for this villainous business.'" Senator William King of Alabama, then in Paris, confided to Buchanan, "I have the opinion that Polk and Dallas were bad selections. Dallas brings no strength to the ticket, ..." and neither candidate had the influence that the party's candidates ought to have. John W. Forney, Pennsylvania editor and Buchanan's liaison man in Washington, said that a "considerable feeling against Dallas is manifested," but that this was lost in the general joy of the deliverance of the party from Van Burens. Dallas's nomination was "one of those things which could not be prevented" after Wright's impolitic refusal. Forney felt that Dallas was not strong in the Keystone state and that, as a senator, his support of the national bank recharter in 1832 against the president's wishes, made him a questionable Jacksonian and a possible hindrance to the national ticket. "'Nothing can save him but the union and enthusiasm which now pervades the Party.'\footnote{A. Eyck to Van Burens, June 4, 1844; Van Burens to George Melville, Philadelphia, June 3, 1844; Van Burens to J. F. H. Claiborne, Mississippi, June 21, 1844, Van Burens MSS, LC (microfilm); Robert Letcher to Buchanan, July 7, 1844; Wm. King to Buchanan, Paris, November 14, 1844; J. W. Forney to Buchanan, June 11, 1844, Buchanan MSS, HSP.}"

The Whigs viewed Dallas's nomination with disdain. Their ticket of Henry Clay and Theodore Frelinghuysen of New Jersey seemed assured of defeating the two nationally unknown Democrats. Philadelphia Whig Sidney George Fisher smugly noted in his diary:

"He [Dallas] went on to say that there was one man who was the great man of this country, and that was Mr. Calhoun." Wharton to Calhoun, May 31, 1844, \textit{ibid.}, 962.
Polk is a fourth rate partizan politician, of ordinary abilities, no eminence or reputation and chiefly distinguished for being a successful stump orator in Tennessee. Mr. Dallas is a gentleman by birth and education, amiable in private life, very bland and courteous in manner, too much so indeed, or rather too indiscriminately so, to give one an impression of sincerity and truth, a reckless partizan totally devoid of principle and capable of upholding or relinquishing any opinions whenever his own or his party’s interests require it. His talents are very moderate, his acquirements scanty, he has an inferior position at the bar, no one would give a dollar for his opinion and his practice is for the most part jury cases unless when political influence introduces him into an important case.

The Whig newspapers were less harsh than Fisher but still considered Dallas’s nomination as a bad political joke on the American public. The National Intelligencer judged Dallas an average politician, a lawyer with fair talents and fit company for Polk on the Democratic ticket. Dallas was the “chosen victim” to run with the Tennessean solely because of their identical views on Texas annexation. The New York Tribune was equally confident that Clay would be victorious in November. It regarded Polk as a “third-rate partizan” and “a buffoon.” Dallas was denounced as “a very Jacobinic, loose-principled, Texas Locofoco.” Since Wright declined the nomination, some Whigs were guessing Dallas might also. But the Tribune said, “Dallas is not too large to run so—he must run. If the Locos can’t make him stand, the Whigs must send a Committee and train him. We are not to be cheated out of a contest.” The Whigs were delighted with the Democratic ticket. Polk was a mystery to some elements of his own party, and Dallas was a lacklustre partisan, who had voted more like a Whig than a Democrat in his own brief term in the Senate. How could the Whigs lose?12

12Entry for June, 1844, Nicholas B. Wainwright, ed., A Philadelphia Perspective: The Diary of Sidney George Fisher Covering the Years 1834-1871 (Philadelphia, 1967), 169-170; National Intelligencer, June 3, 1844; New York Tribune, June 1, 12, 1844; Philadelphia North American, June 1, 1844. The “Old Warrior,” a radical campaign publication of the Pennsylvania Telegraph, attacked Dallas as a “Jacobin Aristocrat,” for his state bank letter of 1836, and for the fact that he prided himself on being a descendant of Lord Byron. Pennsylvania Telegraph, June 1, 5, 1844. Pennsylvania Freeman, June 6, 1844. Benjamin Lundy’s abolitionist newspaper published in Philadelphia, attacked Dallas as “a man who approved himself faithful to the interests of the slaveholders.” Dallas’s anti-abolitionist efforts, his views on Texas, and his geographical roots were the factors that secured his nomination.
Dallas’s reaction to his own nomination was a combination of amazement and indifference. He told Henry Muhlenberg that the convention’s action took him totally by surprise, “but the compliment came in a shape that could not be repulsed.” Had it involved an unkindness to Van Buren, Calhoun, Cass, Buchanan, or Johnson, he might have declined. Dallas said he had been too happy the past five years in private life to entertain the smallest wish to be transformed into a public official. He was not wealthy and was surrounded by such a large family that he could not indulge ambition without second thoughts. Dallas repeated these sentiments in a letter to Van Buren in which he thanked him for the support of his forces at the convention. He wrote the “Little Magician” of his reluctance to engage in public life, which was founded “upon dictates of domestic prudence.” Late in June Dallas confided to Thomas Ritchie, the father of Virginia Democracy, “Personally, I assure you, I would prefer being permitted to stay at home and make hay at the bar, while the sun shines, but having put my foot on the ice, I can’t help hoping that it may be strong enough to bear me.” Dallas ran for the vice presidency because he loved politics and certainly because he possessed some personal ambition (particularly in the state Democracy), but primarily because of loyalty to his party and country. He told a number of people including Polk, that if he ever at any time and owing to any cause, just or unjust, became a burden to the presidential nominee “pray cut me loose instantly and resolutely. Personally I have not the slightest wish to quit the pursuits of private life.” Dallas undoubtedly realized that he was being used by his party. He was not chosen for his political record or his abilities but because he happened to agree with Polk on the major national issue of the day—Texas—and because he came from Pennsylvania. He was willing to jeopardize his practice and comfortable family life in a contest in which the Democracy’s chances were, at best, slim. Dallas recognized the political feebleness of the vice presidency but was willing to endure it for the good of the party. He described his position to Polk as “a bobtail annexed to the great kite.” Perhaps Dallas was, as Sidney George Fisher characterized him, just a “reckless partizan.”

Dallas to Henry Muhlenberg, June 5, 1844; Dallas to Van Buren, June 6, 1844; Dallas to Thomas Ritchie, June 21, 1844, Dallas MSS, HSP; Dallas to Polk, June 26, 1844, Polk MSS, LC. It is not necessary to examine the responses of the Democratic press to the nominations. The partisan nature of the papers meant dedicated support, if not rejoicing, for Polk and Dallas.
The campaign of 1844 focused around issues as much as personalities. While character assassination was prominent in the party press of the nineteenth century, the bank, Texas, and the tariff were problems that had to be discussed or properly evaded. Naturally, the importance of each of these varied in every state or section of the country, but Dallas, in trying to capture Pennsylvania for the Democracy, was forced to deal with all three.

The bank issue always came back to haunt Dallas. The Whig press continually pointed to the fact that he had sponsored and spoken for the recharter of the Second Bank of the United States in 1832. Dallas tried to cleanse himself of the bank stain by saying that he was instructed to support the institution by his state legislature. This argument was refuted by the Whigs who quoted directly from his instructions in 1832, proving they were not as harsh or rigid in commanding that he sustain the bank as Dallas claimed.  

Certainly the bank was an important election issue in Pennsylvania. The Democratic platform declared opposition to the institution on the grounds that it was unconstitutional and inexpedient. The party aroused many people by claiming the Whigs desired to recharter the monster as a method of regaining economic and political control of the nation and the state. The primary problem remained, however, to convince the Democrats that their vice presidential candidate was not pro-bank. Dallas received numerous letters throughout the summer of 1844 asking for information on his position vis-a-vis rechartering a new bank. He replied that he was opposed to a third bank and that he had supported the Biddle bank because he had a "representative obligation to obey the instructions from his legislature." When these responsibilities ended, he adopted a position "decidedly and openly hostile to the Bank." Dallas told an inquirer, "the principles and policies of Andrew Jackson are of more value to the United States than the Bank in its purest form." There is no way to discern how successful such rhetoric was in convincing doubting Jacksonians that Dallas was a sincere opponent of the bank. Quite probably, his energetic and positive stand on the issues

14Typical of the personal abuse heaped on Clay by the Democratic press was an article which attacked his moral character, dueling, gambling, profanity, and, of course, the "corrupt bargain." Harrisburg Democratic Union, August 14, 1844; Washington Globe, November 1, 1844. Dallas's stand on the bank question disturbed portions of the Democratic press also. Niles Register, June 15, 1844; New York Tribune, June 15, 1844.
of the tariff and Texas offset their fears.13

The Baltimore convention of May, 1844, had selected Dallas for the second spot on the ticket because of his compatible views with Polk in favor of Texas annexation. Months before Dallas stepped onto his porch on May 31 to exhort a crowd in favor of "Polk, Texas and Oregon," there was no doubt how Dallas stood on the issue. The national leader of the Texas coterie was Senator Robert John Walker of Mississippi. Walker had begun his activities long before the national convention to rally the pro-Texas men into a powerful and cohesive force. His connections with Dallas proved extremely valuable in swinging elements of the Pennsylvania Democracy to the side of annexation. Through Dallas, the Philadelphia Pennsylvania, the leading Van Buren organ in the state, was persuaded to espouse the cause. Dallas was probably influential in recruiting Philadelphia aristocrat Charles J. Ingersoll, chairman of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, for the Texas clique. William Wilkins, Secretary of War in Tyler's cabinet, was also brought into the fold by his brother-in-law, Dallas. Walker began his campaign by publishing a pamphlet early in 1844 justifying the need for American annexation of Texas. Dallas read the pamphlet eagerly. He wrote Walker, "It is comprehensive, clear, argumentative and eloquent... My head has been running on this topic for some months and your admirable brochure comes to me like manna in the way of starved people." Walker followed his publication with a fervent and impassioned plea in May, 1844, in favor of the treaty for annexing Texas at a secret session of the Senate. The Mississippian used a variety of reasons (most of which appeared in his publication) for the necessity of such action, including Manifest Destiny, the inferiority of the Mexicans, and a nationalistic desire to expel "English intrigue" from Texas. His speech was a futile effort, since the treaty was defeated by a large margin in the Senate on June 8. Henry Clay, who had declared himself opposed to immediate annexation in April, joined the majority in voting against it. This, of course, only increased the likelihood that Texas would be a key campaign issue. As Sidney George

13Harrisburg Democratic Union, October 30, August 14, 1844; Pittsburgh Daily Morning Post, June 10, 11, 1844; John Wentworth to Dallas, Washington, June 4, 1844; Dallas to Wentworth, June 8, 1844, Dallas MSS, HSP. In the June 8 letter Dallas also took a stand against the distribution of public lands (as the Democratic platform called for), which was a popular measure in Pennsylvania and one which he supported in 1832. H. O. Foster to Dallas, Washington, May 31, 1844; Dallas to Foster, June 4, 1844; "A Staunch Democrat" to Dallas, Buffalo, June 7, 1844, Dallas MSS, HSP.
Fisher noted, "Conquest, extension of territory, war—these will be the topics urged during the contest, topics always exciting and captivating to the people." Dallas had begun to prove the validity of Fisher's remarks in December, 1843. At that time he spoke to a Democratic rally in favor of annexation and caught the attention of a number of party leaders. Approximately one year later Dallas wrote to a Pittsburgh committee which had invited him to speak at a Jackson day gathering:

To me the incorporation of Texas into the federal Union seems not only the opening of a natural and almost exhaustless resource for the fabrics and goods of the east, agricultural products of the west, etc.—but it assumes the aspect of a just and necessary consequence upon the genius and maxims of our confederated system.

Texas annexation does not seem to have been a crucial issue to the people of Pennsylvania. The press of both parties evidenced concern for the problem, but it was certainly secondary to the bank and the tariff. The importance of Texas, as far as Dallas was concerned, was that he was one of the early and leading advocates of annexation. This factor ingratiated him with the influential Southern politicians who sought a running mate for Polk. After his nomination Dallas did not have to speak extensively on Texas. It was obvious how the nominees and a large segment of the Democracy stood on the issue. Since Dallas had vacillated on the bank and his position was unclear to many, he stood on "Jacksonian principles" and tried to explain his past actions. The problem for Pennsylvania and Dallas in the campaign of 1844 was the protective tariff. It was here that Dallas would make his greatest contribution and ultimately his greatest sacrifice.16

The tariff was the most important question to Pennsylvania voters in the election of 1844. There was no doubt where Henry Clay or

16Washington Globe, June 3, 1844; National Intelligencer, June 14, 1844; Niles Register, June 15, 1844; Sellers, Polk, 54; Dallas to Walker, February 5, 1844, Walker MSS, LC; Entry for June, 1844, Fisher Diary, 170; Dallas to Pittsburgh Committee, January (1845?), Dallas MSS, HSP. Dallas pressed the admission of Texas as far and fast as he could as presiding officer of the Senate in 1845. Dallas to Sophy, December 16, 1845, ibid.

Texas annexation was popular in Pennsylvania with both the press and the party. There was little dissension over the issue, and most Democratic congressmen and legislators gave it their support. This was not the case in New York and New England where the Democracy was divided. Snyder, Jacksonian Heritage, 176, 182. Henry Clay continued to vary his stance on Texas throughout the campaign, so the Whig press never really knew what position to take.
George M. Dallas stood on protection, but Polk's position was dangerously unclear. It would be Dallas's task to conduct a campaign which would convince the voters of the soundness of his colleague's tariff views. As a Congressman, Polk had voted against the high "Tariff of Abominations" of 1828 and for the reduced rates of 1832 (as had Dallas). The tariff plank of the Democratic platform of 1844, "which meant everything to everybody," did nothing to clarify the issue. This ambiguity was deliberate, because, like Jackson before him, Polk did not want to alienate the low tariff South or the high tariff Northeast. But Polk lacked the charisma of "Old Hickory," and he would have to make some statement on the subject if he expected to capture the Keystone state. Senator Walker, demonstrating fine political perception, recognized this fact in May before leaving Baltimore. He wrote Polk informing him of the strong tariff feelings in Pennsylvania and of the importance of the Commonwealth in the election. Walker admitted he personally was anti-tariff, but he represented only Mississippi. The Tennessean would have to represent the Union and therefore was obliged to go as far as his principles would permit in allowing "incidental protection." The industries of Pennsylvania, which were still recovering from the recent depression, demanded a high tariff man, and there was no chance that a free trader could receive her electoral votes. Walker urged Polk to present a tariff policy that would supply the needs of the government and offer "equal and adequate" protection to American industry. This policy would be opposed by the South, but the party's views on Texas would compensate for this. 17

Walker's advice was both sound and timely. No sooner had word been received in Pennsylvania of the nominees of the convention than the politicians were clamoring for a policy statement on the tariff. Henry Muhlenberg wrote to Dallas reminding him of the almost universal sentiment on the subject and asking for a reassuring message from Polk to indicate that he was not anti-tariff, something moderate that would allow "discriminating duties and incidental protection." Dallas told "Father" Ritchie of Virginia that the Democracy's chances were good in Pennsylvania, although the tariff was a problem. Dallas felt that some parts of the state would be lost to Clay because of his positive support of protection. The Philadelphian did not hesitate to inform Polk's friends of the im-

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importance of the issue. When Andrew Jackson Donelson visited Dallas immediately following the nomination, he was told of the seriousness of the situation. Donelson then advised Polk, "You are aware that the lobby which will be used against you in this region is the tariff . . . . You should deliberate it and carefully give your enemies no advantage which can be avoided. I tell you your success is certain if your ground on the tariff is wisely chosen. Do not be in a hurry in taking it." Pennsylvania Democrats were equally quick to warn the presidential nominee against any rash action. A Harrisburg correspondent told Polk, "Much will depend however on the position you can occupy on the tariff question. This is the only question that can give us any trouble in the state." Another Keystone supporter made his feelings more explicit, "The only thing the Whigs expect to work upon in our state is the tariff. All we ask in Pennsylvania is a revenue tariff so adjusted as to afford protection to our iron, coal and manufacturing. I hope you come up with a position compatible with this."¹⁸

Polk had always favored reducing the duties but had never made a definite commitment against any degree of protection. This made an avenue of compromise available with the high tariff Pennsylvanians. Gideon Pillow, a confidant of the Tennessean's, had assured Dallas that the nominee "would content all but the ultra" on the issue. Such promises did not satisfy Dallas or his associate in Philadelphia politics, John K. Kane, who urged Polk to make a dignified, reserved statement on the topic. Following Walker's advice, Polk finally yielded to the pressures of the concerned Keystone Democrats. On June 19 he replied to Kane's inquiry: He opposed a tariff for protection only and not for revenue. A desirable tariff would contain discriminatory duties that would produce needed revenue and at the same time offer reasonable protection to home industries. Polk included a covering letter to Kane that suggested he consult with Dallas and Henry Horn, another Philadelphia Democrat, about the statement and withhold it from publication "unless it be deemed absolutely necessary." Polk later wrote to Dallas informing him that he would issue no more public letters, nor make any public appearances whatever. "It will comport best with propriety and the

¹⁸Muhlenberg to Dallas, June 3, 1844; Dallas to Ritchie, June 21, 1844, Dallas MSS, HSP; A. J. Donelson to Polk, Philadelphia, May 31, 1844; J. Miller to Polk, Harrisburg, May 31, 1844; Isaac McKinley to Polk, Harrisburg, June 3, 1844, Polk MSS, LC. Polk also received numerous letters from New York urging a tariff as much for revenue as for protection.
dignity of my position to remain quietly at home.” After further thought, Polk asked Kane on July 2 to withhold the tariff letter entirely, but the Democrats had already published it alongside a Clay letter which indicated a similar position. The Pennsylvanians were relieved and happy over Polk’s statement. Upon reading the nominee’s opinions, Dallas immediately wrote him, expressing his satisfaction. “I think your doctrine on the tariff will impair your strength here very little if at all, and perhaps it is the matter on which brevity would be the soul of wit.” After the letter’s publication, Dallas reported its success to Polk, “The Democracy of Pennsylvania has never been so united and cordial . . . . Your tariff letter has proven to be exactly what I predicted . . . and has given entire satisfaction.” The middle of the road policy would serve its purpose. Polk was proclaimed throughout Pennsylvania and the Northeast as a friend of protection. His statement came none too soon as the press of both parties in the Commonwealth made the tariff the issue in the campaign of 1844.19

The Whig press made earnest efforts to illustrate positive differences in the tariff records of Polk and Clay. The Pennsylvania Telegraph quoted from the lengthy speech made against the protective system in 1832 and dubbed him virtually a “free trader.” The New York Tribune printed portions of a pamphlet published by Polk in 1843 in an unsuccessful campaign for governor of Tennessee. In the brochure Polk stated that he opposed the high tariff of 1842 “not regarding it to be a Revenue Tariff, but in many of its provisions highly protective and oppressive in its character. I am in favor of the restoration of the Compromise Act of 1833.” This bill to lower rates had been solidly and vociferously opposed by Dallas in the Senate. The Whigs attempted to emphasize Clay’s more consistent posture in favor of moderate protection. Since Dallas was not vulnerable on the tariff (they attacked his Whig-like voting record on the bank, land distribution, and internal improvements), Polk remained the chief target of their tariff barbs.20

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19Sellers, Polk, 119-121; Shenton, Walker, 52-53; Lambert, “Election of 1844,” 192-193; Dallas to Polk, June 26, 1844; Dallas to Polk, July 6, 1844. Polk MSS, LC. In this same letter to Polk, Dallas expressed his strong disagreement with the Tennessean’s decision to stand for one term only; Dallas felt it would undercut the president’s power. However, the Philadelphian did agree with Polk that neither of them should travel the country during the campaign. The party would benefit most by their tranquillity. Ibid.

20Pennsylvania Telegraph, June 5, July 31, August 7, 1844; National Intelligencer, June 11, 1844 (quoting from a Uniontown, Pa., paper); New York Tribune, June 29, July 11, 1844.
The Democrats of Pennsylvania were not paying attention to the valid Whig accounts of Polk's tariff record. The Jacksonian press flooded the state with Clay's policy and their nominee's protectionist views, as stated in the Kane letter, challenging "the most skilful logicians to point out a shade of difference between them." The Harrisburg Democratic Union showed that the Democrats were the true friends of the protective tariff of 1842 and that the Whigs tried to make the bill objectionable to President Tyler. The votes of Senators and Representatives were tallied to prove Democratic loyalty to the 1842 measure. The fact that Henry Clay had chosen that occasion to return home to Kentucky and did not vote was seldom passed over by the press. Repeatedly, the partisan editors pointed to Polk as a "special friend" of the coal and iron interests, refuted the free trade argument, and reprinted the Kane letter espousing "a revenue tariff which will afford ample protection to American industry." A few days before the election Democratic voters were exhorted to turn out at the polls, but they were warned, "BEWARE OF FEDERAL LIES. You will most probably on the eve of the election, hear that Mr. Polk is dead, has declared himself opposed to the tariff, or has done some other horrible thing . . . ." The party approached November with growing confidence that key states like Pennsylvania—and therefore the presidency—would soon be theirs.\(^\text{21}\)

In their bid for the White House the Commonwealth Democrats faced a serious problem outside their control. Dallas had strong and legitimate fears that two groups would cut heavily into Jacksonian voting strength in the state. The Native Americans in particular were powerful in Dallas's own area of Philadelphia and southeastern Pennsylvania. He received letters in the summer of 1844 from groups of German Democrats asking his position on nativism. Dallas also was approached by a committee of naturalized citizens from New York who wanted a public statement on the subject. In the latter instance Dallas was cautious because he suspected the committee was a group of Whigs, attempting to get the Democratic nominee to alienate the Native Americans by taking a stand. This issue was especially difficult in Philadelphia, a city containing a large number of immigrants. Dallas told Polk that he would say nothing on the topic of nativism unless the Tennessean approved. If forced to make a statement, Dallas said he would attack the nativists as "mis-

\(^{21}\)Harrisburg Democratic Union, July 24, 31, August 7, 14, September 25, October 16, 30, 1844; Pittsburgh Morning Post, June 5, 6, 1844.
led by ignorant or angry passions or by a baser impulse of proscriptive bigotry.” The Philadelphian was very concerned about a coalition of Whigs and nativists in his city which could defeat the local Democrats and cut severely into the party’s state and national totals.22

Dallas also envisioned an alliance of Whigs and abolitionists not only in Pennsylvania but throughout the North to defeat the Democracy. He had expressed these fears in a letter to John Willis, a representative to the Virginia convention in 1840, which was later published by the Richmond Enquirer. Dallas felt the election of General Harrison would open the door for the abolitionists whom he strenuously opposed because they sought to violate the constitutional rights and domestic institutions of the Southern states. At that time Dallas claimed abolitionists were the “ruling cabal” and the “master spirits” of the Whig party and “the Presidential candidate is notoriously their nominee.” The motive for Dallas’s letter was undoubtedly political, but he certainly believed his own rhetoric. He hoped to frighten the slave-holding Virginians into remaining firm for Van Buren so as to halt the “threat of abolitionism.” It was the Keystone state, however, not the “Old Dominion,” that failed the New Yorker in 1840.

Again in 1844 Dallas cried out against such a coalition. This time he predicted a union of abolitionists and nativists that would merge with the Whigs in the East and North before March 4, 1845. The common designation of this combination would be the Liberty party. “It is their inevitable tendency and termination,” Dallas said. The increase in the number of abolitionists had outstripped his apprehensions, and the fanatic hostility to papal power by the nativists had grown immeasurably since 1840. When an alliance was formed among them, they could use the Whig party as a vehicle to their purposes. Dallas warned Polk that while the Democracy would still win in November, the president would have to face such a potential confederacy on issues like Texas, naturalization laws, and slavery in the near future. The Pennsylvanian encouraged Polk to plan on quieting the disruptive tide of Southern Democracy on the tariff, so that they might first squelch the most important problem of abolitionism. Dallas viewed the “fanatics” as a threat to the Constitution and urged the Tennessean to “postpone the tariff question until the country is secured against the alarming strides of abolition.” On

22Dallas to Polk, July 26, August 7, 1844, Polk MSS, LC.
October 8 Dallas cautioned Polk that abolitionism was a great issue in the 1844 race. If the South went Whig, the Northern Democrats would be alienated. If the South went Democratic, the abolitionists would rapidly retrograde and disappear. "In very truth, the great question of union and disunion is at issue, through not in the shape it is put by some hot partizans in South Carolina."23

Dallas never doubted that Pennsylvania would vote Democratic in November, although he showed concern over the possible narrow margin of victory. He was equally confident of the party's chances in the gubernatorial contest of October, which caused the Democracy some difficulty when the unfortunate Henry Muhlenberg, on the eve of his sure election as governor, died of apoplexy. Dallas did not think, however, that his death would hurt the Jacksonian cause against Whig candidate Joseph Markle. The state leaders immediately recalled the convention and on September 3 in Harrisburg selected Muhlenberg's old rival, Frances R. Shunk of Pittsburgh, the secretary of the Commonwealth and a leading political strategist in the Porter administration. Dallas commented to Polk that although he liked Muhlenberg, he felt Shunk would be a stronger candidate. Whatever the comparative strengths of the two men, the important fact was that Shunk triumphed in the October 8 election. His margin of victory, however, was only 4,000 out of 316,000 votes cast. Philadelphia, led by the Native Americans, went heavily Whig because Shunk was identified with the Catholic interests. The coalition of nativists and Whigs created a "Waterloo of defeat to the democrats" in the Philadelphia congressional elections. The alliance swept all but the Fourth District—held by Charles J. Ingersoll—in destroying the Democracy. However, across the Commonwealth five more Democrats were added to Congress and the state legislature gained about twenty Jacksonians. Thus in mid-October, Dallas declared that the Whigs had been shaken by their state-wide defeats, and he predicted that Polk would do well in Pennsylvania—except for his demoralized county—emerging with a plurality of 10,000 votes.24

23Dallas to John Willis, August 27, 1840, Dallas MSS, (Lib. Co.), HSP; Pennsylvania Freeman, June 20, 1844; Dallas to Polk, October 8, 16, 1844, Polk MSS, LC. Polk used the Dallas letter of October 8 as a desperate measure to stir Tennessee voters against Clay and abolitionism. This blatantly sectional tactic failed to help him, and Polk lost his home state in the November election. Sellers, Polk, 154-155.

24Dallas to Polk, August 7, 11, September 3, October 8, 9, 10, 11, 16, 1844, Polk MSS, LC.
In the first week of November Americans went to the polls to select a president. Dallas wrote to Polk each day, reflecting his nervousness in fluctuating voting estimates, but also emphasizing unflinching confidence in their eventual triumph. On November 6 Dallas received word that New York City and the state of Virginia had voted Democratic. The overjoyed and optimistic Philadelphian exclaimed, “Are we still to invoke our philosophy to be prepared for defeat? Not a jot of it!”

When the final ballots were tabulated, the Polk-Dallas ticket enjoyed a solid electoral lead (170-105), capturing fifteen states to eleven for the Clay-Freylinghuysen slate, although the Democrats’ popular vote margin was only 37,000 out of 2.7 million votes cast. Democratic strength was prevalent in the West and Southwest, while the Whigs were strong in New England and parts of the old South. Polk’s capture of New York and Pennsylvania was the key to victory. The Keystone decision was as narrow as the national one. Polk’s margin was 6,382 out of a total of 328,000 votes. He lost both Pittsburgh and Philadelphia by sizeable numbers. Party divisions in the rural counties formed no discernible patterns, however, so that it could not be stated that the legendary Jacksonian agrarian elected Polk. Counties that voted for Van Buren in 1836 voted for Polk in 1844, with little deviation. Whig balloting was likewise similar in both elections. Apparently the addition of Dallas to the ticket made little difference in terms of the number of voters who turned out in Pennsylvania, although it is impossible to judge the state and national effects of his views on the tariff and Texas.25

The Whigs were extremely bitter over their defeat in Pennsylvania. The National Intelligencer commented, “These returns clearly indicate, we think, that the state has studied her interests so well as to have given her vote for a man directly and inveterately opposed to them—a species of political wisdom for which Pennsylvania has distinguished herself of former occasions.” The Democrats were, of course, elated and declared that the victory had “settled forever” the questions of a national bank and land distribution and provided

25Dallas to Polk, November 1-6, 1844, ibid.; Niles Register, February 15, 1845; Snyder, Jacksonian Heritage, 222, 225. These pages contain the popular vote totals in Pennsylvania for the presidential elections. In the election of 1844 Polk had 167,245 votes to Clay’s 160,863 in the commonwealth. This was a total and margin of victory similar to the gubernatorial race a month earlier. The voting totals in the presidential race in Pennsylvania showed an increase of approximately 25,000 votes for each party over 1840. The great increase in voter participation occurred in the Van Buren-Harrison election. Washington Globe, November 4, 1844.
a mandate for the United States to “re-annex” Texas and “re-occupy” all of Oregon up to 54°40’. There was no mention of the tariff, the Philadelphia North American, a nativist paper, which was anti-Texas and pro-tariff did not ignore the protection issue. The paper claimed that the state had been “swindled by a cabal of as desperate demagogues as ever clutched the public purse.” The Democracy had lied to the people of the Commonwealth by arguing that a free trader was a protectionist. The editors predicted that soon Pennsylvania and the state Democracy would regret that they had supported the banner of “James K. Polk and the Tariff of 1842.”

George M. Dallas was now vice president-elect of the United States. His ally, Robert John Walker, would soon be made Secretary of the Treasury and his enemy, James Buchanan, Secretary of State. Yet the picture looked bright for the Philadelphian and the reconstructed and rejuvenated Pennsylvania Democracy. As he prepared for his departure from the Quaker City in the winter of 1844-1845, Dallas must have given serious thought to the problems facing him as presiding officer of the Senate and to the future of his party and the nation. The tariff, Oregon, and a restructuring of the Democracy were all problems that the new administration would encounter in the next four years. Polk had pledged himself to one term in office. Thus Dallas’s actions in Washington, and the power he could gain and assert as vice president on state and national leaders, might place him in a prominent position as one of the dominant figures of a new Democracy. This would also route him on a collision course with Buchanan, a course from which the “Sage of Wheatland” would ultimately emerge not only as a leader of the state party, but as President of the United States.

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26National Intelligencer, November 4, 5, 1844; Entry for December 29, 1844, Fisher Diary, 177-178; Harrisburg Democratic Union, November 6, 1844; Philadelphia North American, October 25, November 4, 5, 1844.