

NORTH CAROLINA'S FEDERALISTS IN AN EVOLVING PUBLIC SPHERE, 1790-1810

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ABSTRACT

Frustrated by electoral defeat at the hands of Jefferson and his allies in 1800, North Carolina's Federalists devised a plan in 1802 to send the *Minerva*, a Raleigh newspaper edited by William Boylan, to leading Federalists across the state. These Federalist leaders, including Duncan Cameron, William R. Davie, and Alfred Moore, all prominent politicians and lawyers, believed that the public mind had been corrupted by the newspaper propaganda of the Jeffersonian Republicans. The dissemination of the *Minerva*, however, could restore the public to a deferential position as well as increase their knowledge about the true state of political affairs. Though the newspapers found their way to each judicial district in North Carolina, they failed to transform the public sphere. The editor of the *Minerva*, William Boylan, increased the rancor of his partisan invective throughout 1802 and 1803, even though Federalist electoral success still remained elusive. Boylan also pursued the position of state printer, a job which he and his uncle had held for a number of years, but which had been given to Joseph Gales, an Englishman and Republican editor of the *Raleigh Register*. When Boylan failed to obtain the position of state printer in 1804, he became increasingly bitter toward Gales. When Gales accused Boylan of burning down the press of the *Raleigh Register*, Boylan responded by beating Gales savagely on the streets of Raleigh in 1804. Boylan, humbled in court by a fine in 1805, retreated from his former partisanship as his Federalist comrades abandoned him because of his attack on Gales. The Federalists, therefore, failed in their attempt to control the public sphere because they could not imitate Jeffersonian propaganda without betraying their conceptions of disinterestedness, virtue, and reason.

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To my other teachers—Drs. Berkeley, La Vere, McCarthy, Toplin, and Fain—I can only say that I hope I bear the marks of your teaching in my work. I have profited immensely from both from your example and prodding.

To the archivists and support staffs at the Southern Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, at the Perkins Library of Duke University, and the North Carolina State Archives in Raleigh, I owe thanks for assistance in bringing box after box of manuscripts.

To Carole Sutton, my colleague in the school system, what would have I done without the benefit of your indefatigable editing?

Finally, I owe much to those North Carolina historians who have preceded me. Through both their insights and mistakes they have illuminated my path.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my parents, DL and Virginia Owen, for giving me an appreciation of my North Carolina heritage, to my wife, Melissa King-Owen, who has endured my fascination with the Federalists with uncommon grace, and, most importantly, to Dr. Milton Ready—my undergraduate mentor at UNC-Asheville—who encouraged me as a young scholar to find my own metaphors, analogies, and alternate hypotheses to explain the past.

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INTRODUCTION

“Federalism begins to look up. Very true, being now on its back, it can look no other way.”¹

The Federalists of North Carolina endured during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as a beleaguered minority. They managed to achieve the adoption of the federal Constitution in North Carolina only after a second ratification convention, and, thereafter, maintained an ephemeral influence in state and national political offices. Descended from the conservatives who had wanted to rein in the excesses of the Revolution that raged from 1776 to 1781, these friends of authority, order, and stability attempted to lead a state whose democratic tendencies posed a serious challenge to eighteenth-century notions of deference to the aristocratic elite of society. The North Carolina Federalists, as self-proclaimed men of virtue, learning, and talent, suffered constant rejection at the ballot box during the early days of the American republic.

Electoral failure led to an especially bitter partisan spirit in the days after the election of Thomas Jefferson as President in 1801. William R. Davie, North Carolina’s arch-Federalist, delegate to the Constitutional Convention, former governor, and ambassador to France during the Quasi-War crisis of 1798-1799, predicted in 1802 to John Steele, the Salisbury merchant and Comptroller of the United States Treasury, that “we shall never see one clear day.”² For Davie, Steele, and the other Federalists in the state, the storm clouds had indeed cast their dark shadows over the future of good and orderly government in the United States. Seeking to explain the disastrous election of 1800, many Federalists concluded that Republican newspaper editors had captured the public mind with their insidious propaganda. The proliferation of Republican

¹ Quoted in James Broussard, *The Southern Federalists* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978), 80.

² J.G. de Roullac Hamilton and Kemp P. Battle, eds., “William Richardson Davie: A Memoir,” *James Sprunt Historical Monograph* 7 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1907), 49.

newspapers had filled the public sphere with misinformation designed to discredit the friends of government. Duncan Cameron, a Federalist lawyer in Hillsboro, in 1802 indicted the Republican newspaper editor William Duane, editor of the Philadelphia *Aurora*, as a primary culprit: “the political opinion of a great portion of our citizens seems to me to grow out of hatred and party principles they are in the habit of reading and I am strengthened in this belief from an assurance that Duane published and sent into all part of the United States many papers that never were subscribed for.”³

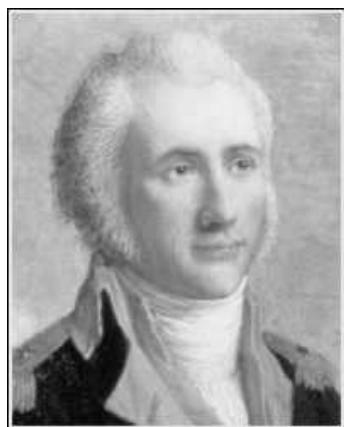
The election of 1800, therefore, galvanized Federalist intent to reverse Jeffersonian democracy. The intensively partisan nature of the election and its aftermath, which Federalists viewed in almost apocalyptic terms, portended the end of the revised republican experiment launched at the Constitutional Convention in 1787.⁴ William R. Davie wrote to John Steele in 1801 that “the Federalists own the destruction of the Constitution as an event certain under the administration of Mr. Jefferson.”⁵ John Cameron, brother of Duncan Cameron, noted in the summer of 1800 that the “people seem bent on their own Destruction, which, may the Supreme Governour of the Universe avert—by frustrating the Machiavellian & diabolical schemes of those Evil-designing men & Jacobinical infidels by whom the Profanus Vulgus are, at present, led astray!”⁶ The people, by this account, did not possess the requisite virtue to distinguish truth from lies as printed in Republican newspapers. Only those eighteenth-century gentlemen

³ Duncan Cameron to John Moore, 1802, John Moore Papers, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University.

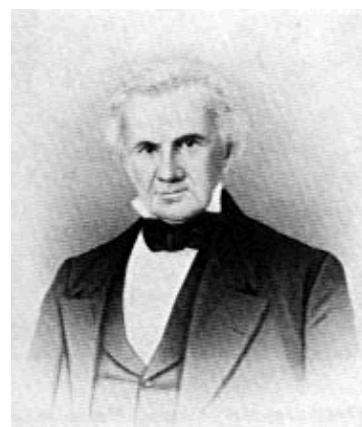
⁴ For the apocalypticism of the Federalists, see Michael A. Bellesiles, “The Soil Will Be Soaked with Blood: Taking the Revolution of 1800 Seriously,” in *The Revolution of 1800*, ed. James Horn, Jan Ellen Lewis, and Peter S. Onuf (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2002), 59-86, and Joanne B. Freeman, “Corruption and Compromise in the Election of 1800: The Process of Politics on the National Stage,” in *The Revolution of 1800*, ed. James Horn, Jan Ellen Lewis, and Peter S. Onuf (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2002), 87-120.

⁵ Hamilton and Battle, “William Richardson Davie: A Memoir,” 43.

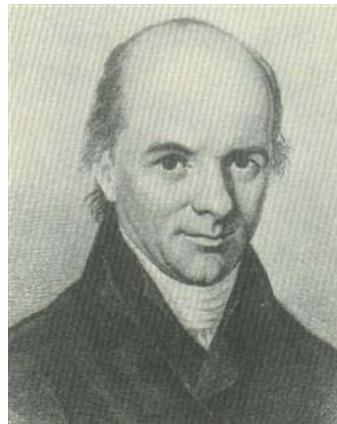
⁶ John Cameron to Duncan Cameron, June 12, 1800, Cameron Family Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina Chapel Hill (SHC).



a.



b.



c.



d.



e.



f.

Figure 1: Prominent North Carolina Federalists. a.) William R. Davie b.) Duncan Cameron c.)

Alfred Moore d.) Samuel Johnston e.) William Boylan f.) John Steele

pursuing a civic life in which they subordinated their private interests for the public good displayed virtue.⁷ The common people could only emulate these gentlemen through enlightenment. Otherwise, they were helpless against the beguiling yet insidious falsehoods that North Carolina Federalists believed emanated from the pens of William Duane and James Callender, a scoundrel who desecrated the names of both Washington and Adams in his pamphlet *The Prospect Before Us*. Republican print propaganda consequently threatened to undermine the stability of the republic by soiling the public mind.⁸

If Republican print propaganda bore the onus for leading the public astray, Federalists in North Carolina came to believe that their own newspaper machinery could undo the damage. William R. Davie induced Charles W. Harris, mathematics tutor at the University of North Carolina, to address Duncan Cameron in 1801 with a plan that would “do away with those misrepresentations which have been circulated with inconceivable industry and received with too much credulity.” Harris requested that Cameron furnish names of “firm federalists, men of influence” with whom a state-wide correspondence could be constructed, much as the revolutionaries of 1776 did with the committees of correspondence.⁹ This epistolary phalanx could gather and share vital information which might allow the Federalists to outflank the Republicans. Creating an informed Federalist elite became the first step towards creating an informed citizenry, and North Carolina’s leaders found support for their plans in a national movement aimed to roll back the Jeffersonian revolution. Alexander Hamilton called for a meeting of leading Federalists in 1802 in conjunction with a meeting of the Society of

⁷ Ruth H. Bloch, “The Gendered Meanings of Virtue in Revolutionary America,” *Signs* 13 (Autumn 1987), 37-58; Andrew S. Trees, *The Founding Fathers and the Politics of Character* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 78, 86-94.

⁸ For an overview of Republican print propaganda, see Jeffrey L. Pasley, “*The Tyranny of Printers*”: *Newspaper Politics in the Early American Republic* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2001).

⁹ Charles W. Harris to Duncan Cameron, January 9, 1801, Cameron Family Papers.

Cincinnati, a group that furnished many Federalists because of its connection with George Washington and military men of the Revolution. Hamilton invited William R. Davie to participate in creating a plan that would remove from “among us *incorrect men with very incorrect views*; which may lead to *combinations and projects* injurious to us as a party, and very detrimental to the Country.” William R. Davie left no record of his attendance, and Hamilton’s meeting failed to produce concerted action on a national scale.¹⁰

Even though a national plan for action did not emerge in 1802, North Carolina’s Federalists wasted no time in furthering their aims for a properly informed citizenry. In August of that year, probably while the Superior Court met, leading Federalists gathered at Hillsboro to work out the details of how they would curb the excesses of ignorance resulting from Jeffersonian democracy. If Republican newspapers spread the pestilence of ignorance, then Federalist newspapers might provide inoculation. Duncan Cameron and others proposed to raise a subscription in each of the state’s judicial districts to purchase ten newspapers for each county in the district. Cameron explained the need for the plan in a letter to Colonel John Moore, a leading Federalist in western North Carolina:

The political opinion of a great portion of our citizens seem to me to grow out of hatred and party principles. They are in the habit of reading, and I am strengthened in this belief from assurance that Duane published and disseminated into all parts of the United States many hundred papers that never were subscribed for, and that Gales from the first year at this place pursued the same measure. If these suggestions be true, it would seem to be the duty of the federalists to pursue the same means to promote their views.¹¹

Cameron worked out a plan with William Boylan, editor of the *Minerva*, a firmly Federalist newspaper published in Raleigh, to distribute nearly six hundred papers weekly at \$1.25 each.

¹⁰ Harold C. Syrett, ed., *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, 27 vols. to date (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961-), 25:562-563; David Hackett Fischer, *The Revolution of American Conservatism: The Federalist Party in the Era of Jeffersonian Democracy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 84.

¹¹ Duncan Cameron to John Moore, 1802, John Moore Papers.

Several leading Federalists in the judicial districts received letters encouraging their participation and asking them to oversee the efforts: William Boylan for New Bern, William B. Grove for Fayetteville, Colonel John Ashe for Wilmington, Colonel John Moore for Morgan, Archibald Henderson for Salisbury, Duncan Cameron for Hillsboro, William R. Davie for Halifax, and a yet unnamed person for Edenton.¹²

Cameron hoped for Moore's cooperation in "executing a plan which has for its end the noble objects of suppressing falsehood and disseminating truth, of subverting the wild and visionary projects and opinions of Democracy and advocating in their place sound, substantial, practical principles of Federalism."¹³ Unfortunately, no records exist to reveal either Moore's or any of the other gentlemen's replies. Only a few references to this plan exist in scattered and cryptic correspondence between Duncan Cameron and William Boylan. Undoubtedly, this correspondence required secrecy, as Duncan Cameron himself realized when he warned Colonel Moore that "it may be dangerous and tend to defeat the plan if a knowledge of it became common," and, therefore, it should be revealed only to "such characters as you may know or believe to be confidential." Since the Federalists had long attacked the secret cabals and causes of the Republicans, and President Washington himself had denounced voluntary associations like the Democratic-Republican societies as dangerous to the public good, Duncan Cameron likely knew that the Federalists would be charged with hypocrisy if the plan became public knowledge.¹⁴

¹² Duncan Cameron to John Moore, 1802, John Moore Papers. Nathaniel Macon discovered the plot in 1805 and obtained a complete copy of Cameron's letter. See Nathan Alexander to Nathaniel Macon, February 14, 1805 in William E. Dodd, ed., "Nathaniel Macon Correspondence," *John P. Branch Historical Papers of Randolph-Macon College* 3 (June 1909), 36-38.

¹³ Duncan Cameron to John Moore, 1802, John Moore Papers.

¹⁴ Duncan Cameron to John Moore, 1802, John Moore Papers. For discussions of Federalist ideas about self-created societies and cabals, see Stanley Elkins and Eric McKittrick, *The Age of Federalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 451-461 and John L. Brooke, "Ancient Lodges and Self-Created Societies: Voluntary

The lack of extant documentary evidence about this plan has made it difficult to evaluate Federalist aspirations and successes. Only William Boylan's editorials in the *Minerva* remain for scholars to examine, and how much his editorial decisions were influenced by the counsels of Federalist leaders such as William R. Davie, John Steele, and Duncan Cameron may never be known. This documentary difficulty likely proved discouraging for most early scholars of North Carolina politics who have mentioned, but have not analyzed, this 'newspaper plan' in depth. More recent conceptualizations of the scope of political history have allowed scholars to examine such aspects of the social history of the early republic in ways that were not possible a century ago when scholars first noted Cameron's and Boylan's plan for creating an informed citizenry through newspapers.

The traditional foci of political history—laws, lawmakers, party politics, and bargains wrangled from political opponents—have given way in recent years to discussions about political economy as well as developing theories about political society. Because the Federalists have long been associated with the establishment of a strong central government, precedent-setting leadership in the Presidency, but also with failure as a political party, historians have largely ignored the broader social, cultural, and economic terms that informed Federalist policies and politics. Much of the literature on the Federalists has, consequently, been characterized by a filiopietistic tone that narrowly focuses on leadership. This has led to lost opportunities for exploring the relationship between the masses of society and their leaders within the context of political culture as well as the development of the early republic's political culture in the context of its political ideology.

Association and the Public Sphere in the Early Republic," in *Launching the "Extended Republic": The Federalist Era*, ed. Ronald Hoffman and Peter J. Albert (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1996), 301-305.

Scholarship on Federalists in North Carolina has existed in two distinct realms. Those historians who have studied the Federalists nationally have been more welcoming of new conceptualizations of political history while those historians who have written solely on North Carolina have tended to reinforce in a whiggish view of the past “flawed only by its unexamined assumptions about the nature of social change and the malleability of human nature.”¹⁵ Rarely have the two realms intersected, explaining why no original analysis of the Federalists in North Carolina has appeared in the last thirty years. Scholars working from a national perspective have included North Carolina’s Federalist leadership in their discussions, but in their analyses southern Federalists often play minor political roles compared the New England giants of Federalism. Both streams of scholarship have, as a result, failed to illuminate just who Federalists of North Carolina were and in what they believed. Neither stream has reexamined the newspaper plot hatched by Cameron and others in the light of contemporary analyses of the early republic’s political culture. What this newspaper plan has to say about the Federalists as an organized—or disorganized—group in North Carolina has the potential to reveal why they failed to achieve the positions of leadership they wanted so badly. While it also reveals more about why the Federalists floundered in the emerging, democratically-oriented mass politics of the early republic, it also illuminates why that political culture was successful.

The first scholar to uncover the outlines of the newspaper plan was William E. Dodd, biographer of Nathaniel Macon, North Carolina’s arch-Republican (though he had quite an independent temperament) Representative, and later Senator, for nearly forty years. Dodd’s *The Life of Nathaniel Macon* (1903) only mentioned that Macon had uncovered evidence of the plan

¹⁵ Robert M. Calhoon, “A Troubled Culture: North Carolina in the New Nation, 1790-1834,” in *Writing North Carolina History*, ed. Jeffrey J. Crow and Larry E. Tise (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979), 80.

in 1805 but did not attempt a sustained analysis of Federalist motives.¹⁶ In 1910 Henry M. Wagstaff provided the first sustained analysis of the Federalists in North Carolina in his “Federalism in North Carolina” but only mentioned that William R. Davie had opened correspondence in 1801 with leading Federalists to establish the *Minerva* as the official party newspaper and to collect subscriptions to support it.¹⁷ William K. Boyd’s *History of North Carolina: The Federal Period*, published in 1919, failed to mention the newspaper plan though Boyd did argue that the partisan press in North Carolina originated with the editorial war conducted by William Boylan in the *Minerva* and his republican rival, Joseph Gales, publisher of the *Raleigh Register*.¹⁸ Samuel A’Court Ashe’s *History of North Carolina*, completed in 1925, incorrectly noted that William Boylan moved the *Minerva* from Fayetteville explicitly to counteract the republican press of Joseph Gales. William Boylan had begun publishing in Raleigh prior to Joseph Gales’ arrival. Ashe, however, indicated his familiarity with Dodd’s work when wrote that William R. Davie and John Steele had set up correspondence with leading Federalists to furnish subscriptions for *The Minerva* in order to counteract the specter of Jeffersonian democracy. Unfortunately, both Wagstaff and Ashe mangled some of the details. It appears that the central figure in the correspondence was Duncan Cameron, not William R. Davie, and the plan to support *The Minerva* arose in 1802, not 1801.¹⁹

The confusion created by these early scholars appeared in later works of synthesis. R.D.W. Connor’s *North Carolina: Rebuilding an Ancient Commonwealth*, published in 1929, did not discuss the correspondence or subscription plans but repeated the incorrect assertion that

¹⁶ William F. Dodd, *The Life of Nathaniel Macon* (Raleigh: Edwards and Broughton, 1903), 178-179.

¹⁷ Henry M. Wagstaff, “Federalism in North Carolina,” *James Sprunt Historical Publications* 9 (1910), 38.

¹⁸ William K. Boyd, *History of North Carolina: The Federal Period, 1783-1860* (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Company, 1919), 47-51.

¹⁹ Samuel A’Court Ashe, *History of North Carolina*, 2 vols. (Spartanburg, S.C.: The Reprint Company, 1971 [originals 1908, 1925]), 2:177, 181.

William Boylan moved to Raleigh in 1802 to counteract Joseph Gales and his *Raleigh Register*.²⁰

While Hugh T. Lefler's *History of North Carolina* (1956) did not analyze the Federalist newspaper plan, it did make much of Joseph Gales' *Raleigh Register* as a leading cause of the decline of the Federalists, a point repeated in his later work, *North Carolina: The History of a Southern State*, coauthored with Albert Ray Newsome.²¹ William S. Powell's *North Carolina Through Four Centuries*, published in 1989, recapitulated Lefler's analysis of the influence of Joseph Gales on North Carolina politics and included the erroneous contention that Federalists brought William Boylan from Fayetteville to Raleigh to counteract Gales.²² Neither Gales nor Boylan can be found in Milton Ready's *The Tar Heel State*, published in 2005. Indeed, for Ready and most historians of North Carolina, the Federalists never had a chance in a state where Jeffersonian sentiments prevailed even before they were known as Jeffersonian. Such a focus on Jeffersonian republicanism has obscured the activities of the Federalists, minimized their importance in the state's political history, and obscured the development of the state's early political culture.²³

Although general and interpretive histories of North Carolina have been of little use in understanding the Federalist plan to enlighten the state's citizens through the use of *The Minerva*, Delbert Gilpatrick's 1931 *Jeffersonian Democracy in North Carolina, 1789-1816* (1931) made the most of available information to interpret William Boylan's activities with the Federalists. Though limited by the progressive and somewhat Turnerian cast of the questions it

²⁰ R.D.W. Connor, *North Carolina: Rebuilding an Ancient Commonwealth*, 4 vols. (Chicago: The American Historical Society, 1929), 1:432.

²¹ Hugh T. Lefler, *History of North Carolina*, 4 vols. (New York: Lewis Publishing Company, 1956), 1:283-284; Hugh T. Lefler and Albert Ray Newsome, *North Carolina: The History of a Southern State* 3d ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1973), 297.

²² William S. Powell, *North Carolina Through Four Centuries* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 235.

²³ Milton Ready, *The Tar Heel State: A History of North Carolina* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2005), 143-161.

asked, *Jeffersonian Democracy in North Carolina* firmly grounded its reading of the Federalists in newspaper and archival sources. Gilpatrick appeared not to have known about the scheme worked out by Duncan Cameron and others to send the *Minerva* throughout the state, but he did analyze the growing partisan rancor between Joseph Gales and William Boylan which culminated in Boylan's famous attack on Gales. Because Gilpatrick's conception of North Carolina's history focused on the state's Jeffersonianism, his Federalists met defeat at every turn and gave way to triumphant democracy. His account, therefore, was factually accurate but shed little light on the interplay between Federalism and the broader political culture.²⁴

While state-oriented histories have remained whiggish and progressive, scholars working at the national level have been more likely to recognize Federalism in broader social, economic, and cultural terms. One of the first of these histories to consider the Federalists in broader social terms was David Hackett Fischer's *The Revolution of American Conservatism* which analyzed Federalist attempts to adopt the party propaganda of the Jeffersonians in a bid to become more competitive. A generational divide characterized their efforts since older Federalists abhorred the idea of copying the democratic style of the Jeffersonians while younger Federalists adopted modern campaigning techniques and organizational structures designed to help them win elections in the early republic. Fischer knew of Duncan Cameron's letters to Federalists encouraging the adoption of the *Minerva* and argued that the newspaper plan was a conscious imitation of Jeffersonian political strategy. Nonetheless, because Fischer saw the young Federalists as imitators of the Jeffersonians, he evaluated Federalists through a Jeffersonian lens

²⁴ Delbert H. Gilpatrick, *Jeffersonian Democracy in North Carolina, 1789-1816* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931), 104-106, 136-140.

that not only distorted their intentions but also obscured the limits of their use of democratically-oriented political techniques.²⁵

The underlying theme of organization characterized not only Fischer's work but also Lisle Rose's *Prologue to Democracy: The Federalists in the South, 1789-1800* (1968) and James Broussard's *The Southern Federalists* (1978). As Broussard wrote, "the Southern Federalists' greatest failing as politicians was their inability to develop a party organization after 1800." Broussard, however, was aware of the informal networks established by North Carolina Federalists and briefly discussed the plan to distribute copies of the *Minerva* throughout the state. In his discussion of the southern Federalist press, he made much of North Carolina's partisan debate between Gales and Boylan, calling it "the most vigorous battle over printing" in the South. Yet, Broussard's obsession with organization, with analysis of roll-call votes, and the traditional subjects of political history kept him from analyzing Federalist intentions in promoting the *Minerva*. Even his chapters on the Federalists' interests in education, banking, and the economy are separated from the rest of the traditional politically-focused narrative, in effect denying their importance in the political context in which they happened.²⁶

The traditional political focus of works on the Federalists, such as Stanley Elkin's and Eric McKittrick's *The Age of Federalism*, has given way to works intent on examining the social and cultural world of the Federalists. Everyday acts, clothing, and even foodstuffs have become tools of analysis for scholars who eschew the "Founder's chic," the idolization of the great statesmen who shaped the American republic.²⁷ A more recent tool especially useful for

²⁵ Fischer, *Revolution of American Conservatism*, xviii, xix, 69-70, 138, 392-393.

²⁶ Lisle A. Rose, *Prologue to Democracy: The Federalists in the South, 1789-1800* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1968), xi-xvii, 48-51, 12, 139, 143, 205, 238, 246; James Broussard, *Southern Federalists*, 257, 268, 281-285, quote on page 287.

²⁷ Stanley Elkins and Eric McKittrick, *Age of Federalism*; for a criticism of Elkins and McKittrick see Jeffrey L. Pasley, Andrew W. Robertson, and David Waldstreicher, "Introduction: Beyond the Founders," in *Beyond the Founders: New Approaches to the Political History of the Early American Republic*, Jeffrey L. Pasley,

analyzing newspapers has been the concept of the public sphere, first propounded by Jurgen Habermas in his *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. The realm of public discourse had been fundamentally altered by the democratization of print, Habermas argued, leading to a bourgeois public sphere which mediated between the world of government and the private world of individuals. The nature of this public sphere has shifted in various historical settings. In the consensual model of public sphere, elites maintained control over public opinion by limiting the free expression of ideas or by coercing the publication of acceptable ideas, thus creating a consensus of opinion. These elites, by their enlightened abilities and virtue, possessed the character necessary for shaping acceptable public opinion and expected that the masses would defer to their elite leadership. The oppositional public sphere operated from the premise that the realm of public discourse should operate like a market where intellectual ideas could be freely exchanged by willing buyers and sellers. No outside interference should prevent the sale of intellectual commodities or attempt to force certain unacceptable ideas out of competition. The oppositional public sphere accepts the proposition that truth will emerge from conflicting ideas because rational people will put stock only in those ideas which accord with their interest and common sense.²⁸

Habermas' concepts have been useful for analyzing the public sphere in the early republic as well as the ways in which newspapers and politicians attempted to shape public opinion. As Richard Buel, Jr. has argued in *Securing the Revolution*, "public opinion was the

Andrew W. Robertson, and David Waldstreicher, eds. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 1-2, 8-9. For a rebuttal to the notion of a "founder's chic," see the review by Trevor Burnard, "The Founding Fathers in Early American Historiography: A View from Abroad," *William and Mary Quarterly* 62 (October 2005), 745-764.

²⁸ Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, translated by Thomas Berger (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991); Habermas's ideas have been applied by a few historians of the early republic. See John L. Brooke, "Consent, Civil Society, and the Public Sphere in the Age of Revolution and the Early American Republic," in *Beyond the Founders: New Approaches to the Political History of the Early American Republic*, Jeffrey L. Pasley, Andrew W. Robertson, and David Waldstreicher, eds. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 207-250. See also Michael Warner, *Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth Century America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990).

single most important ingredient in the politics of the first party system.”²⁹ Notwithstanding some allowance for Buel’s hyperbole, public opinion did matter and politicians frequently fretted over the state of the public mind. The founders’ pursuit of the public support helped to institutionalize the first party system and to bring about what Richard Hofstadter has referred to as the rise of a legitimate opposition.³⁰ At the same time, scholars such as Ronald Formisano and John Hoadley have pointed out that the idea of a party system did not find favor among the founders. The Federalists, in particular, remained wedded to an older conception of politics that eschewed institutionalized parties. The Jeffersonian Republicans, themselves heir to the same anti-party bias, only haltingly moved toward formal party structures.³¹ Not even all of them agreed on the utility of such a system. To speak of party and the shaping of public opinion, moreover, requires caution when considering the Federalist case. Even as the Federalists in North Carolina began to experiment with elements of party organization, they found it at odds with the quality of disinterestedness that they expected of eighteenth century gentlemen.

Paradigmatic shifts in Federalist scholarship over the last thirty years have made it possible to conceive of the Federalists intellectually, socially, religiously, and culturally as well as politically. It is now possible to pursue a more nuanced and culturally aware investigation of why North Carolina Federalists believed it necessary to spread issues of the *Minerva* across the state, what they expected to gain from doing so, and why their efforts did not win them the deference and allegiance of the electorate. Such an investigation can aid in reassessing why the Federalists in North Carolina eventually expired as a potent political force and why the changing

²⁹ Richard Buel, Jr., *Securing the Revolution: Ideology in American Politics, 1789-1815* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972), x.

³⁰ Richard Hofstadter, *The Idea of a Party System: The Rise of Legitimate Opposition in the United States, 1780-1840* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969).

³¹ Ronald P. Formisano, “Deferential-Participant Politics: The Early Republic’s Political Culture, 1789-1840,” *American Political Science Review*, 68 (June 1974): 478; John F. Hoadley, “The Emergence of Political Parties in Congress, 1789-1803,” *American Political Science Review*, 74 (September 1980): 758.

political culture of the state embraced Republicanism. Whether their demise sprung from organizational, strategic, or ideological failings, the strategy of using the *Minerva* to create an enlightened citizenry says much about North Carolina Federalists and why their efforts were in vain in the emerging democratic political culture of the early republic.

CHAPTER 1 – NORTH CAROLINA AND ITS FEDERALIST LEADERSHIP

*“North Carolina is at present in the most dangerous state. The lawyers all tories, the people substantially republican, but uninformed and deceived by the lawyers, who are elected of necessity because few other candidates.” Thomas Jefferson, April 1800*³²

North Carolina’s Federalists aimed to rule over a rural domain in 1800. Though Federalists were concentrated in the state’s urban centers—towns like Newbern, Wilmington, Salisbury, Fayetteville, Hillsboro, and Raleigh—the vast majority of the state’s population resided in the countryside. Even though most Federalists appreciated urban life, they aspired to the life of leisured property owners, as patriarchs and masters of plantation homes where they dabbled in the delights of life befitting their exalted status. North Carolina’s geography and economy agreed with their pursuits as the state seemed particularly destined to be an agrarian freeholder’s paradise.³³

Agriculture and commerce in North Carolina at the dawn of the nineteenth century did not explode with the promise of phenomenal capitalist growth. The state’s principal urban areas in the eastern coastal plain saw brisk trade in naval stores, lumber, tobacco, wheat, flaxseed, cotton, and rice. Wilmington, as the only viable port with a direct Atlantic connection, ranked thirteenth nationally for exports while New Bern and Edenton exported only half as much as the port city. The town of Washington on the Pamlico River was home to the trading headquarters of the Blount family while Fayetteville, in the interior on the Cape Fear River, had become an essential stop for goods on their way to the coast. Many of the state’s goods actually departed via Virginia and South Carolina, leading to incessant calls for

³² Paul L. Ford, ed., *The Works of Thomas Jefferson*, 12 vols. (New York: G.P. Putnam and Sons, 1904-1905), 7:400.

³³ Broussard, *Southern Federalists*, 378, 380, 392; Boyd, *History of North Carolina*, 83-85.

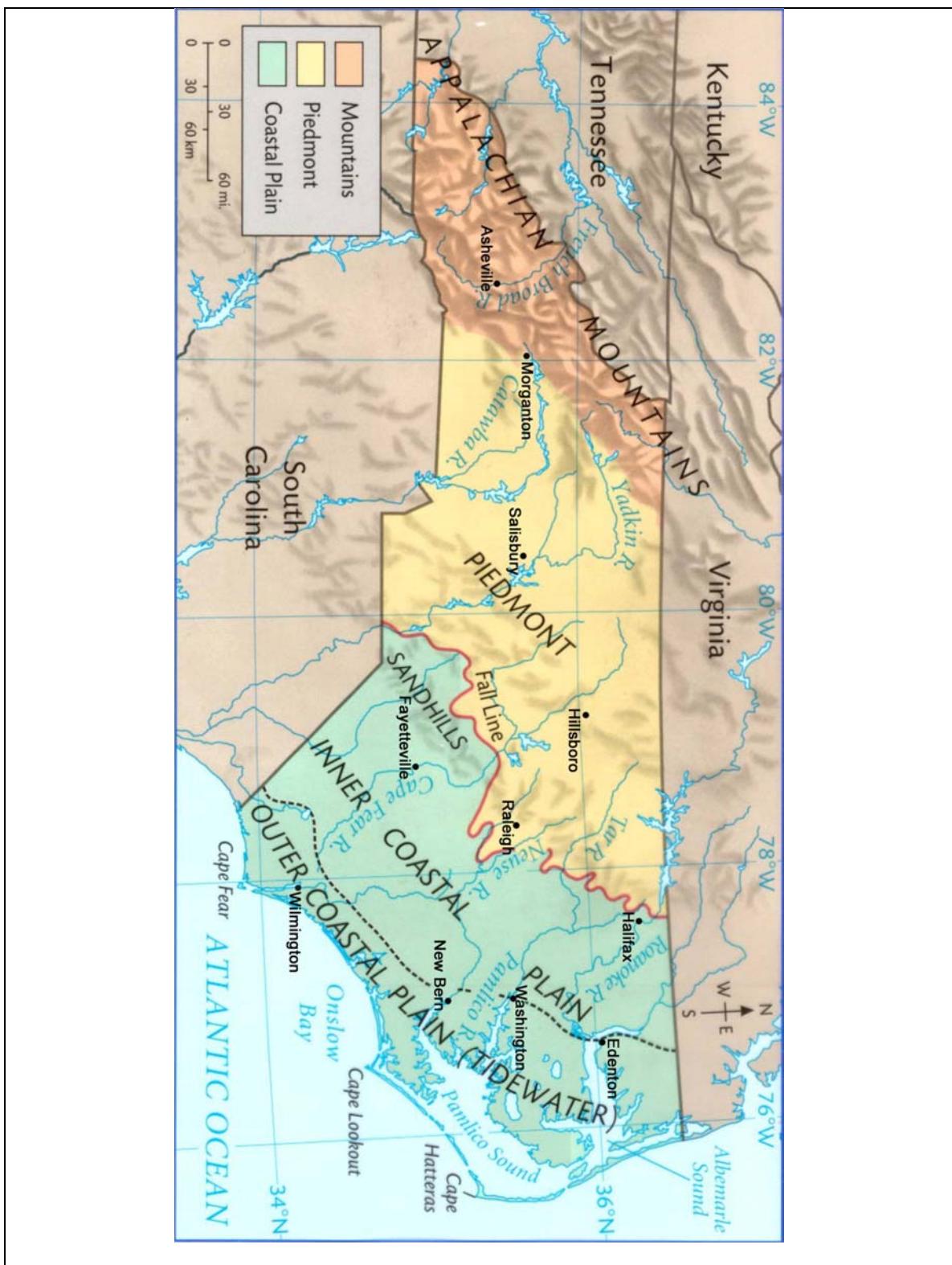


Figure 2. North Carolina's Geography and Principal Urban Areas in 1800

the improvement of the state's navigation in the nineteenth century to prevent such a loss of trade. North Carolina remained constantly jealous of her northern and southern sisters.³⁴

The volume of exports in 1800 reached nearly \$770,000, but a commentator from Salisbury noted in 1802 that "North Carolina has not much foreign trade. Her ports are not favorable to it."³⁵ Many, therefore, recommended, as did the author of "Reflections on the Capacities of Internal Improvements of the State of North Carolina," that the state press for development of its own internal manufactures as well as education through "county and district libraries" for the development of such industries.³⁶ The General Assembly, in a bid to spur domestic cotton production, actually signed a contract with Eli Whitney in 1802 to hold the rights for using his cotton gin.³⁷ Other citizens thought the best way to make money was through land speculation. The state owned thousands of acres, and just about every eighteenth-century North Carolinian with some means bought and sold land in hopes of making a fortune. For John Gray Blount, a merchant on the Tar River, land speculation was his "Hobby-Horse," though it brought him and other "land-jobbers" opprobrium from yeomen farmers who despised speculators who bought land at low prices but sold them for a fortune.³⁸

Land speculation featured properties from each of the three geographical sections of the state: the mountains (including Tennessee), the piedmont, and the east. These three regions, with enormous jealousy, guarded their interests in state politics with a watchful eye. On occasion, a coalition of western and eastern interests threatened to trump the prerogatives of the

³⁴ Leonard L. Richards, "John Adams and the Moderate Federalists: The Cape Fear Valley as a Test Case," *North Carolina Historical Review* 43 (January 1966), 15, 16; Alice B. Keith, "Three North Carolina Blount Brothers in Business and Politics, 1783-1812" (Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1940).

³⁵ William H. Hoyt, *The Papers of Archibald D. Murphey*, 2 vols. (Raleigh: E.M. Uzzell and Company, 1914), 2:156; quote from the *Minerva* (Raleigh), July 27, 1802.

³⁶ *Minerva*, August 31, 1802.

³⁷ *Minerva*, December 28, 1802; *Raleigh Register*, January 4, 1803.

³⁸ Boyd, *History of North Carolina*, 87-88; Alice B. Keith, William H. Masterson, and David T. Morgan, eds., *The Papers of John Gray Blount*, 4 vols. (Raleigh: Department of Archives and History, 1959-1982), 2:74, 342, 650.

piedmont, but sectional suspicion was not easily overcome. Geographic differences played a key role in this suspicion.³⁹ The least wealthy section was the most sparsely populated: the mountains. Settled largely during and after the chaos of the Revolutionary War, the mountains in 1800 had a population of just over thirty-six thousand residents, of which ninety percent were whites.⁴⁰ They owned about two percent of the state's slaves. Mountainous western settlers still ran into conflict with the Cherokees during the 1790s, a testament to the raw and unsettled conditions of the frontier they hoped to conquer.⁴¹

The eastern region, composed of coastal and coastal plain counties, and possessing a majority in the General Assembly because the state Constitution awarded representation by counties rather than population, held forty-six percent of the state's population in 1800.⁴² Easterners owned some sixty-two percent of the state's slaves, who toiled away on eastern plantations, slogged through the forests of the Great Dismal Swamp, and worked on the docks in the port towns. A good number of Federalists came from this section of the state, including William R. Davie and William Barry Grove. The towns of this area—Wilmington, Newbern, Fayetteville, Halifax, Edenton, and Washington—dominated the cultural life of North Carolina, with greater access to the newspapers, books, literary institutions, and societies that characterized urban life. The most staunchly Federalist region in the state—the upper Cape Fear River region

³⁹ Keith, et. al., *The Papers of John Gray Blount*, 2:146; H.M. Wagstaff, ed., *The Papers of John Steele*, 2 vols. (Raleigh: Edwards and Broughton, 1924), 1:84-85; Joseph McDowell to William Lenoir, December 10, 1792, William Lenoir Papers, SHC; Boyd, *History of North Carolina*, 84-87.

⁴⁰ United States, *Return of the Whole Number of Persons Within Several Districts of the United States: Second Census* (New York: Arno Press, 1976); in the direct tax of 1801, each western county paid an average of \$1745.70 in land taxes, whereas the piedmont and the east paid nearly twice as much. See the tax schedules reprinted in the *Minerva*, September 15, 1801.

⁴¹ Keith, et. al., *The Papers of John Gray Blount*, 2:212; David Vance to Richard D. Spaight, November 22, 1793, Governor's Letter Books, North Carolina Department of Archives and History (NCDAH); David Vance to Richard D. Spaight, July 2, 1794, Governor's Letter Books, NCDAH; Norman K. Risjord, *Chesapeake Politics, 1781-1800* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), 68.

⁴² This circumstance resulted from the provisions of the N.C. Constitution of 1776, and became part of the sectional conflict between the more rapidly growing west and the declining east. See Thomas E. Jeffrey, "County Division: A Forgotten Issue in Antebellum North Carolina Politics," 65 (July 1988), 314-354; U.S., *Second Census of the United States*, 1800.

around Fayetteville—returned William Barry Grove to Congress as representative consistently from 1792 to 1802. One scholar has noted the Scottish heritage of the region, tinged with Toryism, provided the cultural basis for the identification of the region's farmers with the Federalist program. Some of the other towns in the area, however, especially the urban areas with a burgeoning class of men of middling property, identified with Republicans.⁴³

The fastest growing region of the state, the piedmont, composed of counties from the fall line westward, held forty-six percent of the state's population, outnumbering the coast by a little over twelve hundred people in 1800. Piedmont planters owned about thirty-five percent of the state's slaves.⁴⁴ Because of the growth of the area, the direct tax on land, houses, and slaves in 1801 revealed the average taxed value of land per county to be nearly \$1,000 more than the coast.⁴⁵ The capital of the state, the fledgling city of Raleigh, located in what seemed to many to be a barren backwoods in 1792, had by 1800 become a town with two newspapers, a few stores, Peter Casso's inn, the Capitol building, and a motley assortment of houses. The piedmont was also home to the towns of Salisbury and Hillsboro, the residences of John Steele and Duncan Cameron, respectively.⁴⁶

It is important to remember that the men who referred to themselves as Federalists displayed as much variety as the regions in which they lived. In a sample of twenty-nine Federalists, a great majority served in local, state, and federal governments.⁴⁷ Most had attended a university, received private education at home, or attended some local academy. The oldest of them had been born in 1733; the youngest, in 1788. The average age of these Federalists in 1800

⁴³ Broussard, *Southern Federalists*, 371, 378, 392; Richards, "John Adams and the Moderate Federalists," 14-18; Risjord, *Chesapeake Politics*, 52-63.

⁴⁴ United States, *Second Census*.

⁴⁵ *Minerva*, September 15, 1801.

⁴⁶ James Vickers, *Raleigh: City of Oaks* (Sun Valley, C.A.: American Historical Press, 1997), 15-23; Risjord, *Chesapeake Politics*, 63-68.

⁴⁷ The sample is based largely on Fischer, *Revolution of American Conservatism*, 387-397.

was thirty-six.⁴⁸ Conforming somewhat to the thesis posited by David Hackett Fischer, North Carolina's Federalists fell into two generational groups.⁴⁹ A significant cluster of older Federalists, born in the 1760s or earlier, included such men as William R. Davie, Abraham Hodge, Samuel Johnston, William Polk, John Steele, and William Barry Grove. Nearly forty percent were born in the 1770s and included such leaders as William Boylan, Duncan Cameron, William Gaston, and Charles W. Harris. The younger men dominated the coterie who hoped to use the newspaper plan to enlighten the state's citizens, though some older leaders, such as William R. Davie, were active participants.⁵⁰

Probably the most prominent of these men was William R. Davie, considered by his peers to be the most effective Federalist leader.⁵¹ Educated at Princeton, Davie had an illustrious career in North Carolina until he departed the state in 1805. He served in the House of Commons, was a delegate to the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia, helped shepherd the ratification of the U.S. Constitution in North Carolina, served as governor, sponsored the bill to establish the University of North Carolina, and helped to negotiate the treaty which ended the crisis with France in 1800. Though he owned lands around the state and in South Carolina, he resided in Halifax, where he married a niece of the Republican politician Willie Jones. His leadership was the reason that others looked to him to organize a correspondence to counter the Republicans in the state after 1800.⁵²

⁴⁸ See Table 1; Broussard, *Southern Federalists*, 389.

⁴⁹ Fischer, *Revolution of American Conservatism*, xviii.

⁵⁰ See Table 1; Broussard, *Southern Federalists*, 389.

⁵¹ See William B. Grove's assessment of Davie. William B. Grove to James McHenry, August 20, 1798, William R. Davie Papers, SHC.

⁵² Blackwell P. Robinson, *William R. Davie* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1957); Beth Crabtree, *North Carolina Governors, 1585-1974* (Raleigh: Division of Archives and History, 1974), 55-56; *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*, s.v. "Davie, William Richardson."

Name	Birthplace	Dates	Education	State Offices	National Offices	Occupation
Ashe, Samuel	Bath, N.C.	1725-1813	private	Governor Judge		Lawyer
Bagge, Charles F.	Salem	1770-1829	Moravian school	House of Commons		Merchant
Boylan, William	New Jersey	1777-1861	private	House of Commons		Publisher
Cameron, Duncan	Virginia	1777-1853	private	House of Commons		Lawyer
Culpepper, John	Wadesboro	1761-1841	private		Representative	Minister
Dave, William R.	England	1756-1820	Princeton	House of Commons Governor	Commissioner to France	Lawyer
Davidson, William	Charleston	1778-1857	private	Senate	Representative	Planter
Dickson, Joseph	Pennsylvania	1745-1825	private	Senate	Representative	Lawyer
Gaither, Basil	Maryland	d. 1803	private	Senator		Planter
Gaston, William	Newbern	1778-1844	Princeton	Senate, House of Commons, Judge	Representative	Lawyer
Graham, Edward	New York	1765-1838	Princeton			Lawyer
Grove, William B.	Fayetteville	1764-1818	private	House of Commons	Representative	Lawyer
Harris, Charles W.	Concord, N.C.	1771-1804	Princeton			Mathematics Tutor, Doctor, Lawyer
Haywood, John	Edgecombe	1755-1827	private	State Treasurer		Civil Servant
Henderson, Archibald	Williamsboro	1768-1822	Springer College	House of Commons	Representative	Lawyer

Table 1: North Carolina Federalists⁵³

⁵³ Based largely on Fischer, *Revolution of American Conservatism*, 387-397.

Table #1 cont.

Hill, William Henry	Brunswick Town	1767-1808	various Boston schools	District Attorney, Senate	Representative	Lawyer
Hodge, Abraham	New York	1755-1805	private			Publisher
Iredell, James	England	1751-1799	private	Customs Collector, Attorney General	Associate Justice of Supreme Court	Lawyer
Jocelin, Amariah	Wilmington	?	private		Navy Department	Merchant
Johnston, Samuel	Scotland	1733-1816	private	Senate, Superior Court Judge	Senate	Lawyer
Macay, Spruce	Rowan	1755-1808	Princeton	House of Commons		Lawyer
Matthews, Mussendine	Iredell	1753-1830		House of Commons		Planter
Moore, Alfred	Halifax	1775-1810	private	Attorney General, House of Commons, Judge	Associate Justice of Supreme Court	Lawyer
Murphrey, Archibald Debow	Caswell	1777-1832	UNC	Senate, Judge		Lawyer
Pearson, Joseph	Rowan	1778-1834	Clio's Nursery	House of Commons	Representative	Lawyer
Polk, William	Charlotte	1758-1834	Queen's College	House of Commons	Supervisor of Internal Revenue	Planter
Purviance, Samuel	Wilmington	1774-1806	private	House of Commons	Representative	Lawyer
Stanly, John	Newbern	177-1834	Princeton	House of Commons	Representative	Lawyer
Steele, John	Salisbury	1764-1815	Clio's Nursery	House of Commons, Boundary Commissioner	Representative Comptroller of the Treasury	Merchant

Samuel Johnston, the oldest of the Federalists, had been born in Scotland in 1733 and came to North Carolina at the age of three. He served in the General Assembly, was governor, became president of the convention to ratify the U.S. Constitution, served in the U.S. Senate, and spent his latter years as a judge of superior court. He made his residence near Edenton on a plantation named *Hayes*. His sister Hannah married James Iredell. Though a staunch Federalist, Johnston apparently did not participate in organizing a disciplined party in the state nor did he seem associated with the newspaper scheme.⁵⁴

James Iredell had been born in England and came to North Carolina at the age of seventeen. He studied law under Samuel Johnston. Along with William R. Davie, Iredell became a major spokesman for the ratification of the U.S. Constitution at the Hillsboro Convention in 1789. George Washington appointed him a justice of the Supreme Court in 1790. His most famous case involved *Chisholm v. Georgia* (1793), which addressed the issue of whether citizens from one state could sue another state. Following a logic that accepted the primacy of state sovereignty, Iredell authored the lone dissent in the case. Following a short illness probably wrought by his travels as a justice on the circuit, he died in 1799 just two years shy of his fiftieth birthday. Iredell's travels, as well as his premature death, meant that he did not participate in Federalist plans to undo the effects of democracy in the state, though his son, James, did become active in Federalist circles in the early nineteenth century.⁵⁵

John Steele, born in Salisbury in 1764, was a member of the convention to ratify the U.S. Constitution, served in the House of Commons and as a U.S. congressman, and was appointed Comptroller of the Treasury in 1796 by Washington. One of few Federalists to remain in office

⁵⁴ *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*, s.v. "Johnston, Samuel"; Timothy Silver, "Southern Federalists and the French Crisis, 1789-1800" (M.A. Thesis, Appalachian State University, 1979), 15, 46-47, 83-84.

⁵⁵ Willis P. Wichard, *Justice James Iredell* (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 2000); *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*, s.v. "Iredell, James."

after Jefferson's election in 1800, Steele served another two years until he resigned in 1802.

Though he remained active in North Carolina politics, serving numerous times in the House of Commons and as a boundary commissioner for the state, he aspired to maintain a quiet life on his plantation named *Lethe* in Salisbury. He had worked in mercantile pursuits early in his career but turned to farm life and horse racing after 1802. Steele's independent temperament marked him as an unlikely candidate to become a Federalist partisan. There is no evidence to suggest his participation in the newspaper plan, and he frequently corresponded with the arch-rival of the Federalists, Nathaniel Macon.⁵⁶

William B. Grove exchanged letters with many Federalists around the state, but surprisingly little is known about him. He was the stepson of Colonel Robert Rowan, a patriot who was jailed during the Revolution for his association with a Tory. Grove served in the House of Commons, was a delegate to the Hillsboro and Fayetteville Conventions where he favored adoption of the U.S. Constitution, and served as a congressman from 1791 to 1802. He inclined toward support for the French, preferred Jefferson over Hamilton, and disliked Hamilton's proposed Assumption legislation. Though he initially leaned toward the Republican position, his Federalism grew stronger by the time he left office. He agreed to help with the newspaper campaign, but left no record of his participation.⁵⁷

Duncan Cameron's family came from Virginia, as did his wife's family, the Bennehans, who were Orange County merchants. Duncan Cameron's father was an Anglican minister before the Revolution and part-time schoolteacher thereafter. The Camerons were related by marriage to former governor Abner Nash of North Carolina and were acquaintances of William R. Davie.

⁵⁶ William S. West, "John Steele: Portrait of a Modern Southern Federalist" (Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina, 1971); *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*, s.v. "Steele, John."

⁵⁷ Richards, "John Adams and the Moderate Federalists," 22-27; *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*, s.v. "Grove, William B.,"; Silver, "Southern Federalists and the French Crisis," 13, 44-45, 93-95.

Cameron studied law and settled in the town of Hillsboro, site of the 1788 convention that failed to ratify the U.S. Constitution in North Carolina. Cameron served in the House of Commons, was a superior court judge, served as a trustee for the University, and worked with the first state bank as a director, and later, as president. As a driving force behind the campaign to send the *Minerva* around the state, Cameron corresponded with Federalist leaders for much of his life.⁵⁸

Archibald Henderson was perhaps the most staunchly Federalist of his peers. Born in Granville County in 1768, he went to school with John Haywood, later state treasurer, and Robert Goodloe Harper, an unwavering Federalist who went on to represent South Carolina in Congress. Henderson resided in Salisbury where he practiced law along with Spruce Macay, a stalwart Federalist who taught William R. Davie. Henderson served as a congressman from 1798 to 1802, and later served in the General Assembly. He found political life as a congressman “little congenial to his tastes” and his support for the Alien and Sedition Acts earned him great enmity from Republicans in the state.⁵⁹

Among the non-office holding Federalists was Abraham Hodge, who had been born in New York in 1755. He worked for a New York printer during the Revolution and conducted George Washington’s traveling press while the army encamped at Valley Forge. Sometime around 1784, Hodge moved to Halifax, the home of William R. Davie, supposedly at the request of some prominent citizens of the state. Though he was state printer continuously from 1785 to 1798, he also published several newspapers including the *State Gazette of North Carolina* (Newbern, then Edenton), the *North Carolina Journal* (Halifax), and the *North Carolina Minerva and Fayetteville Gazette*. As an outspoken Federalist, Hodge engaged in fisticuffs with Republican Thomas Blount in 1798 over some pamphlets Hodge had published which criticized

⁵⁸ *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*, s.v. “Cameron, Duncan.”

⁵⁹ Archibald Henderson, “A Federalist of the Old School,” *The North Carolina Booklet* 17 (July 1917), 3-38; *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*, s.v. “Henderson, Archibald.”

Blount's character. Hodge was widely respected by Federalists in the state, and he corresponded with John Steele and William R. Davie, though few of his letters survive.⁶⁰

Hodge's nephew, William Boylan, was born in Pluchamine, New Jersey, in 1777. Hodge brought Boylan to Fayetteville in 1796 to help with the publishing of the *North Carolina Minerva and Fayetteville Advertiser*. To comply with a state law that required the state printer to reside in Raleigh, Boylan moved the newspaper from Fayetteville to Raleigh in 1799. He spent ten years fighting the Republicans in print but sold the *Minerva* in 1810 and devoted himself to his plantation in Raleigh. He was a councilor of state in 1806 and a representative in the General Assembly from 1813-1816. He was, perhaps, the first person to grow cotton in Wake County and ardently supported education by donating to the University of North Carolina as well as supporting the Raleigh Academy.⁶¹

Across the state, these wealthy, elite men with deep roots in the state's history tended toward Federalism while more recently established and upwardly mobile members of society preferred Republicanism.⁶² Federalists favored the planter's life, though some, like John Steele, also dabbled in the mercantile pursuits. Often bound by consanguineous ties in the small world of nineteenth century North Carolina, these gentlemen knew and associated with other elite men all over the state.⁶³ Many of the Federalist leaders also practiced law, much to the dismay of Thomas Jefferson, who lamented that such tory lawyers duped the people. Of the twenty-nine men associated with Federalism in the state, eighteen spent time in courtrooms as attorneys.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*, s.v. "Hodge, Abraham"; *North Carolina Journal* (Halifax), August 6, 13, 20, 1798.

⁶¹ *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*, s.v. "Boylan, William"; William B. Bushong, "Montfort Hall and Its Architect, William Percival" (M.A.: Appalachian State University, 1979), 1-9.

⁶² Fischer, *Revolution of American Conservatism*, 206-217.

⁶³ Jane Turner Censer, *North Carolina Planters and Their Children* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1984), 1-15.

⁶⁴ The twenty-nine chosen are based on Fischer, *Revolution of American Conservatism*, 387-397. See Table 1.

The practice of law led them to judicial districts all over the state where they developed close ties during Superior Court sessions. The abundance of attorneys led Joseph Caldwell, President of and professor at the University of North Carolina, to notice that the “state appears to be swarming with lawyers. It is almost the only profession for which parents educate their children.”⁶⁵ Most Federalist leaders were also highly educated, and at least six of them graduated from Princeton University.⁶⁶ Like most elite men, they valued the enlightening effects of education.

The Federalist commitment to education demonstrated itself in a loyal attachment to the state’s first university, promised in the 1776 state Constitution, but only realized when William R. Davie sponsored a bill in 1789 that finally made the institution a reality.⁶⁷ The trustees named to the university in that sponsoring legislation read like a who’s who of Federalists. Samuel Johnston, James Iredell, Hugh Williamson, Archibald Maclaine, James Hogg, William Barry Grove, Alfred Moore, Benjamin Hawkins, and William R. Davie were among those charged with guiding the establishment of the state’s premier educational institution.⁶⁸ The committee led, by Dr. Samuel Eusbius McCorkle, Presbyterian preacher and Princeton graduate, proposed a thoroughly classical schooling for the state’s young men: the study of languages, belles letters, agriculture, botany, architecture, mathematics, and natural philosophy.⁶⁹ Others in the state did not agree, however, that spending money on the education of elite youth would serve the best interests of the state as a whole. “Ignoramus,” writing to the *North Carolina Journal*, attacked

⁶⁵ See Joseph Caldwell to John H. Hobart, November 8, 1796, in R.D.W. Connor, ed., *A Documentary History of the University of North Carolina*, 2 vols. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1953), 2:71.

⁶⁶ Fischer, *Revolution of American Conservatism*, 387-397.

⁶⁷ Darryl Lynn Peterkin, “‘Lux, Libertas, and Learning’: The First State University and the Transformation of North Carolina, 1789-1816” (Ph.D. diss., Princeton, 1995), 5, 16-19; Richard D. Brown, *The Strength of a People: The Idea of an Informed Citizenry in America, 1650-1870* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 66.

⁶⁸ Connor, *A Documentary History*, 1:23.

⁶⁹ Connor, *A Documentary History*, 1:183.

the whole idea of a central university in 1793 by arguing that “it is not in the power of more than one person in a hundred to avail himself of the institution,” causing students of moderate incomes to go into debt to keep up with the “sons of our Nabobs.” “Ignoramus” instead proposed that a “public school [be] established and supported in every county by a general tax on the inhabitants.” True to the agrarian sentiments of most of the inhabitants of the state, “Ignoramus” also rejected the curriculum, questioning that the study of natural philosophy would be of use to “a planter.”⁷⁰

While “Ignoramus” continued his attacks on the university, Federalists waged an editorial campaign in the newspapers to refute the charges of elitism. “A Friend” in 1793 averred that “learning is friendly to religion, it corrects prejudice, superstition and enthusiasm, and gives right views of God, by leading to the proper knowledge of his works.” Furthermore, supporting institutions of higher education encouraged the enlightenment of young minds which could only have a salutary influence on good government. “A Republican government,” argued “A Friend,” “is founded on *virtue*. It demands an equal and general diffusion of knowledge, without which it cannot exist. *Where ignorance prevails there* prevail savage ferocity and despotism. Where learning is confined to a *few*, there is, or will be a proud imperious Aristocracy, or the government of *kings*.”⁷¹ At the exercises for laying the cornerstone of the Old East building, Dr. McCorkle waxed grandiloquent about the promise of education: “to diffuse the greatest possible degree of happiness in a given territory, is the aim of good government and religion . . . They in like manner demand liberty and good laws. Liberty and laws call for general knowledge in the people, and extensive knowledge in the ministers of the state, and these in fine demand public

⁷⁰ All quotes from Connor, *A Documentary History*, 1:206-207, 207-210; Brown, *The Strength of a People*, 78.

⁷¹ Connor, *A Documentary History*, 1:217-218.

places of education.”⁷² Public support of the University of North Carolina, Federalists argued, marked the state for future greatness because of the extraordinary commitment to spreading enlightenment among the people.

Federalist support of the University of North Carolina did not imply a unified educational vision for the institution. One of the more serious disagreements rose between Dr. McCorkle and William R. Davie. McCorkle, who was the brother-in-law of John Steele, proposed an educational plan that emphasized classical languages and strict devotion to the values of Christianity through the study of moral philosophy.⁷³ Davie, on the other hand, advised a more contemporary curriculum including modern languages and scientific pursuits. Davie’s mind, influenced by the enlightenment, agreed that the study of classical languages had a certain usefulness but that Greek and Latin did not prepare a man for playing an active role in a republican society. Charles W. Harris, the first professor of math at the University, believed that learning Latin and Greek merely overloaded “the memory with words of a dead language.”⁷⁴ McCorkle’s plan, however, remained fairly intact even after he had been dismissed. His successor, Joseph Caldwell, favored a classical and religious education as well. Davie’s plans for enlightenment did not come to full fruition at the campus located in Chapel Hill.⁷⁵

Republican fears that the university would become the nursery of not only elitism but of a new crop of Federalist politicians, led to the repeal of the institution’s sources of income in 1800.⁷⁶ Such an attack on the state’s main means for promoting an enlightened public earned

⁷² Connor, *A Documentary History*, 239.

⁷³ West, “John Steele,” 159. Apparently, McCorkle’s dismissal caused a rift between Davie and Steele which was not healed until 1799, when they once again started corresponding.

⁷⁴ J.G. de Roulliac Hamilton and Henry M. Wagstaff, eds., “The Harris Letters,” *James Sprunt Historical Publications* 14 (Durham: Seeman Printing, 1916), 13.

⁷⁵ Robert M. Calhoon, “An Agrarian and Evangelical Culture,” in *The North Carolina Experience: An Interpretive and Documentary History*, ed. by Lindley S. Butler and Alan D. Watson (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 172-174; Peterkin, “Lux, Libertas, and Learning,” 46.

⁷⁶ Peterkin, “Lux, Libertas, and Learning,” 56; Broussard, *Southern Federalists*, 323

scorn from Federalists. Archibald Henderson wailed: “Alas! Alas! The legislature of No. Carolina to wage war against the arts and sciences!”⁷⁷ William R. Davie opined that “the friends of science in other States regard the people of North Carolina as a sort of Semi-Barbarians.”⁷⁸ William Polk, a staunch Federalist, complained that “there never was so much ignorance collected in a legislative capacity since the days when laws were enacted prohibiting the frying of pancakes on Sundays.”⁷⁹ A *Minerva* editorial from 1803 lamented that the trustees could only look at incomplete buildings and book-less library shelves while the legislature sacrificed “convenience to economy,” and threatened the very foundation of society. “No country can long remain free,” the editorial cautioned, “unless its religious, civil and political rights are duly understood and appreciated by the mass of its Citizens: a knowledge not to be acquired, but through study and the aid of instruction.”⁸⁰ The General Assembly finally restored support in 1805 but reserved the right to appoint vacancies on the board of trustees and made the governor chairman of the board, ensuring a university compliant to Republican demands. Since the institution had been chartered for the people, Republicans, who believed that they represented the public, saw no wrong in subordinating it to their partisan prerogatives.⁸¹

The common whites, who made up the majority of the state’s population, likely did not aspire to the life of a gentleman scholar and undoubtedly regarded the university with some suspicion. Yeomen farmers and poor whites regularly clashed with elites, coming from what Bill Cecil-Fronsman has called an “egalitarian culture,” despised the life of elite privilege and celebrated the basic equality of all men before the law. Many of these common whites in the state nurtured their sense of right and wrong in the Baptist or Methodist faiths, both of which

⁷⁷ Archibald Henderson, “A Federalist of the Old School,” 71.

⁷⁸ Quoted in Broussard, *Southern Federalists*, 324.

⁷⁹ William Polk to John Steele, November 20, 1800, John Steele Papers, SHC.

⁸⁰ *Minerva*, February 8, 1803.

⁸¹ Lefler, *History of North Carolina*, 1:285; Kerber, *Federalists in Dissent*, 95.

celebrated the individual and his place before a God who was no respecter of persons.⁸² The majority of planters, on the other hand, embraced the Episcopalian or Presbyterian faiths and valued religion that celebrated hierarchy and order. Even as many of these elite men outwardly professed admiration for the hierarchy of Episcopalians and Presbyterians, they inwardly aspired to a notion of faith based on enlightenment and reason. Reason, they argued, allowed humanity to transcend passions and enthusiasms which hindered a right understanding of God's moral order. Thus many elite Federalists espoused doctrines which more evangelical and orthodox members of their communities deemed deist.⁸³ Joseph Caldwell lamented in 1796 that "religion is so little in vogue . . . [and] every one believes that the first step which he ought to take to rise into respectability is to disavow the as often and as publicly as he can all regard for the leading doctrines of the scriptures." Caldwell had even been endeavoring, without success, to convince the Federalist politician, William R. Davie, that he ought "to enquire with accuracy into the subject" of the "evidence of Christianity."⁸⁴

The genteel morality of elite men recognized the church as an institution that served to provide order in society and accordingly favored traditional, non-evangelical Christianity because of the salubrious effects it wrought on an unruly populace. Church hierarchy, like the state hierarchy, taught people to respect their social betters. The steady growth of the Baptists, Methodists, and other evangelically-oriented faiths during the Second Great Awakening continued to present a threat to the elite conceptions of society.⁸⁵ The typical adjectives hurled at

⁸² Bill Cecil-Fronsman, *Common Whites: Class and Culture in Antebellum North Carolina* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1992), 7-8, 40-55.

⁸³ Broussard, *Southern Federalists*, 394; Censer, *North Carolina Planters*, 5-6; Richard Rankin, *Ambivalent Churchmen and Evangelical Churchwomen: The Religion of the Episcopal Elite in North Carolina, 1800-1860* (Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1993), 1-22.

⁸⁴ Connor, *A Documentary History*, 2:71, 79, 113.

⁸⁵ Rankin, *Ambivalent Churchmen*, 7, 20, 27-29; Linda K. Kerber, *Federalists in Dissent: Imagery and Ideology in Jeffersonian America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), 208-211. These denominations had also threatened the orthodox, legitimately established faiths prior to the Revolution.

these new sects included fanatical, enthusiastic, hypocritical, and noisy. William Boylan's account of a camp meeting in Granville County in 1805 ridiculed the "jerking convert, barking convert, [and] jumping covert" as examples of the disorderly nature of these new denominations.⁸⁶ At the same time, it would be a mistake to assume that elite men such as the Federalists adhered so closely to religious rationalism as to claim the title deist or to reject the doctrines of Christianity. Readers of William Boylan's *Minerva* saw repeated examples of President Jefferson's so-called deism which bordered on atheism. Such criticism arose, however, from the conviction that Jefferson threatened the hierarchical order of the established church and as a result threatened to remove a weapon of social control from the Federalist arsenal.⁸⁷

As the concept of hierarchy provided scaffolding for Federalist concepts of religion, so it also permeated their notions of government. Government was as much a science as botany; in the rational worlds of elite discourse, Federalist ideology ascribed to scientific principles on the nature of the social contract between men. Different talents and a diversity of characters fitted men and women for a rank in society, whether one believed that God had ordained it so or believed that it simply represented an inherent natural order. All civilized societies believed in these ranks, establishing a hierarchy in which the Federalists undoubtedly believed themselves to be at the top.⁸⁸ When John Steele declined to serve in the House of Representatives after 1792, Alexander Hamilton noted that the thought gave him "pain" because his "apprehension is excited" when he saw so many "valuable members dropping off." "The House will I fear,"

⁸⁶ *Minerva*, October 7, 1805. Governor Swain once described William Boylan as "austere" and "sedate," two virtues diametrically opposed to the emotionalism of the evangelicals. See Samuel A'Court Ashe, Stephen B. Weeks, and Charles L. Van Noppen, eds., *Biographical History of North Carolina From Colonial Times to the Present*, 8 vols. (Greensboro: C. L. Van Noppen, 1905-1917), 6:91.

⁸⁷ *Minerva*, May 1, 1800, January 11, 1803, March 21, 1803, August 22, 1803.

⁸⁸ Robert Wiebe, *The Opening of American Society: From the Adoption of the Constitution to the Eve of Disunion* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984), 9-13.

Hamilton wrote, “lose more of its talent than it can spare.”⁸⁹ William Barry Grove wrote to the merchant James Hogg that he hoped “our representation in Congress will be more respectable for Talents & proper qualifications” when new elections took place in 1798. Grove also inquired: “How in the name of God is any Government to act wisely, or remain Reputable in the eyes of a Jealous & discerning People, If they themselves appoint Men totally incapable of thinking or acting on the great affairs of a great Nation?” Federalist men had the requisite talents, and they expected that the populace would recognize their superior abilities. Such an attachment to a deferential vision certainly produced much consternation the more it became apparent that the public did not accept such Federalist fictions.⁹⁰

Deferential political rituals, as historian Andrew W. Robertson has argued, worked in the earlier part of the eighteenth century because they allowed the people to believe that they exercised power. Elites believed that although commoners did not possess the requisite intelligence to judge matters of policy, the lower orders of society could exercise the ability to recognize a candidate’s good character and select him for his virtue only. Elite male ritual of wooing the voter included displays of intellectual wizardry through flowery speech. The image of the male elite seeking the attentions of a “female” public was bound up in the patriarchal notions of eighteenth century society. The best men in society, however, did not pursue the electorate in a way that gave power to the public, for that opened a man up to charges of electioneering and demagoguery.⁹¹ Frequently, politicians described their candidacy for office

⁸⁹ Alexander Hamilton to John Steele, October 15, 1792, John Steele Papers.

⁹⁰ Broussard, *Southern Federalists*, 307-308; Kerber, *Federalists in Dissent*, 173-178; Simon Newman, *Parades and the Politics of the Street: Festive Culture in the Early American Republic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 168.

⁹¹ Andrew W. Robertson, “Voting Rights and Voting Acts: Electioneering Ritual, 1790-1820,” in *Beyond the Founders: New Approaches to the Political History of the Early American Republic*, ed. by Jeffrey L. Pasley, Andrew W. Robertson, and David Waldstreicher (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004): 57-73. The limits of deference as a concept have been hotly debated in early American history. See J.G.A. Pocock, “The Classical Theory of Deference,” *American Historical Review* 81:3 (June 1976), 516-523; John M. Murrin, “In the

as “yielding” to the interests of the people. Thus, William R. Davie wrote to John Steele in 1803 that “gentlemen . . . prevailed upon [me] ‘to offer’ as they call it;” Samuel D. Purviance in 1800 noted that he had declined the invitation of a “considerable number of the citizens of our district” until he decided to “comply with the wishes” of his friends.⁹² The language of deference continued to operate in the minds of North Carolina Federalists even though deferential norms waned while democratic discourses began to prevail. William H. Hill, a member of Congress from the Wilmington district, reminded his constituents in his farewell speech in 1803 that “the important questions, concerning a candidate for office are, ‘is he honest, is he capable, is he faithful to the constitution?’”⁹³ These same questions became the ninth toast at July 4th celebrations in Smithfield in 1803. Federalists believed that the people should select a candidate based on their perception of his honesty rather than inquire about his politics or party affiliations.

The rise of democratic appeal to the people led Charles W. Harris in 1800 to bemoan the fact that “it is not the personal good qualities of a candidate that are inquired for; whether he is a Federalist or not, is all the question.”⁹⁴ John Steele noted in 1796 that the “question does not seem to turn upon the talents of the candidates, their local situations, or upon what is termed Federal and antifederal, but upon the great pivot of Neutrality, or War.”⁹⁵ Both observations on the decline of the deferential order indicated shifts toward a system whereby policies and party loyalty became the important means for judging a candidate’s suitability for office. Ronald Formisano has charted this decline, noting that while the older and newer forms of political

Land of the Free and the Home of the Slave, Maybe There was Room for Deference,” *Journal of American History* 85 (June 1998): 86-91; Kathleen M. Brown, “Antiauthoritarianism and Freedom in Early America,” *Journal of American History* 85 (June 1998): 77-85; Richard Beeman, “Deference, Republicanism, and the Emergence of Popular Politics in Eighteenth-Century America,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 49 (June 1992): 401-430.

⁹² William R. Davie to John Steele, John Steele Papers; Samuel D. Purviance, “To the Freedmen of the Fayetteville District,” *Minerva*, July 15, 1800.

⁹³ *Minerva*, April 11, 1803.

⁹⁴ Hamilton and Wagstaff, “The Harris Letters,” 71.

⁹⁵ John Steele to John Haywood, November 25, 1796, Ernest Haywood Papers, SHC.

participation coexisted, Federalists found themselves unsure of the new political order. The ideological cleavages, both between Federalists and Republicans as well as within the Federalists ranks, accounted for the passionate response of Federalists to the shifting political order. The Federalist science of politics had to give way before new forms of participation which did not fit comfortably in older systems of classification.⁹⁶

The acceptance of popular participation beyond just the ritual of voting accelerated the development of what Richard Hofstadter called the legitimate opposition.⁹⁷ For most eighteenth century North Carolina politicians, however, the term ‘party’ implied illegitimacy. A great insult to John Steele occurred in 1795 when Colonel Joseph McDowell informed Steele that he had been regarded as a member of the “aristocratical party” because of his connections to Alexander Hamilton. In drafts of some toasts that Steele shared with prominent Republican Nathaniel Macon in 1803, he praised the “absence of party spirit” because we “are all republicans and all Federalists.” In 1804, Steele again reminded Macon that “party spirit is the evil genius of republics.”⁹⁸ “Here party influence or omnipotent brandy (both blind leaders) dictate everything,” wrote Charles W. Harris to his brother Robert in 1800. Harris worried that parties would bring about the dissolution of the union:

Federalism and its opponent become daily more distinctly divided by districts, counties, towns, or neighborhoods, but this division will only be formidable when States become the limits of political opinions, when nothing less than a dissolution of our Union will be the consequence, and on this principle we seem now nearly ripe for a division.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ Formisano, “Deferential-Participant Politics,” 473-487; Zvesper, *Political Philosophy and Rhetoric: A Study of the Origins of American Party Politics* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 84, 169; David Waldstreicher, “Federalism, the Styles of Politics, and the Politics of Style,” in *Federalists Reconsidered*, ed. by Doron Ben-Atar and Barbara B. Oberg (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998), 109-111.

⁹⁷ Richard Hofstadter, *The Rise of a Legitimate Opposition*, 2-4.

⁹⁸ Kemp P. Battle, “Letters of Nathaniel Macon, John Steele and William Barry Grove, with Sketches and Notes by Kemp P. Battle, LL.D.,” *James Sprunt Historical Monograph* 3 (July 1902) (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1902), 18, 43, 57.

⁹⁹ Hamilton, “The Harris Letters,” 68, 76.

Parties threatened the order and stability of society by promoting the selfish interests and views of a narrow-minded group. The particular threat from party activity was that it made men slaves to the party and eliminated both independence and disinterestedness. Thus William R. Davie, owing “nothing to any man or party,” believed himself to be “entirely at liberty to act without reserve in any direction the public good may require.”¹⁰⁰

While anti-party thought prevailed into the nineteenth century, often the Federalists claimed that their exertions did not merit the term party while those of the Republicans did. An item in the *Minerva* in 1800 summoned the people of America to “elect none but the firm friend of your present constitution; crush the monster, faction.”¹⁰¹ Thus, the Federalist effort to save the government constituted the only acceptable coalition of politicians.¹⁰² At the same time, however, the science of politics began to assume the permanence of party behavior. “A Sketch of Parties,” appearing in the *Minerva* in 1800, argued that “party divisions are inseparable from free government.”¹⁰³ In a government as free as that of the United States, the essayist averred, it is no wonder that a multiplicity of interests dominated. James Iredell, in a charge to a grand jury in Richmond in 1796, had come to the same conclusion. “As long as government shall subsist,” Iredell wrote, “under any form of any description various opinions will be entertained upon the subject of political regulations. They embrace a variety of interests, all of which cannot equally be promoted, tho’ all ought to be consulted, and as much as possible to be reconciled.”¹⁰⁴ Just how all interests would be reconciled was left to the reader to ponder. The author of “A Sketch

¹⁰⁰ Griffith J. McRee, *Life and Correspondence of James Iredell: One of the Associate Justices of the Supreme Court of the United States* (New York: P. Smith, 1949), 480. On the antipartyism of the Founders, see Hofstadter, *The Rise of a Legitimate Opposition*, 10-25; Fischer, *Revolution of American Conservatism*, 50-51; Formisano, “Deferential-Participant Politics,” 478; James Roger Sharp, *American Politics in the Early Republic: The New Nation in Crisis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 8-10, 42, 53, 64, 287.

¹⁰¹ *Minerva*, May 20, 1800.

¹⁰² Newman, *Parades and Politics of the Street*, 168.

¹⁰³ *Minerva*, December 23, 1800.

¹⁰⁴ *Minerva*, June 16, 1796.

of Parties” contended that the “enlightened statesman” consulted his own common sense to judge the worth of each party’s arguments. The system, however, continued to evolve in the direction of a party system, much to the chagrin of the Federalists.

If Republicans had fewer qualms about party behavior, it would be a mistake to assume that they had created a complete party system by 1800. Federalists, however, remained uneasy about their participation in parties even if they accepted them as a natural product of the American political system. Samuel D. Purviance, aspiring to a seat in Congress in 1803, informed his prospective constituents that he would never advocate any measure “from the mere Spirit of a Party” which might be “prejudicial” to the welfare of his country. Muzzendine Matthews, running as a candidate for the Salisbury District in 1803, declared that he would “not stand committed to vote with any party, but will act independent of party, according to the best of my judgment, in any measure which I may judge conducive to the interest of the Union in general or North Carolina in particular.”¹⁰⁵ William R. Davie, in a circular to announce his candidacy for Congress in 1803, declared his independence of party:

I desire it that it may be clearly understood, that I never have, and that I never will, surrender my principles to the opinions of any man, or description of men, either in or out of power; and that I wish no man to vote for me, who is not willing to leave me free to pursue the good of my Country according to the best of my judgment, without respect to party men or party views.¹⁰⁶

Davie had been prevailed upon to run by “moderate men of both parties” but immediately found himself denounced as the “King of the Federalists to the Southward.” Republicans, convinced that Davie had a chance to win, prevailed upon one of the two Republican candidates to withdraw. Davie lost.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ *Minerva*, May 2, 1803, June 13, 1803.

¹⁰⁶ “Circular Letter,” May 2, 1803, William R. Davie Papers, SHC.

¹⁰⁷ William R. Davie to John Steele, August 20, 1803, John Steele Papers.

As early as 1798 some Federalists had conceded the need for party structure, even if it only meant rudimentary organization. Samuel Johnston wrote to his brother-in-law James Iredell in 1798 that he was convinced “that neither I nor any one in the same situation can do much public Service, without forming extensive connexions something like a party, aided by a conduct intended to establish a pretty general confidence and this is not be effected in a single session.”¹⁰⁸ While organization and cooperation marked the Federalist efforts after 1800, they did not create a party system. The coalition they did create lacked centralized planning and coordination. Part of the impetus behind their reluctance inhered in the conservatism of many of the Federalists. The watchword for their distrust of change was innovation. Any activity which seemed to undermine tradition and order fell under disapprobation for this reason. “It is sound policy to resist innovation in its beginning,” wrote Duncan Cameron in 1805, “for when it is once begun, no one can tell when or where it will stop.” Archibald Henderson closed his circular letter in 1801 with a monitory notice about innovation:

I cannot close this letter without endeavouring to impress on your mind the necessity of resisting the influence of that *spirit of reform*, which continually aims at the subversion of the established order and the settled course of things, which is ever uneasy under present circumstances, and forever promising its deluded votaries some distant good.¹⁰⁹

The spirit of reform, Henderson argued, “loosened the social compact, and weakened the obligations of morality.” Joseph Pearson, a neophyte legislator in the General Assembly in 1804, informed John Steele that “if we can prevent innovations & have things mostly as they are

¹⁰⁸ Samuel Johnston to James Iredell, December 4, 1798, Charles E. Johnson Collection, North Carolina Division of Archives and History (NCDAH).

¹⁰⁹ Noble E. Cunningham and Dorothy H. Cappel, eds., *Circular Letters of Congressmen to Their Constituents, 1789-1829*, 3 vols. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1977-1978), 1:247.

it may perhaps be the best direction for our exerting.”¹¹⁰ Constant innovation, to the Federalists, suggested a mercurial temperament and lack of principles.

If the Federalist position on innovation seems disingenuous considering the U.S. Constitution, the whole of the Washington presidency, and the Alien and Sedition Acts of the Adams administration, it seemed that way to Republicans as well.¹¹¹ For Federalists, however, the term ‘innovation’ inspired anti-French sentiments and struck directly at the predilections of the Republican Party. Jefferson and his disciples were frequently portrayed as having philosophical interests—with connotations of the French *philosophe*—that led to visionary, impractical, and unsound schemes.¹¹² Thus, the *Minerva* lampooned Jefferson on a number of occasions for his philosophical inquiries, referring to him as “another great man, who was reluctantly dragged from his philosophical retreat, where he had been arranging the bones of a great animal, to be the ruler of a great people.”¹¹³ Particularly damning was Jefferson’s welcoming of the radical Thomas Paine, once lauded for his *Common Sense*, but now excoriated for his radical views and particularly rejection of revealed religion in *The Age of Reason*. The *Minerva* declared in 1803 that “the conduct of the executive of the United States in regard to Tom Paine is tantamount to an open declaration of coincidence of opinion, with Paine, in whatever relates to politics, in whatever relates to the awful subject of religion, and in whatever relates to the venerated name of Washington.” William Hill informed readers of the *Minerva* in his remarks on religion that “Jefferson invited Thomas Paine; and offered him a national ship to bring him to your country. And this anti-christian monster of iniquity is the cherished friend and

¹¹⁰ Joseph Pearson to John Steele, November 26, 1804, John Steele Papers.

¹¹¹ See the *Raleigh Register*, April 8, 1800, for Gales’ comments on innovation. Gales, borrowing from Lord Bacon, asked “Time is the greatest innovator [sic], and why may we not imitate time?”

¹¹² Kerber, *Federalists in Dissent*, 21, 67-93; Jeffrey L. Pasley, “The Cheese and the Words: Popular Political Culture and Participatory Democracy in the Early American Republic,” in *Beyond the Founders: New Approaches to the Political History of the Early American Republic*, ed. by Jeffrey L. Pasley, Andrew W. Robertson, and David Waldstreicher (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 31-56.

¹¹³ *Minerva*, July 27, 1802.

companion of a man whom a Christian people have elevated to the first station in the government of their country.”¹¹⁴ Consequently, innovation, with its connotations of philosophical fancy, had a specific meaning for Federalists, while its tangential relationship to religion further marked it as a threat to established order.

Though their elite views seemed to insulate them from the public, the Federalists did maintain a consistent view of the duty of public servants, even if they privately complained that public service was hardly worth the emolument it provided.¹¹⁵ The fact that they wrote circulars to their constituents indicated that they believed that the public had a right to know and judge the fruits of their labors. Duncan Cameron asserted this duty in a broadside of 1805 as did Archibald Henderson in 1801 and John Stanly in 1802.¹¹⁶ At the same time, they expressed vexation at the General Assembly’s use of the doctrine of instruction.¹¹⁷ The General Assembly had long considered it the duty of the state’s representatives not only to make legislation favorable to the state but to report frequently to the legislature or the governor about national politics. Thus, the localism and state’s rights temperament of the Confederation period perpetuated itself. “Congress have rec’d many absurd Instructions from the last Assembly,” Hugh Williamson wrote in 1793, “or rather the Members of Congress from our State.”¹¹⁸ When John Stanly spoke against the repeal of the Judiciary Act of 1801, he explicitly attacked the doctrine of instruction:

The Legislature of the State of North Carolina, a part of which I have the honor to represent, has thought proper to recommend to her Representatives on this floor, to use their endeavors to effect the measure contemplated by the bill on your table . . . Holding myself responsible to my constituents for the vote which I shall give

¹¹⁴ *Minerva*, August 22, 1802.

¹¹⁵ William B. Grove told John Steele in 1803 that he rejoiced in his “escape from the broils and toils of a public character, in those days of Democratic mania, & affection of Republicanism.” See William B. Grove to John Steele, May 27, 1803, John Steele Papers.

¹¹⁶ Duncan Cameron, December 21, 1805, Cameron Family Papers; Cunningham, *Circular Letters of Congressmen*, 1:242, 286.

¹¹⁷ On the doctrine of instruction, see Boyd, *History of North Carolina*, 48, 50; Ashe, *History of North Carolina*, 2:124

¹¹⁸ Keith, et. al., *The John Gray Blount Papers*, 1:232

on this, as on every other question, I cannot admit the right of any other authority, however respectable, to control, or in any manner to influence my conduct I owe, also, a duty to myself, to give no vote which my conscience and my understanding do not approve.¹¹⁹

The stance of North Carolina's congressional delegation on the doctrine of instruction explains why no Federalist senators from the state can be found after the third Congress. Ignoring the instructions of the General Assembly could halt one's career, and few Federalists were willing to prostitute their independence before a legislature that considered it their duty to instruct representatives and senators on the best legislative course for the state and nation.¹²⁰

The Federalist gentlemen who called North Carolina home in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries inhabited a world dominated by agrarian values. They aspired to the planter ideal, though they were comfortable in the slowly evolving urban areas of the state. Highly educated, and many of them practicing attorneys, they had access to the avenues of political power that made them the envy of the lower orders in society. Because of their enlightenment, rational natures, virtue, and talents, they expected deference from those below them in the hierarchy. At the same time, they courted the public in ways that were circumscribed by tradition and created the fiction whereby they claimed to rule on behalf of the populace. Nevertheless, they had to acknowledge the growth of not only parties but a fledgling party system and had to reach accommodation with democratic practices in a system which convinced the common people of their everyday importance in politics. Such shifting of the natural order of the social contract led Federalist men to hold onto the idea of enlightening the public through education but keeping the people within acceptable boundaries through the wholesome effects of both church and social hierarchies. They abhorred new political realities which made their

¹¹⁹ *Annals of Congress*, 7th Congress, 1st Session, 569-579.

¹²⁰ Boyd, *History of North Carolina*, 65.

opinions prey to the whims of the electorate and especially despised a General Assembly which dared to instruct them when they represented the people directly.

Thomas Jefferson undoubtedly exaggerated when he said that the people of North Carolina were all republicans duped by a class of lawyers who were all Tories. North Carolina's revolutionary heritage had left an ethos of democratic principles which undoubtedly animated a great portion of the populace. Many of those who wanted to be free from oppressive government, to build their lives and fortunes as yeomen, and to escape the oppressive yoke of taxation doubtless looked upon the Federalist gentry of the state as Tories. At the same time, the lawyers who inherited a tradition of Federalist conservatism, even if it smacked of Toryism, had a vision of a prosperous republic where all orders lived in harmony and government effectively channeled private interest into public gain. The success of the Federalists' vision depended, in large part, upon their ability to mold a virtuous and enlightened citizenry in a world where the public's ideas about democracy, representation, and political leadership had not only perceptibly shifted but now received credence from a growing opposition.

CHAPTER 2 – PRESS AND PUBLIC IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

“Reason when it was allowed a fair scope, has had its full effect on an enlightened justice, on a virtuous candour, on a generous people.” James Iredell¹²¹

North Carolina Federalists’ pursuit of newspapers as a means to enlighten the people of the state was rooted in their constructions of both the nature of the people and the public sphere in which that enlightenment was to take place. These constructions implied abstractions which Federalist leaders understood when speaking or writing to each other, but they also reflected physical phenomena that often behaved in ways that ran counter to Federalists’ neat theories. So much was at stake in the plan to foist reasoned judgment on the public, and the Federalists not only hoped to shape public opinion but remain unsullied by their foray into partisan politics. Since they were convinced that Republicans had beguiled the people through newspapers into voting for Jefferson, it only made sense to utilize newspapers for partisan ends.

Even though a great number of North Carolinians at the end of the eighteenth century could not read, print materials remained accessible.¹²² Newspapers and other printed works were important to the state’s citizens whether read individually or aloud to the community. Though printed materials provided a connection to the wider world and kept the people informed, the amount of reading matter available to North Carolinians was less than in the more urban areas of the north. The lack of printing presses and the geographic deterrents to travel made exchange of printed material difficult, and print culture came to the state much later even than surrounding southern states. A printer from Williamsburg, Virginia, James Davis, set up the first press in

¹²¹ *Minerva*, June 16, 1796.

¹²² There is a need for more data on literacy in North Carolina at the turn of the nineteenth century. Data from Perquimans County shows an increasing literacy rate by 1776, but the testimony of questionnaires sent out by Thomas Henderson, editor of the Raleigh *Star* in 1810 reported that in some counties as many as one-half of the adults could not read. The 1840 census showed that about one-third of the adult white population were illiterate. See Robert E. Gallman, “Changes in the Level of Literacy in a New Community of Early America,” *The Journal of Economic History* 48 (September 1988), 567-582; Powell, *North Carolina Through Four Centuries*, 246-247.

North Carolina in 1749, not only printing books, pamphlets, and laws, but the colony's first newspaper, the *North Carolina Gazette*, as well.¹²³

A succession of newspapers came and went throughout the eighteenth century. By 1789, the state had two major newspapers: the *State Gazette of North Carolina* (Edenton) and *Martin's North Carolina Gazette* (Newbern).¹²⁴ Abraham Hodge, the Federalist printer from New York, oversaw the *State Gazette* while an anti-federalist, Francois X. Martin, published *Martin's North Carolina Gazette*. Hodge, as public printer for the state, amassed enough resources by 1792 to begin another newspaper, the *North Carolina Journal*, in Halifax with his business partner, Henry Wills. Throughout the 1790s many printers and papers appeared in the state, mostly in New Bern, Fayetteville, and Wilmington, towns with significant populations that could support such endeavors. Printing was a capital-intensive and risky business because subscribers routinely did not pay their bills. Yet, purchasing the paper, the type, the ink, and the labor needed to run the press consumed many printers' fortunes. The hunger for news did not come with an inclination to pay for it and those who could not afford papers simply went to local taverns and stores to hear it read. Consequently, newspapers extended their influence and were even mailed to distant friends to share again and again.¹²⁵

Abraham Hodge brought his nephew, William Boylan, to North Carolina in the 1790s to establish a paper in William B. Grove's hometown, Fayetteville. The *North Carolina Minerva, and Fayetteville Advertiser* first appeared in 1796 and continued until 1799 when Boylan had to

¹²³ Maryland had a newspaper in 1727, South Carolina in 1732, and Virginia in 1736. For an extensive overview of North Carolina's print culture in the eighteenth century, see Patrick M. Valentine, "Libraries and Print Culture in Early North Carolina," *North Carolina Historical Review* 82 (July 2005), 293-325.

¹²⁴ The ephemeral *Wilmington Centinel* (1788-1789) also appeared, but disbanded and moved to Fayetteville to become the *Fayetteville Gazette*.

¹²⁵ Robert N. Elliott, "North Carolina Newspapers in the Federal Period, 1789-1800" (M.A. Thesis, University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, 1948), 16-28; Jeffrey L. Pasley, "The Tyranny of Printers,: " 24-45; John Cameron to Duncan Cameron, October 24, 1799, Cameron Family Papers; Battle, "Letters of Nathaniel Macon, John Steele and William Barry Grove," 88; Alexander Martin to William Lenoir, February 29, 1794, William Lenoir Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina Chapel Hill.

move the paper to Raleigh to comply with an act of the legislature requiring the public printer to reside in Raleigh. Hodge remained in Halifax to edit the *North Carolina Journal* and left Boylan on his own. Boylan was a mere twenty-three by the time Jefferson defeated Adams for the Presidency.¹²⁶

Boylan's most serious competition came from Joseph Gales, a printer from England who had come to North Carolina via Pennsylvania at the request of some prominent citizens. In 1799 Gales established the *Raleigh Register, and North Carolina Weekly Advertiser* and revolutionized printing in North Carolina. His knowledge of shorthand allowed him to take notes of the full debates in the state legislature which helped to bestow upon him the duties of the public printer. His editorials have been described as "aggressive, partisan, and highly readable," by one student of his newspaper exploits. Gales had the support of Republicans in the legislature and served their causes since he, having been part of a democratic movement that was crushed in England, shared their Jeffersonian ideals.¹²⁷

In 1800 most newspapers, Gales' and Boylan's included, ran to a length of four pages. The first two pages typically dealt with foreign affairs, including news of European battles, court politics, and commerce. Of course, the attitudes of the editors could show in their choice of news materials, making it no surprise that Gales and Boylan selected foreign stories with an eye towards generating support for their own political persuasions.¹²⁸ Most newspapers also included local news often buried on the third or fourth page, which consisted largely of extracts of letters from gentlemen on various subjects, not all of which were political. The equivalent of

¹²⁶ Elliott, "North Carolina Newspapers," 30-34.

¹²⁷ Robert N. Elliott, "The Raleigh Register, 1799-1863," *James Sprunt Studies in History and Political Science* 36 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1955), 3-17; Seth Cotlar, "Joseph Gales and the Making of the Jeffersonian Middle Class," in *The Revolution of 1800: Democracy, Race, and the New Republic*, ed. James Horn, Jan Lewis, and Peter Onuf (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2002), 335-343.

¹²⁸ Seth Cotlar, "Reading the Foreign News, Imagining an American Public Sphere: Radical and Conservative Visions of 'The Public' in Mid-1790s Newspapers," in *Periodical Literature in Eighteenth Century America*, ed. by Mark Kamrath and Sharon M. Harris (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2005), 307-338.

a gossip column provided information about dalliances, marriages, and deaths, while the remainder of the paper carried advertisements for goods at local stores, or very commonly, for the best racing horses any gentleman could want. Early papers lacked a consistent editorial section, and it was rare that anyone commented on local news. Most southern newspapers such as Gales' and Boylan's, in fact, derived from extracts copied from northern papers. As foreign news had an exotic quality, hardly anyone displayed a strong interest in reporting local or state matters since most gentlemen in North Carolina shared that information in frequent epistles.¹²⁹

Federalists did deem newspapers important for the increase of knowledge among the people. Congressman John Steele noted in 1792 that the creation of postal routes would allow the transport of newspapers "on the lowest terms," which reflected the belief that "the diffusion of knowledge is productive of virtue, and the best security for our civil rights are incontrovertible truths which cannot be too frequently, or too forcibly inculcated."¹³⁰ John H. Hobart, a correspondent of Joseph Caldwell at the University, hoped in 1796 that "by the assistance of Webster's and Fenno's papers" Caldwell would be able to "make good Federalists of some of" his North Carolina friends.¹³¹ Whereas Steele saw the potential of the news to cultivate the virtue of the people, Hobart saw newspapers as a partisan weapon. The tension between the two visions for newspapers and knowledge proved to be a source of dissent even among the Federalists.

Federalists worried that newspapers, while encouraging virtuous citizenship, could also provide citizens with potentially inappropriate information. Planter-lawyer William R. Davie remarked to state treasurer John Haywood in 1805 that nothing was "more ridiculous than Boys

¹²⁹ Elliott, "North Carolina Newspapers," 51-52, 57, 58, 62; Pasley, "The Tyranny of Printers," 24-27, 40, 44.

¹³⁰ Cunningham, *Circular Letters of Congressmen*, 1:9.

¹³¹ Connor, *A Documentary History*, 2:81.

at school talking of ‘sacred regard to their rights,’ ‘the high and imposing duty of resistance,’ and of ‘denouncing laws,’ etc. etc., the general Slang of the times culled from the columns of Newspapers, yet these very words are attended with the most mischievous consequences.”¹³² Words and concepts had a certain power to influence behavior, and newspaper editors would have to be careful that their presses did not turn out potentially revolutionary materials. Thus did John Steele toast the press in 1803 but note that his generation ought to “learn to distinguish between its freedom and licentiousness.”¹³³ The public prints could enlighten or lead astray if their words fell into the wrong hands.

Newspapers also had a practical purpose in building an enlightened citizenry: the spread of useful information could help North Carolinians pursue their material interests and benefit the nation. The importance of postal routes cannot be underestimated for southerners as they provided the means to connect southerners to the new nation as well as to inform them. John Steele believed that such post roads would throw “political information into the heart of the three Southern States” and allow him to more effectively communicate with his constituents.¹³⁴ If the routes had existed earlier, William B. Grove argued, the people of the South could have made economic decisions that would have kept them from being the prey of speculators in certificates. “A want of conveyance of information among the people,” Grove believed, “has not only been a real loss for individuals but to the State; had our own People held their Paper Credit, they would have gained the advantage of the increase Value, and become friends and attached to the government which they Now in some measure abhor.”¹³⁵ The lack of information had impeded

¹³² Hamilton and Battle, “William Richardson Davie: A Memoir,” 60.

¹³³ Battle, “Letters of Nathaniel Macon, John Steele and William Barry Grove,” 44.

¹³⁴ John Steele to Joseph Winston, July 20, 1790, Ernest Haywood Papers.

¹³⁵ Battle, “Letters of Nathaniel Macon, John Steele and William Barry Grove,” 86.

the development of nationalism, which harmed Federalist hopes for muting the illiberal localism of the states.

North Carolina Federalists learned early the lessons of nationalism and an informed public after the defeat of the pro-Constitution forces at the Hillsboro Convention in 1788. An ill-informed electorate sent too many anti-federal men to the convention, and the lack of verve on the part of the Federalists to mitigate negative public opinion of the Constitution contributed to the refusal of the North Carolina convention to join the union. Historian Penelope Sue Smith has argued that the defeat at Hillsboro taught the Federalists that they needed better organization, that they were a minority, and that they could not win by the intellectual weight of their arguments alone. “The defeat at Hillsborough,” Smith writes, “brought about an alteration in political style, an adjustment to modern political realities” for the Federalists.¹³⁶ Federalists may have learned those lessons slowly and uncomfortably for the next decade, but William R. Davie and James Iredell did apply their newfound knowledge to a campaign designed to remove lingering misperceptions of the Constitution. In state newspapers, popular anti-Federalist leaders like Willie Jones and Thomas Person received severe public criticism, particularly the latter who had called George Washington a “damned scoundrel.” An ensuing pamphlet war and a barrage of newspaper editorials refuted anti-federalist criticisms of the Constitution and highlighted the difficulties North Carolina would face as an independent state. The effectiveness of the public education campaign could be debated as the central explanation for North Carolina’s final entry into the union, but the Federalists believed that when the next convention at Fayetteville accepted the Constitution, the shift in public opinion was largely due to their vigorous efforts.¹³⁷

¹³⁶ Penelope Sue Smith, “Creation of an American State: Politics in North Carolina, 1765-1789” (Ph.D. dissertation, Rice University, 1980), 613, quote on 631.

¹³⁷ Louise Irby Trenholme, *The Ratification of the Federal Constitution in North Carolina* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932), 133-138, 193-209; Alan D. Watson, “States Rights and Agrarian Ascendant,” in

With the spread of newspapers over the years after the ratification of the Constitution in North Carolina and with the increase in the number of postal routes, John Steele believed that “if the people hereafter remain uninformed it must be their own fault.”¹³⁸ Yet, misinformation, rumor, and lies still characterized communications in the South and made it difficult for Federalists to inspire the citizens to become friends of government. In addressing President John Adams in 1798, the Officers of the Lincoln Regiment of the state militia recognized their difficulty in obtaining information: “though our situation is far from the seat of general legislation and among the last to be informed of governmental measures yet we shall endeavour to prove that we shall be among the foremost for zeal and loyalty.” They could not “prove” their loyalty, but only “endeavour” to do so.¹³⁹ That the bonds of loyalty relied so heavily on the lack of information was surely not lost on the Federalists’ understanding of the importance of information in the early republic.¹⁴⁰

Even though access to information through newspapers underpinned Federalists’ conceptions of creating a virtuous citizenry, men like John Steele and William R. Davie expressed caution about their own relationship to the press. Davie complained to Steele in 1800 that the “eager vivacity of the federal printers” damaged the cause of Federalism because these printers continually “sounded the tocsin of alarm” over the election of Jefferson.¹⁴¹ Crying wolf too often could have negative consequences for the Federalist image. Davie reassured Steele that he would not engage in sounding the alarm by putting any of Steele’s letters in the press. In an

The Constitution and the States: The Role of the Original Thirteen in the Framing and Adoption of the Federal Constitution, ed. Patrick T. Conley and John P. Kaminski (Madison: Madison House, 1988), 263; Albert R. Newsome, “North Carolina’s Ratification of the Federal Constitution,” *North Carolina Historical Review* 17 (October 1940): 297.

¹³⁸ Cunningham, *Circular Letters of Congressmen*, 1:4.

¹³⁹ Officers of the Lincoln Regiment of Militia to John Adams, October 2, 1798, John Adams Papers, Duke University.

¹⁴⁰ David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776-1820* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

¹⁴¹ Hamilton and Battle, “William Richardson Davie: A Memoir,” 42.

age where prominent politician's letters frequently ended up reprinted in newspapers, even when they were marked private, Davie's reassurance carried no small amount of comfort for Steele.¹⁴² Steele requested security for his letters when he wrote to John Haywood, the state treasurer, in 1802 concerning his resignation from Jefferson's administration. "Mr. Jefferson and Mr. Adams have both suffered so much," Steele wrote, "by the licentiousness of the press that I should be extremely sorry to contribute materials which might increase it."¹⁴³ That Steele thought abuse of the character of both presidents ran far too rampant is a testament to his disdain for the excesses of print.

Other Federalists, too, were ambivalent about literary contributions to the press. William B. Grove expressed regret in 1794 that he had merely signed a paper written by Benjamin Hawkins for publication.¹⁴⁴ Duncan Cameron's father, John Cameron, explicitly warned his son against sending letters to the press. "Let me conjure You," Cameron entreated, "not to enter upon any public Disputation thereon, whether verbally or in print, until you are more independent than at present."¹⁴⁵ Entering the world of public print could have disastrous consequences for one's fortunes, but that did not deter Charles W. Harris from actually writing entire pieces for publication in Hodge's newspaper.¹⁴⁶ The eighteenth century custom of withholding one's name by using an eponym usually derived from classical sources. It did, therefore, provide a shield for correspondents such as Harris who simply wanted their ideas in print to be considered without reference to character of a specific individual. That practice, however, came into question and it did not prevent rival essayists from exposing the identities of anonymous correspondents.

¹⁴² Hamilton and Battle, "William Richardson Davie: A Memoir," 51.

¹⁴³ John Steele to John Haywood, December 24, 1802, Ernest Haywood Papers.

¹⁴⁴ Battle, "Letters of Nathaniel Macon, John Steele and William Barry Grove," 110.

¹⁴⁵ John Cameron to Duncan Cameron, October 24, 1779, Cameron Family Papers.

¹⁴⁶ Hamilton and Wagstaff, "The Harris Letters," 82.

What increased Federalist ambivalence about the press more than anything else was its vulnerability to manipulation.¹⁴⁷ William B. Grove commented to James Hogg in 1798 that Hogg's

observations relative to the incorrect information on the real State of affairs among the great mass of the People, & the causes of it correspond entirely with my own opinion; to find fault, abuse, and write infamous insinuations to Degrade our own government, is the highth of some mens Ambition, & the greatest evidence of their attention to the Happiness & interest of the Country men; --their object is to flatter the ignorant, & to increase their own Consequence among the Malcontents¹⁴⁸

Printers bore a sacred responsibility because creating a virtuous citizenry depended on having truth as the centerpiece of public communication. An anonymous correspondent in the *Minerva* in 1803 argued that the duty of "a man who feels an honest concern for the welfare of his country," and who wished to "inform the understandings of men, and carry conviction home to their senses," was to announce his arguments publicly and proclaim his sentiments openly. Such a man should be "solicitous" that all should have the proper means for evaluating arguments and coming to a conclusion on their own. Instead, the correspondent averred, the purveyors of republican propaganda shunned the possibility of "free, open and candid discussion" by using "unblushing falsehood, designing misrepresentation, and impudent invective."¹⁴⁹ William Boylan, in an editorial in the same year, accused such republican pamphleteers of deliberately leaving out information "which in the least tends to criminate the pretensions of their party."¹⁵⁰

The Federalist crusade for truth originated in a conviction that the printer's role in publishing a newspaper was simply to publish the news and allow the people to make their own informed judgments about politics. Impartiality in the selection of news for publication made

¹⁴⁷ Brown, *The Idea of an Informed Citizenry*, 87.

¹⁴⁸ Henry M. Wagstaff, "The Letters of William Barry Grove," *James Sprunt Historical Publications* 9:2 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1910), 77-78.

¹⁴⁹ *Minerva*, August 8, 1803.

¹⁵⁰ *Minerva*, December 5, 1805.

sound financial as well as political sense. Many of the editors of the late eighteenth-century who experimented in partisanship suffered immensely from the loss of advertising revenue as well as the loss of social standing when they advocated positions which galled local elites. Printers, moreover, were seldom viewed as the paragons of genteel society and behavior. They often came from humble backgrounds, and their lives exhibited the dependence on the marketplace that eighteenth century republicans abhorred. The vicissitudes of having a commercial life and earning a living from subscriptions which rarely came in seemed to make editors unfit to serve as models of republican virtue. As they lacked the extensive education of aristocrats, it was also expected that editors would defer to the enlightened opinions of their social betters. Hence, the publication of extracts of letters from gentlemen rather than the editor's own compositions dominated most southern newspapers. The editor, then, simply had to copy materials culled from other sources and arrange them in print so as to provide information to the public. It was not an intellectually demanding job, nor did it call for partisanship.¹⁵¹

The eighteenth-century term for impartiality was disinterestedness, and it was expected of elite men. The Federalists had long given up, in Gordon Wood's words, "Revolutionary utopianism," believing that the best way to lead the republic was to make vigorous government the agent of civic virtue by harnessing the natural interests and passions of the common people for the good of the entire nation. Only gentlemen could expect to rise above those base passions and those attachments to local interest which led to the chaos of the 1780s and the need for a Constitutional Convention in 1787. The education that Federalists so frequently praised, therefore, was the means for promoting enlightenment, explaining why the common people, bereft of elite educational opportunity, lived in slavery to their private interests. Additionally,

¹⁵¹ Pasley, "The Tyranny of Printers," 24-27, 34-35, 40-45, 57-58, 79-103; Fischer, *Revolution of American Conservatism*, 132-134.

pursuing disinterestedness required freedom from dependence upon the marketplace and the ability to have the requisite leisure for the improvement of one's mental faculties, two qualities that the common people would probably never obtain. The common people, however, could be made to understand and appreciate disinterestedness, but it required both a university to mold leaders as well as newspapers which would supply the appropriate understanding of current events to minds dominated by parochialism.¹⁵²

Such notions of disinterestedness came under increasing attack as the eighteenth century closed. The Republicans, in particular, attacked the supposition that any person could be free from interest. All people, they reasoned, pursued those policies and practices which best materially benefited themselves. There could, therefore, be no truly disinterested men. The Republicans, like their intellectual and political ancestors, the anti-federalists, came to accept an argument that self-interest could be celebrated and harnessed to work for the whole of American society. The intellectual implication of the rejection of disinterest was that the opinions of gentlemen should not be regarded as a kind of sacrosanct truth. If George Washington advocated a policy, did he sponsor it to protect his own interests, or did he think it truly benefited the whole of society? Such a conflict between competing understandings of interest thus animated the Federalist debate over accurate information in newspapers. Federalists had a difficult time accepting that Joseph Gales' *Raleigh Register* could be publishing information as equally truthful as William Boylan's *Minerva*. While the Republicans did not accept the kind of relativism

¹⁵² Gordon S. Wood, "Interests and Disinterestedness in the Making of the Constitution," in *Beyond Confederation: Origins of the Constitution and American National Identity*, ed. Richard Beeman, Stephen Botein, and Edward C. Carter II (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 81-104; Gordon Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 104-105; Pasley, "The Tyranny of Printers," 161-162.

prevalent in the postmodern era, they did advocate, much to the chagrin of Federalists, the possibility for mutually conflicting and truthful “interests” in print.¹⁵³

Federalist advocacy of the Sedition Act during the Quasi-War with France demonstrated their concern for the dissemination in print of accurate information. Most North Carolina Federalists remained relatively quiet about the Sedition Act, though William B. Grove voted for it while only Archibald Henderson publicly and vehemently supported it during its reauthorization debate.¹⁵⁴ Henderson agreed with his Federalist colleagues that the act did not impose a prior restraint on printers but only made them liable for abuses. Such arguments essentially reflected the traditions of English common law. Henderson further addressed the problem of an ill-informed public by challenging the idea that the government could not be maliciously damaged by falsehoods if its actions were just. Such a doctrine, Henderson posited, “would be true were all the people placed in a situation to judge correctly for themselves. But you know sir, this is impossible; the people must be informed through the medium of public prints, and if those prints teem with falsehoods and malicious abuse, they will be deceived; and instead of forming just opinions they will be constantly led astray.” With a central government so far removed from most people’s everyday lives and the specialized knowledge inherent in such a government’s bureaucracy, Henderson believed it imperative for the correct information to be available to the public. “Will it be said,” Henderson inquired, “that they can tell what is false and what is not?”¹⁵⁵

Republican truth and interest in print appeared to Federalists as mere propaganda, devoid of rationality and substance. To the Federalist mind, Republican newspapers corrupted the

¹⁵³ Wood, “Interests and Disinterestedness in the Making of the Constitution,” 81-104; Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*, 243-270; Zvesper, *Political Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 14-15.

¹⁵⁴ *Annals of Congress*, 5th Congress, 2nd Session, 2171.

¹⁵⁵ Cunningham, *Circular Letters of Congressmen*, 243-244.

minds of the people and prevented the creation of public opinion which could be expected to engender proper deference to government. William Boylan argued in 1805 that in “a government so entirely dependent on public opinion, and exercised by officers delegated so directly by the people as ours, it is of utmost importance that the Citizens should form correct opinions of men and measures.”¹⁵⁶ The nature of “the people,” as another abstraction, and in Edmund Morgan’s words, a fiction, made them susceptible to misinformation. Just as with newspapers, Federalists expressed ambivalence about the concept of the sovereign people. On the one hand, the people embodied the nationalism that legitimated the Constitution. But, on the other hand, Federalists frequently deprecated them for their lack of wisdom. The people were necessary to counteract the idea of states rights, but they proved to be unwieldy as a means of creating a vigorous central government. The Federalists could only attempt to direct the people as fathers would look after their sons, hoping that they would not become wayward and profligate.¹⁵⁷

Though the people existed in reality as individuals living across the United States, the Federalist construction of the people as a group served to sever the ideal from the real. When Federalists spoke of the people, their theories did not always accord with reality. Salisbury politician John Steele spoke of the people as having difficulty governing their passions, though clearly even Federalist men had to learn to control their passions.¹⁵⁸ However condescending

¹⁵⁶ *Minerva*, December 5, 1805.

¹⁵⁷ Edmund Morgan, *Inventing the People: The Rise of Popular Sovereignty in England and America* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1988), 149-269.

¹⁵⁸ Cunningham, *Circular Letters of Congressmen*, 1:4. William B. Grove noted that one such gentleman, Richard Dobbs Spaight, could have avoided his famous duel if he had not “fallen sacrifice to his own violence of temper.” See Battle, “Letters of Nathaniel Macon, John Steele and William Barry Grove,” 27. John Steele also wrote disparagingly on September 13, 1803 on the passions of Judge Chase, a Federalist judge whose ravings from the bench earned him impeachment proceedings. See Battle, “Letters of Nathaniel Macon, John Steele and William Barry Grove,” 40. Robert Wiebe notes that even the great men of the founding era—Washington, Jefferson, Madison, Adams, and Monroe—suffered from headaches, wrathful outbursts, apoplexy, epileptoid hysteria, and temper tantrums. Passion could affect all men. See Wiebe, *The Opening of American Society*, 15.

Federalist descriptions of the people may seem, the vision of a sovereign people served political purposes and figured widely into everyday discussions of how the nature of the people made it difficult to govern them.¹⁵⁹

In general, the sovereign people deemed learning as a mark of aristocracy. “A Friend,” writing on behalf of the University of North Carolina, believed that most common people despised higher education for four reasons. First, if a good man had natural ability—given by God—then he would not need learning to improve himself. Second, learning could never give man ability if he did not have it in the first place. Third, since the prophets and apostles were illiterate, to strive beyond their example would be mere vanity. Finally, learning tended to make men vicious. “Ignoramus,” who attacked the University, actually decried education for the common people because religion had diffused “its meliorating influence to a degree bordering, apparently, on beatitude” and eliminated the need for further enlightenment.¹⁶⁰ Indeed, “Ignoramus” argued, too much learning made men desire to rise above their station. As a result, they became too lazy to do hard work. At any rate, commoners disdained the classical education of the elite as snobbery.¹⁶¹

Federalists believed that the masses themselves would never attain the highest level of enlightened virtue since society depended upon hierarchies of talent to maintain order and stability. At the same time, they hoped to remove some of the local prejudice and ignorance attached to the common man’s experience in order to render him better able to recognize superior virtue in his social betters. Consequently, Federalists only cared about the

¹⁵⁹ Wiebe, *The Opening of American Society*, 37.

¹⁶⁰ Connor, *A Documentary History*, 1:190, 191.

¹⁶¹ Connor, *A Documentary History*, 1:212, 213.

enlightenment of the public on election day.¹⁶² If Federalists could insulate the people from their own ignorance, they could prevent such electoral debacles that resulted in the Jefferson's ascendance to the Presidency. Yet, it was not easy to reform the people. William R. Davie noted to Duncan Cameron in 1803 that his opponents had “succeeded completely in raising the spirit of party into a flame, and alarming the ignorant and credulous with frightful stories about kings and aristocrats; thousands of those poor wretches sincerely believe they have saved their Country from these monsters by preventing my going to Congress.”¹⁶³ The terminology that Davie used, particularly the term “story,” frequently found its way into Federalist critiques of the sovereign people’s intellect. Stories implied fiction. The Federalists wanted to teach the sovereign people truth.

The people were extraordinarily sensitive to party behavior. “The public spirit,” lamented William R. Davie, “appears to be destroyed by party rage, and the effects of these domestic evils are increased by party embarrassments.”¹⁶⁴ The inhabitants of Chatham County, writing to John Adams in 1798, bemoaned the fact that “by the malice of our Enemies we are represented as a divided people, a people inimical to the measures of our Government.”¹⁶⁵ Party spirit had driven a wedge into the sovereign people, in effect undermining a sense of American nationalism. Because the will of the public could be swayed so easily, Federalists deprecated the ravings of demagogues, which the “mass of the people” admired “as an effort of the sublimest patriotism.”¹⁶⁶ Demagogues wooed the public with flattery and promised policies to “ingratiate

¹⁶² David Waldstreicher, “Federalism, the Styles of Politics, and the Politics of Style,” 103, 109, 111; Zvesper, *Political Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 43, 169.

¹⁶³ William R. Davie to Duncan Cameron, August 28, 1803, Cameron Family Papers.

¹⁶⁴ Hamilton and Wagstaff, “William Richardson Davie: A Memoir,” 44.

¹⁶⁵ “Address of the Inhabitants of Chatham County to the President of the United States,” May 15, 1798, John Adams Papers.

¹⁶⁶ William R. Davie to John Steele, February 21, 1801, John Steele Papers.

themselves into the good will of the people.”¹⁶⁷ Gentlemen, unlike demagogues, did not chase after the attentions of the public, and, therefore, maintained their intellectual independence to make policy for the good of all. That is why Amariah Jocelin, a merchant from Wilmington, believed that popular elections “being under the management of designing men express nothing fairly and justly.”¹⁶⁸

On some occasions the people reversed the natural order of deference and forced the politicians to abandon their principles. During the Quasi-War with France, public opinion against the French increased rapidly in 1798 and 1799 largely as a result of the sentiment that America’s honor had been sullied by the treatment of American ambassadors in the XYZ Affair. Federalists often interpreted this surge of popular ardor for their strong stance against France as a commitment to their party rather than as an expression of war fever.¹⁶⁹ Republican politicians scrambled to claim the mantle of Federalism. “All these candidates [Alston, Blount, Binford, and Kennedy] were democratic,” Peter Brown wrote to James Iredell about the Edenton elections in 1798, “but the voice of the people has converted all except Blount & of the strength of that voice you may judge by its raising so despicable a thing as Alston, merely because he was the first to declared himself Federal . . .”¹⁷⁰ Samuel Johnston humorously noted to Iredell in November of the same year that “all the members” with whom he had conversed “are wonderfully federal, I say wonderful because I never conceived it possible there would be so universal a conversion in so short a space.”¹⁷¹ Popular clamor for action against France muted pro-French Republicanism in politicians who were eager for office. Federalists condemned such

¹⁶⁷ Joseph Courtney to John Cain, July 29, 1796, William Duffy Papers, NCDAH.

¹⁶⁸ Wagstaff, *The Papers of John Steele*, 1:156.

¹⁶⁹ Lisle Rose, *Prologue to Democracy*, 169, 172, 176-179; Gilpatrick, *Jeffersonian Democracy in North Carolina*, 99.

¹⁷⁰ Peter Brown to James Iredell, August 11, 1798, Charles E. Johnson Collection.

¹⁷¹ Samuel Johnston to James Iredell, November 28, 1798, Charles E. Johnson Collection.

a failure to stand up for principle not only as morally weak, but also unnatural because it reversed the hierarchy upon which society was built. The people may have been sovereign, but they did not have a right to intimidate their superiors in such matters.

On some occasions Federalists dropped the mantle of respect for the people and denigrated them as the lowest class of scum on the earth. The leading citizens of Rockingham petitioned one of their Federalist leaders to run for office, begging him to prevent “eminent danger from the votes of an ignorant dram Drinking Rabble.”¹⁷² William B. Grove described his constituents as “ignorant, very ignorant & liable to be imposed on by petty fellows, telling pretty tales.”¹⁷³ Grove’s disgust with them actually led him to suggest to the Secretary of War the possibility of using weapons to keep order among the lower classes:

But thank God in this part of the State we have few Grumbletonians, and still fewer Jacobins and I am persuaded you may with safety confide in us so far as to lend us some of those arms which are and must be useless and unsafe in their present situation, and may eventually wanting in the hands of active citizens to keep a certain class of people in order, that are very numerous in the Vicinity of Georgetown and Wilmington, both of which places must be immediately aided from this District in case of any disturbance of a serious nature.¹⁷⁴

If the public gathered in the form of a mob primarily composed of the lowest class of landless, impoverished, and unruly people in the state, Grove had little reservation about shooting them to preserve order. Such a policy, of course, would have been deemed by disinterested men as promoting the public good even if it implied that the sovereign people held their power only to a point.¹⁷⁵

Not all Federalists were of a like mind on the subject of the people. Archibald Henderson, in his speech on the repeal of the Judiciary Act of 1801, indicated that he did not

¹⁷² Henry M. Wagstaff, “The Harrington Letters,” *James Sprunt Historical Publications* 13 (1914) (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1914), 17-18.

¹⁷³ Wagstaff, *The Papers of John Steele*, 1:125.

¹⁷⁴ William B. Grove to James McHenry, August 20, 1798, James McHenry Papers, Duke University.

¹⁷⁵ Fischer, *Revolution of American Conservatism*, 156-157; Wiebe, *The Opening of American Society*, 38.

believe his conscience to be captive to the will of the people. “If this approbation [of his vote],” Henderson explained, “is only to be obtained by the unconditional surrender of my understanding, and the violation of my oath, I hope I shall be excused if I do not make this sacrifice at the altar of public opinion.”¹⁷⁶ Privately, Henderson confessed to lawyer Spruce Macay in 1800 that he was tired “of this dismal clamor about the people. I respect them as much as any man but I am not for sacrificing my judgment and opinion together with their essential interest to the intemperate howlings of a few demagogues.”¹⁷⁷ His paternalism, seen in his determination that he understood the interests of the people better than they did, meant that he might at times have to vote against their wishes as it was for their own good. At the same time he could not bring himself to sacrifice his better judgment to a community whose intellects had been addled by Republican demagoguery.

The Salisbury merchant John Steele, for his part, expressed slightly more Jeffersonian sentiments about the people. In his first circular letter he supposed that the people of North Carolina were “too enlightened, and too much attached to order and tranquility” to condemn proposed excise taxes without giving them a fair trial.¹⁷⁸ Steele also supposed that the people had enough common sense to see through the rhetoric used by Federalists and Republicans. He declared to John Haywood in 1796:

The old story of kings and aristocracy of which many patriots pretend to be so much afraid (in this country where every Farmer is a King upon his own Soil) must be too ridiculous to require serious refutation. It is in my mind like accusing a man of sense, of wanting to introduce Witches and Hobgoblins into the United States. Notwithstanding this I am a republican, and one I hope will always entertain too high a respect for the public sentiment of my country to suppose it

¹⁷⁶ *Annals of Congress*, 7th Congress, 1st Session, 523.

¹⁷⁷ Henderson, “A Federalist of the Old School,” 15.

¹⁷⁸ Cunningham, *Circular Letters of Congressmen*, 1:4. Steele was wrong. The legislation under discussion was the excise tax on whiskey, and it proved to be extraordinarily difficult to collect in western North Carolina. See Jeffrey J. Crow, “The Whiskey Rebellion in North Carolina,” *North Carolina Historical Review* 66 (January 1989), 1-28.

capable of being influenced by mere sounds, or word which with respect to a nation of free Holders can have no meaning.¹⁷⁹

Steele did not believe that the tropes which characterized the debate between Hamilton and Jefferson had any grounding in reality. The whole political rhetoric of the 1790s, in his estimation, smacked of hyperbole. The people had too much common sense to accept it. Those who were true republicans, the yeomen farmers firmly rooted in the soil they owned, could not be swayed by the fictions of aristocracy and monarchy that galvanized the public mind and increased the rancor of partisanship.

Federalist ideas about the people, the public “mind”, and the press reflected their model of the consensual public sphere. Between the private world of individuals and the public actions of government lay a realm where voluntary civil association and a literate print culture existed. Federalists, as the most enlightened members of society, hoped to teach the public through the press and educational reform how to act as a people. The exercise of popular sovereignty was a public act and Federalists hoped to be able to direct that sovereignty into socially conservative ends. Though they believed that the legitimacy of the government rested on public opinion, they hoped to shape that public opinion into what historian Seth Cotlar has called passive citizenship.¹⁸⁰ The educational imperatives and newspaper campaigns of the Federalists emphasized obedience to one’s social superiors over critical engagement with civic processes. For Federalists, the public sphere of letters created a world of polite and genteel culture where issues could be debated rationally among gentlemen whose identities would be withheld to prevent the ascription of political opinions to motives other than reason. John L. Brooke has termed this “the consensual public sphere,” although it is doubtful that it ever existed in pure

¹⁷⁹ John Steele to John Haywood, November 25, 1796, Ernest Haywood Papers.

¹⁸⁰ Seth Cotlar, “Reading the Foreign News,” 327.

form even while the Federalists were in power.¹⁸¹ The appearance of oppositional presses by the early 1790s effectively limited their ability to control information and shape public opinion. The Sedition Act demonstrated Federalist aspirations for limiting critical engagement, but the law backfired and ended up spurring the development of even more oppositional presses.¹⁸²

The oppositional public sphere which grew out of opposition politics in England and the American revolutionaries' rejection of British rule accepted the primacy of interest and welcomed it in print to a certain degree. The free expression of ideas, whether right or wrong, misinformed, or illogical, should not be impeded, Republicans argued, because the public mind, by the exercise of common sense and reason, would eventually discern true and honest policy. Critical engagement, therefore, was necessary to the Republican conception of opposition. Without motivating the people to action, Republicans could not mobilize voters in a way that would influence the outcome of political campaigns. Such a hortatory style directly contrasted with the Federalist belief in the need for deference to intellectual and social superiors. Both the Federalist and Republican efforts to shape the informed citizen and public opinion together through newspapers made the meaning of civic engagement hotly contested in the early republic and probably contributed, in David H. Fischer's estimation, to widespread voter participation at the polls.¹⁸³

The mediating institutions known as voluntary political associations helped to create the public sphere by arranging physical space in organizations for the discussion of ideas by private

¹⁸¹ John L. Brooke, "Reason and Passion in the Public Sphere: Habermas and the Cultural Historians," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 29:1 (Summer 1998), 43-67.

¹⁸² Brooke, "Ancient Lodges," 275-283; John L. Brooke, "To be 'Read by the Whole People': Press, Party, and Public Sphere in the United States, 1789-1840" *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 110:1 (2002), 55-65; Michael Warner, *The Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth Century America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), xi-xiii, 39-42; Brooke, "Consent, Civil Society, and the Public Sphere in the Age of Revolution and the Early American Republic," 212-217.

¹⁸³ Brooke, "To Be 'Read by the Whole People,'" 74; Seth Cotlar, "Reading the Foreign News, Imagining an American Public Sphere," 312, 326, 327; Fischer, *Revolution of American Conservatism*, xv; Brown, *The Idea of an Informed Citizenry*, 61; Brooke, "Ancient Lodges," 276-277; Kerber, *Federalists in Dissent*, 206-207.

citizens. A number of such associations such as the Masons and the Society of the Cincinnati had existed before and during the Revolution.¹⁸⁴ Such societies proliferated during the 1790s, many directly challenging the hegemony of Federalist control over older political groups. President Washington found them to be “self-created,” and with other Federalists agreed that they posed a threat because groups of individuals representing their own private interest, presuming to bring themselves into existence as separate social entities—apart from the sovereign people as a whole—threatened the established hierarchy. Voluntary political associations posed a threat to the Federalist conception of order particularly because they were thought to interfere with the proper operation of government on society. As mediating institutions, these civic organizations functioned as another layer for political information and organization of policies which, in turn, shaped public opinion. By banding together a group with a common private interest, such organizations could seek redress or influence policy to the detriment of the public good. When the lowest orders of society came together to form such associations, the Federalists called them mobs. The only function of a mob was destruction, and Federalists were cognizant of the direct threat to public order as well as to private property.¹⁸⁵

Federalist conceptions of acceptable civic association did not prevent individuals from organizing into groups and engaging in political activity. Thus, the Federalist hope for a consensual order clashed daily with the reality of opposition in society. That is why Samuel Johnston was so pleased when President Washington denounced the Jacobin Societies, as he

¹⁸⁴ Brooke, “Ancient Lodges,” 287-306. Brooke makes a strong case for Federalist membership, at least early on, in the Society of the Cincinnati and the Masons. For Masonic activity in North Carolina, see Thomas C. Parramore, *Launching the Craft: The First Half-Century of Freemasonry in North Carolina* (Raleigh: Grand Lodge of North Carolina, 1975). On the Society of the Cincinnati, see Curtis Carroll Davis, *Revolution’s Godchild: The Birth, Death, and Regeneration of the Society of the Cincinnati in North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1976). For a useful overview of civic associations or self-created societies, see Elkins and McKittrick, *The Age of Federalism*, 451-461.

¹⁸⁵ Brooke, “Ancient Lodges,” 301-305.

called them, which formed in the early 1790s.¹⁸⁶ Writing to James Iredell in 1795, William R. Davie regretted that “the present crisis appears to me to be the most delicate and important since the organization of our government, the antifederalists and the personal enemies of Administration, have rallied with astonishing activity, the circumstance of the threat has ranged a variety of parties on their side, and given an imposing appearance to their numbers, and I believe they will now make their last effort to shake the Government.” Davie might as well have called them a mob.¹⁸⁷

Federalists could not prevent intrusions from these lower classes into their own civic associations. The most important of these local institutions for shaping the public sphere was the annual July 4th toasting ritual. The process of developing toasts brought together leading men of the community as they debated the precise and proper wording for each political sentiment expressed in the toasts. These toasts could have functioned as early political party platforms. Indeed, Federalists hoped that the ritual of toasting would inculcate proper political values among the members of the community who came to hear them at public celebration dinners. Because toasts were published in leading newspapers, they also reflected the hope for Federalist consensus in the written public sphere as well. Republicans, however, did not always allow the toasting ritual to remain securely within the hands of Federalists.¹⁸⁸ A “Citizen of Johnston” reported to the *Minerva* in 1804 that the usual process of preparing toasts had failed for that year because of extraordinary conflict. “It was proposed to the committee,” the correspondent noted, “that they [the toasts] should be perfectly neutral” because there were going to be at the

¹⁸⁶ Samuel Johnston to James Iredell, December 10, 1794, Charles E. Johnson Collection.

¹⁸⁷ William R. Davie to James Iredell, September 4, 1795, William R. Davie Papers, NCDAH. For Federalist thought on mobs, see Fischer, *Revolution of American Conservatism*, 156-157; Kerber, *Federalists in Dissent*, 181-192; Wiebe, *The Opening of American Society*, 38.

¹⁸⁸ David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fêtes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776-1820*, 33-34, 129-130, 216-245.

celebrations “persons of different political sentiments.” Such neutral toasts would have likely reflected Federalist consensus on acceptable political sentiments, but “a foreigner, who has lately come to reside in the county, intruded himself & proposed some [toasts] of a very inflammatory nature, highly insulting to a very respectable portion of those gentlemen who were expected to join in the celebration.” Opposition now challenged consensus.¹⁸⁹

The committee could only agree on one toast for the occasion due to the intransigence of the “foreigner”: “to the “4th of July and the principles of ’76.” When the foreigner dared to propose his own toasts at the celebratory dinner, in spite of the agreement to avoid party strife, the company refused to drink to them. He continued proposing his own toasts of a partisan nature until a county magistrate proposed one of his own: to the “American Government, supported by Americans, uninfluenced by *officious* and *intermeddling aliens*.” A peal of laughter and a loud applause muzzled the “foreigner” who offered no further toasts that day. When William Boylan reprinted this account in the *Minerva*, he not only intended to discredit the foreigner, who was none other than Joseph Gales, the editor of the *Register*, but sought to reinforce acceptable political norms in a public setting. Even though the committees gathered only once a year to organize the toasts and hold the Independence Day celebrations, these proved to be acceptable civic associations so long as the Federalists could maintain control over the toasting process.¹⁹⁰

As the Federalists analyzed the defeat of John Adams in the election of 1800, they observed a public sphere that slipped further and further from their control. All of the institutions and civic associations which mediated between the private lives of citizens and the central government seemed to fall under the irresistible spell of democracy. By 1804 they could

¹⁸⁹ *Minerva*, July 23, 1804.

¹⁹⁰ *Minerva*, July 23, 1804.

not even prevent interloping foreigners from prostituting the rituals of community toasts for July 4th to partisan imperatives. Growing like weeds, Republican newspapers spread pernicious doctrines throughout the community and reinforced the illiberal and unenlightened perspectives of the common people. The sovereign people, having been told for so long how crucial their participation was to the legitimacy of government, believed the rhetoric.

It became imperative to make sure that the public sphere reflected the sober doctrines of rationality and enlightenment so that the rhetoric of democracy did not lead to chaos and the election of untalented and corrupt men to stations of high public honor. Federalists hoped that they could continue to manage the people much as a father would exercise firm leadership to secure the proper upbringing of his children. Nonetheless, most recognized that their inactivity and disorganization made it impossible to exert vigorous leadership for the whole of North Carolina. Some Federalists believed that the people could be rescued from their political errors, but it would take an active campaign by means of the *Minerva* to educate them. In adopting this new tactic, Federalists tried to hold onto cherished notions of hierarchy and deference from their past. The story of their experiment is the story of William Boylan and the *Minerva*.

CHAPTER 3 – WILLIAM BOYLAN, FEDERALIST PARTISAN

*“Those therefore of every political sect who wish to be informed fully of the conduct of the government, and be made acquainted with the characters of the members of the administration, have recourse to the Minerva.” William Boylan, 1804*¹⁹¹

When Duncan Cameron and other leading Federalists worked out a plan in 1802 to create the enlightened, educated, and informed society that could reverse the excesses of Jeffersonian democracy, they naturally turned to the *Minerva*, a newspaper begun by Abraham Hodge and William Boylan in Fayetteville in 1796. Named after the Greek goddess of wisdom and war strategy, the *Minerva* seemed to be the best vehicle for convincing the public to defer to the leadership of the natural elite. Having been moved from Fayetteville to Raleigh in 1799 for political reasons, the *Minerva*’s sole purpose rested on tying together the diverse elements of North Carolina’s Federalist leadership in a way that would situate them to take the reins of state power from the untalented and ignorant lot of demagogues who had led the people away from a true understanding of a republican government. William Boylan aimed to make his newspaper a truly state-wide forum for Federalist ideas. No doubt his tactics derived nourishment from those of the other Raleigh editor who had been brought to North Carolina in 1799 for purely political reasons: Joseph Gales.

Boylan’s experiments with partisanship evolved slowly from 1800 to 1804. He, along with most genteel editors in the South, found it difficult to strike a balance between demagoguery and paternalism. Efforts to mobilize the people to accept passive enlightenment and deference undermined traditional Federalist notions of the roles of the natural elite and the common people in the political process.¹⁹² Surely David H. Fischer was at least partially correct

¹⁹¹ *Minerva*, November 5, 1804.

¹⁹² Waldstreicher, “Federalism, the Styles of Politics, and the Politics of Style,” 111; Zvesper, *Political Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 169.

when he argued that after 1800 Federalists began to mimic some of the partisan elements that they believed enabled the Republicans to win elections. The degree, however, to which there was a generational divide between younger and older Federalists—Younger Federalists adopting emerging partisan techniques and older leaders eschewing such newfangled ideas—may have been less significant in the South than Fischer supposed.¹⁹³ Even the younger leadership of the Federalists in North Carolina experienced discomfort in adopting the propaganda techniques of the Republicans. When Archibald Henderson articulated the hope in 1802 that “*tempora, mutantur seu non mutamur in illis,*” he and other Federalists must have recognized the challenge of remaining unchanged in changing times.¹⁹⁴

Despite the mask of impartiality that he hoped to use as he shaped public opinion, Boylan moved toward partisanship in several stages. His editorial choices for articles from 1796 to 1800 reflected concern for national topics and policies; these pieces he selected from the publications of other editors rather than writing them himself. With the impending disaster of the election of 1800, Boylan focused intensely on Thomas Jefferson, copying the bitter diatribes of northern editors into the *Minerva*. Boylan’s focus on Jefferson continued to be an obsession after 1800, as it did with many other Federalist editors, leading him to repeatedly refer to the topics of religion, economy, slavery, Thomas Paine, philosophy, and the spoils system in his criticism of Jeffersonian policies.¹⁹⁵ At the same time that he attacked Jefferson, Boylan endeavored to link state politics to national politics where possible, bringing to his readers’ attention the way in which North Carolina Republicans were merely the stooges of the sage of Monticello. The more

¹⁹³ Fischer, *Revolution of American Conservatism*, xviii, 1-49.

¹⁹⁴ *Minerva*, March 9, 1802. “The times, though they are changed we are not changed in them.” This is a reference to Christoph Besold, *Synopsis Politicae Doctrinae*, 11:14 (Amsterdam: Janissonius, 1648) and Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 15:165. The original was tempora mutantur et nos mutamur in illis (“the times are changed and we are changed in them”).

¹⁹⁵ Kerber, *Federalists in Dissent*, 12.

Boylan animadverted upon state politics, the more he began to endorse openly certain candidates and to denigrate others. This led him to write his own editorials rather than to merely reprint the notions of others, and he even began to comment upon reprints of important public documents, telling his readers what conclusions to draw from studying the speeches and acts of Congress.¹⁹⁶

As Boylan's own editorial voice began to assert itself, the *Minerva* began less and less to show multiple viewpoints of stories, for Boylan preferred to select the facts which fit his own suppositions. At the same time, Boylan continued to assert that he merely printed the truth as a corrective to the falsehoods of the Republicans, maintaining the fiction of the editor's impartial mask.¹⁹⁷

What helped Boylan to move from merely printing the news to commenting on state politics was the increasing vitriol of Federalist printers across the nation after the election of 1800. Boylan, taking advantage of free exchanges of papers between printers, copied articles from an extensive list of sources.¹⁹⁸ From 1800 to 1803 he reprinted articles from at least twenty-five different newspapers, some prominent, and some obscure. Drawing on the heavily Federalist *Gazette of the United States*, Boylan found in that publication a ready source of national news with enlightened commentary. Also favored were the *Washington Federalist*, the *Anti-Democrat* (Baltimore), the *Baltimore Federal Gazette*, and *Boston Columbia Centinel*, all solidly Federalist newspapers. Boylan, however, did not merely copy from those who shared his political opinions, for he found it prudent also to read the papers of the Republicans. At times he reprinted articles from Republican presses followed by commentaries on the same topics from Federalist editors. He also made use of state newspapers, such as the *Cape Fear Herald*, the *Raleigh Register*, and the *Newbern Gazette*. Since most newspapers of the day endlessly

¹⁹⁶ *Minerva*, May 30, 1803.

¹⁹⁷ Fischer, *Revolution of American Conservatism*, 132-135

¹⁹⁸ Pasley, "The Tyranny of Printers," 48.

recycled the same news, Boylan earned no opprobrium because he did not print articles he had himself written. In general, the editor of a newspaper merely gathered and arranged materials for the reading public. Genteel editors did not engage in investigative reporting.¹⁹⁹

Boylan's first step toward partisanship came during the contest for the Presidency in 1800. Indeed, it was this contest which convinced Duncan Cameron and the Federalists that newspapers could create a properly informed public. The election of 1800 marked one of the greatest crises in orderly government since the adoption of the Constitution. It pitted an increasingly embattled John Adams against the popular Thomas Jefferson, with supporters on both sides threatening dissolution of the union and anarchy. Adams represented to many all that was wrong with Federalism. The Alien and Sedition Acts, the increase in the military during the Quasi-War crisis, the installation of odious taxes on land, houses, and slaves, and Adams' own supposed monarchist sentiments all became elements in the Republican critique of the President. At the same time, Federalists despised Thomas Jefferson, painting him as a slave to the French interest and as a man whose philosophical cast of mind made him unfit for leadership while his sponsorship of party made him detested as a demagogue. It did not help the Federalist cause that within their ranks dissent resulted from Alexander Hamilton's famous denunciation of Adams' character. Adams was even regarded by many of his own party to be going insane. When the tie

¹⁹⁹ From a random sample of the *Minerva* from 1800 to 1803, Boylan quoted from the *Boston Columbia Sentinel*, *Gazette of the United States*, *Washington Federalist*, *Raleigh Register*, *Anti-Democrat*, *Connecticut Courant*, *Baltimore Federal Gazette*, *New York Evening Post*, *Newbern Gazette*, *Palladium*, *Aurora*, *Cape Fear Herald*, *Virginia Gazette*, *Frederick Town Herald*, *Alexandria Advertiser*, *The Balance*, *New York Spectator*, *Litchford Monitor*, *Charleston Courier*, *Port Folio*, *Frederick Town Herald*, *New England Repository*, *Spectator*, *Bee*, and *Philadelphia Gazette*. The *Gazette of the United States* was quoted on eight occasions. See the *Minerva*, May 22, 1800, July 15, 22, 29, 1800, August 26, 1800, February 23, 1802, May 3, 1802, May 17, 1802, June 29, 1802, July 20, 1802, July 27, 1802, August 10, 1802, August 17, 1802, August 24, 1802, September 7, 1802, September 14, 1802, October 12, 1802, January 4, 1803, January 11, 1803, January 18, 1803, February 8, 1803, February 13, 1803, March 14, 1803, March 21, 1803, May 9, 1803, June 6, 1803, June 20, 1803, September 5, 1803, September 26, 1803, October 3, 1803, October 24, 1803, and October 30, 1803.

between Jefferson and Burr ended before a Federalist-dominated House of Representatives, the showdown between the Federalists and Republicans only continued to raise passions.²⁰⁰

Federalists in the House of Representatives during that cold winter of 1801 threatened to elect Burr or to have no President at all. Republicans threatened to withdraw and reorganize the government should the Federalists attempt to stall the election beyond March 4, 1801, the day on which the new President would assume office. Fires in two government buildings, stories of slave rebellions in Virginia, and rumors of mobs seizing arms electrified the country. Republicans spread rumors of a plot to assassinate Jefferson. Federalists threatened to make John Marshall, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, the temporary president. When the Federalists at last acquiesced to the election of Jefferson after thirty-five ballots, the crisis abated. Jefferson promised in his famous inaugural address that “we are all federalists, we are all republicans.” Hardly any Federalists believed it. The young republic had avoided the fate of France, but the effect on the body politic cascaded through the medium of the public prints.²⁰¹

Boylan shared in the passions of public opinion during the election crisis of 1800. He reprinted an article entitled “Important Crisis” from the *Philadelphia Gazette* in May of 1800 which argued that Jefferson “never approved of many parts” of the Constitution and intimated that Jefferson had led Madison astray in the formation of an opposition party. “Mr. Jefferson’s men declare there is no conciliation; they are determined to go to all lengths to accomplish their object,” the author of the editorial declared.²⁰² “NO FOREIGNER” in *Jenk’s Portland Gazette*

²⁰⁰ John Ferling, *Adams vs. Jefferson: The Tumultuous Election of 1800* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 119-135; Sharp, *American Politics in the Early Republic*, 163-164; John Ferling, *John Adams: A Life* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992), 373-380, 390-395; Susan Dunn, *Jefferson’s Second Revolution: The Election Crisis of 1800 and the Triumph of Republicanism* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004), 137-152.

²⁰¹ Ferling, *Adams vs. Jefferson*, 176-196; Dunn, *Jefferson’s Second Revolution*, 190-217; Sharp, *American Politics in the Early Republic*, 250-275; John C. Miller, *The Federalist Era* (New York: Harper and Row, 1960), 272-273.

²⁰² *Minerva*, May 20, 1800.

in July 1801 agreed that Jefferson was dangerous and went on to accuse him of being in “full concert with the French revolutionists.”²⁰³ Boylan reprinted a clear statement of why Adams should be elected from the Boston *Chronicle* in May 1800. That editorial also listed five reasons to reject Jefferson:

- 1st. He is a Deist—a man that disregards the volume of divine inspiration, and ridicules the Christian religion.
- 2^d. He has uniformly opposed the wise and energetic measures of this government—calculated to support its dignity and ensure its prosperity.
- 3^d. He is confessedly at the head of a party in this country, whose object is opposition to the laws, subversion of order, and destruction of religious principles.
- 4th. As a wise and political legislator, his abilities are suspect, though his heart were untainted.
- 5th. His household is French—his language, his dress, his manners, his associates are French—and his library and Philosophy are French—Such a number of French dishes might be unpalatable to the American taste.²⁰⁴

These same themes—religion, philosophy, politics, and party behavior—became standard fare in Boylan’s newspaper attacks on Jefferson. To them Boylan added others as Jefferson’s first term gave the Federalists even more fodder. Though Boylan himself rarely wrote anything on Jefferson, he selected choice material from northern newspapers which displayed the Federalist penchant for bitter invective and satire.

A repeated focus of attack on Jefferson and his party concerned finance. Federalists constantly sought to contrast Jefferson’s supposed parsimonious economic philosophy with what they deemed wasteful spending. One of their favorite targets was the *Berceau*, a French ship which had been captured during the Quasi War and returned to the French after that conflict had abated. Federalists attacked Jefferson for expending money on refitting the ship so that it could be returned to the French in its original condition; Jefferson authorized the expenditure without an appropriation from Congress, and the \$32,839.54 that went into the ship’s repair did not

²⁰³ *Minerva*, July 1, 1800.

²⁰⁴ *Minerva*, May 1, 1800.

escape Congressional scrutiny.²⁰⁵ On other occasions Boylan lambasted the fact that the Republicans had raised the salaries of officials working in the executive branch, a fact which escaped the attention of Republican printers but not their Federalist counterparts.²⁰⁶ A “POOR MAN” noted in 1802 that Jeffersonian economy resulted in a total cost of nearly one million dollars to the American people “for only one year,” which in the “POOR MAN’S” estimation, was a “needless expenditure.”²⁰⁷ Boylan, with an eye to his own situation, also disseminated stories of Republican legislatures which had granted expensive printing contracts to Republican printers at great expense to the people.²⁰⁸ The intended message for the public was that Republicans were hypocrites eager to spend the public’s money.

Boylan wanted his readers to understand that the Republicans had not only bankrupted the nation financially but morally as well. Though the Federalists themselves held diverse religious opinions, they agreed that the moral fabric of the community depended on the members of that community holding the same truths to be self-evident. Any questioning of Biblical truths threatened to undermine the entire community. Thus, Boylan frequently sounded the tocsin of alarm in discussions of Jefferson whose connection to the radical Thomas Paine encouraged further speculation about the sincerity of Jefferson’s religious convictions. “*Republicus*,” comparing Jefferson to Washington in 1803, reminded readers that “we have reason to suspect that his [Jefferson’s] religious and political principles are adverse to our late father’s [Washington’s], we have cause at least to pause and examine.”²⁰⁹ A frequent tactic of many Federalist editors was to compare Republican leaders to the example of Washington, whose apotheosis upon his death in 1799 accorded him cult-like status. In a country that had abandoned

²⁰⁵ *Minerva*, February 23, 1802, June 1, 1802.

²⁰⁶ *Minerva*, June 8, 1802, November 21, 1803.

²⁰⁷ *Minerva*, August 10, 1802.

²⁰⁸ *Minerva*, December 21, 1802.

²⁰⁹ *Minerva*, January 11, 1803.

monarchy, George Washington came closest to replacing the King of England since his image as the father of the country engendered powerful emotional, social, and political capital for Federalist editors.²¹⁰

The remarks of William H. Hill, congressional representative from Wilmington from 1799 to 1802, perhaps reflected most clearly the anxiety Federalists felt over Jefferson's religious principles. Though Hill recognized that liberty required religious toleration, it did not require "our own religion to be ridiculed and reviled." He queried, "who shall ridicule your faith, revile the religion of our ancestors, and consider every sect or denomination of Christians as fools, or enthusiastic madmen, treat the divine author of our religion as an imposter, & vilify him in terms of obscene abuse, declare your holy redeemer, the saviour of the world, a child of lust, the mere bastard of a profligate mother?" The answer to the question was not Thomas Jefferson but author of the pamphlet *Common Sense*, Tom Paine, whom the Federalists reviled for *The Age of Reason*, a book which had argued for a radical deism informed by skepticism and freed from dogmatic forms of Christianity. Jefferson, however, had invited Paine to America. Hill questioned the motives of Jefferson for bringing this "anti-christian monster of iniquity" to the United States to be the "cherished friend and companion of a man whom a Christian people have elevated to the first station in the government of their country." Federalist editors accepted the logic of guilt by association. They hoped that such a strategy would portray Jefferson's religious values in very negative terms. By extension, if the head of the party lacked moral principles, then perhaps, too, the entire party lacked virtue.²¹¹

One of the most damaging criticisms of Jefferson came in the wake of revelations of his supposed relationship with one of his slaves, Sally Hemings. Since the information had been

²¹⁰ Newman, *Parades and Politics of the Street*, 44-45, 63-64.

²¹¹ Minerva, August 22, 1803; Kerber, *Federalists in Dissent*, 208-211.

released by a former Republican printer named James Callender, Federalists gloated over what they saw as intra-party backstabbing. Northern Federalists, in particular, criticized the relationship and questioned the sincerity of the Southern slave-holding elite's attachment to democracy.²¹² William Boylan apparently did not find anything dangerous in using much of the material he gleaned from northern newspapers about Sally Hemings, though he lived in a state that also contained large numbers of blacks in bondage. "AMICUS," writing in 1802, sarcastically justified Jefferson's relationship with Sally by arguing that "Sally was your own property, and you had an undoubted right to use her as your please."²¹³ In a parody of Jefferson's own inaugural address, an editorial in September of 1802 managed to lampoon Thomas Paine and slavery in the same piece. "We are all Musselmen and all Frenchmen," the editorial asserted, "as we are all now Americans and all Frenchmen, we are all Deists and we are all Christians; we are all black and we are all white, and consequently all Brigands. – Huzza for massa Jefferson."²¹⁴ One of the most trenchant pieces of invective managed to turn Jefferson's relationship with Sally Hemings into a mathematical puzzle: "If according to the sage of Monticello, a full blooded Congo negro, is cousin German to an Ourang Outang, what relationship does there exist, between said Ourang Outang and young Tom J_____; whose grandmother was a full breed Congo, and whose and grandfather, were human beings."²¹⁵ This author lampooned Jefferson's philosophical investigations, the relationship with Sally Hemings, and the President's views of human rights. Boylan reprinted countless pieces of such bitter satire.

²¹² Kerber, *Federalists in Dissent*, 23, 51-52.

²¹³ *Minerva*, September 28, 1802.

²¹⁴ *Minerva*, October 19, 1802.

²¹⁵ *Minerva*, October 19, 1802.

Federalist views of philosophy and science also led to a questioning of Jefferson's fitness for the Presidency. The term 'philosophy' connoted French *philosophes*, and Jefferson's supposed love for all things French further alienated him from those who favored cordial diplomatic and economic relations with Great Britain. The term also reflected a deep distrust of those minds ever mired in speculation. The science of government demanded a firm attention to fixed principles much as classical republicanism eschewed the property-less as the foundation of society because of their rootlessness. An undisciplined, philosophical mind was unfit for leadership as reflected in the comments of an essayist in the summer of 1802: "another great man [Jefferson], who was reluctantly dragged from his philosophic retreat, where he had been arranging the bones of a great animal, to be the ruler of a great people."²¹⁶ The reference was to Jefferson's own observations on the bones of a woolly mammoth, an undignified subject of investigation for a president.²¹⁷ One of the most widely lampooned schemes was Jefferson's plan to build dry docks for all of the ships that would be taken out of commission in the navy. This plan intended to save money by avoiding upkeep on the ships and salaries for the sailors, but Jefferson earned ridicule from many quarters over the idea.²¹⁸ Federalists regarded the scheme as ridiculous and preferred constant vigilance and preparation for defense against possible European aggressors.

Jefferson's character frequently paled in comparison to the Federalist portrayal of Washington. The iconographic significance of Washington for the early republic is difficult to overstate and Federalists were quick to attack any move which seemed to lessen the American Cincinnatus in the eyes of the public. Jefferson's association with the Republican printer, James

²¹⁶ *Minerva*, July 27, 1802.

²¹⁷ For a perceptive discussion of this mammoth as well as the mammoth cheese delivered to Jefferson by the town of Chesire, see Jeffrey L. Pasley, "The Cheese and the Words," 31-56.

²¹⁸ *Minerva*, March 14, 1803.

Callender, and his *The Prospect Before Us*, a book highly critical of both Washington and Adams, became a frequent topic for editorials. Jefferson stood accused of actually providing money to Callender for the printing of the book.²¹⁹ Thus, Republicans found it difficult to distance themselves from the cult of Washington. Though they frequently praised his virtues in general, they refrained from praising the man himself. William H. Hill lamented in his farewell address to the electors of the Wilmington district in 1803, with a nod to James Callender, that “with this prospect before us, we look around for a Washington but we look in vain. Your councils are no longer composed of federalists. The friends, the framers of the federal constitution have been driven from the confidence of the people—and the opposers, the enemies of that constitution have assumed their places.”²²⁰ In the Federalists’ Manichean cosmology, Washington embodied all that was good and right with the republic while Jefferson reflected the character of the Antichrist. Boylan hoped to educate the people to choose wisely: the model of Washington reflected the true course of the republic.

In establishing the image of Jefferson as all that was unacceptable in American politics, Boylan could link Jefferson to Republican politicians in North Carolina. Such assassination by association allowed Boylan to construct an image of other Republicans as subservient to an evil party. Boylan’s defamation of Republican principles often took the form of commentary on the circular letters of members of Congress. Examining the circulars of Federalists John Stanly and William H. Hill, Boylan praised Hill for “openness and boldness of conviction” in his reflection on the administration while he commended Stanly for asserting the facts and resting his case “at the bar of public reason.”²²¹ But in a preemptive slap at Mr. Stanford’s letter, which had yet to be published, Boylan referred to Stanford’s writings as “pieces of Cheese,” distributed in the

²¹⁹ *Minerva*, July 20, 1802, August 31, 1802, September 28, 1802.

²²⁰ *Minerva*, April 11, 1803.

²²¹ *Minerva*, March 21, 1803.

district as “bait for rats.”²²² The reference was, of course, to the gift of a twelve-hundred pound cheese to Jefferson from the inhabitants of Cheshire, Massachusetts; the “mammoth cheese,” as it was nicknamed, became a favorite object of Federalist caricature.²²³ Boylan then attacked a recent Democratic conclave in Newbern which had a “boozing match” to celebrate the second anniversary of Jefferson’s inauguration. During the celebrations, Jefferson earned a six-gun salute while the Constitution merited but three. Boylan sarcastically noted that “the constitution was once upon a par at least with the President, but the depreciation must have taken place since its mutilation by Congress the session before last.” The oblique reference to the Republican gutting of the Judiciary Act in the “mutilation” of the Constitution did not go unnoticed by Boylan’s readers.²²⁴

In an editorial on Representative James Holland’s circular letter two months after the critique of Mr. Stanford, Boylan called Stanford’s attempt at epistolary activity a “miserable and stupid production.” Boylan, nonetheless, attempted a new tactic in his denigration of Holland’s writing abilities by suggesting that even the Democrats were ashamed of some of the ignorance of their own members.²²⁵ “Though Mr. H. cannot be prevented from writing and talking—The democrats of late have too much grace to report any of his speeches, or publish any of his compositions,” Boylan noted.²²⁶ Such a rhetorical ploy was meant to suggest that democrats could come to their senses and leave the party of Jefferson. Just a week prior to this editorial Boylan exulted that “hardly a week passes but we hear of the conversion of some respectable democrat to the cause of federalism.”²²⁷ Boylan’s rhetorical strategy, therefore, was to

²²² *Minerva*, March 21, 1803.

²²³ Pasley, “The Cheese and the Words,” 31-56.

²²⁴ *Minerva*, March 21, 1803.

²²⁵ *Minerva*, May 9, 1803.

²²⁶ *Minerva*, May 9, 1803.

²²⁷ *Minerva*, May 2, 1803.

assassinate the character of Jefferson and all who belonged to his party and to also encourage defection from that party to the Federalist cause.

Boylan not only paid attention to national matters but also tried to focus attention on state-wide politics. His gaze seemed to be cast eastward, however, since he reported on candidates and issues more important to the inhabitants of the piedmont and coastal plain. Rarely did the backcountry attract his notice. Those running for office in the eastern districts, moreover, commonly placed notices of their intentions in the *Minerva*. The old custom was that a candidate would simply place a simple notice of his candidacy in the newspaper, or one of his friends would inform the public for him so as to give the appearance of disinterestedness. Rarely did such a candidate discuss his own political philosophy, since his honesty and integrity alone should have been enough to make him a worthy selection.²²⁸ Candidates in Boylan's paper, however, gave summaries of their political principles, even describing their party affiliations for the benefit of the public. The intensified partisanship following the election of 1800 resulted in such attempts to delineate party principles for a public that had grown accustomed to party politics though there was no full-blown party system in operation.

Samuel D. Purviance ran for office in the Fayetteville district in 1800, placing his advertisement of his political wares in the July issue of the *Minerva*. Although he claimed disinterestedness—his aspirations for office were motivated by the “solicitations” of the citizens of his district—he told his readers that he was a Federalist. “But although I am the friend of order, of government, and of the present administration,” he wrote, “I will not pledge myself to support, in consequence of a bigoted or selfish policy, any measure which I might think pernicious to the general welfare of our country, or the particular interests of yourselves.” Thus, Purviance laid claim to his Federalism, maintaining his independence of party not only to

²²⁸ Roberston, “Voting Rights and Voting Acts,” 67-78.

legislate for the interests of his district but for the entire country based on his talents and character. Here the old notions of independence and disinterestedness coexisted with party behavior.²²⁹ When Purviance ran again in 1803, he shifted rhetorical tactics to moderate the negative connotations of the Federalist Party. In his May advertisement he claimed to be a “REPUBLICAN” based on his devotion to the form of government adopted “by the People of the United States.” He also claimed to be a “FEDERALIST” because he supported the Constitution, preferred the “sage and polite Counsels of Washington” to the “visionary Speculations of an unpracticed Theorist,” and supported the “firm and energetic Spirit” which preserved the civil and religious liberties of the people. At the same time as he announced his principles, Purviance was careful to denounce “the mere Spirit of a Party” and the “filthy Mazes of Electioneering Wiles” which deluded the people into voting for demagogues who crowded about their past services or made promises to the people about future benefits. Again, Purviance had adapted the old to fit with the new.²³⁰

Boylan considered it his duty to promote the cause of such Federalist candidates as Purviance across the state, but he also endeavored to comment upon Republicans whom he considered to be particularly heinous. In doing this, he had to rely on his own editorials rather than copy articles from other newspapers. Boylan, however, made sure to publish attacks on only the most scurrilous Republicans, ignoring such prominent figures as Nathaniel Macon.²³¹ One of the most intriguing and despised characters who endured a verbal beating from Boylan was Duncan McFarland, a perennial office-seeker from the Fayetteville district. McFarland contested every seat that he lost, and his polychrome past made him universally despised among

²²⁹ *Minerva*, July 15, 1800. See also the announcements by Alexander Duncan Moore in the *Minerva*, March 7, 1803 and Mussendine Matthews in the *Minerva*, June 13, 1803.

²³⁰ *Minerva*, May 2, 1803.

²³¹ *Minerva*, October 30, 1803.

Federalists. McFarland had been accused of witchcraft, murder, rape, hog-stealing, forgery, perjury, and interfering with the mails. He was actually tried and convicted for rape and almost extradited to South Carolina for the murder charge.²³² Widely considered to be an electioneering demagogue because he organized the Fayetteville district into wards and spoke in Gaelic, McFarland became the subject of at least four major editorials in the *Minerva* in 1803 and 1804. Boylan ridiculed McFarland for trying to contest the Congressional seat won by Samuel Purviance and for McFarland's lack of character and talent. To attack someone's public character could bring the challenge of a duel, and Boylan did not taunt other Republicans in the same way as he jeered Duncan McFarland.²³³

By the spring of 1803, Boylan had been publishing the *Minerva* on behalf of North Carolina Federalists for eight months. His mask of disinterestedness had remained somewhat in place as his choice of editorial material reflected his Federalist sympathies without requiring the explicit use of his own voice in print. By April of 1803, however, the mask had been laid aside in favor of an open declaration of partisanship. In deciding to give the *Minerva* an openly Federalist stance, Boylan relied on the advice and help of Duncan Cameron. Boylan asked Cameron in April 1803, a month before the "alteration of the *Minerva*" was to take place, for "that which" Cameron had promised him. The context suggests that Cameron may have been intending to write an article. Although Boylan noted that he had been promised something from Halifax as well, he was directed "by them [those at Halifax] to urge you [Cameron] to preface one."²³⁴ A somewhat desperate Boylan wrote to Cameron again three weeks later and pleaded: "You will no doubt see that I depend on you, & that a failure will very much embarrass me,

²³² Gilpatrick, *Jeffersonian Democracy in North Carolina*, 169-170; Richards, "John Adams and the Moderate Federalists," 28-29.

²³³ *Minerva*, October 24, 1803, October 30, 1803, July 30, 1804, September 10, 1804.

²³⁴ William Boylan to Duncan Cameron, April 4, 1803, Cameron Family Papers.

besides being a great disappointment to others.”²³⁵ The context does not reveal whether the support was financial or took the form of an anonymous article.

The “alteration” that Boylan spoke of referred to the front page of the May 2, 1803 edition of the *Minerva*. Instead of foreign or domestic news, Boylan had written a statement of the principles of the *Minerva*. This statement began with an analysis of the situation of the contemporary political system in the United States and the dangers that it faced from demagogues, luxury, and faction. “Thus the simple virtues of republicanism,” Boylan averred, “have in all ages, sooner or later, become a prey to hypocrisy, knavery and address of intrigues; we cannot flatter ourselves with the hope of always avoiding the snares which every nation, at some period or other, has fallen.” The only solution to this problem lay in the “constant diffusion of correct information” because “virtue alone is not sufficient.” Virtue, Boylan argued, “must be enlightened, and that is the sacred duty of the press.”²³⁶ Boylan, therefore, proposed to his readers that he would focus on domestic issues and make an attempt to carefully present debates on current issues in their entirety without spreading them over several issues. He believed that such attention to the domestic political issues was far more important than stories about Berlin, London, or Paris.

Boylan did not stop with a mere announcement of his sacred duty as a printer to provide correct information for public consumption. He went on to lay out the actual editorial principles and political philosophy under which the *Minerva* would operate:

²³⁵ William Boylan to Duncan Cameron, April 21, 1803, Cameron Family Papers.

²³⁶ *Minerva*, May 2, 1803.

MINERVA; or, ANTI-JACOBIN.

PUBLISHED (WEEKLY) BY WILLIAM BOYLAN.

RALEIGH, (N. C.) MONDAY, JUNE 11, 1804.

[No. 426.]

COLONEL BUTLER'S TRIAL.

This well known and established reputation of the officer implicated—the honorable interest in his behalf unconfined even by the limits of party distinction—and a variety of independent circumstances, have all conspired to produce in an uncommon degree and to keep alive general attention & curiosity in every part of the Union, as to this case, of which it is at last in our power to announce to the public a complete and authentic statement. By recurring to our Journal for December last, it will be found that on Monday the 21st of November the General Court Martial, ordered for the trial of Col. Thomas Butler assembled in

course be no impropriety in his (the secretary's) letting the col. know the nature of the sentence." (We have been thus particularly, at the request of col. Butler, who is now in Frederick, as to the language used by the secretary; because in the colonel's appeal to the President, which follows, the ground on which the secretary of war deemed himself justifiable in making known the sentence does not appear as accurately and as fully as he himself might wish.) The secretary then related the decision of the court, such as the reader will presently see it. Whereupon col. Butler observed that if the court had found him guilty of disobedience under the first specification, for not cutting off his hair agreeably to the laws of my country,

the essence of a military command. And had the court entered into an investigation of the legal merits of that order, they could not have held it in any higher point of view, than the expression of will from one individual to another, which no duty required him to respect, & no power compelled him to obey.

I would fain hope, please your Excellency, that it will not be said, such principles as these are subversive of military subordination; for I flatter myself, that my character as an officer is so well established, as not to admit a doubt of my obedience to the orders of superiors in rank, and at all times to have paid implicit obedience to the laws of my country.

peal to the President, the secretary of war returned Col. Butler the following reply.

War Department, March 14, 1804.

Sir,

The memorial accompanying your letter of the 10th last, was in conformity with your request, presented to the President of the United States, who referred it to the secretary of war for his decision thereon. It has therefore become his duty to make such observations on the subject of the said memorial, as the nature of the case requires. Presuming it to have been your intention, that your memorial should be considered in the nature of an appeal from the sentence of the general court martial, to the Presi-

RALEIGH REGISTER

AND

NORTH-CAROLINA STATE GAZETTE.

* Contains the Plan of the Antislavery Party.
Edited by Philip Bagwell, Esq., M.A., &c.

Vol. IV.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 25, 1822.

No. 172.

LAWS OF NORTH-CAROLINA.

Passed at the late Session of the General Assembly.

An Act for the relief of the Tuscarora Nation of Indians.

WHEREAS the Indians composing the Tuscarora Nation, have by their chief Sachems, and others, regularly deputed and authorized, requested the con-

dition of all debts and demands of twenty-five pounds and under, agreeable to the recitation of the before recited act, *Provided always* That the sum of execution on sums from twenty to twenty-five pounds, shall be the same as is provided for sums between ten and twenty pounds in the before recited act. And whereas executions are not made returnable on any certain day from the issuing thereof, whereby great injury often reliefs to the party recovering, by reason of executors neglecting to perform their duty; therefore,

b.

Figure 3: The *Minerva* (a.) and *Raleigh Register* (b.) Mastheads. Note that while the *Minerva* masthead is plain, the *Raleigh Register* features a liberty cap mounted on a pike with the word *libertas* inscribed below. The visual communicated Gales' political sentiments to even the non-literate public.

The principles of the MINERVA have been steady and uniform—We believe the existing Federal Constitution to be America’s last and best hope—we feel a deep and fixt conviction that when that day shall arrive, when this result of mutual deference and concession, shall be no more, our next will be the result of chance and not of choice—we shall therefore consider it a primary duty to maintain and defend “those safe, sound and moral principles of government” which form the basis of this constitution; and we do not hesitate to avow, that the examination of the views and conduct of men in power will be a leading object of the MINERVA.²³⁷

On the surface the language could have expressed the views of even some Republicans, but beneath Boylan’s carefully chosen words lay a deep commitment to the Federalist view of government. The reference to mutual deference should have reminded readers of Washington’s letter transmitting the Constitution to Congress and the references to safe, sound, and moral principles reflected the Federalist commitment to stability, orthodoxy, and soundly Christian mores in both society and government. Boylan did promise his public that he would examine the most important domestic events with a “fair, candid, and dispassionate” demeanor, thus couching his open declaration of partisanship in terms of disinterestedness.²³⁸

Boylan continued his declaration with an analysis of the importance of studying the emerging party system. Reflecting an older conception of politics, however, Boylan embedded party behavior in the context of individual behavior. “Public measures will only be connected with private character,” Boylan maintained, “when the secret springs of action must be traced to the moral or physical character of the man.” The nature of these characters, therefore, determined the nature of the party and explained the “origin of all measures.” Boylan, moreover, argued that it was vital for the health of the public that all people have a “thorough knowledge of the elements of which a party is composed, their activity and direction” because it formed “the rational ground of public confidence, or the measure of public contempt and detestation.” Since

²³⁷ *Minerva*, May 2, 1803.

²³⁸ *Minerva*, May 2, 1803.

party behavior had become inextricably linked to American political life, Boylan argued for a close scrutiny of such behavior. His acceptance of party behavior stemmed from pragmatic considerations of the political system but did not extend so far as to adopt the party system wholesale.²³⁹

Boylan also announced a special role for himself in this process. Republican printers had long claimed that a republic needed newspaper editors to preserve the health of the political system by keeping constant vigilance over all public measures. Now that the Federalists formed the opposition to the Jeffersonians, Boylan also claimed the same role. He promised that “democratic hostility to the press will not deter the editor from a faithful discharge of his duty.” He reminded his readers that the spirit of Jacobinism brought about the need for vigilance because the Republicans were managed by a “conclave, whose sittings are permanent” and that they acknowledged no “moral restraint” in their ruthless pursuit of their “victims.” While this exalted role signaled Boylan’s changing sensibilities in adopting the mantle of a Republican editor, but it also reflected his commitment to a Federalist version of truth which he could impart to the people.²⁴⁰

The role which Boylan ascribed to himself as a printer had a basis in both his experiences and those of his uncle, Abraham Hodge. Hodge printed *The North Carolina Journal* at Halifax and in 1798 ran stories about one of the greatest scandals in early North Carolina history: the Glasgow Land Frauds. James Glasgow, Secretary of State, had aided land speculators and cheated Revolutionary War soldiers out of their land certificates through fraudulent land warrants. The frauds were discovered in 1797 and the General Assembly directed Blake Baker, the Attorney General, to investigate and try the men in a special court tribunal created in 1799.

²³⁹ *Minerva*, May 2, 1803.

²⁴⁰ *Minerva*, May 2, 1803.

Implicated in the frauds were John Gray and Thomas Blount, Washington merchants, and the latter probably lost his reelection campaign for Congress in 1798 due to the negative publicity.²⁴¹ “An Elector” published a handbill against Blount, and Blount confronted Abraham Hodge to find out the name of the anonymous character assassin. Hodge, eager to protect his source, refused to give Blount the name unless he secured permission from the writer first. An angry Blount then attacked Hodge with an umbrella and accused the printer of being the author himself.²⁴²

Hodge’s commentary on the incident reflected interesting conceptions of the relationship between private character and the public sphere. Blount had argued that since his private character had been denigrated in public, Hodge was bound to give the name of the author without first asking. Hodge disagreed by noting that since Blount had published an address prior to the handbill, he had made his private character a public commodity. “An Elector” had only “animadverted on the subjects contained in it; which being in my opinion open to free discussion, I did not ask the author’s permission to surrender his name—not imagining it would have been demanded.” Since the public sphere had to be a place for the free discussion of ideas, disembodied from those that created them, Hodge saw nothing amiss in anonymity for his contributor. “Innocence will never employ force instead of argument,” Hodge wrote, “nor use violence where it can convince. It is, moreover, quite immaterial by whom a charge is made—the only question is, whether it be true or false. The charge, and not the author, should alone be the subject of discussion.” Hodge, remaining true to the expectations of impartiality, invited Blount to print a rebuttal.²⁴³

²⁴¹ Russell Koonts, “‘An Angel Has Fallen?’: The Glasgow Land Frauds and the Establishment of the North Carolina Supreme Court” (M.A. thesis, North Carolina State University, 1995), 1-47; Keith, et. al., *The Papers of John Gray Blount*, 2:224-226, 232, 237, 259.

²⁴² *North Carolina Journal* (Halifax), August 6, 1798.

²⁴³ *North Carolina Journal*, August 6, 1798.

With Hodge's model of the sacred duty of the editor before him, Boylan experienced his own incident involving the Glasgow Land Frauds over revelation of sources and public character. Blake Baker, a friend of the Blounts, found it difficult to prosecute them for the land frauds committed with Glasgow. North Carolina appointed a special agent for the case, Samuel D. Purviance, who found his way blocked at every turn by Baker's refusal to communicate on key aspects of the case. Purviance eventually resigned his post, and Blake Baker was censured by the General Assembly for not prosecuting the case with vigor.²⁴⁴ An editorial in the *North Carolina Mercury and Salisbury Advertiser* explained that Baker's actions were due to the "attachment he had for the Mr. Blounts, and the intimacy that was then and for many years fulfilled between them—he could not do the state justice without forfeiting a friendship which he considered himself not at liberty to do."²⁴⁵ By 1800 the case against the Blounts had largely stalemated much to the chagrin of those who believed that their speculative activities had been illegal and detrimental to the public welfare.

Boylan reported in the August 5, 1800 edition of the *Minerva* that Blake Baker had filed a *nolle prosequi* in the case, ending the deadlock over prosecution of the Blounts. Baker, however, had told a certain Mr. White that there some indictments that had not yet been brought before the court, causing Boylan to question the Attorney General's honesty in the case.²⁴⁶ Boylan had also offended Baker because he had written a complimentary piece on the appointment of Samuel Purviance to investigate the frauds. "I thought it my duty," Boylan recounted of his disagreement with Baker, "as being the Editor of a Newspaper printed at the seat of government and having the confidence of the legislature by being appointed almost

²⁴⁴ Koonts, "'An Angel Has Fallen!'" 23-46; *North Carolina Mercury and Salisbury Advertiser*, September 25, 1800.

²⁴⁵ *North Carolina Mercury and Salisbury Advertiser*, September 25, 1800.

²⁴⁶ *Minerva*, August 5, 1800, August 12, 1800.

unanimously one of their Public printers—I say I conceived it my duty to assure the public, that they had from the honest intentions of this gentleman [Purviance] nothing to fear, that there was every prospect the state would have justice done it” The implication was that Baker had failed in his duty. Consequently, Baker wrote Boylan a “threatening letter” demanding that Boylan set the matter right or “he [Baker] would justify himself in a way perhaps more disagreeable.”²⁴⁷

Baker, presumably to “justify himself,” paid a visit to Boylan on Monday, September 1, 1800, accompanied by a Mr. Sessoms. Boylan agreed with Baker that his informant, Mr. White, was not the correct source of information for the *nolle prosequi* and the outstanding indictments and that he would print a retraction to clear up the matter. When Baker demanded that Boylan print a statement saying that Baker had acted in a “praiseworthy manner,” Boylan refused.²⁴⁸ Baker then attacked Boylan by aiming a blow at his “head with a hickory club” which Boylan took on the arm. “The result was a stroke upon the arm and the skin taken off near the eye by a gouge, on my part; and a black eye and a bloody chin on that of Mr. Baker,” Boylan recounted.²⁴⁹ While notions of southern male honor inspired the fight, Federalists also explained it as a Republican attempt to censor the press. An extract from a letter from a gentleman in Wilmington noted that the “federalists of this town have been filled with a deal of glee and good humour by the detail of the late unsuccessful attempt of a State’s officer to assume to himself the censorship of the Minerva. What democratic lust of vengeance could have urged this ‘elegant and sonorous’ trumpeter of the praises of Jefferson and Madison, to invade with Goth like fury the sanctuary of letters and the ‘palladium of our liberties’!”²⁵⁰ Boylan, in his own attempt to

²⁴⁷ *North Carolina Mercury and Salisbury Advertiser*, September 25, 1800.

²⁴⁸ *North Carolina Journal*, September 13, 1800; Hamilton and Wagstaff, “The Harris Letters,” 82-83.

²⁴⁹ *North Carolina Mercury and Salisbury Advertiser*, September 25, 1800.

²⁵⁰ *Minerva*, September 30, 1800.

obtain satisfaction, sent a challenge to Baker that was not answered. He later recounted the incident as a triumphant moment when he stood up for truth and right in the face of adversity.

In the three years that passed after Boylan faced Baker in a battle over truth, Boylan, Duncan Cameron, and other Federalists continued the fight against falsehood in their newspaper scheme. Boylan publicly thanked the gentlemen who had secured new subscribers in June of 1803 and asked them to forward the lists of his new readers and their addresses to him. Eighteen hundred and three seemed to be the year in which the Federalists would once again take the lead in government as the most eminent and virtuous men in North Carolina. It also coincided with William R. Davie's last campaign for office, a campaign that hoped to bring the state's arch-Federalist back into Congress. Unfortunately for Davie, the residents of Halifax heard stories of his supposed monarchism and that he would threaten the leadership of Jefferson, and they voted for Willis Alston instead.²⁵¹ By November of that year, Boylan wondered to Duncan Cameron if he should continue to send the newspapers as they had planned.²⁵² If the Federalists failed to obtain the election of Davie, they then had to consider whether their newspaper plan was misconceived.

Boylan's growing involvement in partisanship in the name of enlightening the state's citizens so that they could select the best men to represent them grew from 1800 to 1803. He did not adopt the techniques of Republican editors without some uneasiness since the public sphere in which those editors operated accepted private interest, contested truths, and solicitation of the people's baser instincts by electioneering. Elements of his conservative Federalist world-view remained to anchor him to an older conception of the role of an editor while exploring new

²⁵¹ William R. Davie to Duncan Cameron, August 2, 1803 and August 28, 1803, Cameron Family Papers; William R. Davie to John Haywood, September 2, 1803, Ernest Haywood Papers; William R. Davie to John Steele, August 20, 1803, John Steele Papers.

²⁵² William Boylan to Duncan Cameron, November 7, 1803, Cameron Family Papers. Unfortunately, Cameron's reply is not extant.

rhetorical possibilities in print. It helped that the polite world of Federalist sarcasm appealed to his elitist sensibilities. Thus, he freely borrowed from the bitterest satires that northern editors could write. At the same time, he cautiously explored his own developing invective in linking state politicians who served at the local and national levels to the enemy of Federalism: Thomas Jefferson.

Historians have questioned whether the intense scrutiny of Jefferson and the *ad nauseum* tactic of constantly referring to the same flaws in Jefferson's character and leadership had any appreciable effect on the outcome of national and state politics. Once Davie failed to defeat the Republicans in the Halifax elections, it seemed that everywhere a Federalist turned, the Jeffersonians dominated. The citadel of Jeffersonian democracy seemed unassailable, and that must have increased Federalist bitterness. Making the *Minerva* the instrument of public enlightenment depended on a steady editorial course which only became harder as the waves of resentment imperiled Boylan's mission. Along with Boylan's growing partisanship in national and local politics came a burgeoning mordancy for another editor: Joseph Gales. The ensuing war between them humbled Boylan and further eroded of the cause of Federalism in North Carolina.

CHAPTER 4 – THE WAR OF THE EDITORS

“The cold-blooded assassinator of private character, the secret plotter against his neighbour’s fame, is at length dragged before the public, and stands forth that literary wonder, that scientific desperado, that butcher of good names—WILLIAM BOYLAN.” Joseph Gales, 1804²⁵³

By most accounts William Boylan possessed a “sedate” and “austere” personality.²⁵⁴

Having traveled to a dance in Pittsboro in 1800 in the company of a friend, Boylan refused to take part in the festivities since they imperiled the *gravitas* of his gentlemanly nature. Like most Federalists, Boylan prized the moderate, balanced, and dispassionate countenance of a rational and virtuous man. Excessive passions could lead to a loss of control, and a man who could not control himself could not lead. At times, however, when William Boylan wrote, his moderate persona disappeared under a species of rage that bore the marks of being both violently angry and arrogantly patronizing. His was a passion originating from typical Federalist sense of superiority and highly conscious of slights to his character.²⁵⁵ University professor Charles Harris noted with surprise that one of William Boylan’s letters appeared “altogether moderate” during the fracas Boylan had with Attorney General Blake Baker over the Glasgow Land Frauds. Lawyer Duncan Cameron considered one of Boylan’s letters to the General Assembly “Philippic” and Boylan’s demeanor “intemperate.” Both of these observations suggest a man whose rational head only occasionally controlled a sometimes passionate heart. The moderation of Boylan’s partisanship, therefore, depended on his ability to avoid the dangers of a choleric temperament.

²⁵³ *Raleigh Register*, December 3, 1804.

²⁵⁴ Ashe, *Biographical History of North Carolina*, 6:91.

²⁵⁵ Trees, *The Founding Fathers and the Politics of Character*, 52. The eighteenth century term for being conscious of the most minor insults to one’s reputation was “sensibility,” a meaning which differs significantly from contemporary parlance.

The disappointments of the 1803 elections and the newspaper campaign to influence the mind of the public threatened to bring out Boylan's temper as these events became linked with Boylan's own personal quarrel with Joseph Gales, the editor of the *Raleigh Register*. Gales had come to North Carolina by way of Pennsylvania in 1798 at the behest of Nathaniel Macon and other leading Republicans in the state. Gales had been a printer in Sheffield, England in the early 1790s, part of a group of reformers associated with the radical writings of Thomas Paine. As the English government began to suppress the writings and activities of Gales and Richard Davison, his associate, pressure mounted on Gales to leave in order to avoid arrest. He fled England in 1794 and eventually made his way to Philadelphia in 1795 with his family in tow. By 1799, Gales and his family, firmly ensconced in Raleigh, began the business of publishing a newspaper to advance the Republican agenda.²⁵⁶

Both the *Minerva* and the *Raleigh Register*, therefore, had come to North Carolina's capital for political reasons. The appearance of two papers immediately inaugurated a conflict exacerbated by the Republican domination of the General Assembly and placed Boylan and the Federalists on the defensive as a beleaguered minority. Because the General Assembly controlled the choice of the lucrative office of state printer, that choice was bound to become a partisan one. Throughout the conflicts between Gales and Boylan, the one issue that seemed to animate their mutual hatred more than any other was the selection of the public printer. Gales, a Republican brought to North Carolina for party purposes, expected that a Republican General Assembly would award him the contract. Boylan, who had rendered past service to the state in that job along with his uncle Abraham Hodge, also expected that he would be given a fair chance to obtain the emoluments of the office. Underlying Gales' and Boylan's political animus toward

²⁵⁶ Elliott, "The Raleigh Register, 1799-1863," 3-14; Seth Cotlar, "Joseph Gales and the Making of the Jeffersonian Middle Class," 335-343.

one another, therefore, was their private economic interest in their competition for the office of state printer. Boylan's umbrage at Gales only increased as the position of state printer went to Gales every year from 1800 to 1810.²⁵⁷

Boylan's opening salvo against Gales appeared in the *Minerva* in December 1802. A month prior, Boylan had distributed a handbill on his latest failure to obtain the printing contract from the General Assembly in which he proposed to divide the public printing between himself and Joseph Gales.²⁵⁸ "Some of the violent democrats talk of having him called to the Bar of the Senate & punished for the Contempt of which they say he has been guilty," Duncan Cameron noted to Richard Bennehan.²⁵⁹ Boylan channeled his exasperation at the General Assembly toward Richard Davison, Gales' associate from England, who had been publishing a newspaper in Warrenton, Nathaniel Macon's hometown, called the *Warrenton Messenger*. "SCRUB," whose pseudonym implied that he was removing dirt by vigorous rubbing, asked series of pointed questions about Davison who had made presumptuous nominations for governor and vice-president in his paper. "SCRUB" wanted to know if this was the same Davison who was the "Renegado Englishman" who had participated in the seditious activities in Sheffield. Finally, the anonymous "SCRUB" requested Boylan's opinion of Davison's character, giving Boylan a convenient platform to promote his grievances against Gales.²⁶⁰

Boylan first attacked Davison's defense of the General Assembly's decision to give the printing contract to Gales, noting that the Boylan had offered to do the job for two hundred

²⁵⁷ Gilpatrick, *Jeffersonian Democracy in North Carolina*, 106, 136, 137, 139-141; Broussard, *Southern Federalists*, 287-290. The man who helped Gales to try to obtain the office of public printer in 1799 was the man who had beaten Abraham Hodge with an umbrella in 1798: Thomas Blount.

²⁵⁸ Handbill of William Boylan, November 17, 1802, Cameron Family Papers.

²⁵⁹ Duncan Cameron to Richard Bennehan, November 24, 1802, Cameron Family Papers.

²⁶⁰ *Minerva*, December 7, 1802. Davidson had apparently nominated Nathaniel Macon as vice-president and James Turner as governor of North Carolina. Davison also insinuated that he had dined with Macon, resulting in Macon's threat to horsewhip Davison and the admonition to never mention Macon's name in his newspaper again. See the *Minerva*, May 30, 1803.

pounds less than Gales. Boylan also pointed out that he had preceded Gales in establishing his printing shop in Raleigh, correcting an error in the *Raleigh Register* and allowing him to question Gales' honesty. Boylan, too, denied Gales' assertion that he had requested an increase in the public printer's salary in 1799, as well as the charge that the laws and journals of the state had been delivered late. The comment that elicited the most vitriol was Gales' claim that Boylan was a native of Jersey and Mr. Hodge was a "native of God knows where." Boylan responded: "Yes, Mr. Boylan is a native of N. Jersey, he left that state when a child, he left it with the good wishes of many honest men and what is more he can return and meet the embraces of his friends and relatives, and defy the Prison and the Gallows to say that he has wronged them of their rights. Can you say so Mr. Gales?" Boylan responded to Gales' assertion of his loyalty and patriotism to the United States that Gales had traveled to so many countries after being forced to leave England that America was a homeland of last resort.²⁶¹ Like many other Federalists, Boylan feared the corrupting influence of foreigners whose loyalty to the United States seemed suspect, especially since many of them contributed their suffrages to the Republicans.²⁶²

Throughout the summer of 1803, Boylan continued his attacks on Davison and Gales. In a June 6, 1803 editorial, Boylan ridiculed "Pikeman Davidson" as the "vilest wretch of the 500 Sheffield Traitors," especially for Davison's "important self-talk of his great *political information, his opinions and his patriotism, & [because he] struts like a crow in a gutter.*" "A bad subject never yet made a good citizen," Boylan commented. Gales and Davison, because of their past disloyalties, obviously lacked the character befitting good citizens and could even be

²⁶¹ *Minerva*, December 7, 1802.

²⁶² Rogers M. Smith, "Constructing American National Identity: Strategies of the Federalists," in *Federalists Reconsidered*, ed. by Doron Ben-Atar and Barbara B. Oberg (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998), 19-40.

expected to turn against the United States.²⁶³ The next month, Boylan returned to the issue of public printing, arguing that Gales had failed in his duty to perform the task quickly and reiterating the claim that he could do the job for “*four hundred dollars less than is allowed to the Public Printer.*” In a new tactic, Boylan then listed the names of the members of the Senate who had voted against his proposition for dividing the public printing. Boylan then asked if Joseph Winston, the last name on the list, was the “proper person to be entrusted with the guardianship” of the rights and property of the citizens of his district.²⁶⁴ The concatenation of electioneering, chastising candidates, and denigrating Gales and Davison placed Boylan at the nexus of clashing political and private interests.

Boylan and Davison traded barbs throughout the summer of 1803. As the cold Raleigh winter of 1804 opened, Boylan continued his attack as misfortune in the form of a mysterious fire struck Joseph Gales’s printing shop on January 22. Gales lost most of his typefaces, equipment, and paper supplies. Although Boylan might have rejoiced privately at Gales’ loss, the event turned out to be a defining moment in his dislike for Gales, and memories of it came back to haunt both of them a year later. Boylan only laconically reported that the fire had occurred—perhaps to distance himself from the possibility of blame for the event—and that the loss was supposed to be around two thousand dollars.²⁶⁵ A full account came out in the *Raleigh Register* of January 30, 1804. What allowed Gales to print that account was Boylan’s willingness to let Gales use the press of the *Minerva*, a circumstance that is difficult to explain. Whether Boylan simply donated the use of his press out of the goodness of his heart or from some other ulterior motive, the documentary record does not tell us.²⁶⁶

²⁶³ *Minerva*, June 6, 1803.

²⁶⁴ *Minerva*, July 18, 1803.

²⁶⁵ *Minerva*, January 30, 1804; see also Hodge’s account in *North Carolina Journal*, February 2, 1804.

²⁶⁶ *Raleigh Register*, January 30, 1804.

Gales' account of the burning of his office became important in the later conflict with Boylan. Gales related that the causes of the fire were "enveloped in uncertainty." Those who were in the room on the Sunday morning when the fire broke out saw no stray embers which could have ignited the blaze, though Gales admitted that a sheet of the laws might have fallen onto the hearth by accident. "But it is extraordinary," Gales noted, "that the flames seemed to proceed from a closet adjoining the fire-place, where one would scarcely think it possible they could be communicated from the hearth." In this closet was a "small hole in the plank, through which fire might have been communicated from the court-house lot by an Incendiary." Gales, nevertheless, dismissed the idea that an arsonist was responsible for "so fowl an act." Since Gales ascertained his loss at two thousand dollars, he called upon those indebted to him to make "immediate payment" so that he could continue his work and recover from his loss.²⁶⁷ Gales relied on Boylan's generosity and the press run by Davison in Warrenton to continue his work, and his printing office was not rebuilt until after April 2, 1804.²⁶⁸ The incident so shook Gales that he later founded, in conjunction with state treasurer John Haywood, a mutual aid society for the prevention of fire.²⁶⁹

The burning of Gales' print office and Boylan's subsequent invitation to Gales to use the equipment in the *Minerva* office invites cautious speculation. If Boylan had been behind the arson, then his generosity toward Gales would have diverted any accusation. Boylan, perhaps, also gained insight into Gales' methods and abilities by watching his rival editor at work. It is difficult to ascribe purely altruistic motives for Boylan's behavior given his long-standing antipathy toward Gales. Gales obviously thought that the fire was the work of an arsonist, and his claim that such a charge was beyond belief allowed Gales to suggest the possibility without

²⁶⁷ *Raleigh Register*, January 30, 1804.

²⁶⁸ *Raleigh Register*, April 2, 1804.

²⁶⁹ *Raleigh Register*, June 4, 1804.

making any direct accusation. Though their motives remain obscure, the fire clearly affected both men.

As the presidential election contest of 1804 began to heat up, particularly in the summer of that year, Boylan's invective against both Gales and President Jefferson mounted. The foreigner who had involved himself in the making of the Raleigh toasts in July 1804 (see chapter two) was Joseph Gales, and that incident occasioned a number of editorials on Gales' character. The writer of one essay against Gales, "A Citizen of Johnston," increased his attacks as summer spilled into fall.²⁷⁰ At the same time, Boylan printed a number of pieces rejecting Thomas Jefferson as the sole author of the Declaration of Independence, a move designed to deflate Jeffersonian pretensions to democracy and liberty. Jefferson had only drafted the Declaration of Independence. Since it was completed by the work of a committee, the leader of the Republicans could not claim any special status as the document's parent. It galled Federalists to think of praising Jefferson for the Declaration when the document that should have been most central to the republican celebrations was the Constitution. Thus, even the image of what both documents stood for in the public consciousness was subject to partisan rhetoric.²⁷¹

While Boylan attempted to strip the mythical-religious symbolism attached to Jefferson and the Declaration of Independence, "A Citizen of Johnston" assaulted the character of Joseph Gales. "A Citizen" found it inconceivable that Gales, a foreigner from Great Britain, would have even been allowed to sit on a committee designed to select toasts for an *American* holiday. For all he knew, Gales might have been "in the ranks against us [during the American Revolution]." Even more damning was the accusation that Gales "was never fairly nominated but that in his *usual habit of solicitation*" he managed to get himself included on the committee though he was

²⁷⁰ *Minerva*, July 23, 1804, September 10, 1804, September 24, 1804, October 13, 1804.

²⁷¹ *Raleigh Register*, July 9, July 16, July 30, September 17, October 1, and November 12, 1804; *Minerva*, July 9, July 23, August 13, August 20, September 10, September 24, October 15, and November 12, 1804.

not welcome. This criticism was meant to suggest to the reader that Gales was a placeman, the eighteenth century term for an office-seeker, one who has no principles but instead panders to anyone in power for the sake of an office of influence.²⁷² “A Citizen” was careful to note that his remarks came from a “*disinterested concern*” that foreigners had acquired too much power over natives. Boylan followed the piece with his own disavowal that “A Citizen of Johnston” was a “Republican of the Jefferson School” and that Boylan himself had not written the critique.²⁷³

After Gales had defended himself against such scathing abuse, “A Citizen” published a refutation of Gales’ defense in late September 1804. “A Citizen” accused Gales of writing his own defense and publishing it under a pseudonym so as to give the impression that a prominent citizen of the community supported Gales. He described Gales as having a “philosophic attitude” and being infected “with the *foreign mania*—an insatiable thirst for office.” Both were themes that Boylan had been using in his attacks on Jefferson and the Republicans. “A Citizen” then lampooned Gales’ editorial style in England because it encouraged mob behavior and resistance to the authority of the government “by bayonet and sword.” Then in a new criticism of Gales’ moral fiber, “A Citizen” asked whether it was consistent with the character of a patriot to “intimate to particular friends, the names of such members of Assembly as you wished to be on the committee to examine your accounts for extra printing.”²⁷⁴ By insinuation he implied that Gales had bilked the public through falsified accounts that his Republican friends in the General Assembly had overlooked in order to protect their Republican printer.

²⁷² J.G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 406-408; Forrest McDonald, *Novus Ordo Seclorum: The Intellectual Origins of the Constitution* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1985), 78-79; Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, enlarged ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 102-104.

²⁷³ *Minerva*, September 10, 1804.

²⁷⁴ *Minerva*, September 24, 1804.

“A Citizen” continued his attack with a reference to the infiltration of America by foreigners. “You seem to announce,” the letter noted, “with great exultation that the *public has decided* upon the Citizen, and that he is condemned. I would ask you what kind of people do you style ‘the public.’ Do you speak of true Americans, men of ’76, or do you mean a set of your own kind, a transatlantic set, who have *chosen* this country because *they could stay no where else?*” The sovereign people as envisioned by “A Citizen” had to be natives. “You are obliged to feel the Citizen when he tells you of the ascendancy of foreigners. You cannot turn your eyes in any direction but what you will discover some foreigner, (not every foreigner) endeavouring to ride on the necks of Americans, and claiming as a matter of right, every office.” Gales’s quest for office, the editorial noted, led him to be the public printer, a Trustee of Raleigh Academy, Commissioner of Raleigh, and principal agent of the fire insurance company.²⁷⁵ To “A Citizen,” these positions were evidence enough of Gales’ office-seeking personality, though Boylan, by comparison, held just as many positions in Raleigh. The difference was that Boylan was a native while Gales was not.

By October “A Citizen” published his final piece on Gales’ character. The editor of the *Raleigh Register* had demanded that “A Citizen” publicly reveal his identity and had even insinuated that he knew the name of the informant who had abused his confidences. “A Citizen” refuted the charge, noting that he was not “the confidant” but declared that he obtained information about Gales’ attempt to have the post-master of Raleigh turned out of office so that Gales could have the job for himself.²⁷⁶ Gales’ refutation referred to “A Citizen” as a “*professed Republican.*” “A Citizen” responded:

Has party politicks any thing to do with this controversy? Must your character be tolerated and overlooked because you are a Republican? Are you such a

²⁷⁵ *Minerva*, September 24, 1804.

²⁷⁶ *Minerva*, October 13, 1804.

necessary evil in society that Republicans must support you whatever they may think of you? Or is the *name* of Republicanism the only weapon you can wield in a country where daggers and *pikes* can do you no service? To divert the public attention from your real character, you wish to call on party to your aid, but you cannot. I have neither censured nor condemned your politicks, for that is wholly out of the question.²⁷⁷

This response laid bare the tensions in the party system that would not come to fruition for nearly another twenty years. For those who accepted the inevitability of party politics, it was still inconceivable that the evils of party should trump individual judgment and ability. Personal character and honor were still to be held apart from party organization. “A Citizen” averred that for men such as Gales the name of party was a rhetorical covering for its members regardless of their personal faults. The inchoate party system to which Gales subscribed accepted the necessity of using the name of a party to silence both dissent and critics in order to make all opposition illegitimate. This, of course, was unacceptable to “A Citizen” as well as those of the Federalist persuasion.²⁷⁸

After “A Citizen” had abused the public character of Joseph Gales, William Boylan retreated slightly from the partisanship which he had exhibited for almost two years. Nearly three weeks after “A Citizen’s” last attack on Gales, Boylan dropped “Anti-Jacobin” from the title of the *Minerva*, a term that he had adopted May 2, 1803 when he announced his editorial principles and promised to make the *Minerva* a “scourge to Jacobins.”²⁷⁹ The term reflected a derogatory usage of the “Jacobin Club” from the French Revolution applied to Jeffersonian Republicans; it was meant to suggest that the Jeffersonians held revolutionary ideas that tended

²⁷⁷ *Minerva*, October 13, 1804.

²⁷⁸ Ronald P. Formisano, “Federalists and Republicans: Parties, Yes—System, No,” in *The Evolution of American Electoral Systems*, ed. by Paul Kleppner (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1981), 33-76. I agree with Formisano that overall no complete party system existed, but the attitude toward party presented in this editorial suggests an important pre-condition for a party system: the preservation of the party’s name and the protection of its members by invoking that name regardless of personal moral failings. As an idea, it did not attain widespread popularity until much later.

²⁷⁹ *Minerva*, May 2, 1803.

toward the destruction of liberty and the Constitution. Boylan noted that he had adopted the usage of the term when “the Callenders and Duanes of the day were bribed by *expectants of office* to libel the Federal Administration—when Washington was called a murderer and Adams a hoary headed incendiary.” “Then it was,” Boylan wrote, “that in our attempts to arrest Jacobin fury in its progress, our paper assumed a title significant to our labours.”²⁸⁰

Boylan argued, however, that the term no longer served a purpose because the Jacobin fury had given way to opposition to President Jefferson even from within his own party. Leaders from both parties opposed Jefferson’s attempt to remake the electoral process in order to secure his election “for *life*.” “Jefferson and Gallatin stand nearly alone,” Boylan believed, and thus it was no longer necessary to label *all* Republicans as Jacobins. “If men have the good of their country sincerely at heart,” Boylan averred, “it is unjust and illiberal that they should quarrel about the means of promoting it. To such we shall exercise indulgence and moderation; and to such, whatever party they may consider themselves as belonging to, the name of Jacobin cannot apply . . .”²⁸¹ Boylan seemed to be returning toward his conservative Federalist roots, having admitted in the dropping of “Anti-Jacobin” that he had, perhaps, not exercised so much moderation and indulgence as an impartial and disinterested editor should.²⁸²

A more lucrative motive also appears in Boylan’s reasoning for dropping the “Anti-Jacobin.” He wanted the “Minerva read by persons differing from us in political opinions; and they are such persons that we should be unwilling to present them with a title that would be supposed in the smallest degree to reflect on *them*; it would be undeserved, for they are lead to

²⁸⁰ *Minerva*, November 5, 1804.

²⁸¹ *Minerva*, November 5, 1804.

²⁸² Fischer, *Revolution of American Conservatism*, 145. Fischer argues, I think incorrectly, that Federalist editors began dropping more partisan aspects of their newspaper names in a bid to become more populist in style. No change in style, however, seems apparent for Boylan, and it appears more likely that that he was concerned about the overreaching of his partisanship as well as his upcoming attempt to gain half of the public printer’s salary. No doubt dropping “Anti-Jacobin” would have made it easier for the Republicans in the General Assembly to split the office between Gales and Boylan.

the examination of our pages in quest of *truth*.” Such words sound like the old Boylan in his role of printer of both sides of the story, a creator of a dispassionate public sphere for the rational debate of disembodied facts by people in search of the truth. Perhaps, it also made him more acceptable to the General Assembly and, thus, a viable candidate for the office of state printer. At the same time, Boylan’s retreat did not apply to Davison, Gales, and McFarland, and he declared that Gales and Davison, holding their “lucrative appointments” at the pleasure of a Republican administration, would not dare “to publish any thing unfavourable to their employers, unless it is believed that their disinterested patriotism induced them to call all the way from England *purely* to serve a people about whom they knew nothing.”²⁸³ Boylan, therefore, was advertising his paper as the best source of a fair and balanced assessment of politics because he did not owe his livelihood to the corrupting influence of the administration. Such language reflected eighteenth-century republicanism’s theory on the nature of corruption engendered by placemen who owed their offices to court politics. Such placemen, like Gales and Davison, could not be relied upon for unbiased news.

Boylan’s statement of principles in this editorial did not differ significantly from the May 2, 1803 announcement. He promised that his editorial duties were “governed by a profound veneration for the federal Constitution, and by a respectful regard for the principles of the Washington administration.” He did admit that his paper would be open to communications from both parties provided that they were of suitable intelligence and candor for communication to the public. He hoped for the public’s continued patronage of his newspaper and hoped to be able to provide “interesting original matter” for public consumption based on his extensive

²⁸³ *Minerva*, November 5, 1804.

correspondence with “newsprinters” throughout the United States. It seemed that the experiment in partisanship launched the previous year had come to an end.²⁸⁴

Though Boylan officially withdrew from a policy of ascribing Jacobinical principles to all Republicans, he did not refrain from his criticisms of Davison and Gales. He also did not cease his effort to obtain a share of the public printing, and this brought him once again into direct conflict with Gales over an issue that was primarily private and economic in nature. On November 20, 1804, Boylan sent a handbill to the General Assembly asking for a division of the printing, arguing that the job was too large for the current printer and that it would be easy for one to print the laws while the other printed the journals. Boylan’s “pretensions” to the office included the fact that he had moved to Raleigh expressly for the purpose of obtaining the position in 1798 when the laws required the public printer to reside at the capital. As Boylan was “desirous of maintaining” his family from the “profits” of his profession, he believed that the Legislature could spare a little patronage for him and that by splitting the office it could be beneficial to all involved. He closed his handbill by noting that Congress and many state legislatures had divided their printing between several printers, and that even in North Carolina, Mr. Wills and Mr. Hodge had split the printing for six years (though he neglected to say that they were partners and not business rivals).²⁸⁵

For the first time in four years, the General Assembly agreed. The House of Commons appointed a committee consisting of four men to prepare and report a bill on the division of the public printing on November 22. The Senate concurred and added three gentlemen to the committee.²⁸⁶ Joseph Gales heard the news and quickly composed a letter to the General

²⁸⁴ *Minerva*, November 5, 1804.

²⁸⁵ “The Honourable The Legislature of the State of North Carolina, In Session,” November 20, 1804, General Assembly Session Records, NCDAH.

²⁸⁶ “Bill to Divide the Publick Printing,” November 22, 1804, General Assembly Session Records.

Assembly on November 23 expressing his surprise at the move toward splitting the public printing. Gales argued that no complaints had been lodged against his performance, even when fire had consumed his office. He, therefore, felt “hurt” at the news of the proposal. “I came to this state purposely as a Republican printer,” Gales noted in his letter to the General Assembly, “when there was not a Press of this description in the State; and to my pretensions to public favour were partly founded on this circumstance.” Gales defended his claim to the office by this open declaration of his identification with the Republican Party and support for the administration of Thomas Jefferson. Gales had firmly accepted what Boylan wrestled with: party loyalty deserved the patronage and support of like-minded men. Personal character and virtue could be trumped by identification with party.²⁸⁷

Gales continued his defense of his right to the office from a partisan standpoint by arguing that Boylan, as a Federalist, was unfit to hold the confidence of a Republican-dominated state. “Boylan,” Gales wrote, has “without intermission [abused] not only Republican measures, But the most eminent and virtuous Republican Characters in the United States, whilst I have moved in the same even course in which I began, of supporting and recommending Republican measures, and vindicating Republican characters.” Boylan’s politics, therefore, impeached his character as a worthy printer in a Republican state. To refute the notion that the job of public printer did not require the political opinions of the printer to match the state, Gales questioned such logic.

It has been said by some Members out of doors, “the Printing being a mere mechanical business, it is of no consequence what are the political opinions of the Printer.” This language which suits the purpose of Gentlemen at this time; but is it the language of Truth? Is it of no real importance to the good Government of our Country, whether the State Gazette is Federal, or a Republican print?²⁸⁸

²⁸⁷ Joseph Gales to the General Assembly, November 23, 1804, General Assembly Session Records.

²⁸⁸ Joseph Gales to the General Assembly, November 23, 1804, General Assembly Session Records.

Gales expected the answer to his rhetorical questions to be resoundingly in the negative because he argued that the selection of a Republican printer demonstrated that the legislature of North Carolina supported Republican principles. Unfortunately for Boylan, Gales' logic prevailed.²⁸⁹

On November 26, 1804, Boylan discussed Gales' letter to the General Assembly and then printed the names of those who voted for and against his proposition for dividing the public printing. He followed that pointed piece of news with the results of the vote on his proposition to perform the duties of public printer for three hundred dollars less than Gales. On both counts, Boylan lost.²⁹⁰ A week later, Boylan's full splenetic fury lashed Gales publicly once again for the outcome. Boylan attempted to restrain his criticism "lest malevolence should attribute it to motives unworthy of that decided and independent character which I think belongs to me" and hoped to avoid public disagreement animated by the "passions of party," but Gales' address to the General Assembly and editorials in the *Raleigh Register* had overcome his dispassionate nature. Boylan admitted that his quarrel with Gales was "in part personal" but believed that it was his duty to expose Gales' lack of character publicly.²⁹¹

After a recapitulation of his prior to service to the state as well as his previous attempts to obtain half the public printing, Boylan revealed that it was Gales' letter to the General Assembly on November 23 that most aroused his ire. "Perhaps a more insulting letter than this was never sent to a Legislature," Boylan noted in his analysis of Gales' letter. Boylan found it absolutely unthinkable that Gales could feel hurt and surprised that the General Assembly had considered splitting the duties of the public printer. "Does not my having been public printer, and having discharged the duties of that office faithfully and without reproach, give me at least equal claims

²⁸⁹ Joseph Pearson to John Steele, November 26, 1804, John Steele Papers. Pearson called Gales' reply "arrogant and dictatorial," but Boylan's was "modest." Pearson fully expected Boylan to win the position.

²⁹⁰ *Minerva*, November 26, 1804; William Boylan to the Honourable Legislature of North Carolina, General Assembly Session Records, November 26, 1804.

²⁹¹ *Minerva*, December 3, 1804.

to the appointment with yourself?" Boylan understood Gales' surprise and hurt as an insult because it implied that the General Assembly had considered a proposition from someone less worthy than Gales. For a Federalist like Boylan, it was Gales who lacked worthiness because of his foreign origins, a fact Boylan mentioned in his editorial.²⁹²

Then Boylan attacked Gales for lying about his motives for coming to the United States. "Have you forgotten that you told the public a few weeks ago that your errand [to the United States] was patriotism alone?" Boylan, in comparing Gales' previous statements about his patriotism to his more recent profession of Republican principles to the General Assembly, opened Gales' partisanship to the light of public scrutiny. He then attacked Gales as an office-seeker, an insurrectionist, and an immoral blight on the reputation of North Carolina. "No one is ignorant that you are a *professed* republican," Boylan wrote, "and no one doubts but you will continue the *profession* as long as you are in a republican country, and as long as you find it profitable." Gales, as a prostitute to party, lacked the independent character and virtue that Boylan believed to be necessary in men of quality.²⁹³

Boylan then returned to the devastating fire from the previous winter. What particularly had galled Boylan was that Gales had claimed a loss of two thousand dollars, a loss which fell "wholly on [Gales'] charitable neighbors." "Will you not inform us whether your real loss was not as every body supposes, less than 800 dollars and whether your speculation or *experimental* knowledge did not suggest to you the advantage of representing it to be 2000?" For evidence that Gales had fabricated his losses, Boylan suggested that Gales' rebuilding of his office in brick and the purchase of a piano for the Gales family confirmed that Gales had not suffered nearly so much financially as everyone supposed. Boylan believed that the fire had become Gales' tactic

²⁹² *Minerva*, December 3, 1804.

²⁹³ *Minerva*, December 3, 1804.

for attracting sympathy and did not deserve to be used as a viable argument for why Gales needed the job as public printer.²⁹⁴

Boylan's attack continued with accusations that Gales failed to publish some of the laws correctly while he altered others. Since Gales' defense had been the shield of his loyalty to the Republican Party, Boylan again attacked the notion that party loyalty covered the sins of its members.

Now that you claim an office, though your unfitness is manifest, though you present yourself with a foul and degraded character, you express *republicanism* will carry you through; but you are mistaken, for honest *republicans* are *honest* men, and though you may be tolerated for a time, you will in the end be spurned from society, as a disgrace to the party to which you attach yourself.

Boylan, by confining his attack to Gales, made it clear that he did not quarrel with the Republican Party as a whole, but only with Gales' conception of party loyalty as a replacement for virtuous character. Boylan argued that although there were two parties in the United States, "both have the good of their country at heart." The only difference between the two lay in how they both promoted that good. Boylan, reflecting his recent disavowal of the use of the term "Jacobinism," retreated from a full denunciation of the party of Gales.²⁹⁵

Boylan ended his tirade against Gales by announcing his own political principles, since Gales had seen fit to base his claim to the office of public printer on his Republican loyalty. Boylan noted that his avowal of his political principles was not in expectation that he would be awarded an office from the General Assembly but for the benefit of his subscribers. "Did you suppose sir, the Legislature of North Carolina was governed by a spirit of party and not by a sense of justice and propriety?" Boylan asked. Unlike Gales, Boylan noted that he pursued his Federalist politics because of "independence of opinion" not because he was enslaved to a

²⁹⁴ *Minerva*, December 3, 1804.

²⁹⁵ *Minerva*, December 3, 1804.

party.²⁹⁶ Though Boylan's hatred of the Republicans had led him to open Federalist partisanship, by the end of 1804, he seemed to be retreating to an older Federalist conception of political behavior. While it is possible that this retreat was a calculated move designed to show Boylan's moderation and fitness for the job of state printer, it is also likely that pursuit of partisanship caused tension between Boylan's older views of party and his use of Jeffersonian tactics. Whether one or both reasons explain Boylan's change in tactics, the success of his retreat still depended on keeping his passions in check.

Gales responded to Boylan's accusations ending any hope that the matter would terminate quietly. Thus, began a short war in the public sphere fought with ink and type. Charges and countercharges, along with detailed analyses of each others' editorials, appeared in the pages of the *Minerva* and the *Raleigh Register*. Both circulated handbills against each other.²⁹⁷ The war of words, however, paled in comparison to Boylan's physical attack on Gales on December 4, 1804. Boylan's comments had come out in the *Minerva* on the third and were met by Gales' handbill later that day. According to Boylan's interpretation of the handbill, Gales insinuated that the fire of the previous January had been Boylan's work though the charge had been made initially by a female member of Gales' household. "A member of [Gales'] family used expressions in the hearing of many, which by all were understood to contain charge of the most serious nature against myself, relative to that disaster," Boylan noted in his handbill of December 4. Because Boylan believed Gales to be responsible for the charge uttered by a female member of his family, Boylan had to chastise Gales publicly for the allegations.²⁹⁸

²⁹⁶ *Minerva*, December 3, 1804.

²⁹⁷ *Minerva*, December 17, 1804, December 24, 1804; *Raleigh Register*, December 3, 1804, December 10, 1804.

²⁹⁸ Boylan reprinted his handbill in the *Minerva*, December 17, 1804.

Boylan recalled that he saw Gales going up the street that cold Tuesday morning and stopped to ask how Gales could insinuate that Boylan had been responsible for the fire. “I struck him across the shoulder with my stick, he then rushed toward me grinning like an African baboon; he fell in advancing and immediately scrambled off partly upon all fours,” Boylan recalled. The reference to an African baboon was intended to remind readers of earlier editorials on Jefferson and slavery with the goal of de-humanizing Gales by turning him into a literal degenerate as he already was an inhuman slave to party.²⁹⁹ Gales recalled the incident differently, noting that he preferred the use of argument over the sword as a means of making his points. After Boylan had asked Gales about the allegations of arson, Boylan “raised up a thick walkingstick and struck me a violent blow on my head. Totally unprepared for such an attack, I endeavoured to close with him—he receded, and in following him up, I fell,” Gales recalled. To further cement his image as a victim in the incident, Gales informed his readers that Boylan, a Justice of the Peace, had continued to beat the editor of the *Raleigh Register* while he was on the ground. “Being considerably stunned by his repeated blows on my head, I did not think it prudent without a weapon, to cope with a man capable of such premeditated violence, and returned home.” In the world of southern honor and codes about manly behavior, Gales failed miserably to live up to the ideal. Boylan, on the other hand, where he had once been attacked in 1800 by Blake Baker, now became the aggressor, albeit in defense of his public honor.³⁰⁰

Unfortunately for Boylan, not all of his Federalist friends agreed with the propriety of humbling Gales through a public beating. Duncan Cameron, Boylan’s one-time comrade in pursuit of transforming the public mind through the pages of the *Minerva*, wrote to Joseph Gales

²⁹⁹ *Minerva*, December 17, 1804.

³⁰⁰ *Raleigh Register*, December 10, 1804. On southern honor and manhood see Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *The Shaping of Southern Culture: Honor, Grace, and War, 1760s-1890s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001) and Betram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), as well as Trees, *The Founding Fathers and the Politics of Character*, 45-52.

on January 21, 1805, that he considered the charges printed in Boylan's editorial from December 3 to be libelous. Cameron went so far as to draw up a writ for the sheriff of Wake County to arrest Boylan in the case with damages totaling up to one thousand pounds. Cameron considered this move to be the "most rational way of terminating" the conflict between Gales and Boylan.³⁰¹ Gales' association with Cameron had begun in 1802 when Gales started printing Cameron's law reports, suggesting that Cameron did not consider himself bound to support the Federalists in everything that he did.³⁰² Still, it must have been something of a shock for Boylan to discover his ally in the employ of his greatest enemy.

Though Cameron had originally suggested prosecuting his former comrade Boylan for libel, Gales rejected this proposition, noting in a letter to Cameron on February 12, 1805, that he had looked over his own addresses to Boylan and wondered if the allegations of libel should be dropped. In the light of his own vitriolic comments against Boylan, Gales likely saw little to gain in prosecuting Boylan on that account.³⁰³ Still, he kept in contact with Cameron, who was preparing the case for the Hillsboro Superior Court meeting of October 1805. Gales sent Cameron information again in August of that year, noting that the story of Boylan's offer to hire one of Gales' slaves to set fire to the *Raleigh Register* printing office might play an important role in the trial.³⁰⁴ Unfortunately, the records of what did come out in that trial have been lost, leaving only Gales' and Boylan's summaries of the proceedings.

According to both Gales and Boylan, the court proceedings did not consume much time. After ten minutes of deliberation, the jury awarded Joseph Gales one hundred pounds in damages

³⁰¹ Duncan Cameron to Joseph Gales, January 21, 1805, Cameron Family Papers.

³⁰² Joseph Gales to Duncan Cameron, June 20, 1802, Cameron Family Papers.

³⁰³ Joseph Gales to Duncan Cameron, February 12, 1805, Cameron Family Papers.

³⁰⁴ Joseph Gales to Duncan Cameron, August 23, 1805, Cameron Family Papers.

and costs.³⁰⁵ Boylan had wanted to defend his honor in the case, claiming that the documents would have shown him to be justified in the chastisement of Gales. Boylan's friends, all able lawyers, determined that it would be best not to introduce the publications which had provoked the incident because it would allow Gales to make "a political harangue to the jury, who being entirely democrats, would have had their passions excited, and so led away by their warmth, as to give excessive damages."³⁰⁶ If Boylan's education plan through the *Minerva* had been successful, perhaps those members of the jury might have been able to detect the calumny of Gales in provoking Boylan in this affair of honor. In the jury room, as well as at the ballot box, it must have been painfully evident to Boylan that the public had not been turned away from their Democratic folly. Boylan, having abandoned his dispassionate nature for a more irascible one, had been chastened not only by a man he detested but also by a jury composed of those he had endeavored to turn away from their political sins.

Boylan, thereafter, returned to a more circumspect mode of editorial behavior until the escalating tensions between the United States and Britain gave him and other Federalist editors more fodder for denouncing Republican policies. He resumed printing extracts from other newspapers rather than writing his own editorials on state political figures. A difficulty with judging his editorial course in 1805 lies in the lack of extant issues for that year, severely limiting samples for a full comparison to previous years. Those editorials that remain extant demonstrate a Boylan who discovered that it was better to beat one's enemies at a distance rather than to engage them personally on the street.³⁰⁷ Boylan's surviving correspondence with Duncan

³⁰⁵ Hillsboro Superior Court Records, Minute Document, October 1805, NCDAH. Gales decided to donate the fines to the Raleigh Academy to prove that he had "no view of advantage to himself in bringing this suit." *Raleigh Register*, October 14, 1805.

³⁰⁶ *Minerva*, October 21, 1805.

³⁰⁷ Fewer than twenty-five issues are extant from 1805. The only issues to denigrate North Carolina Republicans were those from November 11, November 25, and December 9, all of which dealt with Duncan McFarland, a man universally disliked by members of both parties; Pasley, "The Tyranny of Printers," 239.

Cameron also reflected the heart of a chastened and betrayed man. None of three existing letters that Boylan wrote to Cameron through 1808 displays the intimacy and familiarity of Boylan's earlier correspondence. Boylan's tone became stiff, aloof, and formal with his old Federalist comrade.³⁰⁸

Though the Federalists in North Carolina would experience resurgence in power and influence during the tumultuous conflict with Great Britain that resulted in the War of 1812, many Federalists earlier concluded that the party had died.³⁰⁹ William R. Davie so informed Duncan Cameron in 1808: "The Federal party is in fact dead and buried, and may be so considered even by its warmest friends, no good can arise from any attempts towards its resurrection, therefore . . . the policy of Individuals of their description [Federalists] . . . ought [to] give their votes to the least exceptionable of the republican candidates."³¹⁰ John Steele told Nathaniel Macon in 1805 that the Federalist Party had been "dissolved at the conclusion of the late general peace when the French revolution terminated . . ." Such defeatism on the part of North Carolina's Federalist leaders certainly did not inspire confidence in Boylan's efforts to overturn the ignorance of the deluded masses. And Boylan, chastised by a man he despised, could not continue the work of the party on his own. Only with the increasing tensions of the approaching crisis with Great Britain did Federalists restart their activity aimed for the "restoration of correct principles."

The Federalist membership of North Carolina's legislature remained fairly constant throughout the first fifteen years of the nineteenth century, and men such as Duncan Cameron

³⁰⁸ William Boylan to Duncan Cameron, November 10, 1805, July 8, 1807, and December 3, 1808, Cameron Family Papers.

³⁰⁹ Broussard, *Southern Federalists*, 83-86; Gilpatrick, 166

³¹⁰ William R. Davie to Duncan Cameron, February 9, 1808, Cameron Family Papers.

and John Steele lent their talents as state representatives for several terms.³¹¹ It is difficult, nonetheless, to conclude that this persistence of Federalism resulted from Boylan's efforts. If historians judge Boylan's newspaper plan by the election of Federalists from North Carolina to national offices, then it was a dismal failure. Its significance, therefore, lies in what it reveals about North Carolina's Federalist leaders and the political culture of the early republic. They were drawn slowly into partisanship by a conscious but troubling imitation of Jeffersonian newspaper propaganda techniques. Their hesitation made them ambivalent about the spread of enlightened ideas through newspapers sent across the state. The pursuit of the people, even to lead them into the paths of deference, seemed to betray fundamental Federalist conceptions of social order and the science of government. Navigation of a public sphere where polemics and passion counted for more than the reasoned judgment of enlightened and disinterested men proved to be a difficult exercise. By engaging the public sphere through conscious imitation of Jeffersonian techniques, Boylan and his Federalist comrades found themselves bound to play by the rules of an abhorrent political game.³¹²

The tensions of the oppositional public sphere also aroused Boylan's own passions. His animus toward Joseph Gales, based largely on the fact that Gales monopolized the emoluments of office as state printer, made him ever resentful, both privately and publicly, of his Republican rival. Boylan, betraying the Federalist mask of impartiality and losing control over his passions, allowed himself to shame his rival publicly in a vicious beating. Unfortunately, though he claimed the prerogatives of a slighted gentleman in the incident, he found himself publicly humiliated both in print and by a jury of his so-called peers.

³¹¹ Broussard, *Southern Federalists*, 216.

³¹² Fischer, *Revolution of American Conservatism*, 152-153, 179. Fischer argues that Federalists learned to make "compromises" with Jeffersonian ideas, but the example of Boylan suggests that those compromises were never fully consummated.

CONCLUSION

“This State of things, however we may unite in lamenting its existence is an evil not to be cured while both parties believe or pretend to believe, the fault to be with their opponents and not with themselves, as if virtue and vice were synonymous with party distinctions.” John Steele, 1805³¹³

The newspaper plan hatched by Duncan Cameron and other leading Federalists finally became a topic for public discussion in 1810. Joseph Gales had made a trip through western North Carolina in the early part of the summer, intending, according to his account, to collect arrears on subscriptions. Instead, he uncovered evidence of the plot that had been instituted in 1802 which, according to the editor of the Philadelphia *Aurora*, William Duane, had been started for the purpose of writing “down the republican administration.” In Gales’ words, the plot’s purpose was “to undermine republicanism.” In the debate that ensued between Gales, Boylan, and an unidentified “Citizen of Wilkes,” issues that seemed have lain dormant suddenly erupted, once again, into the public sphere.³¹⁴

“A Citizen of Wilkes,” much like “A Citizen of Johnston” from five years earlier, attacked Gales’ “effrontery” to suggest that Boylan had been part of a newspaper scheme whose intent was to “write down the republican administration.” This unidentified essayist believed that Gales’ trip to the mountains was nothing more than an electioneering scheme designed to shore up the fortunes of a party which “at the present moment appears to be in a very discordant condition.” One of the purposes of Gales’ trip was to “keep up the spirit of delusion among the people,” something that the Republicans were especially good at because of their propensity for forming “political associations” and “societies.” Gales, according to his critic, had plenty of practice in the art of voluntary political association while acting the part of a treasonous subject

³¹³ Wagstaff, *The Papers of John Steele*, 1:445.

³¹⁴ *Minerva*, July 12, 1810; *Raleigh Register*, July 19, 1810.

in England. “Such a man, Sir, has no legitimate cause of, or excitement to what the ancients called *amor patriae*, or love of country,” wrote the anonymous penman from Wilkes County.³¹⁵

Boylan took up his pen to the attack Gales and the supposed newspaper plot following a summer’s worth of abuse by the Wilkes County essayist. Boylan essentially called Gales a hypocrite, suggesting that if anyone had circulated his newspaper to non-subscribers, it was Gales. “The democrats in most of the states,” Boylan argued, “have set the example, and do not the democratic members of Congress, fill the mails with the Aurora, the Intelligencer, &c. addressed to our federal readers, and what is very unjust, these papers are paid for out of the National Treasury.” Never one to forget his own situation, Boylan then suggested that thousands could have been saved by allowing the public printing to be done by the lowest bidder. As Gales had received “seventeen thousand dollars from the state,” it was perhaps time to share the fruits of the treasury with other deserving printers, particularly as Gales’ popularity was on the wane in the state.³¹⁶

In the charged atmosphere of international conflict with Britain, the largely enervated Federalist Party began a short-lived recrudescence. Had William Boylan decided to remain in the newspaper business, he might have headed toward a second public confrontation with his despised rival. On November 10, 1810, however, Boylan retired as editor of the *Minerva*, passing his duties to his brother, Abraham Hodge Boylan, and another partner, Alexander Lucas.³¹⁷ Thus ended the fourteen year editorial odyssey of one of the state’s foremost Federalist printers. Boylan, at the age of thirty-three in 1810, went on to engage in land speculation, eventually buying Joel Lane’s plantation *Wakefield*, and became the first farmer in Wake County

³¹⁵ *Minerva*, July 2, 1810, August 9, 1810, August 16, 1810, September 13, 1810. All quotes from the August 9 edition.

³¹⁶ *Minerva*, September 27, 1810.

³¹⁷ Bushong, “Montfort Hall and Its Architect, William Percival,” 3; Ashe, *Biographical History of North Carolina*, 6:91.

to plant cotton. He served in the General Assembly in 1812, was on the board of trustees for the Raleigh Academy, and became president of the State Bank, treasurer of the North Carolina Agricultural Society, president of the Raleigh and Gaston Railroad, and a commissioner for rebuilding the state capitol after it burned in 1831. He died on the eve of the Civil War in 1861.³¹⁸

Joseph Gales' fortunes by 1810 also declined. An increasing number of Republicans noted, ironically, that Gales had been extravagant in his spending as well as inattentive to his duty as printer. The printer's salary was reduced to nine hundred dollars in 1810, and the legislature heaped further insult on Gales by inquiring about the costs of printing in other states. In 1811, Thomas Henderson, editor of the *Raleigh Star*, a neutral press, became the only candidate for public printer as Gales, incensed and insulted, decided to withdraw his name. Staunch Republicans held up the election of the only candidate, writing on their ballots, "No Federalist," "No pay, no printer," and "Republican printer or none." Gales' reign as the Republican Party's mouthpiece under the patronage of the General Assembly had come to an end. The passions of two-party conflict began to slowly dissipate as North Carolina headed toward its so-called "Rip Van Winkle" years.

The conflict between Gales and Boylan, mirroring the larger clash between Republican and Federalist visions of society, has much to say about the career of Federalism in North Carolina. Historians have long assumed that the Federalist message did not address the Jeffersonian tendencies of the great portion of North Carolina's inhabitants. R. D. W. Connor wrote in 1929 that "the most important reason for the downfall of the Federalists was their indifference to public opinion," implying that the Federalists haughtily ignored the ignorant

³¹⁸ Ashe, *Biographical History of North Carolina*, 6: 92; Elizabeth C. Waugh, *North Carolina's Capital, Raleigh* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1967), 13; Bushong, "Montfort Hall and Its Architect, William Percival," 4-5.

masses.³¹⁹ Because they could not bear a society in which their talents and character were continually spurned, they grew bitter and withdrew from public life. The examples of Boylan, Davie, and Cameron have suggested, on the other hand, that the Federalists had an acute consciousness of public opinion. In true Federalist fashion they wanted to direct it rather than be directed by it.

Hugh T. Lefler argued for a litany of causes to explain the decline of the Federalists in North Carolina. The removal of the war threat with France, the unpopularity of the Alien and Sedition Acts, the retirement of many eminent Federalists from politics, the appearance of Gales' *Raleigh Register*, contempt for the common man, and the lack of patronage power once Jefferson took office were all listed as contributions to the Federalists' demise.³²⁰ While much of his analysis has merit, the fact that the Federalists clung to the hope of reclaiming office after 1800 suggests that the events of 1798 through 1800 did not permanently damage their reputation. Considering, as well, that the Federalists held a consistent level of membership in the General Assembly for ten years after Jefferson's ascension to the Presidency, it becomes more difficult to explain their demise as a result of events prior to 1800. In fact, the Federalists in North Carolina remained fairly strong even after the War of 1812, suggesting that historians who have ignored their presence after 1800 have misconstrued the political landscape of the period after Jefferson's election. "For many years after 1800," Lefler wrote, "North Carolina had a one-party system."³²¹ Such a view, in the light of the activities surrounding the *Minerva*, can no longer be tenable.

James Broussard recognized that the Federalists in North Carolina "enjoyed more success . . . than anywhere else in the South" after 1800, though he noted that Federalism slowly declined

³¹⁹ Connor, *North Carolina: Rebuilding an Ancient Commonwealth*, 1:432.

³²⁰ Lefler, *History of North Carolina*, 1:283.

³²¹ Lefler, *History of North Carolina*, 1:284.

after Jefferson's election.³²² Broussard cited the Federalists' "self-imposed failure to make political capital from promising state issues" as their greatest liability.³²³ Because they lacked a coherent and consistent organization, the Federalists were also incapable of making any policy statements consistently across the state. Yet, the plan for spreading enlightenment to the public through the pages of the *Minerva* suggests an attempt at statewide organization while the pages of the *Minerva* brimmed with what could be described as the "party line" on many key state issues. The furor that Federalists demonstrated when the General Assembly revoked the University's funding sources was one such issue that garnered not only widespread disapprobation from Federalist leaders, but also became the constant subject of editorials about the "gothic ignorance" of the Republicans. Though their organization may have lacked consistent central planning and communication, such leaders as Duncan Cameron, William R. Davie, and William Polk served informally to connect North Carolina's Federalist leadership. In an age that generally eschewed full party organization, the Federalists seem hardly less organized than their opponents.³²⁴

The Federalists of North Carolina were also no less organized than their counterparts in other states. The fact that Alexander Hamilton could not bring together a nationwide meeting of Federalists in 1802 demonstrates that North Carolina's Federalist leaders did not differ significantly in their ability to organize their party or spread their message from others in both the North and the South.³²⁵ Just as William Boylan made the *Minerva* the official party organ of Federalists in North Carolina, so too did other Federalist leaders establish newspapers for the same purpose. The *New England Palladium* and the *New York Post* appeared in 1801, while the

³²² Broussard, *Southern Federalists*, 215.

³²³ Broussard, *Southern Federalists*, 226.

³²⁴ Broussard, *Southern Federalists*, 257-258, 268-269.

³²⁵ Fischer, *Revolution of American Conservatism*, 83-84.

Charleston Courier appeared in 1802; these newspapers all served, like the *Minerva*, to propagate Federalist doctrine in an attempt to mobilize an enlightened public to be deferential to Federalist statesmen. Some of these papers were remarkably ephemeral, finding that adopting a disdainful, acerbic tone did not garner subscribers as it also did not convert the public to the Federalist cause. Many of these papers became more concerned with crafting mordant prose rather than the actual business of electing candidates, demonstrating passivity when it came to adopting a strong electioneering tone. Boylan, like many of these editors, found himself uncomfortable with the direction that his imitation of the Republican press had taken him.³²⁶

The demise of the Federalists in North Carolina, therefore, stemmed largely from their inability to commit fully to the emerging political system which embraced partisanship and an oppositional public sphere. The Federalists in North Carolina did not lack the potential to create a shared popular message. Still, Federalist conceptions of social hierarchy and order made them increasingly anachronistic as social, economic, and political trends opened new possibilities for political participation by even the lowliest members of society. Federalist paternalism, seen most clearly in the belief that the elites needed to educate and instill virtue in a public that was incapable of making good decisions on its own, reflected a vision of social order that was under pressure. There is no doubt that the Federalists reflected an eighteenth-century world order that could not be maintained in the face of growing political participation by the masses.

Though the Federalist message may have lacked broad appeal, the Federalists failed to promote that message in the public sphere. Ideas had become commodities for public purchase, and although the Federalists found it distasteful to hawk their political wares in the same way as one might sell tobacco, still they believed their principles to be superior to those of the

³²⁶ Fischer, *Revolution of American Conservatism*, 137-139, 145; Pasley, “*The Tyranny of Printers*,” 234, 238, 253, 255.

Republicans because of their exalted status, virtue, and talents. Gentlemen of high status might debate as equals, but the information printed for public consumption had to be the consensus of enlightened opinion since the public possessed limited ability to judge and weigh arguments. Still, since the public's opinion became the foundation of government through the election of representatives, it was necessary that the appropriate information be provided for the simple minds of the people.

The Republicans, in forming the opposition to the Federalist program in the 1790s, had largely rejected the idea that the public could not wisely choose for itself without the aid of enlightened and talented men. Republican newspaper propaganda, consequently, aimed directly at the ordinary voter by speaking to him in less exalted language. Federalists like William Boylan attempted to imitate such tactics but could not tear themselves away from their Federalist conceptions of the proper role of the people in the political system. Boylan, like his Federalist colleagues, understood that pandering directly to the people made him no better than the demagogues he denounced in the pages of the *Minerva*. Such reasoning explains why the newspaper campaign was directed toward prominent Federalist leaders across the state, men whom Boylan could count to disseminate the correct information to the public. Boylan did not intend to reach the people without these Federalist gentlemen as intermediaries, since the public needed aid in understanding the enlightened discourse that characterized the pages of his paper.

Boylan also made a costly mistake in linking his private desire for the office of public printer to wider conflict between the parties, thereby weakening the political distinctions between Federalists and Republicans. Clearly, his Federalist colleagues in the General Assembly lacked the votes necessary to divide the public printing. Boylan's pursuit of Gales, whose foreign status, office-seeking personality, and polychrome past made him particularly detestable,

resulted in a public personal quarrel that damaged his reputation and forced him and his allies to confront his partisanship. Boylan had to admit that in pursuing newspaper techniques of the Republicans he had laid aside his disinterestedness and impartiality. Humbled in a court of law by a jury of his peers and prosecuted by a former ally, Boylan retreated from an openly partisan course. Doubtless, Boylan also realized that as long as he imitated the men he despised, he would never be acceptable to the General Assembly for the office of state printer. Whether from internal cognitive dissonance, a desire for office, or some combination of the two, Boylan could not remain the Federalist partisan that he became in 1803.

The fact that the Federalists did not have effective internal mechanisms for dealing with dissent also imperiled Boylan's mission. Not all Federalists shared a common vision politically, and men such as John Steele largely remained aloof from the newspaper plan. Others such as Duncan Cameron, an architect of the plan to use the *Minerva*, failed to support Boylan after he publicly beat Gales. Moreover, Cameron provided legal advice to Gales and wrote out the warrant for Boylan's arrest for libel. In the Republican Party, such dissent would have been quelled—to whatever extent possible—for the purpose of maintaining the party's solidarity. The lack of party structures, therefore, hindered Federalist chances for electoral victory while the lack of internal harmony of party values made it unlikely that Federalists in North Carolina could overcome their independent natures to work together.

The public sphere continued to evolve toward the end of the eighteenth century. As the nineteenth century opened with the promise of Jeffersonian democracy, North Carolina's paternalistic Federalists attempted to change with it. As they experimented with new forms of partisanship to educate the public, they discovered that the rules of the new political game brought internal conflict between their conservative values and the liberalizing trends of

partisanship. Navigating the rules of this game, as William Boylan discovered, also jeopardized their chances for obtaining political office, particularly as the Federalists wanted to win without becoming the demagogues they despised. From civic associations to the world of print, North Carolina's Federalists witnessed the evolution of public sphere that they could no longer control.

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