



# Danville and the Beginning of the Anti-Masonic Movement

*William Cahoon's stunning victory in the Fifth Congressional District brought success to Vermont's nascent anti-Masonic movement, and no one had more influence on the marathon election than did the editor of Danville's North Star, Ebenezer Eaton.*

By KENNETH A. DEGREE

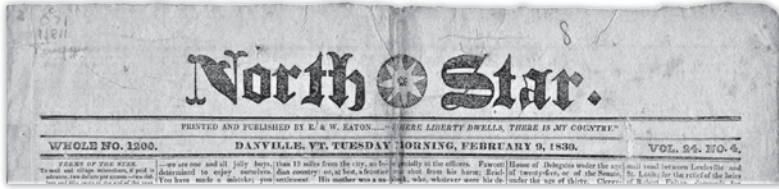
As the nineteenth century dawned, residents of Danville had reason for satisfaction. The Caledonia County town saw its population soar, the only one north of Randolph to do so, to make it the ninth largest town in Vermont. Many prominent members of Danville felt that the town should capitalize on its good fortune and pursue an editor to establish a regional newspaper. (Caledonia County had had one previous newspaper in Peacham, but it quickly perished.) In the autumn of 1806, they contacted an itinerant printer, Ebenezer Eaton, and asked if he would entertain the opportunity. Visiting Danville, Eaton found it a “desirable” place to labor, and after borrowing money from his brother to finance the business, he loaded “his family, belongings and printing press onto an ox-sled” and headed north. After meeting with town leaders, it was decided to name Eaton’s new venture *North Star*. In his introductory editorial, the new editor explained that “the uniform object of the Editor in the management of the *Star* will be to advocate the true principles of Republican Freedom.” His masthead quoted Benjamin Franklin: “Where liberty dwells there is my country.”<sup>1</sup>

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*Masthead of the North Star (Danville); published by E[benazer]. & W. [William?] Eaton. The newspaper was published from 1807 to 1891. Ebenezer Eaton died in 1859. The paper's motto, "Where liberty dwells, there is my country," has long been attributed to Benjamin Franklin. But there is no evidence that Franklin wrote or uttered these words.*

Vermont held no more loyal devotee to republican principles. Ebenezer Eaton believed in the creed that every man had the right to be secure in his property and to reap the rewards of his labor. Eaton thought his adopted town of Danville was the kind of agricultural mecca that would be dear to the heart of his hero, Thomas Jefferson. It was the ideal agrarian area and along with its fellow towns in Caledonia County, would do its small share to keep the young country out of the hands of the monarchists and mercantilists who held sway in Europe. The new editor held to his principles during the War of 1812, even after Caledonia County abandoned Jefferson during the embargo. Eaton lost readership, lost revenue, and had to prevail upon the state legislature to forgive a small debt and keep him out of jail. However, he never lost hope, and when the Madison administration fought the British to a draw, Eaton went to work returning his readership to their former principles.<sup>2</sup>

The Danville editor hoped that the end of the conflict would return the country to its agrarian ways. Circumstances quickly disabused him of that notion. The return of foreign goods that battered budding industries created during the war, a series of poor crop years, disease brought to the state by soldiers, the end of the Vermont State Bank, and the slow demise of the wheat crop, laid the Vermont economy low through the rest of the decade. The 1820s brought the return of prosperity to the Green Mountains, ushered in by the opening of the Champlain Canal in 1823. This transportation breakthrough slashed costs associated with bringing agricultural products to market by 90 percent, and its impact reached clear to the Connecticut River. Commerce exploded in the state and market towns (towns where merchants began to purchase goods from other towns and package them to sell elsewhere) appeared on the Vermont landscape. Many citizens amazed by this transformation contracted a particularly virulent case of "canal fever," and towns in Caledonia County

joined. Eaton narrated the ill-fated attempts to run such canals, from Lake Memphremagog to the Connecticut River and on down to Long Island, or from the Connecticut River to Lake Champlain, along with other high-minded schemes. Yet the finances and geography of the little state assured that such dreams would come to naught.<sup>3</sup>

Instead of seeing the completion of a nearby canal project, editor Eaton had to watch as the towns that benefited most from the opening of the Champlain Canal used the subsequent legislative sessions to bolster their newfound commercial power by gaining charters for banks, insurance companies, and myriad corporations. Initially, Eaton displayed no concern about the disparity in the fortunes of Vermont's towns. Although he held a healthy republican suspicion of banking, he applauded the legislature's attempt to provide charters equally throughout the state, perhaps influenced by the location of the Caledonia County bank in Danville. "However various the opinions may have been relative to the expediency of multiplying Banking institutions," Eaton wrote, "it is evident that the Legislature of this State have at length taken the broad and equitable ground of apportioning these privileges in the various parts of the state."<sup>4</sup>

Eaton apparently held no particular jealousy toward those towns and people who benefited from special economic circumstances, but he worried about power. He feared that the larger towns would use their newfound strength to dominate the smaller towns in the state. Eaton felt that the individual towns and their control of local affairs served as the bastions of liberty and that the wisest form of government, embodying the republican ideas, was a legislature consisting of a representative from each town, making laws that attempted to spread opportunity around the state. As the market towns grew in the 1820s, Eaton maintained a watchful eye.<sup>5</sup>

He did not have to wait long. In 1825, the editor reported what he perceived as a flaw in the way the state chose the Executive Council, the group of twelve men elected at large statewide, along with the governor, to ensure that the bills coming from the General Assembly were constitutional. With but one political party, county caucuses generally nominated candidates. If the majority of the district appeared satisfied with the caucus choice, the candidate was inevitably elected without opposition. Recently, however, trouble had erupted in Caledonia County. L. P. Dana secured the caucus endorsement, but the political friends of Pres West attempted to circumvent the process by putting his name before the public. Eaton accused large-town politicians from outside the county of trying to influence the outcome of the election. He used the example of Joseph Barry, recently elected to the Executive Council from Guildhall

despite receiving less than one-quarter of his home district's vote. To negate this influence, Eaton proposed that the time had come to elect council members by district, except Essex County and Grand Isle County, "which would be offered a proportion of the representation." This would prevent a vocal minority backed by men from outside the district from writing newspaper articles pumping up a candidate "not wanted by a majority of the county." Although Eaton had presciently outlined a primitive senate, which Vermont adopted in 1836, his suggestion went nowhere.<sup>6</sup>

In early 1827, Eaton sounded the alarm that the market towns were once again attempting to add to their power. He anxiously notified his readership of a plot by the larger counties to pack the Council of Censors, a group of thirteen men whose job was to provide constitutional amendments for consideration by a Constitutional Convention to which each town would send a representative. Newspapers from the "southern counties" presented tickets giving two members each to Windham, Rutland, and Windsor counties, while excluding Grand Isle and Essex counties entirely. "The object," Eaton warned, "appears to be, to obtain a majority from the large counties—prescribe their own mode for *electing* a Convention as the Constitution is *indefinite* on this point—and then make alterations in the *Charter of our Rights* as will secure them a *double* representation in the upper branch of the Legislature [Senate], allowing *none at all* to the small counties, and probably but one member in the lower House [House of Representatives] from three or four small towns."<sup>7</sup>

While Eaton worried about these problems, a man named William Morgan of Batavia, New York, said he was going to write an exposé about Masonry. When it was published, both Morgan and the town printer were arrested on dubious charges and constantly harassed by town Masons. Finally, some Masons put Morgan in a carriage and brought him to Fort Niagara, from which he never returned. Eaton saw this affair as proving that large commercial towns were behind the Masonic taint, and he brought them to the fore. Masons were plentiful in Vermont as well, and Eaton went after them.<sup>8</sup>

The *North Star* found that taking such a stance generated resistance. Within a month Eaton reported that most of the Masons from St. Johnsbury had discontinued taking his paper. Danville's county rival began a competing sheet, *The Farmer's Herald*, in July 1827, with Dr. Luther Jewitt in control. Soon after a sheet called *The Extra Star* was published in St. Johnsbury. It was decorated with two coffins bearing Masonic emblems with "Eaton" engraved in each. These events had an impact on the *North Star*: The newspaper was not published for a month

and then the next issue was only half a sheet. Yet even in the half-sheet format, Eaton managed to publish the proceedings of an anti-Masonic convention held at an overflowing courthouse in Danville on August 6. Obviously pointing to situations such as occurred at the *North Star*, one resolution proposed at the convention decried the deceitful attempts of some members of the Masons to “derange the business and oppose the interests” of such individuals who opposed the institution. The meeting ended with the nomination of William Cahoon of Lyndon as a candidate for U.S. Representative from Vermont’s Fifth District in the fall 1828 election. This was not the first endorsement that Cahoon had received. In mid-July a reader who signed himself MANY argued, “The persons heretofore named as Candidates, D. Azro A. Buck and Seth Cushman, are not satisfactory to many of the people. Without saying anything against either of the gentlemen, they are not engaged in pursuits which accord with the interest or feelings of the great body of freeman in this district.”<sup>9</sup>

William Cahoon came to Lyndon from Rhode Island with his father, Daniel, after receiving glowing reports from his brother, Daniel Jr., the town’s first settler. Although Cahoon was involved in agriculture, his primary vocation was running a saw and gristmill in Lyndon. He also succeeded his father as town clerk, serving until he was elected to Congress. Although represented as a plain farmer, it is clear that his town, county, and state found Cahoon to be an influential leader. Lyndon elected him town representative in 1802 and eight times thereafter. He was chosen as a delegate to the state constitutional conventions of 1814 and 1828, presidential elector in 1808, Caledonia County judge from 1811 through 1819, was twice elected lieutenant governor almost unanimously in 1820 and 1821, and was a member of the Executive Council from 1815 to 1820. He was called “General” because he was commander of the fourth division of the state militia during the War of 1812. Despite being chosen by members of the agricultural community, William was no rube, but experienced in politics.<sup>10</sup>

Cahoon faced three qualified attorneys in the race for the Fifth District’s congressional seat. The incumbent was D. Azro A. Buck of Chelsea, who followed his namesake father into the U.S. Congress. Buck the younger graduated from Middlebury College, then studied at West Point. He resigned his commission shortly thereafter, deciding he would rather study law. Yet as the War of 1812 commenced, he was quick to raise a group of rangers and served until 1813. He then returned to his hometown and his practice. Buck was held in high esteem in Chelsea, as he was chosen to represent his neighbors in the legislature for fourteen years. As he worked in the General Assembly, he earned the respect of his fel-

low representatives, who selected him speaker of the house six times. He was considered “an old-fashioned gentleman, of easy and winning address, appreciated of, and abounding in the courtesies of life, not profoundly learned in law or politics, but remarkable for always having an immediate command of all the resources incident to the acute understanding applied to a close observation of common things.”<sup>11</sup>

Though beloved in his hometown, it appears that Buck was more appreciated statewide than he was in his home district. In 1820, the Chelsea lawyer ran against John Mattocks of Peacham for the Fifth District seat and was soundly beaten. In 1822, when the five-man congressional delegation was chosen statewide, Buck was selected with the fourth highest vote total, while the incumbent Mattocks finished a distant sixth. In the 1824 election, with new districts drawn up, Buck and Mattocks again squared off. Mattocks edged Buck and returned to Washington. Whatever the reason for this undercurrent of unpopularity, Azro Buck had another problem as he ran for reelection: He was an unapologetic Mason. Eaton charged that the incumbent stated that “he will stand or fall with the Institution of Masonry.” Whether Buck truly said this, or whether the words were placed in his mouth by the zealous *North Star* editor, was unimportant. Eaton would do his utmost to make the accusation stick.<sup>12</sup>

Azro Buck’s opponent in the 1826 election had again thrown his hat into the ring. James Bell of Walden was considered an “excellent lawyer.” Orphaned at birth, Bell was said to have raised himself “from the plough to the halls of legislation.” He, too, served his hometown in the state legislature, in 1815 and from 1818 to 1827. Due to his keen legal mind, he was generally appointed to the judiciary committee. Like Buck, Bell was also a Mason.<sup>13</sup>

Seth Cushman, the Jacksonian candidate, was an attorney from Guild-



*Daniel Azro A. Buck. No date.*

hall. Considered a “handsome” fellow blessed with “gentlemanly manners,” he was a bit of an outcast for his lack of evangelical zeal. Although “not a deep student of the books,” Cushman nonetheless “possessed a remarkable intuition and skill in the conduct of a case.” Yet being a fine lawyer was not enough for many. One biographer stated, “had his moral and religious principles equaled his natural abilities, he would have been the pride of his friends.”<sup>14</sup>

As time ran down to election day, Ebenezer Eaton was busily welding the anti-Masonic frenzy to his republican principles. However, it was reported that the Masons were busy as well. One writer, who named himself VIGILANCE, stated that there had been a flurry of activity in the county lodges, and he wondered if that meant they would back only one candidate. To the editor of the *North Star*, the choice for the congressional seat could not be more plain. “Four candidates are presented in the 5th Congressional District for your suffrages. Three of them are *lawyers*; two of the lawyers *Masons* which renders them . . . objectionable; and the other is a *farmer*.”<sup>15</sup>

Understandably, with four candidates in the field the election did not produce a winner. Azro Buck mustered a plurality, but was far from gaining the majority needed for victory. The incumbent was unable to reach 40 percent of the vote. The Jacksonian Seth Cushman came in second with 26 percent; William Cahoon received a shade over 24 percent. Eaton must have been pleased by the results of his home county. Of Cahoon’s 1,674 votes, over 78 percent came from Caledonia County. It appeared that it would be up to the *North Star* editor to do the political spadework necessary outside his hustings to build support for his candidate.<sup>16</sup>

Initially, this mission appeared to be filled with dreaded portents. Shortly after the first election, a freshet occurred after a week of heavy rains in the area, destroying General Cahoon’s mills. This was followed by rumors that the candidate had taken ill and if elected, would be unable to serve. Eaton was quick to rebut, arguing that Cahoon had indeed been ill, but at present was “convalescing and will be restored to health in a short time.” Despite the efforts of Eaton and Cahoon’s friends, these reports had a devastating effect on his prospects in the next election on November 11, 1828.<sup>17</sup> Cahoon’s vote total dropped three hundred votes, yielding less than 20 percent of the total. Again, the lion’s share came from his own county (72 percent). Any solace that Eaton and his followers could take came from the Masons’ fall: Both the incumbent and James Bell hemorrhaged votes, showing that their results were affected by their Masonic taint. Seth Cushman, however, was the beneficiary of the other candidates’ losses, gaining over seven hundred votes and claiming almost 37 percent of the ballots.<sup>18</sup>

The third election, on January 5, 1829, brought continued disappointment to Eaton and other Cahoon followers. Despite the fact that a convention of churches from Montpelier and Caledonia and Orleans counties met at Danville, resulting in a call for Masons to leave their lodges, Cahoon failed to benefit. Despite Eaton's proud assertion that the *North Star* subscription list had doubled since he waded into the Masonic controversy, the third trial brought continued disappointment to Cahoon, who slumped to his lowest total, 1,213 votes, slightly more than 18 percent of the vote. In the third contest, the lowest number of voters came out to cast their ballots. Seth Cushman just barely remained in the lead, while Bell slipped into insignificance. After Cahoon's miserable performance in the third round of balloting, the editor of St. Johnsbury's *Farmer's Herald* insisted that only Buck and Cushman had any chance to win the contest, therefore it was time for the Lyndon sawyer to step aside. "Nonsense," countered Eaton, "we have 'the balance of power' in our hands, and our numbers are everyday increasing; let us sustain this power, as in justice to ourselves and country we ought," at least until they can offer someone free of Masonry. At this point, Cahoon was the only candidate "whose principles are based on those which anchored the fathers in '76. He always marshalled in the republican ranks, and never deserted them."<sup>19</sup>

Ezekial Parker (E. P.) Walton, editor of Montpelier's *Vermont Watchman and State Gazette*, also found it an opportune time to attack the anti-Masons. Walton found the new group "inconsistent," refusing to vote for Azro Buck yet willing to vote for other Masons. A correspondent calling himself AN ANTI-MASON responded that "if the choice were between two Masons, they would vote for *someone*." Walton agreed that the anti-Masons who "principally reside in Caledonia County" held the balance of power in their hands. Yet he wondered if they were concerned with winning. "To us it appears very evident, that while anti-Masons deprecate, as dangerous to civil liberty and subversive of all free government, all combinations of societies and individuals to *control* elections or interfere with the affairs of government," warned Walton, "they are themselves, to say the least, at no very great remove from the very sin they so vehemently charge upon others—that of forming combinations for political effect. If they cannot succeed entirely to CONTROL," he continued, "they appear resolutely determined, if possible, to PREVENT elections."<sup>20</sup>

Eaton knew that his candidate had to show some life in the next trial to stay in the race. The fourth canvas, held on March 2, 1829, saw a notable shift in the candidate's fortunes. The beginning of spring brought with it an increase of five hundred new voters. The rise in voters corresponded



with a sizable increase in the tallies of both Seth Cushman and William Cahoon. They also benefited from a reversal of Azro Buck's fortunes. Anti-Masons had made inroads into Orange County, holding a convention in Buck's hometown on February 11, yet Cahoon's success seems to have come from Caledonia County anti-Masons driving their like-minded neighbors to the polls. Danville's votes for Cahoon went from 265 to 313, and Lyndon's tallies for its favorite son rose from 142 to 183. Surprisingly, rival St. Johnsbury went from 66 votes for Cahoon to 153. Other large towns in the district, disillusioned with Buck, mostly ignored the anti-Masonic entreaty, with some voting for Bell; but the lion's share voted for the Jacksonian, Seth Cushman. Cahoon's candidacy was finally gaining much-needed traction.<sup>21</sup>

After four attempts to find a winner, E. P. Walton delayed his subsequent endorsement in the hopes that a compromise could be arranged between Buck and Cahoon. They and their subalterns would choose a new candidate "of good character and not a Mason" on which they would both agree. Buck attended a meeting in Montpelier and an emissary was sent to Danville to a meeting of the friends of General Cahoon to see if he would yield. The compromise was rejected, although both groups admitted that Cahoon was amenable to the measure. Without an agreement, chances that the election would be settled were dim.<sup>22</sup>

The fifth attempt to secure a winner in this district came on May 4, 1829, when many area farmers would be busy with spring planting. Therefore, the number of voters dropped to the low levels seen in January. Nevertheless, as Seth Cushman lost almost 300 ballots and Azro Buck's tallies were in freefall, General William Cahoon gained 350, capturing almost 31 percent of the vote. Again, Danville increased its vote for Cahoon, while the anti-Masonic candidate made solid gains among smaller towns such as Waterford, West Fairlee, and Lunenburg. With the momentum building, Eaton was eager for the next election. "Caledonia County has done, and will again do, her duty nobly. It was here that the standard



*Ezekiel Parker (E. P.)  
Walton. No date.*

was first raised in Vermont—the first in New England. She can muster two thousand anti-Masonic votes,” Eaton ranted. This was four-fifths of the amount necessary for victory. “She entirely disclaims all local needs and interests. Her voice is distinct and clear for EQUAL RIGHTS, and no secretly sworn combinations.” He continued, “Men of Washington, Orange, and Essex [counties], lay aside your party preferences—nothing can come of them—come to the aid of your brethren and friends.”<sup>23</sup>

Many Republicans, particularly those from Washington County, who had cast their lot with Azro Buck, now were desperately looking for an alternative. Unable to compromise with the anti-Masons, they were ready to vote for James Bell, who for the bulk of the campaign had gathered votes from just a handful of towns. Their frantic nature amused Eaton, who offered to his readers that Bell, “who has for the last three or four heats, rather *walked the course* than ran it, is to be put under the whip and spur for the next round.” Anti-Masons who had painted Buck as an unabashed loyalist of the lodge would be satisfied with the sixth tilt, as the incumbent became an also-ran. His vote sank to 863, with 667 from his home county. Washington County had abandoned the incumbent for James Bell. As Buck sagged, editor Walton of the *Watchman and State Gazette* remained furious with the *North Star* editor and other anti-Masonic leaders, maintaining that this group had “done more to mar the peace of society, than any other, or than all the parties besides.” After six tries, the Fifth District had come no closer to finding a winning candidate. It became clear that some sort of compromise candidate was needed to conclude this never-ending campaign.<sup>24</sup>

The anti-Masonic refusal to compromise drove E. P. Walton and other Republicans over to the Jacksonians, seeking a candidate on whom these two parties could agree. This of course played right into the hands of the anti-Masons. Why, they asked, would two political parties, so far apart on so many issues, suddenly congregate and choose a coalition candidate? Eaton and the anti-Masons were sure they had the answer. The protection of the Ancient Craft was foremost on their minds. The editor could not come to grips with the notion that reasonable men had decided that enough was enough and it was time to end this interminable election. No, to the leaders of this rebel movement, liberty itself was at stake. As Eaton described it, “political Masonry” had produced an “amalgamation of federalists and republicans, Adamsites and Jacksonians, in the election of Samuel Prentiss, a Mason and a Federalist.”<sup>25</sup>

Prentiss was an attractive compromise. Born in Stonington, Connecticut, he grew up in Northfield, Massachusetts, where despite receiving a common school education, he began reading the law. He continued his study as he moved to Brattleboro. Emerging as a brilliant lawyer, he lo-

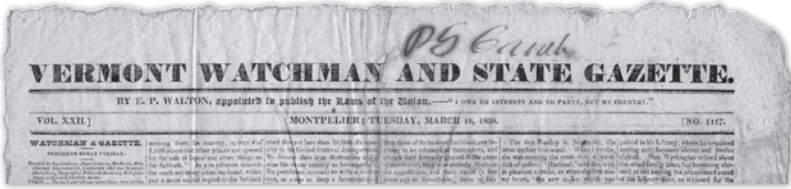
cated in Montpelier, where he was chosen to become a member of the Vermont Supreme Court in 1822. He turned down the offer, arguing that the “meager” salary would not support his large family. Instead, he represented the capital city in the legislature in 1824 and 1825. It was during the latter year that he created a plan that made members of the Vermont Supreme Court chief justices of the county courts. Once that act passed, Prentiss accepted the next call to the high court. In 1829, Prentiss was still serving on the bench, and therefore, as Walton put it, he was “above all the political controversy which has divided the people throughout the [district]—and *was uncommitted to any party.*”<sup>26</sup>

The opponents of anti-Masonry methodically brought Prentiss to the fore. At a Jacksonian state convention on July 15, Seth Cushman publicly decided not to run again, and George Washington Hill (editor of the Montpelier *Vermont Patriot and State Gazette*) nominated Prentiss from the floor of the Republican convention. E. P. Walton agreed with the nomination, stating he was authorized by Mr. Buck and Mr. Bell to say that they too heartily concurred with the nomination of Mr. Prentiss. Walton was almost jovial in stating, “we will not forego the opportunity it affords us of saying that it is pleasant, at least once in our lives, to agree with the editor of that paper [the *Patriot*].” To the Jacksonian and Republican followers, selecting a compromise candidate was an appropriate solution to conclude a well-fought campaign. However, the nascent anti-Masonic group saw only perfidy. Most agreed when Ebenezer Eaton called the maneuver an “amalgamated bargain and corruption.”<sup>27</sup>

One correspondent, called SPIRIT OF '76, viewed the previous elections in the Fifth District as a dispute between Freemasons over the proper distribution of this “office of profit” among themselves. When it appeared that “the fraternity” might possibly lose this congressional seat



*Samuel Prentiss. No date.*



*Masthead of the Vermont Watchman and State Gazette (Montpelier); published by E. P. [Ezekiel Parker] Walton, from 1826 to 1836. In 1831 the Gazette merged with the State Journal (Montpelier) to form the Vermont Watchman and State Journal, published by E. P. Walton & Son [Eliakim Persons Walton].*

altogether, the fighting “ceased” and all “cordially” united behind another brother “of higher standing in the public’s estimation.” This left many men in an uncomfortable position, particularly newspaper editors. As the writer exposed, G. W. Hill of the *Patriot* professed a belief that the salvation of the country depended on the maintenance of republican principles. Yet he demonstrated by approving the compromise candidate that he was more interested in upholding Masonic principles. He charged two others, E. P. Walton of the *Watchman* and E. C. Purdy of the *Rutland Herald*, of choosing to give aid and comfort to a situation “inimical to the best interests of our country.” Rather than endorse a plain republican farmer, like William Cahoon, they chose to back a Jacksonian candidate, simply because Cahoon was not a Mason. The writer ended with a war cry: “If our rights are attacked at the Ballot Boxes, there we must defend them.”<sup>28</sup>

As expected, supporters of the compromise candidate suggested to the populace that Samuel Prentiss was the superior candidate and should be elected. William Cahoon, argued editor Hill of the *Patriot*, was “an invalid unable to attend to his domestic affairs,” and therefore incapable of representing his district in the U.S. Congress. Even when he was healthy and rose to office, Hill offered, he was a disappointment. Cahoon was chosen as a district judge but, unlike Prentiss, lacked the legal knowledge for the post. In the opinion of the Jacksonian editor, the anti-Mason also served unremarkably as lieutenant governor and as a member of the Executive Council. In response, Eaton and his fellow anti-Masons refused to rise to rumors about Cahoon’s health; instead they played up his plain republican demeanor. Eaton set his sights on Prentiss’ past as a Federalist during the war years, and his dabbling with the Ancient Craft. The compromise drew the attention of a contributor dubbed EQUAL RIGHTS. “Where was there ever such an instance, where two parties were so much at vari-



*Masthead of the Vermont Patriot [and State Gazette] (Montpelier); published by George Washington Hill from 1826 to 1839.*

ance, and had shown so much bitterness, spite and venom toward each other,” he asked, “of their coming, in the short space of a month, to amiable terms and bargaining with each other to put down all opposition unitedly?” The correspondent suggested “that something stranger than desires to end this political contest has brought these parties together.”<sup>29</sup>

Whatever their motivation, the amalgamationists were not able to capture the election. Although in the seventh round of balloting on September 7, 1829, Prentiss gathered 122 more votes than Cahoon, over 300 ballots were given to other candidates. Therefore, the district would have to endure yet another canvass. Both Eaton and Walton lamented a low turnout. Walton argued that many men, feeling that success was certain, did not take the time to vote. Eaton agreed, stating that many anti-Masons did not vote, feeling the cause was lost. In reality, this canvass featured the highest turnout of the election, with both major candidates reaching the highest totals yet. Democratic editor Hill was ready for another shot with Prentiss, offering him as a candidate on October 12. However, shortly thereafter, the legislature intervened. With the aid of anti-Masonic solons, Samuel Prentiss was chosen as chief justice of the Supreme Court of Vermont four days later. Now that amalgamationists had lost their best candidate, a sense of inevitability fell over the next election. James Bell and Seth Cushman rushed to their respective colors, but the result was a thrashing by William Cahoon, the anti-Masonic candidate. His 3,912 votes in the eighth round, November 2, 1829, were the highest received by any candidate. After almost a year of balloting, Vermont sent their first anti-Masonic representative to Congress.<sup>30</sup>

William Cahoon’s stunning victory in the Fifth Congressional District brought success to Vermont’s nascent anti-Masonic movement, and no one had more influence on this marathon election than did the editor of

Danville's *North Star*, Ebenezer Eaton. An analysis of the results reveals that Eaton and his followers achieved only modest success in their effort to gather other counties to the cause. Rather, it was their feat of gathering all the like souls in Caledonia County, and leading them to the polls, that brought them to victory. To view how remarkable this was, we have to review the 1830 census records to determine the number of possible voters for a few Caledonia County towns. For example, Lyndon had 425 men age twenty to ninety a year after the final vote; 240 voted for Cahoon. Peacham had 283 men from twenty to ninety in the 1830 census; 129 voted for Cahoon. Danville had 557 men from twenty to ninety in 1830; 467 voted for the Lyndon sawyer. More than simply a political movement created to promote equal rights, anti-Masonry metamorphosed into a crusade.<sup>31</sup>

While the *Vermont Patriot* and *Vermont Watchman* went back to attacking each other, Ebenezer Eaton was glad that he had directed Caledonia County to a return to republican principles. He summed up his view of the battle in an editorial on October 6, 1829, a short month before the anti-Masonic victory lap. "Who are the Masonic party and their retainers?" asked the Danville editor. "You find them triumphant in villages and large towns, where wealth gives power and influence, where the multiplied ramifications of society bind man to his fellow more closely, and render him more dependent upon another for mechanical and professional employment, for pecuniary accommodations, for a thousand different favors, which render a person obliged, in some measure, the slave and the sycophant of another, and places him absolutely under his control and influence. In such places, persons reside who have no stake in the soil, and have to live by their wits rather than by honest labor, and are thus led to turn their attention to the procurement of office to eke out their means of livelihood. . . . We must expect Masonry will be triumphant in the large towns, but the freemen of the soil will not yield their honest energies in support of Masonic influence."<sup>32</sup>

It was the Morgan affair in upstate New York that had provided Eaton's readers with a vivid example of what might happen if large towns were allowed to dominate the state. Thereafter, the anti-Masonic movement raced quickly ahead of the rest of Eaton's republican principles, helping to secure William Cahoon the congressional seat in the Fifth District. Until 1835, the anti-Masonic party held sway in the Green Mountains, and Danville was the party's epicenter. The town was home to the governor, the state treasurer, a United States congressman, and the *North Star*, the conscience of the party.<sup>33</sup>

Yet it would not remain so for long. The anti-Masonic Party was for the most part a victim of its own success. By 1834, most Masonic lodges had

surrendered their charters. On the political front, the return of a robust national party system left many anti-Masons feeling without a political home. By 1836, the third party that had dominated the state was no more. In Danville, Ebenezer Eaton decided to support Andrew Jackson and the Democratic Party, which he believed placed greater emphasis on equal rights (at least for white males). It was the end of the road for his (and Danville's) statewide influence.<sup>34</sup>

As M. T. C. Alexander commented in the short history of Danville in Abby Hemenway's *Vermont Historical Gazetteer*, "during the early history of the town, it had marked influence in councils of the State; and for many years, even up to and during Anti-Masonic times (from 1828 to 1835), stood among the foremost in the State for its wealth and productions, the energy and public spirit of its people. Its citizens were the recipients of the highest honors in the gift of the people. Many causes, both physical and moral, which we have not the space to detail, have operated seriously to lessen her influence and popularity."<sup>35</sup>

Poor Danville not only lost its influence in the state, but it lost its power in its own county. By midcentury, St. Johnsbury, dominated by the industrial might of the Fairbanks family, had command of Caledonia County. In 1855, all public buildings were moved there from Danville.<sup>36</sup> For one shining moment Ebenezer Eaton, the citizens of Danville, and their brand of republican principles dominated the state.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Hamilton Child, *Gazetteer of Caledonia and Essex Counties, 1764-1887* (Syracuse: Syracuse Journal Company, 1877), 98; Susannah Clifford, *Village in the Hills: A History of Danville, Vermont 1786-1995* (West Kennebunk, Me.: Town of Danville, 1995), 50-51; Abby M. Hemenway, *The Vermont Historical Gazetteer* (Burlington, Vt.: Miss A. M. Hemenway, 1867), 1: 312-319; Thomas W. Arnold, comp., *Two Hundred Years and Counting: Vermont Community Census Totals, 1791-1990* (Burlington, Vt.: Center for Rural Studies, 1993). Eaton was financed by his brother, William, who was a Revolutionary War hero and a diplomat, yet in his later years was reduced to a drunken profligate. John A. Garraty and Mark Carnes, eds., *American National Biography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 7: 267-269; James G. Wilson and John Fiske, eds., *Appleton's Cyclopaedia of American Biography* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1887) 2: 50.

Eaton was apprenticed in the printing office of Isaiah Thomas Jr. After his apprenticeship concluded, he worked in Boston for a year or two. Feeling he was up to the task, Eaton moved to Geneva, New York, where he attempted to publish a Democratic newspaper. "Not succeeding in this enterprise as expected," the young editor eventually closed down his venture and went to work in the office of Solomon Southwick in Albany, before getting the call from Danville. See Ebenezer Eaton obituary, *North Star*, 5 February 1859. The attribution of the quotation to Benjamin Franklin is now considered doubtful.

<sup>2</sup> Drew McCoy, *The Elusive Republic: Political Economy in Jeffersonian America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 166-178; *Vermont General Assembly Journal* (1813), 179.

<sup>3</sup> Melancthon W. Jacobs, "Canal Surveys Across Vermont," *Vermont History* 21 (October 1953): 262-272, and "A Canal Across Vermont," *Vermont History* 23 (October 1955): 141-152. The canal issue was covered unceasingly in the *North Star* from the beginning of January 1825 through the spring of 1826.

<sup>4</sup> Kenneth A. Degree, "Legislative Voting Patterns on Banking in Vermont," *Vermont History* 69 (Winter/Spring 2001): 143-171; and "Anticipating Anti-Masonry: The Vermont Gubernatorial Election of 1826," *Vermont History* 72 (Winter/Spring 2004): 5-22; *North Star*, 8 November 1825.

<sup>5</sup> *North Star*, 9 August, 23 August 1825.

<sup>6</sup> *North Star*, 20 February, 13 March 1827; Randolph A. Roth, *The Democratic Dilemma: Religion, Reform, and the Social Order in the Connecticut River Valley of Vermont, 1791-1850* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 139-141.

<sup>7</sup> *North Star*, 13 March, 3 April, 15 May 1827. When Eaton writes of the “upper body of the Legislature,” he is referring to the proposal to create a Senate. Eaton’s phrase “lower House” therefore refers to the House of Representatives. A bicameral legislature, with House of Representative and Senate, was proposed by the Council of Censors in 1792, 1813, 1827, and 1834. It was finally created by amendment to the Vermont Constitution in 1836.

<sup>8</sup> Paul Goodman, *Towards a Christian Republic: Anti-Masonry and the Great Transition in New England, 1826-1836* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 3-4, 122-176.

<sup>9</sup> *North Star*, 14 November 1826, 27 February, 19 June 1827, 18 March 1828. Edward T. Fairbanks, *The Town of St. Johnsbury, Vermont* (St. Johnsbury: The Cowels, 1914), 184; *North Star*, 15 April, 12 August 1826.

<sup>10</sup> *North Star*, 14 November 1826; Prentiss C. Dodge, *Encyclopedia Vermont Biography* (Burlington, Vt.: Ullery Publishing Company, 1912), 71; Venila L. Shores, *Lyndon: Gem on the Green* (Lyndonville, Vt.: Town of Lyndon, 1986), 12-20, 23, 65; *North Star*, 16 July 1828.

<sup>11</sup> Hemenway, *Gazetteer*, 2: 872; Dodge, *Encyclopedia*, 70.

<sup>12</sup> *North Star*, 26 August 1828. The information on the Mattocks-Buck rivalry was culled from Christie Carter, ed. and comp., *Vermont Elections, 1789-1989, State Papers of Vermont*, 21 (Montpelier, Vt.: Vermont Secretary of State, 1989).

<sup>13</sup> Hemenway, *Gazetteer*, 1: 428-430; Walter Hill Crockett, *Vermont, The Green Mountain State* (New York: Century Publishing, 1921), 5: 237-239.

<sup>14</sup> Hemenway, *Gazetteer*, 1: 1007-1008; Crockett, *Vermont*, 5: 292.

<sup>15</sup> *North Star*, 19 and 26 August 1828.

<sup>16</sup> The percentage of Cahoon’s vote attributed to Caledonia County was gathered from the town-by-town results printed in the *North Star*, 28 October 1828.

<sup>17</sup> *North Star*, 9 September, 11 November, 2 December 1828.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 23 December 1828, 6 January 1829.

<sup>19</sup> *Farmer’s Herald*, 6 January 1829; *North Star*, 10 February, 24 February 1829.

<sup>20</sup> *Vermont Watchman and State Gazette* (Montpelier; hereafter cited as *Watchman*), 23 March 1829.

<sup>21</sup> *North Star*, 30 June 1829.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 28 July 1829; *Watchman*, 16 June, 30 June 1829. Although it has little to do with this story, August 1829 was also the month that the Anti-Masonry Party came into existence with the first state-wide political convention. It served to increase the ire of the two Montpelier editors, horrified by the presence of men of the cloth in attendance. They were also incensed by Eaton’s creative depiction of the event, and disgusted when Eaton “forgot” to mention that Heman Allen declined to run as governor on the Anti-Masonic ticket.

<sup>23</sup> *North Star*, 28 July, 4 August 1829.

<sup>24</sup> Crockett, *Vermont*, 5: 34-35; *Watchman*, 4 August 1829.

<sup>25</sup> *Vermont Patriot and State Gazette* (Montpelier; hereafter cited as *Patriot*), 27 July 1829; *Watchman*, 21 July 1829; *North Star*, 18 August 1829.

<sup>26</sup> *Patriot*, 31 August 1829.

<sup>27</sup> *North Star*, 25 August 1829.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 25 September 1829; *Watchman*, 15 September 1829.

<sup>30</sup> *North Star*, 6 October 1829.

<sup>31</sup> “Population Schedules of the 5th Census of the United States, 1830, Vermont,” Microfilm, University of Vermont Libraries.

<sup>32</sup> Goodman, *Towards a Christian Republic*, 234-245.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 133-146.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 264-286, and *North Star*, 6 October 1829.

<sup>35</sup> M. T. C. Alexander, “Danville” in Hemenway, *Gazetteer* 1: 315.

<sup>36</sup> Fairbanks, *The Town of St. Johnsbury, Vermont*, 101.