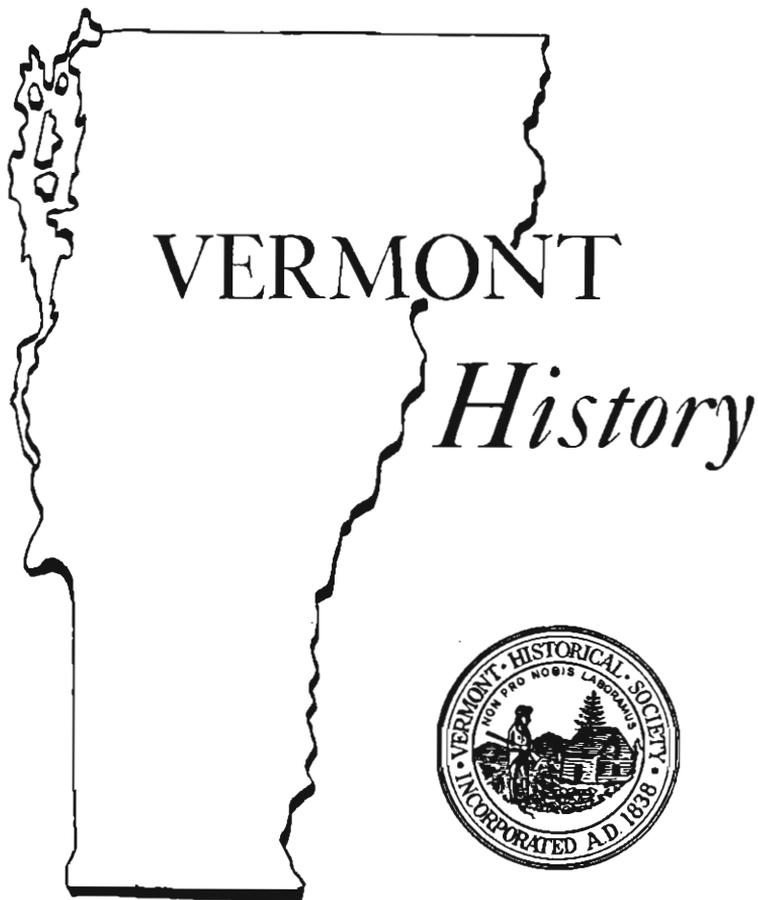


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Patterns of Dissent: Vermont's Opposition to the War of 1812

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THE ever lively debate in American historiography over the causes and consequences of the War of 1812 has received fresh impetus from recent developments in American foreign policy. Widespread dissatisfaction with the premises supporting American involvement in Southeast Asia, frustration with the progress of the war itself, and serious economic difficulties have suggested some striking parallels with the "second war for American independence."

One difficulty in any comparison of experiences, however, has been a continuing re-interpretation of the War of 1812 itself. Immediately after this war most observers were content to see in maritime rights a comprehensive explanation for American involvement.¹ Greater perspective demonstrated the difficulty of explaining New England's opposition and Western enthusiasm for war by reference to maritime rights alone; instead, the frontier's support for war was seen as a manifestation of superior patriotism, while the prospect of annexing Canada remained an incentive to fight once war was declared rather than the reason behind the aggressive attitude of Western politicians.² After 1900 new interpretations began to appear. Maritime rights were abandoned entirely, and land hunger and Indian troubles, which the British allegedly sustained, were put forward as a more plausible explanation for the coming of war. This change of emphasis, however, created as many difficulties as it resolved.³ Many New England legislators did vote for war, including three of Vermont's four members of the House of Representatives. The drive for Canada should not have ex-

1. Theodore Dwight, *History of the Hartford Convention with a Review of the Policy of the United States Government which Led to the War of 1812* (New York, 1833) p. 228.

2. Joel Tyler Headley, *The Second War with England* (New York, 1853), II, 23-66; Richard Hildreth, *History of the United States of America* (New York, 1856-60), I, 225-32; Henry Adams, *History of the United States* (New York, 1891-98), VI, 116-18; John B. McMaster, *A History of the People of the United States* (New York, 1883-1913), III, 456-57.

3. Howard T. Lewis, "Re-analysis of the Causes of the War of 1812," *Americana* (New York, 1911), VI, 506-16, 577-85; D. R. Anderson, "The Insurgents of 1811," *Annual Report of the American Historical Association*, 1 (1913), 165-76; Louis Hacker, "Western Land Hunger and the War of 1812: A Conjecture," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 10 (1924), 365-95. Hacker offered the thesis that prairie land was regarded as unsuitable for tillage; thus Canada was highly prized.

cited much interest in the South, yet here the enthusiasm was greatest.⁴ Finally, new evidence indicated that the South and West were indeed concerned about maritime rights; disruption of trade had depressed prices of agricultural commodities, and Britain's challenge to the principle of freedom of the seas represented an assault upon American sovereignty which frontiersmen and farmers found impossible to tolerate.⁵

Disintegration of a comprehensive explanation of the War of 1812 had led, perhaps inevitably, to greater use of local studies to determine the importance of various factors contributing to war. Studies of the South have stressed the question of honor; disillusionment with the ineffective nonintercourse and embargo devices led nationalists to see war as the only way to sustain American rights.⁶ Analyses of New England history have suggested additional points. Although the region's indifference to maritime rights has not been fully explained, it is clear that the Federalists were determined to embarrass Jefferson by opposing the embargo, and that their resolve was strengthened by the trade crisis.⁷ On the other hand, many New England politicians supported war and turned against it only after two years of military disasters.

Vermont's place in the study of the War of 1812, and of the embargo which preceded that war, is important. Indeed, the state presents in a microcosm most of the problems confronted by historians in attempting to understand the period. Vermont was both a New England state and a part of the frontier. It was divided geographically into two distinct trade areas, one related to the Atlantic and thus affected by maritime questions, the other heavily dependent on access to Canadian ports via the Richelieu River.⁸ Its political heritage was distinctive in that Vermont had determined its relationships with Canada and the United States independent of the course followed by the original

4. Julius W. Pratt, *The Expansionists of 1812* (New York, 1949), *passim*.

5. Warren H. Goodman, "The Origins of the War of 1812: A Survey of Changing Interpretations," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 28 (1941-42), 185; Reginald Horsman, "Western War Aims, 1811-1812," *Indiana Magazine of History*, 53 (1957), 1-18.

6. Margaret K. Latimer, "South Carolina: A Protagonist of the War of 1812," *American Historical Review*, 61 (1955-56), 925-27; Norman K. Risjord, "1812: Conservatives, Warhawks, and the Nation's Honor," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 18 (1961), 206.

7. Latimer, "South Carolina," p. 914; James T. Adams, *New England in the Republic, 1776-1850* (Boston, 1927), *passim*.

8. W. A. Mackintosh, "Canada and Vermont: A Study in Historical Geography," *Canadian Historical Review*, 7 (1917), 9-30.

colonies.⁹ Vermont was a considerable exporter, but largely to Canada. The state's politics also manifested aspects of a split personality. Whereas the remaining New England states were substantially Federalist, Vermont adhered to the Jeffersonian viewpoint from 1800-1808, and then moved unevenly towards the Federalists as war drew closer. As a state recently settled but becoming well populated, Vermont also shared both the fundamental egalitarianism of the frontier and the more urbane, class-conscious flavor of the Eastern seaboard. Indeed, this transition from a frontier to a well-established mode of life engendered a radicalism which expressed itself politically in Matthew Lyon's opposition in 1798 to the Alien and Sedition Acts and emotionally in a series of apocalyptic religious convulsions which lasted almost to the Civil War.¹⁰

While discussions of politics between 1800 and 1815 have been incorporated in several studies of Vermont history, there has been little effort to analyze and describe in detail the nature of dissent itself. Nuquist and Ludlum devote a paragraph to the politics of the period. Crockett and Thompson offer much material but little analysis.¹¹ Williamson's admirable chapter entitled "Embargo, Non-Intercourse and War" must be considered in greater detail.¹² Williamson offers important comments on the constituent elements of the Federalist and Jeffersonian parties after 1800, analyzes expansionist tendencies by referring to the Pratt thesis, and describes the vagaries of party fortunes clearly and concisely. He shows in some detail how intimate were the economic relationships between Vermont and Lower Canada during this period and what devices were employed by merchants in both regions to circumvent the intent of non-intercourse and embargo

9. S. F. Bemis, "The Relations between the Vermont Separatists and Great Britain, 1789-1791," *American Historical Review*, 21 (1916), 547-60 (see in particular Memorial of Levi Allen to Right Hon. Lord Sydney, Sec. of State, Public Record Office, Foreign Office 4, Vol. 7, and Colonial Office 42: 12, f. 409).

10. Andrew E. and Edith W. Nuquist, *Vermont State Government and Administration: A Historical and Descriptive Study of the Living Past* (Burlington, 1966), p. 54; David M. Ludlum, *Social Ferment in Vermont, 1791-1850* (New York, 1939), p. 47; Francis Asbury, *Journal of Reverend Francis Asbury, Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (New York, 1821); James E. McLoughlin, *Matthew Lyon, the Hampden of Congress* (New York, 1900); George L. Montagno, "Federalist Retaliation: The Sedition Trial of Matthew Lyon," *Vermont History*, 26 (1958), 3-16.

11. Nuquist, *Vermont State Government*, p. 54; Ludlum, *Social Ferment*, pp. 48-49; Zadock Thompson, *History of Vermont, Natural, Civil and Statistical* (Burlington, 1838), pp. 92-94. Walter H. Crockett's *Vermont: The Green Mountain State* (New York, 1921), concludes that dissent was a black mark on Vermont history, an incident perhaps better forgotten than analyzed. He offers, however, a detailed chronology.

12. Chilton Williamson, *Vermont in Quandary, 1763-1825* (Montpelier, 1949), pp. 269-75.

legislation. In this context, indeed, his reflections on the attitudes of Canadian settlers in border areas loom as large as his comments on those of Vermonters, and his contribution overcomes the somewhat artificial division of the period into Canadian and American compartments. Williamson does not, however, elaborate on the methods employed to mold public opinion on the embargo-war issue, outline the peculiar difficulties posed for dissent when it achieved a brief majority status during the war, or relate manifestations of dissent in Vermont to recent historiography on the War of 1812. This paper, then, deals specifically with patterns of dissent during this formative period in American and Vermont history and suggests that the state's ambivalence regarding the war reflected complex factors, some shared by other areas but some peculiar to the Green Mountain state in a crucial transitional period in its development.

I

Of the many expressions of dissatisfaction with national policies affecting Vermont from passage of the embargo in 1807 to conclusion of the war in early 1815, perhaps the most obvious and most frequently studied was smuggling. The economic interdependence of Vermont and Lower Canada was already well established by 1807. Vermont supplied timber, beef, grain, and pot and pearl ashes to Canada, and received British manufactures and other goods in return.¹³ The Embargo Act of December 22, 1807, applying solely to seaports, was not unpopular in Vermont, and its tendency to facilitate trade through Lake Champlain was greeted with considerable enthusiasm in border communities. The supplementary "land" embargo of the following March, however, was clearly unpopular.¹⁴ Despite alarming reports in the spring of 1808, most Vermonters were quick to profess their opposition to violation of the law. But as residents of the Champlain

13. Professor H. N. Muller has analyzed the patterns, techniques and intensity of smuggling during this period in "Smuggling into Canada: How the Champlain Valley Defied Jefferson's Embargo," *Vermont History*, 38 (1970), 5-21. Professor Muller suggests that an examination of the components of Vermont's export trade during the embargo period does not support the contention of many Vermonters at the time that smuggling was largely sustained by out-of-state merchants trying to secure access for their goods. Instead, the proportion of goods produced in Vermont increased substantially, reflecting the state's difficulties in marketing its products in the seaboard states. Also see: Williamson, *Vermont in Quandary*, p. 268; J. Lambert, *Travels Through Lower Canada and the United States* (London, 1810), p. 278; J. B. Colton, *Progress of the United States*, p. 36, noted in Lewis D. Stilwell, *Migration from Vermont 1776-1860* (Montpelier, 1948), p. 125.

14. Memorial to President Jefferson of a Town Meeting in St. Albans, printed in *Spooner's Vermont Journal*, June 20, 1808; Thomas Jefferson to A. Gallatin, April 19, 1808, Jefferson's *Complete Works* (Washington, 1853-4), V, 271.

Valley in particular began to feel the pinch of widespread financial embarrassment, and as the embargo's efficacy was more openly disputed, indulgence of smuggling increased. Jefferson's heavy-handed reaction to reports of border smuggling in 1808 alienated many Vermonters who had respected the embargo and who resented imputations of treason. Reports of embargo violations in seaport areas softened pangs of guilt among Vermonters engaged in smuggling.¹⁵ A curious moral ambivalence developed. While the townspeople of St. Albans denied Jefferson's charges, a group of Franklin County residents threatened the life of any official interfering with the border trade.¹⁶ Toleration of smuggling by many who refused to engage in it themselves vitiated the effectiveness of the embargo, and legislation which was both ineffective and vexatious disinclined Vermonters to support it.¹⁷

The strain upon Vermonters' consciences increased perceptibly after war was declared in 1812. Smuggling as a device to stave off economic ruin, to increase profits, or even to protest Madison's policies was one thing; aiding the enemy was another. Before 1812 anti-Jeffersonian newspapers had obliquely applauded the bravado and ingenuity of smugglers, and had condemned enforcement of the embargo as an infringement of individual liberties, and as a perpetrator of unnecessary

15. *Spoooner's Vermont Journal*, May 23, 1808, June 13, 1808, October 24, 1808; *Weekly Wanderer*, May 23, 1808, June 13, 1808, June 27, 1808, July 4, 1808; *Vermont Sentinel*, November 4, 1808; *Watchman*, June 17, 1808, noted in Crockett, *Vermont*, V, 9-15.

16. *Spoooner's Vermont Journal*, June 20, 1808; July 4, 1808; Sept. 12, 1808.

17. Muller, "Smuggling into Canada," p. 20; *Vermont Sentinel*, February 17, 1809. Note letter of John Henry to Governor Craig, February 14, 1809, printed in *Records of the Governor and Council*, 6, Appendix H, No. 3, pp. 483-4. The scope of the increased trade is alluded to in Williamson, *Vermont in Quandary*, pp. 267-68. Also see Abby Maria Hemenway, *Vermont Historical Gazetteer* (Burlington, 1868), I, 468, 610; II, 343, 393, 495; III, 379, 770; V, 1105; noted in Stilwell, *Migration*, p. 126. J. Lambert, *Travels*, I, p. 253. Pro-Jeffersonian newspapers stressed the treasonous aspects of the illicit trade well before war began, in sharp contrast to Federalist and even many rather neutral voices of the press. The Bennington *World* berated the Burlington *Sentinel* for its indulgent attitude towards smugglers, noting that the *Sentinel's* declaration "God grant that the embargo law may continue forever" meant that the people of Burlington were getting rich by evasion of the law. "Because of this violation of the law," the *World* noted, "the embargo must go on much longer than otherwise and the people must suffer more than otherwise, and our government may thank those traitors for the expense of paying and supporting troops sent to the province line." (June 6, 1808, p. 3, col. 4). Modern economic historians have suggested that reports of smuggling from seaports were probably grossly exaggerated, but not those of illicit trade along land routes. If so, Vermonters were finding comfort in rumors from the coast but were themselves actually carrying the lion's share of the weakening of the embargo: Herbert Heaton, "Non-Importation, 1806-1812," *Journal of Economic History*, I (1941), 178-98.

hardships.¹⁸ Until 1812 it was easy to blame smuggling on outsiders and to suggest it was not the business of Vermonters to interfere with it, smuggling was regrettable but certainly not perfidious.¹⁹ War made smuggling patently treasonous on one hand, while it increased the hardships of border areas on the other. The evacuation of border communities in the face of an anticipated invasion left many families permanently destitute.²⁰ Canadian officials offered tempting incentives for trade in items required for war, and new routes were opened east of Lake Champlain where goods could be delivered under cover of the forests.²¹ In 1813 the Vermont legislature also relaxed prohibitions on Canadian trade.²² London was informed that its army was receiving two-thirds of its beef from Vermont and New York, and the invasion route of 1814 was directed down the west side of the lake to avoid antagonizing Vermonters, who seemed more than any other Americans sympathetic to British aims.²³ Without sympathetic negligence in law enforcement smuggling to this extent would not have been possible; a large minority of Vermonters were expressing their opposition to American involvement in war by tolerating illicit trade, while a smaller number turned financial dislocation to profit by active contact with the enemy. Geographic factors, economic necessity, and sentiment conspired to afford disaffected Vermonters a unique opportunity to protest against an unpopular war.

II

Widespread toleration of smuggling reflected opposition to the war, but most smugglers themselves were not politically oriented, and most disaffected Vermonters were not prepared to use this way to express their opinions. A more orthodox vehicle of popular opinion was the press. Again there are difficulties, for newspaper editorials reflect popular sentiment only imperfectly. This was, however, a period of buoy-

18. *Reporter*, (Brattleboro), May 14, 1808; p. 3, col. 2; *Watchman*, Nov. 28, 1811; p. 2, col. 4; letter of James B. Sumner, noted in Wilmond W. Parker, ed., "Letters of the War of 1812 in the Champlain Valley," *Vermont Quarterly*, n.s., 12 (1944), 104-24.

19. *World*, May 30, 1808; *Watchman*, June 3, 1808, p. 3, col. 3. As an observer in Burlington noted: "We are in no danger of impressment as soldiers, or seamen; our property is not seized and condemned. Why, then, permit it to be asked, this severe restriction upon our small, but absolutely necessary commerce with Canada?"—*New Hampshire Sentinel* (Keene), May 14, 1808.

20. Hemenway, *Gazetteer*, III, 32, 144, 321, 347-48; and J. A. Gallup, *Epidemic Diseases in Vermont*, p. 66, pp. 72-73; noted in Stilwell, *Migration*, p. 129.

21. Williamson, *Vermont in Quandary*, p. 272; Crockett, *Vermont*, III, 78-81.

22. Crockett, *Vermont*, III, 73.

23. Sir George Prevost to Earl Bathurst, August 5, 27, 1814, C. O. 42: 157, 120-121, 157-58, included in *Select British Documents Relating to the Canadian War of 1812*, III, part I, 346, noted in Williamson, *Vermont in Quandary*, p. 273.

ant journalistic enterprise, with some thirty newspapers of all descriptions available to the Vermont reading public.²⁴ Most newspapers relied on news gleaned from seaports, other periodicals, travellers, or local meetings; they used their editorial prowess to augment circulation. After 1806 all Vermont newspapers were sensitive to the possibility of war, but the process of educating Vermonters was colored by partisan considerations. While Federalists dwelt upon evidence of an impending rapprochement with Britain, and condemned the embargo as provocative, the Jeffersonian press emphasized British perfidiousness and attempted to prepare its readers for war. By early 1808 such phrases as "the probability of war" and "speedy rupture" were familiar to subscribers to the "Democratic" press, while each hint of negotiations was seized upon by Federalists as evidence of British good will and an impending settlement.²⁵ Moderate newspapers gathered reports from all parties; the Montpelier *Watchman* predicted peace on 11 March 1808, but thought war "inevitable" only a week later. "Clouds of war still obscure the political horizon," it noted, "and we fear they will soon without a warning burst, in a terrible explosion."²⁶ Journalistic exploitation of rumors of war and peace, of British treachery and French godlessness, led inevitably to a certain exhaustion of credibility; by the spring of 1812 all parties discounted the possibility of war, and long before this newspapers were looking for other devices to bolster their positions.²⁷ Dissent focused its attention upon the embargo, a tangible manifestation of popular frustration and, it seemed, of administration thickheadedness. In general, the appeal to the straightened pocketbook, supported by doubts about the embargo's efficacy, found a heartier response than pro-administration references to American honor, the alleged stimulation of commerce, and Britain's domestic crises.²⁸ The embargo was not only "unnecessary and destructive," it was

a system which was to distress Great Britain, but has only distressed ourselves; which was to starve her subjects, but has actually driven our own

24. Clarence S. Brigham, *History and Bibliography of American Newspapers, 1690-1820* (Worcester, 1947), II, 1070-1104.

25. *Watchman*, Dec. 18, 1807, Dec. 25, 1807, Jan. 1, 1808, Jan. 22, 1808, Feb. 5, 1808, Feb. 26, 1808, March 11, 1808.

26. *Ibid.*, March 11, 1808, March 18, 1808, March 25, 1808.

27. *Green Mountain Patriot*, March 10, 1807; *Weekly Wanderer*, (Randolph), June 15, 1807; *World*, (Bennington), Jan. 11, 1808; Spooner's *Vermont Journal*, (Windsor), Jan. 8, 1810; *Reporter*, (Brattleboro), May 30, 1812.

28. *Weekly Wanderer*, Oct. 12, 1807, No. 2, 1807, April 4, 1808; *Green Mountain Farmer*, Bennington, Oct. 21, 1811; *World*, Feb. 29, 1808, March 7, 1808, Aug. 15, 1808; *Green Mountain Farmer*, Dec. 21, 1813, May 4, 1812; *World*, May 9, 1808, Aug. 29, 1808; *Weekly Wanderer*, April 11, 1808; *Watchman*, Jan. 15, 1808.

citizens to beg for bread; which was to produce disorders and discontent in England, but has only produced them at home; which was only to destroy her revenue, but has actually ruined our own. . . .²⁹

Images of Jefferson trampling under foot the destitute populations of border areas proliferated. "Mr. Jefferson loves Democracy well," the *Reporter* noted, "but he now demonstrates that he loves the Embargo better."³⁰ The Jeffersonian response was to label opponents of the embargo as traitors and to attribute its ineffectiveness to violations of the law.³¹ These efforts do not seem to have been convincing; more and more letters appeared condemning the embargo, and by 1811 only a handful of Vermont newspapers continued to support the commercial quarantine. Those who felt obligated to support the administration rested instead on a constant elaboration on British atrocities, but once more the verbal battle favored dissent, and images of French atheistic imperialism displayed a convincing fervor which only popular ignorance of the real situation would have allowed.³²

By 1812 newspaper sentiment reflected a well-developed cynicism regarding policies of the federal government, with Federalists blaming the Jeffersonian party, and Democrats blaming Federalist obstructionism. The war intensified this dissatisfaction by producing an almost unrelieved series of "disasters, defeats, disgrace, and ruin and death," as the *Green Mountain Farmer*, an enthusiastic administration mouthpiece, was forced to admit.³³ If the embargo had aroused hostile feelings in border areas and in trading communities, the prospect of a British invasion along almost defenseless frontiers was even less comforting. It sharpened newspaper rhetoric considerably, and put those opposing the war in an uncomfortable position of trying to avoid the imputation of treason. This was not easily done, and that rather small portion of the press which continued to think of ultimate victory was free with their accusations and insinuations. After the summer of 1814, with a crucial naval victory over the British to kindle patriotic ardor and to relieve widespread anxiety about invasion, newspaper editorials ceased to belittle the military effort. The *Green Mountain Farmer*, for its part, abandoned the prospect of annexing Canada. This return to moderation was well advanced when the shadow of the Hartford Con-

29. *Watchman*, July 29, 1808; *Spooner's Vermont Journal*, Feb. 12, 1810.

30. *Reporter*, May 14, 1808.

31. *Green Mountain Farmer*, Oct. 21, 1811; *Weekly Wanderer*, May 30, 1808.

32. *Reporter*, July 2, 1808, July 30, 1808, Aug. 27, 1808; *Watchman*, April 6, 1810; *Weekly Wanderer*, March 14, 1808; *Green Mountain Patriot*, Jan. 20, 1807, Jan. 27, 1810.

33. *Green Mountain Farmer*, Jan. 13, 1813.

vention reached Vermont in November. The Vermont press proved remarkably unenthusiastic, and news of victory at the Battle of New Orleans in January, 1815, found the press unanimous in its praise. As a form of dissent, newspapers prospered until war was declared; thereafter, limitations imposed by insinuations of treason curbed the more violent opposition, restricted the press as a clearinghouse for popular discontent, and prepared the way for a remarkably smooth transition to peace. Disaster in war at the same time vindicated the dissenting press and barred it from full enjoyment of the administration's predicament.

Newspapers performed another service which bore heavily upon the shape of dissent in Vermont from 1808 to 1815. By publicizing the dramatic, indeed heroic, aspects of smuggling and by focusing attention on economic distress in northern counties, newspapers did much to make a local issue statewide in scope. The proliferation of newspapers in Vermont after 1795 had increased competition and provided an easily accessible sounding board for irate Vermonters.³⁴ In the process the intensity of discontent was undoubtedly magnified, and the exaggerated effect of protest probably stimulated many who would otherwise have remained silent. How widespread was alienation from the Jefferson-Madison administration is difficult to measure. Anthony Haswell, as editor of the *Green Mountain Farmer*, published a memoir of a trip through Vermont in the early spring of 1811, and concluded that three-fifths of the population were firm supporters of the Democratic Republicans. This, coming from a Jeffersonian enthusiast, may suggest that in fact the intensity of dissatisfaction was considerable. Haswell admitted that "the bench, the bar, the public seminary and the sacred desk" were largely opposed to the embargo and to war, that most of the press were "decidedly and virulently engaged in calumniating our cause and our government."³⁵ John Henry, whose sympathies were quite different, believed that residents of Burlington on every level of the social hierarchy thought the embargo acts "unnecessary, oppressive and unconstitutional" (a phrase he apparently borrowed from a local newspaper). His comments from Windsor a month later, on the other hand, show that dissatisfaction was not universal by any means:

34. *Reporter*, June 18, 1808, July 30, 1808; *New Hampshire Sentinel*, May 14, 1808, March 4, 1809, noted in Stilwell, *Migration*, pp. 125-26; E. A. Kendall, *Travels Through the Northern Parts of the United States*, (New York, 1809), III, 284-85.

35. *Green Mountain Farmer*, April 8, 1811, noted in Crockett, *Vermont*, III, 35.

The people in the eastern section of Vermont are not operated upon by the same hopes and fears as those on the border of the British colony. They are not dependent on Montreal for the sale of their produce, nor the supply of foreign commodities. They are not apprehensive of any serious dangers or inconvenience from a state of war; and, although they admit that the Governor, Council, and three-fourths of the representation in Congress are of the Federalist party, yet they do not believe that the State would stand alone and resist the National Government.³⁶

Even while trying to please Governor Craig with news of Vermonters' disaffection, Henry made it quite clear that opposition to the embargo and to war was not the same as support for the dissolution of the union, and that dissent was not spread evenly over the state. Vermonters drew a line at treason and blamed the more outspoken manifestations of dissent on British agents.³⁷ The dilemma of dissent in a constitutional system was acute: where did dissent pass into treason? Letters to newspapers demanding a return to the policies of Adams and Washington were bracketed by protestations of loyalty to the constitution.³⁸ But as war approached manifestations of dissent became at once more intensive and more dangerous. In February 1812 a pro-war demonstration at the State House was interrupted by a large contingent of anti-war Federalists. In September the town of Rockingham refused to assist enlistment of soldiers, and Poultney voted not to pay them. In Bennington anti-war elements disrupted a muster of the militia.³⁹ A parody of enlistment advertisements appeared in the *Windsor Washingtonian*, Vermont's foremost Federalist mouthpiece, under the caption "slaves wanted."⁴⁰ The role of "secret societies" was even more expressive of popular discontent. Reference to them first appeared in Vermont newspapers in 1808, but they did not become an important item of political conversation until 1810.⁴¹ While Federalists issued their own charges of "Democratic societies" acting as "instruments of Napoleon," much more attention was directed towards Jeffersonian charges that a string of secret committees in the North-

36. John Henry to Craig, Jan. 26, 1809, Feb. 14, 1809, Feb. 19, 1809, printed in *Records of the Governor and Council*, Appendix H: "British Intrigue in New England," VI, 478-86. A modern account of Henry's interesting career appears in E. A. Cruikshank, *The Political Adventures of John Henry: The Record of an International Embroglio* (Toronto, 1936).

37. Crockett, *Vermont*, III, 24-5.

38. For instance, the *Watchman*, August 26, 1808, p. 3, cols. 3-4.

39. Crockett, *Vermont*, III, 40-54; *Green Mountain Farmer*, May 20, 1812, p. 3, col. 2.

40. Hemenway, *Gazetteer*, I, 469; *Washingtonian*, Feb. 2, 1814.

41. *World*, Aug. 29, 1808, p. 3, col. 1.

east was plotting secession of the region.⁴² While this was certainly overdrawn, secession was mentioned in high Federalist circles in Vermont, and not entirely discounted by the *Washingtonian*.⁴³ The *Green Mountain Farmer* fashioned a large and conspiratorial image out of rumors and second-hand information, calling for committees of public safety to deal with "domestic traitors" and suggesting that individual liberties be severely curbed during the emergency. Its allusions to "the midnight incendiary or lurking assassin," to treason stalking the streets unmasked, and to "traitors parading forth their Malignancy," cast dissent larger than life.⁴⁴ Especially during the war, however, lack of enthusiasm tended to merge with loose definitions of treason. For many, opposition to the irredentist objectives of War Hawks, and to the expenditure of blood and treasure, were strong enough so that the danger of being accused of treason seemed to matter little. Only when the British had retired from Plattsburgh did Federalists make a strenuous effort to combat the more extremist Jeffersonian insinuations.⁴⁵

III

Vermonters could express their dissatisfaction directly in two ways: at the ballot box; and, after war began, by refusing to enlist or to fight. In its early years of statehood, Vermont supported a political system shaped and colored by the popularity of Thomas Chittenden.⁴⁶ By 1800 Vermont Federalism was enjoying a brief spate of success as voters supported John Adams' anti-French policies. The party was unabashedly conservative, centered in long-settled portions of the Connecticut Valley, somewhat sentimental towards the former British connection, and perhaps, as Jefferson's friends charged, sporting a soft heart for monarchical institutions. The Democratic Republican party appealed more directly to the lingering radicalism of Vermont's frontier, and after 1800 Vermont was once more in its hands. It reflected the suspicions of small farmers towards bankers and aristocrats,

42. *Watchman*, March 23, 1810, p. 3, cols. 1-2.

43. Massachusetts Historical Society, *Transactions*, 69: 276-77; Josiah Dunham to Hubbard, Dec. 7, 1810, Feb. 4, 1811, New York State Library, Hubbard Papers, 1811-1812, noted in Williamson, *Quandary*, p. 264.

44. *Green Mountain Farmer*, July 10, 1812, Aug. 26, 1812, Jan. 13, 1813, March 24, 1813, Aug. 30, 1814, Feb. 15, 1814.

45. William Hale to Hubbard, Feb. 11, 1811; Martin Chittenden to Hubbard, June 27, 1812; Hubbard Papers, 1811-1812, noted in Williamson, *Vermont in Quandary*, p. 265; Richard B. Morris, ed., *Encyclopedia of American History* (New York, 1965), p. 143.

46. Daniel Chipman, *Memoir of Thomas Chittenden* (Middlebury, 1849).

and found itself supported by revivalist elements in this era of religious enthusiasm.⁴⁷

That which in 1805 had seemed a permanent Jeffersonian hegemony was beginning to decay only two years later. Dissatisfaction with the embargo and with the administration's anti-British attitude contributed to a Federalist revival, and that party's essentially aristocratic tone was muted to encourage popular opposition to the embargo, against War Hawk expansion, and against the evil genius of Napoleonic France. The once strongly nationalistic party of Washington and Adams now praised the advantages of sectional autonomy, and its center of support shifted from the south and east to the Champlain Valley. Vermont's own expansionist phase was passing; the St. Lawrence was no longer regarded as the legitimate frontier, and Vermont's trading connections made violent expulsion of the British inconvenient. Almost inevitably, Vermont Federalism in its revival period was based on largely negative themes: frustration with the embargo; alarm at impending depression; fear of war; and an imperfectly articulated dissatisfaction with politics and politicians in general.⁴⁸ Vermonters' approval of Jefferson's protest against British impressment in 1807 was perhaps the last manifestation of widespread political unity in the state for almost a decade.⁴⁹ A year later Isaac Tichenor, a Federalist, captured the governorship by appealing to opponents of the embargo; that dissent was uncoordinated and unsure of its objectives was often shown in intra-party squabbles at the local level, and by sufficient ticket-splitting to preserve Democratic-Republican control of the Assembly.⁵⁰ Tichenor's dilemma was that of a political figure forced to execute legislation which he opposed. In his inaugural address he noted with regret that the embargo laws were "not accompanied with that evidence of national necessity or utility which at once would have

47. Moses Robinson to Jefferson, Nov. 17, 1801, Jefferson Papers, Library of Congress, noted in William A. Robinson, *Jeffersonian Democracy in New England* (New Haven, 1916), pp. 57-59; Noble E. Cunningham, Jr., *The Jeffersonian Republicans: The Formation of Party Organization 1789-1801* (Chapel Hill, 1957), p. 145; also see Cunningham's *The Jeffersonian Republicans in Power: Party Operations 1801-1809* (Chapel Hill, 1963).

48. These themes are noted in Claude G. Bowers, *Jefferson in Power: The Death Struggle of the Federalists* (Boston, 1936). Also see R. A. East, "New England Federalism, 1803-1814," *New England Quarterly*, 10 (1937), 430-46; and David H. Fischer, *The Revolution in American Conservatism: The Federalist Party in the Era of Jeffersonian Democracy* (New York, 1965).

49. Crockett, *Vermont*, III, 5.

50. *World*, Oct. 24, 1808, p. c, col. 1; *Watchman*, Aug. 26, 1808, p. 3, cols. 2-3; Crockett, *Vermont*, III, 15-18.

commanded obedience and respect," but he deplored violations and called for "quiet submission to the privations and inconveniences that may be experienced until we are relieved in a constitutional way."⁵¹ In office, Tichenor found dissent's most effective weapons blunted; his suggestion that smugglers be treated with compassion prompted charges of dereliction of duty.⁵² This was expanded to a charge of treason by the Jeffersonian Republicans and on this chilling note Tichenor was denied a second term in 1809.⁵³

If this brief exercise in Federalist power revealed a surge of dissent in Vermont, it also proved that dissent was too inarticulate to devise a program for sustained rule. Federalist control on the state level invited charges of treason when the national administration held opposing views on such crucial issues as war and peace. Under Jonas Galusha, Tichenor's successor as governor from 1809 to 1812, Federalists once more resumed a minority status, in which they could afford to flirt with secret societies, secessionists, and other champions of discontent without having to uphold the constitution at the same time.⁵⁴ Criticism was divorced from responsibility, and Federalists once more prospered. By 1812 they again faced the embarrassment of a victory at the polls, and had, indeed, pushed the Jeffersonians to a point where war was perhaps the only way to arrest deterioration of confidence in the national administration and in the Jeffersonian party itself.⁵⁵ Resort to war was not an inspired decision, as events soon proved, and even as the conflict moved into its first serious phase Vermonters prepared to

51. *Ibid.*, 19.

52. *Weekly Wanderer*, Aug. 11, 1809, p. 2, col. 4; p. 3, col. 1.

53. *Ibid.*; *Records of the Governor and Council*, IV, 401; Crockett, *Vermont*, III, 26-27.

54. Robinson, *Jeffersonian Democracy in New England*, 89-90; Hemenway, *Gazeteer*, III, 906; Mr. R. Cabot, *Annals of Brattleboro*, I, 329; noted in Stilwell, *Migration*, p. 128.

55. An interesting comment by a Vermont Jeffersonian on this point has been recorded in Roger H. Brown, "A Vermont Republican Urges War: Royall Tyler, 1812, and the Safety of the Republican Government," *Vermont History*, 36 (1968), 13-18. A small portion bears quoting here: "What I can obtain from conversations with the Republicans in my vicinity, and from some letters from various parts of the state, I am led to conclude that the only safety for the Republican interest is to declare war immediately. . . . What I sincerely apprehend is the loss of Republican confidence in our government—I mean in the very form and essence of our government. . . . A declaration of war will confound the Federalists; it will derange their present plans which are calculated only for political campaigns; introduce new topics of conversation; invite many Federalists into the Army—and soldiers are always patriotic in time of war; it will relieve commerce from the embargo, and by opening up new sources of risk or gain will break the mercantile phalanx; and above all it will place the opposition on slippery ground, and drive them to silence or rebellion. I do not fear the latter." Royall Tyler to James Fisk, May 13, 1812.

elect a Federalist governor who was "not yet . . . able to see the necessity of war."⁵⁶ The legislature remained in Republican hands, and it goaded Federalists with a prohibition of all trade with Canada and sweeping provisions for enforcement. This was tempered by a recommendation of the Council of Censors, but not before border communities were enraged at this assault on their economic interests.

As Tyler noted, Federalists' negative tactics could not be sustained forever. As the pattern of dissent infected large portions of the nation, it turned indifference to the war into military disaster. Disaster in turn accelerated economic decline and expanded the distress. Distress intensified demands for peace, but peace might undermine the Federalists. The Federalist party certainly did not conspire to prolong the war, but such items as the refusal by Martin Chittenden, the Federalist Governor, to permit Vermont troops to defend the western side of Lake Champlain in 1813 certainly suggested to the British that victory lay within reach if military operations were continued.⁵⁷ By early 1813 Jeffersonian newspapers were compiling a dossier on Chittenden which contained several references to treason, and, as in 1809, this in the long run inclined moderate elements among dissenters on the war issue to desert the Federalist standard.⁵⁸ Federalists might, and did, suggest that the disastrous course of the war vindicated their belief that it should never have been declared, but few were anxious to support peace on terms of abject surrender.

The limitations of dissent as a basis for positive long term policy were also felt by Vermont Federalists in Congress. As early as 1806 Vermont's enthusiasm for Jefferson was beginning to wane, and James Elliott, one of the state's four members in the lower house of Congress, presented a detailed and uniformly unfavorable report on the embargo; he concluded it was ineffective as a means for pressing maritime rights and demanded rearmament instead. His colleague, James Fisk, wanted rearmament limited to the navy, believing land fortifications useless and distribution of arms to yeomanry unnecessary.⁵⁹ Over the next several years the Vermont delegation participated actively in the debate over whether armament or economic measures would best serve

56. Crockett, *Vermont*, III, 44.

57. Reginald Horsman, *The War of 1812* (New York, 1969) p. 167.

58. *Green Mountain Freeman*, Jan. 5, 1813, p. 3, col. 2; Oct. 26, 1813, p. 3, cols. 1-2; Nov. 9, 1813, p. 3, col. 2; Crockett, *Vermont*, III, 69-72, 114-116.

59. James Elliot, Dec. 6, 1806, Dec. 15, 1806; James Fisk, Dec. 24, 1806, Feb. 4, 1807, Feb. 21, 1807, Nov. 10, 1807, Dec. 3, 1807, recorded in *Annals of Congress* (Washington, 1852), 9 Congress, 2 Session, pp. 120, 160-65, 204, 447-49, 604-5, 10 Congress, 1 Session, pp. 841, 1031-32.

American interests. Fisk and Elliott debated the efficacy of the embargo and rearmament respectively, much as Vermonters were doing at home.⁶⁰ After Jefferson had chastised Vermonters for their resistance to embargo legislation a third Vermont Congressman, Martin Chittenden, introduced a resolution to repeal the embargo, noting its ineffectiveness and the "extreme mortification [in Vermont] of being represented as in a state of insurrection."⁶¹ By 1812 Federalist sentiment was gaining strength in the Vermont delegation, and Jeffersonians such as Fisk, who had relied on the embargo to force Britain to terms, suddenly turned to a demand for war. But Stephen Bradley replied that "public sentiment will not be driven, but must be followed"; the country should not go to war precipitously.⁶² The decision to declare war, in June, 1812, was supported by three of four Representatives and one Senator; they apparently agreed with Royall Tyler that only war would resolve the Jeffersonian party's and indeed the nation's problems.⁶³ But as military setbacks accumulated doves and hawks together demanded an investigation of the conduct of the war; even American successes, William C. Bradley noted, were "perched on an unsteady standard . . . evanescent, unsupported, and unimproved."⁶⁴ In 1814 Vermont relieved the Jeffersonian party of its difficulties by electing Federalists.

By late 1814 Federalists commanded more support in Vermont than ever before. But success reinforced rather than relieved the dilemma posed by protest politics. The platform was negative, and though the Federalists offered voters a way to vent their frustrations, no one contributed a long range policy. With an artificial unity based on hostility to the war the Federalists could not expect to stay in power. Into this uncomfortable context intruded the Hartford Convention. At first glance Massachusetts' Governor Strong's invitation to meet with representatives of other states controlled by Federalists for discussing

60. *Ibid.*, Jan. 16, 1807, Feb. 4, 1807, Dec. 10, 1807, Nov. 10, 1808, April 13, 1808; 9 Congress, 2 Session, pp. 332-447-48; 10 Congress, 1 Session, pp. 1106-1121, 10 Congress, 2 Session, p. 477; 10 Congress, 1 Session, pp. 2110-2118.

61. *Ibid.*, Nov. 10, 1808, 10 Congress, 2 Session, p. 473.

62. *Ibid.*, Jan. 25, 1812, Feb. 25, 1812, Feb. 27, 1812, Mar. 9, 1812, in 12 Congress, 2 Session, pp. 968-69, 1093, 1109, 1187-95. Fisk's rapid change of opinion between January and March 1812 corresponds to the molding of War Hawk sentiment in other sections of the nation. As late as Feb. 27, he opposed war taxes as unnecessarily alarming for Americans and unduly provocative towards the British. On March 12 he reversed his stand and painted a black picture of British intentions and subsequently strongly supported war: *Annals*, April 25, 12 Congress, 1 Session, pp. 213-14.

63. Crockett, *Vermont*, III, 40.

64. *Annals*, Jan. 2, 1813, July 9, 1813, Dec. 30, 1813, 12 Congress, 2 Session, p. 490; 13 Congress, 1 Session, pp. 413-14; 13 Congress, 2 Session, pp. 819-21.

“various important subjects” seemed an opportunity to share in the development of long-range policies. But inasmuch as the dominant tone was sectional, even to the point of contemplating separation from the union, Vermonters were not interested.⁶⁵ Unlike Federalists elsewhere, Vermonters had not conceived their political attachments in these terms, but only as a medium for protesting the embargo and later the war. The pattern of dissent, from smuggling to the election of Federalist gubernatorial and congressional candidates, from civic protests against the embargo to lack of wartime enthusiasm, had never been meant to destroy the union but only to gain specific objectives. The invitation was rejected, perhaps reluctantly, by the Federalists, and statewide sentiment, heretofore so critical of Jefferson and Madison, now condemned as “insidious” this effort to carry protest to its logical conclusion.⁶⁶

The Hartford Convention acted as a catharsis of protest and dissatisfaction in Vermont politics. The Battle of Plattsburgh in the summer of 1814 kindled the spark of patriotism; conclusion of a peace treaty at Christmas destroyed the momentum of protest. In the spring of 1815 a few newspapers continued to complain that all those previously sacred wartime objectives had been abandoned unconditionally, while others justified the Treaty of Ghent with ingenious interpretations of its vague provisions.⁶⁷ As the months passed, memories of previous frustrations, accusations of treason, and scars of economic hardship and military defeats were rapidly forgotten; by summer no one doubted that American rights had been vindicated and Britain delivered a resounding defeat.⁶⁸ Among private citizens lapses in patriotism were soon forgotten, and a thorough purge of Federalists of pacifist and separatist tendencies obliterated the last traces of embarrassment. The era of good feelings had begun, and dissent, nurtured on difficult times, was subsumed into a new era of national confidence and expansion.

65. Crockett, *Vermont*, III, 123-24; Theodore Dwight, *History of the Hartford Convention* (New York, 1833).

66. *Green Mountain Farmer*, Nov. 14, 1814, p. 3, col. 2; Dec. 5, 1815, p. 2, col. 3; Hector Bénévolus (pseud.), *The Hartford Convention in an Uproar! And the Wise Men of the East Confounded* (Windsor, 1815). Two delegates were sent by local groups in Vermont, of whom one was seated.

67. *Watchman*, March 7, 1815, p. 1, col. 4, p. 2 cols. 1-2; *Green Mountain Farmer*, Feb. 27, 1815, p. 3, col. 2; March 6, 1815, p. 2, col. 4, p. 3, col. 1.

68. *Green Mountain Farmer; The Awakening of American Nationalism 1815-1828* (New York, 1965). The new nationalism destroyed Federalism: Shaw Livermore, Jr., *The Twilight of Federalism: The Disintegration of the Federalist Party 1815-1830* (Princeton, 1962).

IV

What had dissent meant to Vermonters, and what was its lasting influence? Overriding everything was popular frustration translated by professional politicians into a Federalist revival. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that means were more important than ends; resurgent Federalists capitalized effectively on popular dissatisfaction but could not long delay the egalitarian impulse in Vermont politics. The pattern of dissent, however, was more than merely a product of politicians' devices. Maritime rights meant little to Vermonters, even to those active in defense of the administration. There was relatively little public reference to annexation of Canada, however popular it appeared to be in the correspondence of some Jeffersonian politicians; the slight effort made by dissenters to demonstrate its folly confirms this. Land hunger was not evident, and at any rate the relatively well-populated lands between the forty-fifth parallel and the St. Lawrence did not offer satisfactory prospects for American settlement. In ultimate terms, the conflict pitted the intangible of national honor against fears of economic dislocation and exposure to invasion. These were certainly not mutually exclusive ideas, but Vermont's exposed position dictated that a choice be made.

How widespread was dissent during this period? As closely as can be determined from voting patterns and the remarks of relatively dispassionate and informed observers, four of ten Vermonters were decidedly opposed to the embargo by 1810, and perhaps five to six of ten to the war by 1814. This represents considerable alienation, and our perspective suggests some reasons why this was so. Probably economic factors were most important; because its economy was young, reserves of capital few, and risky business adventures and a gambling psychology still widespread, the embargo proved particularly devastating. Beyond this, Vermont's orientation was still northward, and only the canal-building era would alter that. Montreal was near; New York City was distant.⁶⁹ The nation's honor was important, but heroic sacrifice required a close identification with the national interest, and in two decades of statehood this had not yet been forged. Finally, there was a real fear of France and its revolutionary tendencies. Vermont was rapidly divesting itself of frontier characteristics. Vermont's population explosion was over; an exodus of young people would soon

69. Dixon Ryan Fox talks about this in *Yankees and Yorkers* (New York, 1940).

be reflected in the decline of dynamism.⁷⁰ Challenging Britain over complex maritime rights was no substitute for economic stability and a peaceful border. Only a question of deeper moral consequence, slavery, would challenge Vermonters' deepest emotions.

70. Stilwell, *Migration*, pp. 124-31.