A POLITICIAN OF EXPANSION: ROBERT J. WALKER

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Among American politicians of the second rank in the period before the Civil War, one of the most significant, and at the same time most elusive, was Robert John Walker. Misplaced, as many another, in a society which could not escape from the sectional conflict over slavery, with its strong moral tinge, his essential interests were always entirely outside the slavery issue. In happier times he might have been a smaller Theodore Roosevelt or perhaps, between 1860 and 1890, one of the great exploiters of our natural resources. As it was, his career as a whole leaves a distinct impression of failure.

Born a Pennsylvanian, the son of a judge, Walker early showed signs of the enthusiastic eagerness which remained his most conspicuous mark. After graduating from the University of Pennsylvania the first of his class and head of his fraternity, he was admitted to the bar, plunged into politics, and one is seriously informed that "at the early age of twenty-two, we find Mr. Walker the acknowledged leader of the Democracy of... Pennsylvania." However this may be, and the quotation is from a characteristically outrageous puff, Walker certainly lost no time in becoming an active politician. Starting in Pittsburgh, he was soon in the van of the Jackson movement of the state and wrote the address of the Harrisburg convention which marked its success.

Though Jackson failed of election to the presidency in 1825,
Walker’s political prospects should have been bright. In that year he married Mary Blechynden Bache, great-granddaughter of Benjamin Franklin and granddaughter of A. J. Dallas, Madison’s secretary of the treasury. What was even more to the point, Mrs. Walker was a niece of George Mifflin Dallas, a Pennsylvania politician rapidly rising on the tide of Jacksonism. The Dallas connection was later to prove of some importance, but for the time being it was not enough to keep young Walker in Pennsylvania and he soon took his mother to join his father and his brother Duncan in Natchez, Mississippi.

The Mississippi of 1826 was preeminently a new country, a region “on the make.” Activity of every sort was tremendous, especially speculative activity, and young Walker was hardly established in a flourishing law practice when he became deeply engrossed in the congenial occupation of discounting the future. His aim, like that of everyone else in the Southwest of that time, was to grow rich by land speculation, and he was second to none in the splendor of his visions. Claiborne, whose rich store of information was not always accurate, said that Walker “purchased large bodies of wild lands (much of it of spurious title) and sugar and cotton plantations and slaves, running up a debt of several hundred thousand dollars.” In this speculation and in other matters Walker was associated with some of the leading public figures of those flush times — Joseph Davis, H. S. Foote, John A. Quitman, William M. Gwin.

The only part of his activities which has really come to light was in connection with the public land sales of 1833. In that year, partly owing to large Indian cessions at the treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek, over a million acres of land, considerably more than a fourth of the total public sales of the country, were sold in Mississippi. In October a large tract was opened for sale at

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3 G. J. Leftwich, in *The Green Bag* (Boston, 1889-1914), XV (1903), 101. This move had been under consideration for some time. Walker to S. B. Wylie, November 19, 1823, in Dreer and Society MSS.


Chocchuma and the prospective purchasers seem to have enjoyed an unusual degree of organization. A large company was formed of speculators mainly from Mississippi, Alabama, and Tennessee: membership, ultimately, was about a hundred and fifty, each person being entitled to put in a thousand dollars as a maximum. Settlers were urged to come in and were promised, if they signed the agreement, up to a quarter section of land they had improved at the cost price. The company bought two thirds to three quarters of the land sold and most of the settlers of necessity gave in to its proposals; those who bid independently had their land "run on them." The company sold its land at auction within a short time after the public sales; the profits of a thousand-dollar share were said to be $301.

Walker was one of the heads of the company; he did a good deal of its bidding and much of the land was entered under his own name. When George Poindexter, the anti-Jackson senator from Mississippi, provoked an investigation a few months after the Chocchuma sales, accusing Samuel Gwin, register of the land office and brother of W. M. Gwin, of collusion with the speculators, Walker was one of the witnesses who did not appear. The whole thing, however, had become largely a political matter, for Poindexter was attacking his Mississippi political enemies by an attempt to prove fraud against Walker and Samuel Gwin, the latter of whom had been pertinaciously appointed by Jackson in spite of the Senate's repeated refusal to confirm. Walker issued a public address in defense, which, with the testimony of his associates, makes out an interesting case. The gist of their arguments was that the company was formed to prevent Alabama speculators from snatching the land of the honest settlers of Mississippi; that the company's promise of turning over improved land to the settlers at cost was, in effect, the application of the preemption law which Congress had failed to pass; that Walker personally insisted on the provision in the company agreement that no one should be precluded from bidding; and

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9 Testimony was taken locally, before commissioners.
10 *Senate Documents*, 23 Cong., 1 Sess., IV, no. 338.
that the company had served its involuntary clients so well that at the close of the sales the settlers gave a public dinner to it, as personified by Walker. Walker himself said that he made only three hundred dollars out of all the operations of the company. He did not say how much land he retained.\textsuperscript{12}

About this time Walker again became actively concerned in politics, but at no time during his life did he give up the attempt to secure a large personal share in the westward growth of the country. Common knowledge of this fact was one of his chief handicaps as a public man, and even in his years of particular glory he was generally regarded as "odorous of Texan scrip." Save his somewhat doubtful associations, there seems to be no evidence that he was not personally honest. Only occasional glimpses are procurable of his business affairs, and these indicate mainly an irrepressible enthusiasm as to the future of the West. He held to his lands even through very difficult times; in 1840 he wrote his wife of his vision of a railroad era when the trip across the continent on American soil should occupy only a week;\textsuperscript{13} and he never missed a chance to gloat over the country’s magnificent future. Like many speculators, he was a loyal friend. Claiborne, a close associate until secession, said of him that he had "known Mr. Walker deny himself almost the necessaries of life, and, in one instance, to secure the payment of an indorsement, hypothecate his per diem as a senator, when it was the only resource he could command for the support of his family." He adds that at one time when Walker was a creditor to the extent of $100,000, he could not borrow enough cash to enable him to travel from Natchez to Washington.\textsuperscript{14}

During his retirement from politics after 1849, Walker’s financial interests claimed more of his attention than the law. He had lands at least in Mississippi, Louisiana, and Wisconsin, some of which he sold very profitably; he was interested, as

\textsuperscript{12}The whole story of this episode can be traced in \textit{American State Papers, Public Lands}, VII, 272-73, 283-84, 414-507, 732-35, 751-60, 768-72; VIII, 711-88. The materials are also in the \textit{Senate Documents} of the twenty-third and twenty-fourth Congresses.

\textsuperscript{13}Washington \textit{Daily Morning Chronicle}, November 12, 1869.

\textsuperscript{14}Draft of a letter for the press, July 27, 1857, Claiborne MSS. (in Library of Congress). A number of other bits of Walker’s affairs are in this collection and one in the Personal-Miscellany MSS., at the same place.
counsel and large owner, in the Almaden quicksilver mine in California, from which he is said to have secured half a million dollars; and he probably invested considerably in railroads.\textsuperscript{15} He spent nearly a year in England, in 1851-52, selling bonds and buying iron for the Illinois Central Railroad. His tour involved a good deal of speech-making and other publicity and included conspicuous attendance at a banquet to Louis Kossuth.\textsuperscript{16}

Appearances point, however, toward the fact that his major enterprise between 1849 and 1857 was in connection with the projects for a railroad to the Pacific.\textsuperscript{17} It was a proper field for an optimist, promoter, and intriguer such as Walker and he was well fitted to be useful to others, for he had prestige in the nation and in Texas, a powerful friend, Gwin, in California, and intimate acquaintance with some of the New York capitalists. In 1852 and 1853 Walker was working with both Texans and Californians in the development of plans and the securing of backers, though the two bills offered in Congress for a southern route to the Pacific failed. Walker became one of the members of the large and strong board of directors of the Atlantic and Pacific Railroad Company, chartered by New York, and thereafter was one of the chief figures in the intense struggle for federal and state favors. In the summer of 1854 he was lobbying at the Texas capitol, and from December, 1854 to October, 1855 he was president of the Texas western road. By that time it had been reorganized as the Southern Pacific Railroad Company and was ready for construction. Walker wrote exultingly in April, 1856 that "our railroad thro Texas, to the Pacific, has succeeded. Last week I bought and paid for the iron, for the first section of our road. . . . Mr. Chambers, my relative, is the Presi-
dent of the Co. . . .” 18 Actually, success had not yet arrived, nor did it come to Walker. In Professor Sioussat’s words, “Financial embarrassment, charges of fraud, extended litigation, and above all the effects of the panic of 1857,” 19 prevented the realization of the scheme. By 1861 only twenty-seven miles had been built.

Walker’s private and semi-public interests of this sort form the most continuous feature of his life and supply the real unity which the sporadic character of his public appearances conceals. His enthusiasms, however, were not only in connection with business affairs. Though he was perhaps best known as the kind of politician who works behind the scenes by “intrigue” and management, he liked popular oratory and practised it with good effect; indeed we are told that he was first taken up by the Democrats of Mississippi as “almost the only man in the Democratic ranks who could meet” the redoubtable Poindexter in debate. He was reputed an accomplished linguist and even indulged in literary ambitions; at one of the busiest periods of his life he confided to a friend that he was engaged, as a labor of love, on a “history of republics.” 20

Walker appeared on the national scene without much preliminary training. In 1834 an inner ring in Mississippi, of which William M. Gwin was the most important member, took him up as a candidate for the Senate, and his campaign of 1835 struck at once the keynote of the tune he was to pipe for years to come. Texas, he said, must be brought into the Union in order that the South might have more senators to protect her peculiar institution. It was the very argument of 1844. Walker, moreover, brought a new type of speaking into Mississippi politics — a lack of personal delicacy and a virulence of sectional appeal which may have been effective but which were hardly healthy. An “original letter” from Andrew Jackson was procured, expressing regard for and confidence in the candidate — a letter which Claiborne says was written by Gwin and copied by A. J. Donelson — and Walker himself read this letter to his audiences.

18 Walker to Buchanan, April 28, 1856, Buchanan MSS.
19 Sioussat, unpublished MS.
It was, incidentally, conspicuously useful to him for some years to come, serving as a sort of certificate of respectability when he was accused of being too intimate with banks and bankers.\(^{21}\)

Finally elected in January, 1836, Walker took his seat in the Senate on Washington's birthday. His rôle there was to be one of the most ardent of the southwestern group, and his speeches were almost entirely in favor of the claims of new states to public lands, in favor of preëmption and lower prices, and against distribution of the surplus, a protective tariff, and abolitionism. He won an early notoriety by seeking a quarrel with Clay on the floor of the Senate, when a reference to the day of his reception called forth from the veteran an admission that the twenty-second of February was indeed glorious but rendered hardly more so by the connection with it of the Senator from Mississippi. Walker, however, an eager and indefatigable worker, won a considerable place for himself. As chairman of the committee on public lands he fought hard for a bill to cut down the surplus revenue by reducing the price of land; he was a powerful supporter of the independent treasury plan; and his friends gave him credit for the permanent preëmption law of 1841. In 1841 Walker was reëlected to the Senate over S. S. Prentiss. Mississippi Democrats in this campaign were in silent opposition to the honoring of the state's obligations, and Walker reserved his high-flown eloquence mainly for national issues, especially that of Texan annexation.

Walker's nine years as Senator are in fact chiefly memorable for his activities in connection with Texas. By temper, by conviction, by residence and interest, he was an expansionist. His strength with Mississippi voters was based on the demand for a preëmption law, on his certificate from Jackson, and, most of all, on his conspicuous labors for the annexation of the Lone Star Republic. In Washington he took a leading part. His resolution of January 11, 1837 for recognizing Texan independence was opposed by the administration and passed the Senate with

difficulty; but despite their ineffectiveness his efforts won great applause in Texas. Arrangement was at once made for a bust of Walker to be placed in the Texan capitol,\textsuperscript{22} and in May, 1837 he was formally received by both houses of the legislature and addressed as the benefactor of the republic.\textsuperscript{23} Later a county was named after him.\textsuperscript{24}

Walker’s opportunity came with the presidency of John Tyler. Claiborne says that he was often closeted with Tyler before the latter’s bank vetoes, which “he stimulated if he did not inspire.”\textsuperscript{25} This is doubtful; but it is certain that Walker was one of the President’s foremost allies in the efforts of 1843-45 to secure Texas to the Union. His activities came to light in January, 1844, when he wrote to Jackson that the Senate would ratify a treaty of annexation, and conjured the ex-president to put pressure on Houston to bring about such a treaty.\textsuperscript{26}

At the same time Walker wrote and published his notorious letter on the annexation of Texas, which served as a major weapon in the campaign to prepare public opinion for the expected treaty.\textsuperscript{27} Among its fervent statistical and emotional appeals was an elaborate argument that annexation would help toward the ultimate extinction of slavery. This appears to have been omitted from the version of the letter circulated in the South.\textsuperscript{28} While the propaganda centering in this well-remembered pamphlet was fermenting, Tyler’s annexation treaty came to the Senate, where Walker led off in its favor. Prolonged debate, however, only served to show that whoever might annex
Texas, John Tyler could not; and the proponents of annexation were forced to wait for a better chance.

While a rather distracted Senate was considering the treaty, the Democratic party was engaged in the difficult task of selecting a candidate for president. Innumerable personal claims and charges have been made about the manipulations which resulted in the rejection of Van Buren and the nomination of James K. Polk, and it will probably remain impossible to explain exactly the rôles played by individuals. Walker, at all events, was at the center of the situation. It seems to have been his initiative which procured, a sufficient number of weeks before the convention met, Van Buren’s letter declaring against the annexation of Texas. That letter, which of course settled Walker’s mind, threw the Democracy into confusion, for a large part of the western delegates, already instructed for Van Buren, felt that if annexation were given up, the Whigs would certainly carry their states. Walker, who had been cultivating the friendship of all camps with much success, was at once at the head of the insurgent group. Too shrewdly anxious for party success to play the game of Tyler or Calhoun, his task was to work for the defeat of Van Buren and the nomination of an annexationist candidate who would divide the bickering factions as little as possible. James K. Polk was adopted as the most available man, and by the time the convention met the Richmond politicians led by Thomas Ritchie had been brought around to him. With these and the Mississippi coterie working together, the successful retention of the two-thirds rule (necessary to defeat Van Buren) was all that was needed. In its support Walker was

29 Thomas H. Benton, Thirty Years’ View (New York, 1883), II, 588; cf. Claiborne, op. cit., 439. B. F. Butler, writing to Van Buren on April 6, 1844, reported a long conversation with Walker about Texas, in connection with which he remarked that Walker, “like all others of our friends at the South, is full of the idea, that this movement is to prostrate Mr. Clay and to secure to you, if you answer favorably, an easy victory.” Van Buren MSS.

30 For the Calhoun view, see J. Franklin Jameson (ed.), in Calhoun Correspondence, Am. Hist. Assoc., Annual Report, 1899, II, 509-10, 854-55, 959. Walker was a personal debtor of Van Buren at times and wrote to him on political matters in an intimate tone. Walker to Van Buren, February 8, 1841, August 31, 1842, August 4, 1843, Van Buren MSS.

31 For his pre-convention activity, see E. I. McCormac, James K. Polk (Berkeley, 1922), 226, and Silas Wright to Van Buren, May 13, 1844, Van Buren MSS.
especially conspicuous. The victory won, he hastened to conciliate the embittered Van Burenites by nominating Silas Wright as vice-president. Wright refused, and it is interesting to note that the nomination actually made was that of Walker’s connection, the Pennsylvanian, G. M. Dallas.\textsuperscript{32}

In the campaign of 1844 Walker was intensely busy. The author of the tariff of 1846 agreed with the policy of the Kane letter, later the cause of so much complaining from Pennsylvania protectionists,\textsuperscript{33} and seems to have been full of advice on every aspect of the campaign. His best work was in starting the first move toward a solution of the vexatious problem of Tyler's presidential candidacy; after a great deal of negotiation Tyler withdrew on the understanding that his followers would be well treated. Walker also served as head of the Democratic campaign committee in Washington, and in this capacity was betrayed by his own cleverness, for he circulated a pamphlet, "The South in Danger," which was so violent in its attempts to identify the Whigs with abolitionism that the Whigs reprinted it for use in the North. Polk’s friends deplored this and there was talk of forgery; but Walker admitted its genuineness and it probably hurt the Democrats more than it helped.\textsuperscript{34}

Walker's last service to Texas was in February, 1845, when he wrote the compromise resolutions which finally resolved the Senate deadlock over annexation by giving Tyler power to choose between rival plans. Benton and a few others were furious that Tyler should have started operations at once under these resolutions, and considered themselves basely deceived. The interest of the episode lies in its showing the continued alliance between Walker and the outgoing president.\textsuperscript{35} As early as December 15, 1844, Dallas, Buchanan’s rival in Pennsylvania, was recommending Walker for the secretaryship of state, stressing as qualifications, his command of foreign languages, and his

\textsuperscript{32} Walker himself had sometimes been considered. S. Wright to Van Buren, May 26, 1844, Van Buren MSS.; U. S. Mag. and Dem. Rev., XVI (1845), 162.

\textsuperscript{33} But he was not responsible for it as was charged. McCormae, op. cit., 260; M. M. Quaife (ed.), The Diary of James K. Polk (Chicago, 1910), I, 43-44.

\textsuperscript{34} McCormae, op. cit., 277-78, 616; Charles F. Adams (ed.), Memoirs of John Quincy Adams (Philadelphia, 1877), XII, 86-87.

\textsuperscript{35} Benton, op. cit., II, 635-38; Smith, op. cit., 343-45; L. G. Tyler, Letters and Times of the Tylers (Richmond, 1884), II, 361.
acceptability to the Texans and the aggressive men of the South- 
west generally. When Polk arrived in Washington, however, in 
the middle of February, he had not definitely made any cabinet 
selections except that of Buchanan. He had tried Silas Wright 
for the treasury; if a New Yorker were impossible, he wanted 
George Bancroft, and planned to make Walker attorney-general. 
But the Cass and Dallas influences were all for giving Walker 
a major post, and Polk at the last yielded to their demands and 
made him secretary of the treasury.36 Andrew Jackson, who did 
not like the speculative activities of Walker and his friends, 
wrote that Walker was the only one of the Cabinet of whom he 
could not approve.37

During his four years as secretary, Walker gained a great 
reputation for industry. Though his health was very bad, he 
drove himself to the limit, and in the autumn of 1847, in the at- 
tempt to bring his annual report down to November 30 instead 
of the usual date of September 30, not only did he himself col- 
lapse but, "from incessant labor night and day, several of the 
officers of the Department were subjected to attacks of illness."38

Walker's first concern was to secure the establishment of the 
independent or "constitutional" treasury system for the handl-
ing of public monies; until this was obtained he felt that the 
country had its "hand in the Lion's mouth." 39 Far more of his 
energy, however, was devoted to the revision of the tariff, a mat-
ter in which he saw eye to eye with the President. His first an-
nual report as secretary was occupied mainly with the tariff and 
at once became a classic of free trade literature. Setting forth 
a little flamboyantly the constitutional, economic, and social 
arguments in favor of a tariff for revenue only, it was widely 
read and discussed both in this country and in England. While 
the report is slightly academic, it remains a very able state

36 McCormac, op. cit., 290-98; Henry B. Learned, "The Sequence of Appointments 
to Polk's Original Cabinet," in American Historical Review (New York, 1895-), 
XXX (1924), 78-79.
37 McCormac, op. cit., 322, n. 7.
38 Reports of the Secretary of the Treasury of the United States (Washington, 
1828-51), VI (1851), 277. The quotation is from the acting secretary. Even six 
months earlier Polk, speaking of Walker's ill health and the "immense labours of 
his Department," feared that Walker had not long to live. Polk, Diary, III, 10, 18. 
Polk at least knew what hard work was.
39 Walker to J. L. O'Sullivan, June 30, 1845, in Dreer and Society MSS.
paper. The tariff bill of 1846, the practical expression of the Polk-Walker ideas, was strictly an administration measure. It aroused much opposition and was put through the Senate by the narrowest of margins, the only tariff in American history which really justifies its one-man title— the "Walker tariff." From the point of view of its author, however, it was mutilated by the omission of duties on tea and coffee, duties which he did not cease to urge throughout his term.

The financing of the Mexican War did not call for brilliant handling, and was carried out simply and successfully. The country was prosperous and the new tariff productive, so that there was very little war taxation. Treasury notes and loans were decided on in cabinet discussion and Congress was induced to give its authorization. At least once the secretary spent a strenuous day at the capitol lobbying to keep his loan bill intact. The banks were sulky at first, on account of the independent treasury law, but Walker had close personal relations with the powerful firm of Corcoran and Riggs and no serious difficulties arose. The total increase of debt from March 4, 1845 to October 1, 1848, was $48,000,000. The whole situation was so easily dealt with that before the end of 1848 Polk and Walker, followed by a unanimous cabinet, had decided to start the reduction of the debt by buying bonds in the market.

Walker's enthusiasm for his work resulted in the initiation of two administrative changes of importance. On his urgent recommendation the tariff act carried with it provisions for the establishment of a warehousing system for the handling of imports, such as has remained in use. Walker's last public report was a study of this system based on two years' experience and on the data obtained by commissioners whom he had sent to England. He was also mainly responsible for the creation of the Department of the Interior in 1849. The bill for its organization was

40 Gideon Welles wrote Van Buren on July 28, 1846, that the President and Cabinet were simply giving in to Walker in supporting his mischievous bill. Van Buren MSS. But Polk's Diary shows that while he and Walker were cordially agreed, Buchanan was nervously opposed to the bill and the rest of the Cabinet left it alone.

41 Polk, Diary, II, 358.
42 Treasury Reports, VI, 334.
43 Polk, Diary, IV, 162, 195-96.
44 Treasury Reports, VI, 345-58, 480-503.
drawn by him as a direct result of his experience with the manifold and disconnected duties of the treasury, and was carried through the Senate by Daniel Webster and Jefferson Davis. Polk disapproved of the bill, but signed it.45

An annexationist through and through, Walker constantly urged in the Cabinet the acquisition of all the territory the United States could get — which, by the autumn of 1847, meant all of Mexico. Buchanan, perhaps more in connection with his presidential aspirations than from conviction, went over to the same view, while Dallas and Cass, powers outside of the cabinet, were also expansionists. It is no wonder that anti-slavery northerners became alarmed.46 Polk, however, was by no means to be stampeded, and when the crisis came over the Trist Treaty, he had at least the tacit support of all his Cabinet save Walker and Buchanan in his determination to submit it to the Senate. Both the disgruntled secretaries talked to a colleague as if they might resign, and it was said that they lobbied behind Polk’s back to have the treaty rejected.47 But a few months later Walker and the President were talking cordially about the possible annexation of Yucatan, where the troubled waters of rebellion offered a temptation to a strong and calming hand; and it was Walker who suggested $100,000,000 as the sum which might be — and was — offered to Spain for Cuba.

Serious charges were made, especially in the Mississippi press, against Walker’s conduct while in the treasury. The episode of the “lost commission” in which he was accused of unfairly withholding Jacob Thompson’s commission as Senator, is a matter of Mississippi politics.48 But the charge, that Walker tried to have a large claim in connection with the Chickasaw Indian agency passed through the treasury despite its being a bad claim, seems to have something in it. The man pressing the

47 Polk, Diary, III, 359, 361.
account was William M. Gwin, a man to whom Walker was frequently indebted and whose career is not a very savory one. What is known of the episode looks unpleasant, and lends some color to Claiborne's opinion that Walker was constantly the "tool" of Gwin.\textsuperscript{49} In one other connection, too, there is more than a vague suspicion of impropriety on Walker's part, when in 1847, by a not unnatural but far from necessary financial arrangement, very large funds which were to be transmitted South for the war were left in the hands of the bankers for many weeks.\textsuperscript{50}

In considering Walker's use of the patronage one finds the administrator as well as the politician. He seems to have been unwilling to discharge valuable men from the treasury even though they were Whigs, and was criticized much for this tendency. McCulloch, the first comptroller, was thus kept in office by Walker's influence.\textsuperscript{51} On the other hand Walker was accused of filling the offices in his gift with men attached to himself personally rather than good party men.\textsuperscript{52} The whole Polk administration was in difficulties concerning the patronage, especially because the followers of Van Buren were so hurt and angry. It is, therefore, rather difficult to distinguish Walker's particular rôle. He, like Buchanan, probably had presidential aspirations, but they never gave sufficient promise of realization to cause serious embarrassment in his position. Though Walker's ways could sometimes be very devious, his conduct during these four years was far more straightforward than that of Buchanan, and he certainly gained the esteem of the stiff and hard-working Polk.\textsuperscript{53}

When Walker went out of office in 1849, he made no attempt to resume a part in Mississippi politics. Instead he settled quietly

\textsuperscript{49}Claiborne, \textit{op. cit.}, 420, 439; see Polk, \textit{Diary}, II, 126-28; Dunbar Rowland, \textit{Jefferson Davis, Constitutionalist, His Letters, Papers and Speeches} (Jackson, 1923), I, 26-28; Calhoun Correspondence, \textit{loc. cit.}, 1041.

\textsuperscript{50}Polk, \textit{Diary}, III, 140 ff.

\textsuperscript{51}Ibid., IV, 200. Polk was obliged to remind Walker not to keep too many Whig clerks, \textit{ibid.}, I, 346.

\textsuperscript{52}Claiborne, \textit{op. cit.}, 421; J. P. Sheldon to Van Buren, October 30, 1845, Van Buren MSS.

\textsuperscript{53}See especially the episode of a consular appointment on which Walker was attacked by Jacob Thompson, a Mississippi Democrat. Polk, \textit{Diary}, I, 127, 132, 166-78, 239, 297. At one time Walker thought of going as minister to England. \textit{Ibid.}, I, 432. He would have been an interesting substitute for George Bancroft.
in Washington with the avowed intention of practicing before the Supreme Court.\textsuperscript{54} Even while Senator he had enjoyed a good practice,\textsuperscript{55} and had been employed in the famous Wheeling Bridge case;\textsuperscript{56} but it is doubtful if he ever intended to devote himself strictly to the law. At any rate, Walker never lost touch with politics and in 1851 John Slidell, managing Buchanan’s presidential candidacy, thought Walker’s support “all important.”\textsuperscript{57} When Franklin Pierce was inaugurated he offered Walker a mission to China, which was accepted. But there was disagreement or misunderstanding about it and Walker resigned feeling that the President had treated him badly.\textsuperscript{58}

Keeping in close touch with the rising Buchanan, Walker was again drawn into active politics as the latter’s supporter in 1856. Slidell was very anxious to obtain his aid, but warned that Walker was proud and sensitive and easily antagonized by tactless handling.\textsuperscript{59} Once in the swim, Walker was busy and full of suggestions. He advised Buchanan to try for the abolition or modification of the two-thirds rule, from the retention of which he foresaw the most dire consequences for the Democratic party and the nation.\textsuperscript{60} At least in the latter part of the campaign he worked in New York, whence was issued his very able “Pittsburgh letter.”\textsuperscript{61} which was translated, it is said, into German, French, Italian, Spanish, and Welsh,\textsuperscript{62} and was expected to be of especial effect in the anti-slavery regions of the middle West. The letter shows how completely Walker had broken away from

\textsuperscript{54}Walker to J. F. H. Claiborne, May 8, 1849, Claiborne MSS. He is said to have resided for a while in New Orleans at about this time, but this has left no trace on his life. 
\textsuperscript{55}He wrote exultantly that his cases embraced one-seventh of the whole docket. Walker to Van Buren, August 4, 1843, Van Buren MSS.
\textsuperscript{57}L. M. Sears, \textit{John Slidell} (Durham, 1925), 86.
\textsuperscript{58}Autobiographical sketch in the \textit{National Intelligencer}, November 12, 1869; Leftwich, in \textit{Miss. Hist. Soc. Publications}, VI (1902), 367; Walker to Buchanan, April 28, 1856, Buchanan MSS.
\textsuperscript{59}Sears, \textit{op. cit.}, 133.
\textsuperscript{60}Walker to Buchanan, April 28, 1856, Buchanan MSS.
\textsuperscript{61}“An Appeal for the Union. Letter from the Hon. Robert J. Walker,” written from New York, Tuesday, September 30, 1856.
\textsuperscript{62}Washington \textit{Daily Morning Chronicle}, November 12, 1869.
his southern associations. Attacking the Republican party as sectional, it defended the non-intervention principle of the Kansas-Nebraska bill by the argument that Kansas would not come in as a slave state anyway, and that the North, gaining steadily on the South in population, did not need to take special measures to insure its predominance. Accepting slavery as an evil in general, Walker, in his own words to Buchanan, "introduced the negro theory of my old Texas letter, and reopened the true safety valve of abolition — Colonization. . . ."63 With colonization the Republicans were to be countermined.

After the victory Walker was one of the strongest candidates for the premier position in Buchanan's cabinet. The choice between him and Howell Cobb was an embarrassing one, but Walker had relatively little support from the South, and Buchanan ended by calling Cass to the state department.64

Buchanan's first and greatest problem was bleeding Kansas. With the concurrence of all Democratic factions, Walker, a more important person than had hitherto been tried, was selected as one who might be hoped to guide Kansas peacefully into the safe port of statehood. It took a good deal of urging, in which Douglas played a large part,65 to get Walker to accept. Kansas, the grave of governors, offered a great opportunity to a man confident of his own powers and of his backing. Even before Walker left Washington, Seward suggested that he was "playing for the succession" to the presidency, and many southerners echoed this opinion with emphasis after the new governor had been a month or two in the territory.66

Walker and his associate, F. P. Stanton, have won the praise of historians for their conduct in Kansas in 1857.67 Walker's understanding with the President was explicit that the bona fide

63 October 3, 1856, Buchanan MSS.
66 F. W. Seward, Seward at Washington (New York, 1891), II, 299; Correspondence of Toombs, Stephens, and Cobb, loc. cit., 405-408.
residents of Kansas should choose their “social institutions” by fair voting, and he stood steadily by the implications of this pledge. His inaugural address, however, was not read or approved by the cabinet; and that address, designed as an appeal to the patriotism and self-interest of the Kansans, and containing the “isothermal” thesis that climatic conditions would ultimately determine the location of slavery, aroused a storm of opposition in the South. Walker soon became a liability to the administration. This was the result of his attempts to conciliate the free-state party in Kansas by reiterating that he would do his utmost, with the support of the administration at Washington, to enable the people of Kansas to rule. His own view of the situation was that the only real question in Kansas was whether it “shall be a conservative, constitutional, democratic and ultimately free state, or whether it shall be a republican and abolition state.” This was sound diagnosis; and if the business of the government was to prevent further civil war in Kansas, Walker probably went none too far in his conciliation of the free-state people, who were naturally suspicious of him and of the administration behind him. But the South had not been prepared to accept a free Kansas. There the Democratic party rose in revolt and the Cabinet took matters out of Buchanan’s hands, forcing him, dishonorable as the action was, to abandon his appointee. In interviews carried on over three days Walker failed to bring the President and Cabinet to his view that the

68 Walker’s letter of acceptance, Kansas State Historical Society, Transactions (Topeka, 1875-1908), V (1896), 290.
69 It is often stated that it was. Howell Cobb’s letter to Stephens, September 19, 1857, is very clear to the contrary. Corresp. of Toombs, Stephens, and Cobb, loc. cit., 423.
72 Walker to Cass, July 15, 1857, ibid., 345.
73 This aspect of the matter is dealt with in full by G. D. Harmon, “President J. Buchanan’s betrayal of Governor R. J. Walker of Kansas,” in Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography (Philadelphia, 1877-), LIII (1929-), 51-91.
so-called ratification of the Lecompton constitution would not do; and before the end of the year, intensely angry, he resigned in a letter of pamphlet length. Though he had undoubtedly made blunders while in the territory, and his excitable temperament had proven a handicap in dealing with the situation there, nevertheless, he can be said to have come very near to statesmanship.74

Walker played some part in the agitation against the Lecompton constitution and became inevitably a follower of Douglas. At heart he had been a Free Soiler for many years, and was hardly out of Polk's Cabinet when he startled F. P. Blair with his clear-cut opinions. "Slavery as a domestic institution," he said, "is worse than monarchy as a political one."75 He is said to have freed his own slaves as early as 1838.76 He did not really care, however, for the slavery question, and his views of it were determined by his imperialistic visions of the future of the United States. In 1860 he took the stump for Douglas and the outbreak of war found him an ardent unionist though still very much a Democrat.77

During the war Walker's financial experience gave him a certain degree of importance.78 In March, 1863 he undertook a financial mission to Europe for the treasury, but on the understanding that he was to receive only his expenses. He stayed abroad for eighteen months, enjoying himself, in his new position of importance, and busily occupied in supporting the credit

74 The Kansas side of the history of these years has been told very fully. A satisfactory account is A. B. Morris, "Robert J. Walker in the Kansas Struggle," MS. (in New York Public Library). See also George W. Brown, Reminiscences of Gov. R. J. Walker with the True Story of the Rescue of Kansas from Slavery (Rockford, Illinois, 1902); and Buchanan's message on Kansas, February 2, 1858, John B. Moore (ed.), Works of James Buchanan (Philadelphia, 1908-10), X, 179-92. An interesting letter from Walker to Buchanan, August 5, 1857, well shows the melodramatic and emotional side of the man, Buchanan MSS.
75 F. P. Blair to Van Buren, June 10, 1849, Van Buren MSS.
76 William E. Connelley, "Kansas Territorial Governors" (Topeka, 1900), 95.
77 Frank Moore, The Rebellion Record (New York, 1861-73), I, Documents, 88, 139. In 1862 Walker and Stanton became proprietors of and frequent contributors to the Continental Monthly, an exceedingly loyal magazine started by C. G. Leland. It has been called "almost semi-official," but it was edited by Walker's sister for half of its brief life and it is hard to see what would have been the place of a semi-official magazine published monthly. Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography, XLIX (1925), 336; Leftwich, in Miss. Hist. Soc. Publications, VI (1902), 370.
of the Union and undermining that of the Confederacy. His free trade policy of 1846 as well as his governorship of Kansas gave him a good deal of prestige in England. He had also made many useful acquaintances during his stay in 1851-52. Besides, as he said, "causing to be taken and bought" two hundred and fifty millions of federal bonds,79 he attacked the credit of the South in a series of pamphlets in which he showed, not very ingenuously, how slavery, Jefferson Davis, and the repudiation of debts, were almost synonymous terms. This, of course, was done to "annihilate" the Confederate cotton loan, for as Walker wrote to Chase from London, "Repudiation is regarded here as 'the sum of all crimes.'" 80

The latter years of Walker's life are obscure but characteristic. His law business was concerned chiefly with the prosecution of claims against the government. He seems to have been mixed up with the innumerable peace intrigues of George N. Sanders;81 acted as "counsel" for the Russian minister (and Secretary Seward) in putting the Alaska purchase bill through Congress in 1868;82 and during his last illness penned an article urging the advantages which would come to Nova Scotia from annexation to the United States.83

Walker died in 1869 closing a career that touched many of the significant movements of his time but which could hardly be ranked as of outstanding importance. The list of his permanent

79 National Intelligencer, November 12, 1869.
80 The Chase Manuscripts in the Historical Society of Pennsylvania contain a series of twenty-eight letters from Walker to Chase, March 24, 1863 to February 26, 1864; those of the last month of his mission are missing. These form the basis of the comprehensive article of Amos E. Taylor, "Walker's Financial Mission to London on the Behalf of the North, 1863-64," Journal of Economic and Business History (Cambridge, 1927-), III (1931), 296-320. Walker's numerous European pamphlets are easily found in large libraries. A Confederate, perhaps Edwin De Leon, issued a counterblast: An Old Acquaintance, "A Familiar Epistle to Robert J. Walker," (London, 1863). It is prefaced by a very unflattering biography and is most effective when it demonstrates Walker's own connection with the repudiating party in Mississippi, and his personal and political friendship with Jefferson Davis.
83 "Letter of Hon. Robert J. Walker on the Annexation of Nova Scotia and British America" [n. p., 1869]. The occasion of this was Nova Scotian discontent with the creation of the Dominion of Canada.
achievements can hardly be extended beyond his work while secretary of the treasury, when the tariff bill of 1846, the warehousing system, and the creation of the Department of the Interior, all left a real impression on our national life. But his career is one of considerable interest. A diminutive person weighing less than a hundred pounds, with a wheezy voice, he suffered all his life from ill health. With his physical handicap, however, went a restless and excitable ambition and an aggressive self-assertiveness. His versatility was considerable, his enthusiasm never exhausted. As a public figure he has always been somewhat puzzling. Though his treasury reports smell a little of the lamp, he was an administrator of real merit. He seems, in spite of his size, to have been able to speak effectively to large audiences; and his political writings included two of the most influential pamphlets published in his generation. Walker’s weakness was lack of concentration: he turned far too frequently from one objective to another. He was also handicapped by his fondness for intrigue and lobbying, by his sensitive personal pride, and by a moral sense which could not embrace slavery as a problem in political ethics. Politics to him was a matter of party success, and then — Away to the glorious American future! Professor Dodd has summarized him in one word as an imperialist. He worked for Texas, for Pacific railroads, for the Union; he helped to secure Alaska and would have been glad to have British America, too. He wanted to advertise the Homestead Act in Europe. Statesman and lobbyist, speculator and public servant, his essential creed may be summed up in his own words: “I am willing to record the prediction, that at the close of this century, with the rebellion crushed and slavery extinguished, our wealth would exceed that of the whole world at this time. How we should exult in the privilege of being permitted by God, to contribute to such grand results.”

84 Polk’s Diary is full of references to Walker’s bad health. A young Mexican who visited him soon after he had fallen senseless in the Treasury Building in December, 1847, understood him to have been stricken with epilepsy. Trist MSS., cited by McCormae, op. cit., 529, n. 88. Though he was active, even when in bed, until his death, he seems to have aged rapidly, as there is a newspaper reference to his “grey hairs” during his visit to England in 1852.
85 Walker to S. P. Chase, April 1, 1863, Chase MSS.
86 Id. to id., May 22, 1863.