
JOSEPH B. HUDSON, JR.

This paper is concerned with politics. Specifically, it is concerned with how the play of politics in the Age of Jackson, chiefly centering over the Bank War of 1832-40, led an influential anti-Jacksonian in New York City to commission a picture: William Sidney Mount’s Cider Making. It is my conclusion that this man, a merchant, banker, and literary amateur named Charles Augustus Davis, commissioned Cider Making in order to celebrate the stunning victory of the Whig party over the Jacksonians in the election of 1840. It is my further belief that the picture not only speaks directly to the event of that election, but contains symbols that were as immediately recognizable to the American electorate of the time—particularly the New York section of it—as a button reading I LIKE IKE was in the 1950s.

Overly facile conclusions with regard to Mount and the spirit of the Jacksonian era are a danger, and Alfred V. Frankenstein has warned against them:

Devotees of... high-minded fictions speak of Jacksonian democracy in connection with Mount, quite oblivious of the fact that precisely the same impulses in art as those which dictated the work of the American painter were simultaneously stirring in countries that had never as much as heard of Andrew Jackson, much less of democracy in any form.1

But these conclusions, it is suggested, have been the claims of scholars who have neglected to consider the complexity of those same Jacksonian democratic beliefs—specifically, how they came, on the eastern seaboard, to divide the state Democratic parties in two, and this most signally over the issue of banking policy.

For Jackson’s war with the Second Bank of the United States, continued by his vice-president and successor Martin Van Buren, tore the New York State Democratic Party into two factions, one “Radical” (termed “Locofoco”) and the other “Conservative.” It is squarely in that context, and the context of the election of 1840, that the key to Cider Making presents itself.

The story of William Sidney Mount’s artistic development has been well told elsewhere;2 there is no need to repeat it here. What is significant for our purposes is


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that his consistent political affiliation was with the Democratic Party. Alfred Frankenstein, Hermann W. Williams, Jr., and Jane des Grange have all referred to his "ardent" political beliefs, and even the most casual reading in the Mount MSS\(^5\) will demonstrate that Mount's involvement in Democratic politics, at both state and national levels, was intense.

What has been insufficiently pointed out, however, is the fact that Mount was a "Conservative Democrat." That is to say, he gave his allegiance to that conservative section of the New York State Democratic Party which, from 1831 to 1854, opposed Jacksonian "fiscal radicalism," opposed left-wing Democrats who supported that policy, opposed the abolitionist Free Soil Party which New York left-wing Democrats founded in 1848, and, of course, opposed that Free-Soil movement's 1856 outgrowth, the Republican Party.

This is somewhat baffling when placed next to the seemingly "liberal" sympathies in his work. As Jane des Grange has commented:

His work, viewed in conjunction with his letters and diaries, reveals a highly complex individual, full of puzzling contradictions and inconsistencies. He was the first to give the Negro a place of dignity in American painting, but he was an ardent member of the Democratic Party, fought the Abolitionists, and called the Republicans "Lincolnpoops.\(^3\)

Whether this seemingly contradictory conservatism arose out of Mount's own sincere convictions, or out of the support he received from his colleagues in the "Conservative" section of the New York Democracy (although he numbered among his friends New York Post editor William Cullen Bryant, a pillar of radical Jacksonianism), or — let us honestly face the possibility — out of an obsequious expediency to the conservative political beliefs of his patrons, it is difficult to say. Certainly its existence is an oddity; and an intriguing parallel presents itself with the other great genre painter of Mount's time, George Caleb Bingham. Bingham's choice of subject matter, like Mount's, appeared thoroughly Jacksonian; yet Bingham stood for political office in Missouri as a Whig, voted Whig, and had Whigs as his closest friends.\(^6\)

Having remarked upon this contrast, let us consign it to future studies and turn our attention to the commissioning patron of Cider Making. "One of the most important New York merchants of the day," as Stuart Feld describes him, Charles Augustus Davis was a partner in the firm of Davis and Brooks, a commission house that for many years was engaged in the Mediterranean trade. It was for him that Mount painted Cider Making. . . . Davis moved in an elite social circle that included the most distinguished businessmen and literary figures of the day.\(^7\)

But there was something else. For the "most distinguished businessmen and literary figures" with whom Davis consorted were predominantly "Conservative Democrats" or Whigs. Davis himself was a ranking New York Whig, a man intimately involved in banking circles, and a violent opponent of Jacksonian fiscal policy. Davis was, in fact, nothing less than a Director of the New York branch of the Second Bank of the United States,\(^8\) Jackson's prime target in the Bank War

3. Frankenstein, Painter of Rural America, p. 51; Cowdrey and Williams, p. 7; Jane des Grange, in Frankenstein, Painter of Rural America, p. 8. Williams's assertion that politics "supplied subjects for Mount's brush" is clearly justified. Besides Cider Making the examples include The Herald in the Country (1853) (originally titled The Politics of 1852 or Who Let Down the Bars), Politically Dead (1867), and Dawn of Day (1867). The last two are no-holds-barred attacks on the Radical Republicans, as can be seen from the following narrative by Mount (Cowdrey and Williams, p. 31): "The design of the picture is also misrepresented as the rooster is not intended to represent the Democratic party, but such gifted politicians as the Editor of the staff who are trying to galvanize some life into the defunct nigger. He is politically dead; radical crowing will not awake him. It is the Radical Republican Rooster trying to make more capital out of the negro who is about used up for the purpose; which is glorious news for the country. The African needs a rest. . . ." See also note 40, below.

4. My mention of Mount MSS refer to those incorporated in a work in progress on Mount by Alfred Frankenstein, whom I thank for granting me access to them.

5. In Frankenstein, Painter of Rural America, p. 8. In his work in progress Frankenstein also remarks on this oddity of Mount's belonging to the right wing of the New York State Democratic Party.

6. The best discussion to date of Bingham's political career is by Keith L. Bryant, "George Caleb Bingham: The Artist As A Whig Politician," Missouri Historical Review 59, No. 4 (July, 1965) pp. 444–463.


of 1832–1840, and was, in the words of Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., “a close friend of Nicholas Biddle.”

And there was something else on the literary side. Davis wrote, among other things, a series of humorous letters by “Major Jack Downing, of the Downingville Militia, Away Down East, in the State of Maine.” These first appeared in the Whig New York Daily Advertiser on 25 June 1833. They were done in imitation of an earlier, more famous series by Seba Smith, the editor of the Maine Portland Courier; but there was a significant difference. Smith’s “Jack Downing” letters had been politically neutral; Davis’s took sides with a vengeance. And the side taken was that of the anti-Jacksonians, the “Conservative Democrats,” and the Whigs. 9

It is by investigating Davis’s political and literary activities that we are provided with the major clue to understanding, not only the relationship between Davis and Mount, but the motive behind Davis’s commissioning, in 1840, of Cider Making. Beyond that, we are led to a new understanding of the iconography of the picture itself. For Davis’s activities—particularly the literary ones—must be seen in the context of the novel techniques used during the 1830s by the Whigs to regain power from the Jacksonians. Essentially, they were his contribution to a barrage of Whig propaganda, the straightforward purpose of which was to pull the wool over the eyes of the American electorate.

By 1833, the year in which Davis began his series of “Jack Downing” letters, the Whigs had nothing to look forward to but four more years of Jackson. Worse still, the assaults on private privileges in such areas as banking and corporate chartering laws were bidding fair to continue past Jackson for another eight years with Martin Van Buren. Something, clearly, had to be done. Thinking Whigs, however, were aware that the outspoken Federalist views of such men as James Kent and Justice Joseph Story would no longer go down easily with the expanded, populist-minded electorate. 11

Thurlow Weed and William H. Seward, two young New York Whigs, rose to meet this challenge. “The more we fight Jacksonianism with our present weapons,” Weed declared to his party, “the more it won’t die!” 12 All true enough, his Whig colleagues had answered, but what, then, were the new Whig weapons to be? To which inquiry Weed startlingly replied: the weapons of the Jacksonians themselves.

As Weed outlined it, his policy was simple. The party, to win future elections, should (1) separate its actual policies from its political rhetoric, (2) tell the

9. Schlesinger, p. 214. Davis’s friendships describe his loyalties. In 1842 he was one of the select few who dined with visiting Daniel Webster—testimony to his position in the inner circle of New York Whiggery (Feld, p. 296). The same year, indicative of his literary associations, he was Chairman of the Committee of Arrangements for a dinner in honor of Charles Dickens (Davis to Bradish, 5 February 1842, Misc. MSS, Luther Bradish Papers, New-York Historical Society). An invitation to this affair was sent by Davis to his friend G. C. Verplanck, who was its “Vice-President,” as was Washington Irving (Davis to Verplanck, 2 February 1842, Verplanck Papers, New-York Historical Society). Verplanck, like Irving, was a Jacksonian Democrat who had turned against the administration because of the Bank War (Schlesinger, pp. 92, 186, 239).

10. Schlesinger, pp. 277–278; Jeannette Tandy, Crackerbox Philosophers in American Humor and Satire (New York, 1925) pp. 32–38. Jesse Bier (The Rise and Fall of American Humor [New York, 1968] p. 38) distinguishes the two creations of “Major Jack Downing”: “The figure of Jack Downing demands two pertinent clarifications. Created by Seba Smith (1792–1868), his character was later appropriated by C. A. Davis for Whig attacks on Jackson. In Smith’s editions (1831 and 1833 especially) of his peregrinations, Downing is confusedly both the comic fool and sage observer, but in neither case is he ever used to expose Jackson himself, only the world of political chicanery which the President is an honest exception. Davis, in Letters to Dwight (1834), makes Downing over into a complete nincompoop for the Whig papers, never an ambitious comic rogue but a stupid partisan of a ruinous Jackson.” And Bier goes on: “Smith himself was influenced by the scandalous new character of Davis’ Downing to the extent that at a later date (1859) he viewed Downing as a far less tolerant and easygoing person than his own earlier versions had shown him.”

11. Public utterance of such sentiments as Story’s on the nature of government (e.g., that its task was to consider “how the property holding part of the community may be sustained against the inroads of poverty and vice”) clearly had to go (Schlesinger, pp. 269, 277). It is true, as W. N. Chambers remarks, that “nearly all of the important extensions of suffrage . . . were accomplished before the sway of Jacksonian democracy. What the Jacksonians did was to build on the enlarged suffrage and profit from it in 1828, as the Whigs were to do in 1840.” The democratic tide, however, had been steadily rising: “Of the thirteen new states that were admitted from 1791 through 1837 all but one (Louisiana) granted legal or virtual adult white male suffrage in their original constitutions and by 1840 only three (Rhode Island, Virginia, and Louisiana) of the twenty-six states of the Union did not offer legal or actual white manhood suffrage” (William N. Chambers, “Election of 1830,” in Fred L. Israel and Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., eds., History of American Presidential Elections, 1789–1968 1 [New York, 1971] pp. 643–684, esp. 647).

people only what they wanted to hear, and (3) once in office implement the policies, justifying them by the rhetoric.

Observe, now, Weed's new Whig catechism in practice. Did the Jacksonians claim to speak for the common man? Then, so did the Whigs; but they did more. For the Whigs were guarding the people against the threat posed to their liberties by interventionist "Big Government," by an Executive branch swollen by Jackson's personal charisma into a tool of potential despotism. By such reasoning, Weed declared, all of the Jacksonians' virtues might be turned against them; and in New York City a group of Whigs, among them Charles Augustus Davis, proceeded to put it to the test.

The first blow, using the theme of "Executive despotism," was struck in the summer of 1833, when the controversy over Jackson's proposed removal of the Federal deposits from the privately owned Second Bank of the United States was building to its height. Now "Executive despotism," in the words of Schlesinger,

provided a platform with room for all the enemies of Jackson, pro-Bank or anti-Bank, broad-construction or State-rights, North or South; and it allowed the Bank to substitute for recharter the "fresher and far more popular issue" of redressing a great wrong committed by an arbitrary and unconstitutional exercise of executive authority.13

Charles Davis's first "Jack Downing" letter appeared, as noted, in the Whig-owned New York Daily Advertiser on June 25. It not only attacked Jackson for undermining the "true interests of the common man" (which meant letting the Bank keep the deposits); it also sounded a new and, to the thinking public, somewhat curious note. For Davis had portrayed the Whigs, not as aristocratic defenders of republican interests, but as populists, as men of the people. Beneath their frock coats and high silk hats, "Major Jack Downing" averred, beat the hearts of simple, down-to-earth public watchdogs, who had, by virtue of those same frock coats and high silk hats, been grievously misunderstood.

This was the beginning of what was to be, for the next seven years, an ever-increasing "media barrage" by the Whigs. Weed and Seward may not have used the term (all too familiar today) "manipulation of image," but they had grasped the essential concept and set out to implement it. They unleashed an approach to democratic politics that is still with us, for better or worse. Schlesinger, remarking upon the effectiveness of both the overall tactics and Davis's letters, says that

The most effective opponents of General Jackson were the cracker-box pundits, drawling to the people in their own accent, countering the fighting democracy of the Jacksonians with the homely conservatism and complacent wisdom of the village sage. Major Jack Downing, as depicted by Charles A. Davis... was a better advocate than all the Websters and Clays of the Senate.

Jackson, in the Downing papers, was a vain, petty old man, played upon by those wily villains, Van Buren and Amos "Kindle," while the character of kindly Squire Biddle gave an artless picture of the benevolence of the Bank. "There is one kind of monied aristocracy I am plaguied afraid of," Major Jack would say, promoting the new emphasis on the dangers of bureaucracy, "and that is when politicians manage to get hold of the money of the people, and keep turnin' it to their own account." "It ain't in the natur of things, for people who have got money to lend, to do anything agin the general prosperity of the country... When ever they take a hand in politics, it is to prevent politicians gettin' things wrong eend first." And so on; only the cynical could resist this rustic sagacity.14

Davis was not alone in his appeals to the people "in their own accent." Davy Crockett of Tennessee, who had been elected to Congress in 1827 on the pledge that he could, as he put it, "whip my weight in wildcats, hug a bear too close for comfort and eat any man opposed to Jackson!,"15 had defected from the Jacksonians ranks in an argument over Indian removal and land speculation. Defeated in 1831, but re-elected in

13. Schlesinger, p. 276. See also pp. 80–114, esp. 97–102. The full flavor of the battle can be appreciated only by a reading of Schlesinger's entire book; the Bank War was merely the most visible symbol of the conflict. Jackson did not remove the deposits until 1 October 1833, but the skirmish lines had been formed early in that year. Jackson toured New York and New England in May and June; Davis's first "Jack Downing" letter appeared in June. Tandy (pp. 32–38) praises Davis's attempt to appropriate Seba Smith's character for Whig interests: "1833... was a year of suspense. No one could forecast the President's next move. There was a bare possibility that cleverly placed articles in the newspapers might turn aside prejudice, and create a popular movement in favor of the Bank, which would force Jackson to keep hands off. Davis saw this opportunity and took it. If he was unable to block Jackson, his letters were undoubtedly a restraining influence. They were widely praised, reprinted in the Quarterly Review, London, and had a very large sale in book form."
15. Schlesinger, p. 278.
1833, he had been promptly and gleefully taken up by the Whigs; 1834 saw him toured around the Northeast as a showpiece of the new Whig "plain-folks" image.16

Although the battle over the bank deposits was lost (Jackson removed them on 1 October 1833), the Whigs were impressed with the public response to Weed’s new approach. Davis’s “Jack Downing” letters, published in book form as Letters of J. Downing, Major, Downingville Militia, Second Brigade, to his old friend Mr. Dwight, of the New-York Daily Advertiser (hereafter referred to as Letters to Dwight) went through ten editions in a year and proved so popular that a pirated edition appeared in Cincinnati. In 1834 Davis also published “the most famous series of Jack Downing papers,”17 The LIFE of Andrew Jackson, president of the United States. Illustrated with satirical woodcuts, surpassing the Letters to Dwight in vituperation, these depicted Jackson as a bumbler, Van Buren as an intriguer, and, as in the Letters to Dwight, frequently resorted for sage advice to “Major Jack’s” close friend, kindly old “Squire Biddle” down at the Bank.

In 1835, in a double-barreled blast, Davy Crockett allowed his name to be attached to a scurrilous biography of Martin Van Buren (ghostwritten by A. S. Clayton, a Georgia Whig),18 and Davis published Jack Downing’s Song Book. Containing a Selection of About Two Hundred Songs, Many of Which are New, which in catchy ditties and jingles pressed home the same message as the Letters to Dwight and the LIFE of Jackson. The brisk sale and widespread circulation of these works delighted the Whigs no end, for as even Jeannette Tandy (a historian sympathetic to the cause of the Second Bank of the United States) admitted, “the Bank question was the most important issue of American politics,” and Davis’s letters were “nicely calculated to remove the suspicions of the farmer for the money machine.”19

But the most important event lay just ahead. By 1835 the Whigs were looking toward the Presidential election of 1836, and it was in the planning for that event that their key to total victory was found.

It happened over the selection of their candidate. Unable to agree upon a national figure, and hoping to so fragment the vote that the election would be thrown into the House of Representatives, the Whigs decided to run a number of local “favorite sons.” Chief reliance was placed upon Hugh Lawson White, a senator from Jackson’s own Tennessee, whose main virtue as a vote-getter, Whigs freely admitted among themselves, was that he looked a lot like Jackson. (White was also a long-term president of the State Bank of Tennessee, and his son-in-law, Samuel Jaudon, was “the cashier of the United States Bank and an influential figure in Bank activities.”20) Daniel Webster, it was decided, would stand in his native Northeast; and John C. Calhoun’s Democrats, still smarting over nullification, could be counted upon to draw away support from the Jacksonians in the Southeast. It was in the then middle of the country, however—in Cincinnati, to be exact—that an inspired find was made.

William Henry Harrison, Clerk of the Cincinnati Court of Common Pleas, was a nonentity in 1835. He had, it is true, distinguished himself as superintendent of the Northwest Indians and governor of Indiana Territory nearly a quarter of a century before, and had a small claim upon history as the hero of the Battle of Tippecanoe (7 November 1811) and the Battle of the Thames (5 October 1813). But he had long since lapsed into the backwaters of the public consciousness, and many of his fellow Whigs felt that, all things considered, he belonged there. Caleb Cushing of Massachusetts, as one example, summed up Harrison in 1835 with two words: “sheer naught.”21

But other Whigs, notably Thurlow Weed, saw a virtue in Harrison’s lack of substance. After all, Weed reasoned, where there was nothing, might not one all the more easily build anything one wished—or, more to the point, anything which others wished? Admittedly, it might result in a candidate as insubstantial as a cloud, but so long as it was an attractive cloud, a cloud believed in by the electorate, why, so much the better. One’s opposition would exhaust itself in trying to grapple substantively with that which had no sub-

16. Schlesinger, p. 278. Crockett was getting housebroken by all of this association with wealth. In Lowell, Massachusetts, he was guided about by Abbott Lawrence, and in his own words: “I was very genteel and quiet, and so I suppose I disappointed some . . . who expected to see a half horse half alligator sort of fellow.” He bounced back, though. After losing the 1835 congressional election he reputedly told his opponents: “You can go to hell, and as for me, I’ll go to Texas.”
19. Tandy, p. 34.
20. Schlesinger, p. 211.
stance; and the electorate would vote into office, in effect, something shining, something speaking, not to their reason, but to their wishes and their social myths.

Weed pushed Harrison on his party, and through his efforts, and the efforts of such allies as Thaddeus Stevens of Pennsylvania, obtained candidate status for him. In this manner the first “image candidate” in the history of American politics was born.22

It was vital that such a candidate avoid controversial—or even meaningful—remarks; why throw meat to the opposition? In August, therefore, Nicholas Biddle himself stepped forward and, as Schlesinger narrates, “delivered in memorable language the instructions for William Henry Harrison’s campaign.” The candidate, in effect, was to keep his mouth shut and let Thurlow Weed, “Major Jack Downing,” Davy Crockett, et al., do the talking. Said Biddle:

Let him say not one single word about his principles, or his creed—let him say nothing—promise nothing. Let no Committee, no convention—no town meeting ever extract from him a single word, about what he thinks now, or what he will do hereafter. Let the use of pen and ink be wholly forbidden as if he were a mad poet in Bedlam.23

Harrison duly went mum and allowed himself to be made out a plain man of the people. The electioneering got under way, the first clear test of Weed’s new tactics. Davy Crockett, prior to his fatal departure for Texas, campaigned strenuously for the Whig ticket, proof in the flesh that the common man’s interests lay elsewhere than with Jackson; and the whole of the Whig machinery hammered home this theme by cartoons, editorials, broadsides, and public meetings where the more pointed favorites from Jack Downing’s Song Book rang out for the crowds.

Van Buren won, by 170 electoral votes to 124. For the Whigs, however, the results were mixed. Hugh Lawson White carried Tennesee, and made inroads into Jackson’s western strength; Daniel Webster, by contrast, barely carried his home state of Massachusetts. But the biggest surprise was Harrison, who, having dutifully followed Biddle’s directive to “say nothing—promise nothing,” captured seven of the twenty-six states of the Union. With this, Weed’s strategy was vindicated, and it was now virtually a certainty that the Whigs would mount a similar, stronger effort in 1840.

In the interlude from 1836 to 1840 the factional rifts within the Democratic Party widened, especially in New York State. Jackson’s drastic Specie Circular of 1836, requiring that payments be made in gold for purchases of public lands, had originally been intended to put a stop to rampant land speculation at the inconvenience and expense of the government. Its immediate effect, however, was to force many banks to call in outstanding loans in order to meet their own bullion requirements.24 When Congress reconvened in December, 1836, the Whigs, fearing the “domino effect” of these short-term economic consequences, attempted a repeal of the Specie Circular. They failed, but only by Jackson’s presidential veto, and the acrimony generated by the struggle tore the Democratic Party in two. The Congressional leaders of the pro-Bank Democrats during the fight had been W. C. Rives of Virginia and N. P. Tallmadge of New York, and Tallmadge now proceeded to lead his “Conservative Democrats” out of the regular New York Democratic Party organization, and into near open alliance with the New York Whigs.25

The Whigs quickly exploited this split: they gained in the elections of 1837, and in 1838 elected Weed’s ally William H. Seward governor of New York State. The anti-Bank Democratic faction responded to this, not with calls for a healing moderation and a closing of ranks, but by becoming even more strident and ultra, loudly adopting resolutions which proclaimed that it was no more disturbed at the present day, on being called ‘Agrarians,’ ‘Loco Focos,’ or ‘Radicals,’ than it did in the brightest days of the illustrious Jefferson, at being called ‘Democrats and Jacobins.’26

In the meantime the economic consequences of the Specie Circular had broadened into the Panic of 1837.

22. It may be argued that this tendency began with Jackson’s campaigns for the presidency in 1824 and 1828. Harrison, however, set the mold. For a summary of Weed’s discovery, tactics, and political legacy, Henry Bamford Parkes, The American Experience (New York, 1947) pp. 163–165. For a discussion of the parallels between the 1840 campaign (“the Image Campaign”) and modern “packaging” techniques for political candidates, William N. Chambers, pp. 643–684.
23. Schlesinger, p. 211.
25. Schlesinger, pp. 130, 257.
the most severe in the nineteenth century. New York's business and merchant interests, recoiling from their loss of capital, flocked outright to the Whig Party, or stayed "Conservative Democrats" and secretly hoped for a Whig victory. Speaking of this process of economic polarization, Schlesinger says:

The exodus of Tallmadge and his followers . . . established state politics more firmly than ever on class lines.28

As a nineteenth-century historian of New York business described the acid atmosphere in New York City:

The mass of large and little merchants . . . like a flock of sheep gathered either into the Federal, Whig, Clay, or Republican folds. The Democratic merchants could have easily been stowed away in a large Eighth avenue railroad car.29

On 9 October 1839 the Second Bank of the United States finally failed, "carrying down with it," in Schlesinger's words, "most of the banks of the country except those of New York and New England." Shortly thereafter the Whigs, at their December convention in Harrisburg, nominated William Henry Harrison for the presidency, and in keeping with the pattern of 1836, nominated him without a platform.

The election of 1840 was a political hurricane. The Whigs struck their keynote on 14 April when Representative Charles Ogle of Pennsylvania rose in the House and delivered a speech on "The Royal Splendor of the President's Palace," Samuel Eliot Morison describes its tone and impact:

Maine lumberjacks, Buckeye farmers, and Cajuns in the bayou country were shocked to learn that under Little Van the White House had become a palace "as splendid as that of the Caesars"; that the President doused his whiskers with French eau de cologne, slept in a Louis XV bedstead, sipped soupe a la reine with a gold spoon, ate pate de foie gras from a silver plate, and rode abroad in a gilded British-made coach, wearing a haughty sneer on his aristocratic countenance. What a contrast to old hero Harrison, the Cincinnatus of the West, the plain dirt farmer . . . 31

The Democrats, reacting fast, tried to turn this to their advantage by making Harrison out to be a simpleton; and to this end a Democratic journalist in Baltimore editorialized that Harrison would prefer a log cabin to the White House, were he but given a pension and a barrel of hard cider.

This, given the tactics of the Whigs, was fatal. "Over some excellent madeira," Schlesinger narrates,

at Thomas Elder's fine mansion on the Susquehanna, Elder, a bank president, and Richard S. Elliott, a Whig editor from Harrisburg, considered how they could turn this squib to political uses. Hard cider and a log cabin? . . . Yes, the answer soon rang across the land, the Whig party is the party of hard cider and log cabins, and it will defend them to the end against all the sneers of the Democrats.32

Pandemonium ensued. At rallies and clam+bakes, picnics and torchlight parades, the Whigs roared out their new slogan: LOG CABIN AND HARD CIDER! The former hero of Tippecanoe now became OLD TIP, the plain man's champion, and the name of his running mate, John Tyler of Virginia (carefully chosen, as a Southerner and recent ex-Democrat, to balance the ticket) was coupled with it to form yet another slogan, one of the most famous in American political history: TIPPECANOЕ AND TYLER, TOO!. From this point on, as Morison states:

It . . . became the log-cabin, hard cider campaign. There were log-cabin badges and log-cabin songs, a Log Cabin newspaper [edited by Thurlow Weed's discovery and protégé, Horace Greeley] and log-cabin clubs, big log cabins where the thirsty were regaled with hard cider that jealous Democrats alleged to be stiffened with whisky; little log cabins borne on floats in procession, with latchstring out, cider barrel by the door, coonskin nailed up beside, and real smoke coming out of the chimney, while lusty voices bawled:

Let Van from his coolers of silver drink wine,  
And lounge on his cushioned settee;  
Our man on his buckeye bench can recline,  
Content with hard cider is he.  
Then a shout from each freeman—a shout from each State,

To the plain, honest husbandman true,
And this be our motto—the motto of Fate—
"Hurrah for Old Tippecanoe!""33

Badges and songs, floats and free drinks: these were only a part of the Whig barrage. All of the visual media of the day were brought into play:

Wood engravers and lithographers were kept perpetually busy turning out pictures: Harrison, the Hero of Tippecanoe, astride a monumental horse; Harrison as Cincinnatus at the plow; Harrison greeting his comrades at arms at the door of his log cabin, with a long latchstring hanging down; Harrison as an Indian chief, paddling furiously toward the White House from which Van Buren ("the flying Dutchman") was fleeing; Harrison as a boxer administering a thrashing to Van Buren, with Old Hickory, as Van Buren’s trainer, looking on in gloom. Brass and copper medals were struck off, with a log cabin, a flag, a barrel and cup on one side, Harrison on the other: "He leaves the plough to save his country.""34

The Democrats struggled to reason with the electorate, but their voices were drowned in the waves of mass enthusiasm. Such attempts as they made to rouse the public were woefully inadequate in the face of the political blitzkrieg mounted by Weed and Seward. "O.K."—for "Old Kinderhook," Van Buren’s birthplace—came into American English (as did "booze"): E. G. Booz, a pro-Whig Philadelphia distiller, sold whisky in log-cabin shaped bottles for the campaign), and there were some attempts at catchy Democratic songs, for instance, "The Paper Plague":

The Paper Plague afflicts us all,
Its pains are past enduring;
Still, we have hope in Jackson’s robe,
Whilst it wraps around VAN BUREN.
Then let the working class,
As a congregated man,
Behold an insidious enemy:
For each Banker is a foe,
And his aim is for our woe—
He’s the canker-worm of liberty!"35

But to no avail. "They were baffled," as Schlesinger narrates:

...is not whether Harrison drinks hard cider," said William Cullen Bryant plaintively. "...The question is what he and his party will do if they obtain the power." But the crowds roared back: "Tippecanoe and Tyler Too." "Are the Whigs contending for the privilege of living in log cabins?" asked one bitter Democrat. "Is there any despot in the land who prevents them from pulling down their mansions of bricks, of granite, and of marble, and putting up log cabins in their place?" The crowds replied: "Van, Van is a Used-up Man..." It was futile to argue against the elements.

The hard cider continued to flow, the parades continued to roll through the streets. In the end, the returns were clear. William Henry Harrison had sustained a crushing victory over Van Buren: 234 electoral votes to 60. The Whig effort of the 1830s: Crockett’s touring, Seward’s and Weed’s extraordinary tactics, Greeley’s journalism, Biddle’s directives, and Davis’s "Major Jack Downing"’s songs and letters had unbelievably, for the Whig Party, brought home the harvest.

Charles Augustus Davis had commissioned Catching Rabbits from William Sidney Mount in 1839. Toward the middle of November, 1840, just as it was becoming clear that the victory had gone to Harrison, he commissioned another picture."36 "The subject," Mount wrote his friend Benjamin F. Thompson in December, "is cider making in the old way.""37 This, of course, was to be the canvas we now know as Cider Making. Few preliminary sketches are known to exist for it,"38 which fact suggests that it was completed with some degree of haste, Mount’s main effort being expended directly on the canvas, and even though it bears in two places the date 1841, Mount’s correspondence indicates that it was completed by mid-December, 1840."39

34. Schlesinger, pp. 291-292.
35. This and following extract, Schlesinger, p. 298.
36. Admittedly conjectural, this appears plausible given Harrison’s victory in November, the motivation behind the commissioning of the picture, and Mount’s first mention of it in his letter of 5 December.
37. Frankenstein, Painter of Rural America, p. 31.
38. Feld, p. 300.
39. Mount wrote his friend Charles Lanman in January, 1841, that the death of his brother Henry had so depressed him that he had been unable to work for six weeks; his brother Robert appears to refer to the picture as completed in a letter of January, 1841 (Mount MSS: W. S. Mount to Lanman, 23 January 1841; R. N. Mount to W. S. Mount, 17 January 1841).
Catching Rabbits (also known as Boys Trapping) had been exhibited in 1839 at the National Academy of Design. Stuart Feld has noted that “the critics were unanimous in acclaiming Mount’s success,” and has concluded from this that “it was undoubtedly the phenomenal popular success of Boys Trapping that prompted Davis to order another and larger picture from Mount in the following year.” I myself would submit that the popular success of Boys Trapping was only secondary to Davis’s primary motive in commissioning Cider Making, and that motive was to celebrate the “Log Cabin and Hard Cider” campaign, with its overthrow of Jacksonian populism by William Henry Harrison, “Old Tip.”

What more logical reason, one wonders, could Robert Nelson Mount have had when, on 17 January 1841, he wrote his brother:

I think your last picture ‘Cider Making’ should have been painted large and placed in one of the vacant Squares at the Government House in Washington City.

For the entire “Conservative Democrat”—Whig faction was triumphantly poised on the threshold of the White House, following what had been, to that time, the most extraordinary presidential campaign in the nation’s history.

The objection will, of course, be made that the picture’s message is not political, but is one of generalized, rural values. There is no argument on the point that Cider Making, as the catalogue of the Metropolitan Museum’s centennial exhibition stated, “is a masterful celebration in detail and color of familiar rural pleasures and countryside.” It is. But any analysis that points this out and goes no further skirts the issue of the end for which these rural values were being celebrated.

Were they, one asks, intended as a celebration of Jacksonian Democracy? This hardly seems likely, given the political sentiments of Mount and Davis. As a nonpolitical celebration of “familiar rural pleasures”? This also seems remote, when one considers the history of Davis’s involvement with the Whig struggles against Jackson; the bending, on the part of the Whigs, of “plain-folks” rural values to their own purposes (as in Davy Crockett and “Major Jack Downing”); and the timing of Davis’s commissioning of Cider Making with respect to the election of 1840.

Moreover, there is the iconography of the picture itself. One must face, besides the direct political allusion of the picture’s theme in 1840—41—cider making—the fact that the canvas is double-dated. In the lower left-hand corner (as well as on the back) the picture is dated 1841. And yet, directly confronting the viewer, centrally located in the foreground, is a cider barrel prominently marked 1840. According to Stuart Feld, the inclusion of the date 1840 on one of the cider barrels in the foreground suggests that the painting was based on sketches made during the cider-making season of the previous fall.

This, it is submitted, is doubtful. Again, it seems much more likely that the date is there in commemoration of the Hard Cider campaign.

Support for this interpretation is found in a critical review of Cider Making that was published in the New York American on 14 April 1841. Feld termed this review “a veritable guide to Mount’s painting,” but he did not mean this literally. He interpreted the review, rather, as being a charming narrative, a fanciful tale spun out to suit Mount’s picture and amuse the critic’s readers. Alfred Frankenstein largely dismissed the review; it was, he said, indicative of the over-riding stress on narrative characteristic of the criticism of Mount’s time (but not at all characteristic of Mount’s own views and intentions) . . .

40. Although the picture was not researched in the course of this paper’s preparation, the likelihood exists that Catching Rabbits is tied to the success of the new Whig electioneering methods. In the review of Cider Making in the New York American, 14 April 1841, the expression “rabbit chaser” is italicized; it has the ring of political slang.
41. Feld, p. 297.
44. Feld, p. 300.
45. Feld, p. 300.
46. Frankenstein, Painter of Rural America, p. 31. In stating that the review may not have reflected “Mount’s own views and intentions,” Frankenstein may have raised a complex point. Although Mount’s sympathies were with the “Conservative” Democrats, who, after the splitting of the party in December, 1836, were in near open alliance with the Whigs, Mount appears to have brought himself—probably out of rock-bottom party loyalty—to support the Democratic ticket in 1840. As a basis for this we have Mount’s letter to his brother Robert in 1840 in which he says, “New York
I believe, however, that the review is perfectly consistent with the politics that underlay Cider Making, and that the painting's meaning has gone unperceived simply because its political aspects have been consistently overlooked.

As Feld points out, the painting in all likelihood went to Davis's home prior to April, 1841. From Davis's home, where it must have been a focus of admiring conversation for his "Conservative Democrat" and Whig associates, it was taken, in early April, to the National Academy of Design's Sixteenth Exhibition. The paper in which the review appeared, the New York American, was one of the leading Whig organs in New York City, the critic was a Whig in his sympathies, and the date of the review, 14 April 1841, was the anniversary of Representative Ogle's speech, "The Royal Splendor of the President's Palace," which had kicked off the Log Cabin and Hard Cider campaign.

But most important, and underscoring all of the above, was the fact that William Henry Harrison had died just ten days before, of pneumonia contracted during his inauguration, and the nation was now officially in mourning for "Old Tip." Nostalgic memorials to the first American president to die in office were pouring forth from press and pulpit; he was in the forefront of the public consciousness.

The review is filled with allusions to the 1840 campaign. Set in "one of those rich and mellow days of early autumn" (which would mean the autumn of 1840, in the thick of the campaign), the story tells how the narrator found himself:

in the midst of "high vintage,"—and a more joyous and hilarious occupation, it has seldom fallen to my lot to witness.

"All the folks," he is informed by one "Mrs. Josslin," were "down to the Cider Mill." And then she detailed to me all the incidents of the apple-gathering, and the bright prospects of a good cider year.

There follows what looks suspiciously like a lightly veiled allegory of the New York State or National Whig Party in victory: certain "younger ones" are being permitted to ride "on the cross beam" "as a reward for past services," the faithful wheelhorse is continuing to plug away, the bearer of "the whip" has settled back to enjoy "a taste of the 'pure juice' " (of victory, presumably), and so on. And presiding over the entire process of "cider making" is a character named "the Old Squire." (It will be recalled that this was Nicholas Biddle's countrified nickname in Davis's "Jack Downing" letters.) The "Old Squire," the story proceeds, has a present to make:

A full barrel of cider stood near, just rolled from the press, to undergo the process of fermentation, or in other words, to pass from the condition of sweet to "hard cider"; as it was of choice quality, the old squire had marked it "1840"—a year ever famous, he said, for "hard cider," and he intended it as a present to "Old Tip."

As if this last were not enough in itself to conclusively establish the political nature of the painting, Mount's own politics are brought up. Where is Mount, who had no aversion to painting himself into his own pictures? Why, the narrator speaks up, overhearing a dialogue to this effect between a young man and woman, there's "my friend Mount" over there, "in the distance . . . seated like a good Conservative on the fence." Exactly as, in his politics, he was.

Seen in this political context, as a picture having its roots in the events of 1832–40, of the "Age of Jackson," the "Bank War," and the "Log Cabin and Hard Cider" campaign, the Metropolitan Museum's 1970 remark that:

will go for Van Buren 20 thousand notwithstanding Log Cabin & hard Cider. We are full of life here at the North" (Mount MSS: W. S. Mount to R. N. Mount, 12 July 1840). This does not, of course, alter the views of or role played by Charles Augustus Davis; neither does it alter the affinity between Mount's position and that of his Whig patron. It may, however, indicate the quality of independence in Mount—a dogged, cussed determination to remain a Democrat, even at such a time of persuasion from the other side.

47. Feld, p. 300.
48. Schlesinger, pp. 276, 539.
49. This and the following quotations, Feld, pp. 300, 302.
50. Frankenstein, Painter of Rural America, pp. 45, 51, discussing the paintings California News and The Herald in the Country. The latter has a strong political message, much as does Cider Making. It should be noted that newspapers figure in the compositions of all three canvases.
51. Feld, p. 304.
when [Cider Making] was exhibited in New York at the National Academy of Design, it must have had a strong nostalgic appeal for metropolitan viewers, so many of whom were country transplants.\(^{52}\) 

appears to have been right, but for the wrong reasons. The picture most certainly “had a strong nostalgic appeal” in April, 1841, but the primary memories stirred in its viewers would have been those of the just-dead Harrison, the torchlight parades, hard cider, and log cabins rolling through the streets of his campaign, and the songs and letters of “Major Jack Downing,” creation of the painting’s commissioning patron, Charles Augustus Davis.

\(^{52}\) Howat and Spassky, No. 53.