

# ROCHESTER HISTORY

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## THURLOW WEED IN ROCHESTER

By GLYNDON G. VAN DEUSEN

On a November day in 1822 a tall, well-built young man, a bit awkward in his carriage, but with a broad forehead, generous mouth and firm chin, walked into the printing establishment of Everard Peck in Rochester. The visitor, a stranger in the busy mill town of approximately 3,000 people, was looking for work as a printer. When told that there was no opening, an expression of bitter disappointment crossed his face and, his eyes filling with tears, he started slowly for the door. Everard Peck, just turned thirty-one, could remember his own arrival and struggle to secure a footing in the frontier village only five years before, which may account for what followed. But it is just possible that Peck sensed in the stranger something of that quality which, years later, made a youth named Henry Adams look up to Thurlow Weed "not only obediently — but rather with sympathy and affection, much like a little dog."<sup>1</sup> At any rate, Peck reconsidered and offered a temporary job, which was eagerly accepted. Thurlow Weed, journeyman printer, had started his life in Rochester.

Weed had just passed the twenty-fifth birthday of a life that had been a target for the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. Born in the little hamlet of Acra, Greene County, New York, of honest but poverty-stricken parents, his education had been largely confined to the school of hard knocks. From the age of eight, he had been at various times tavern boy, farm hand, cabin boy on a Hudson boat, volunteer in the War of 1812, and dabbler in many more of that infinite variety of occupations open to young America at the beginning of the nine-

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teenth century. Gradually he had settled upon the trade of printing, a trade that had a marked fascination for him. That occupation offered variety, excitement, a roving life for a youth who could find pleasure in gypsying about the country, and — added interest — it was in close touch with the roaring politics of the state and nation.

This is not the place to give the details of Weed's early career. It is sufficient to say that, down to the close of 1822, he had wandered about the state as journeyman printer, occasionally as editor of a small country paper,<sup>2</sup> developing his craft, and making acquaintances and friends who were later to stand him in good stead. There was always trial and tribulation. Cantankerous rivals snarled and yapped at the would-be editor. Dire poverty was never very far off. But there was also plenty of good conversation, the jollity that he always loved, and romance, culminating in his marriage, April 26, 1818, to Catherine Ostrander of Cooperstown. This was a happy marriage, destined to last until Mrs. Weed's death on their wedding anniversary, forty years later.

The young man who brought his wife and little family from Manlius, at least part of the way on a canal boat, to Rochester in 1822\* had certain well-marked characteristics. He was industrious and temperate in his habits. He had developed a passionate love for the theatre, cultivated during an all-too-brief stay in New York City. Intellectual tastes had awakened, stimulated by wide reading in Shakespeare, Burns, Scott, Samuel Johnson, and other English authors.<sup>3</sup> Friendliness, generosity, sympathy with the lowly and oppressed were well-defined traits. These, and his capacity for unaffected kindness are reminiscent of Benjamin Franklin. He had learned, too, that politics was a rough and tumble, knock-down-and-drag-out fight, and that in political journalism quarter was scarcely expected and seldom wisely given. Something of a dual character was his: on the one hand genial, witty and charming, inspiring confidence and life-long friendships; at the same time exciting bitter and long-lived animosities by the thrusts of a pen sharpened, perhaps, by the wits of Swift and Steele, strengthened, it may be, by Gibbon's solemn sneer.

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\**Editor's Note:* Weed, *Autobiography*, p. 95. Weed does not clearly indicate the extent of their trip by canal, but if they secured a boat ride all the way to Rochester they were among the very first travelers to come by that route, since the canal was only opened as far west as Rochester late in October, 1822, and was soon closed by a break in the great embankment near Pittsford.

Weed had no money in 1822. He lived on the edge of nothing during most of his stay in Rochester. His residence on Hughes Street (what is now North Fitzhugh, between Main and Allen) was anything but luxuriously furnished, lacking even a table until he could manage to buy one from a carpenter and carry it home in his arms. The pockets of his worn and ill-fitting clothes were all too frequently as bare as the proverbial cupboard. Henry B. Stanton, who came to Rochester in 1826, stood on the street one day with Weed and lawyer Frederick Whittlesey. Weed's little son came up and asked for a shilling with which to buy some bread. Weed looked queer, felt carefully in his pockets, and said — "That is a home appeal, but I'll be hanged if I've got the shilling." Whittlesey gave the boy a silver dollar, and he was off like a deer to tell his mother the glad news.<sup>4</sup>

Such an existence was hard for a small but growing family, and Weed was sometimes plunged into deep despair by his failure to get ahead financially.<sup>5</sup> But these moods were infrequent. He worked hard, staggering into the shop under bales of paper, pulling with bare, ink-spattered arms at the hand press set on a rickety table, the press from which ran the scanty sheets of the weekly *Rochester Telegraph*. He played ball\* on Mumford's meadow, just above the main falls, during the long summer evenings. Winter and summer there was plenty of opportunity for lengthy and arduous political discussions with a widening circle of friends. Lawyers and rising politicians, such as Frederick Whittlesey, prominent merchants like the genial and kindly Samuel G. Andrews, learned quickly to like him and to respect his shrewdness and good judgment. Slowly he got ahead. The occasional editorials that he wrote for the *Telegraph* had a pungency that attracted favorable attention. In 1824, Peck made him the editor of the paper. In 1825, going head over heels into debt in order to do it, he purchased the *Telegraph*, formed a partnership with Robert Martin, and issued the paper as a semi-weekly until 1827. Then Weed sold out, to embark within a year upon another newspaper venture. Through all this,

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\**Editor's Note:* Weed in his recollections fifty years later (*Autobiography*, p. 203) refers specifically to "baseball," but in view of Cooperstown's claim to the honor of having given birth to that great American sport in 1839, it is unfortunate that we do not have a more detailed description of the games played on Mumford's Meadow. Was it possibly a variation of the children's game described by Robert W. Henderson's "How Baseball Began" in the *Bulletin of the New York Public Library* (April, 1937), 41:287-291.

affluence failed to appear, but there was little thought of changing occupations. Printer's ink had long since seeped into his blood, and he had learned to know only too well the joy of combat on the printed page.

Weed's editorial views, at least so far as politics were concerned, harmonized with those of Peck, who had established the *Telegraph* as a Clintonian paper. The great attraction of De Witt Clinton for Western New Yorkers was his part in building the Erie Canal, and his general advocacy of internal improvements. To a section which was still essentially a frontier, with many resources untapped and glittering opportunities for money-making lying dormant because of the lack of roads and waterways, to say nothing of banks, such a policy was irresistible. The "Bucktails," the followers of Martin Van Buren, "the Red Fox of Kinderhook," looked upon canals with a dislike that was partly bred of political exigencies, and in part of debtor's fears and distrust of moneyed interests. This suspicious attitude deprived them of participation in the popularity that "Clinton's ditch" brought to its pugnacious, opinionated and ambitious sponsor.

The Bucktails' organ in Rochester was the *Monroe Republican*, edited by Derick Sibley, and with him Weed became involved in a violent altercation as an excerpt from the *Telegraph* will serve to indicate:

We have neither time nor a disposition to notice the ribaldry and blackguardism, which, week after week, falls from the classic pen of Derick Sibley. Should we attempt it, we could not, probably, add much to the disgrace which he is bringing upon his own head by the management of his paper—alike disgraceful to himself, as a man, and obnoxious to decency. . . . We therefore deem it prudent to forebear accepting the challenge which is every week handed over to us, and to plod on in the old way . . . leaving our neighbor to wend his way among the rubbish and filth with which he is so much encumbered.<sup>8</sup>

In later years, Weed and Sibley became firm friends and Whig allies, but their rivalry in 1824 afforded no such prospect. Weed's sav-

age attacks, under the guise of saintly forbearance, delighted the Clintonians and increased the popularity of the *Telegraph*. Its popularity was further enhanced by Weed's advocacy, as early as 1823, of John Quincy Adams, a sterling champion of internal improvements, for President of the United States.<sup>7</sup>

Weed's devotion to men and measures popular with the business interests, together with his winning manners and capacity for inspiring confidence, brought him a mission to Albany in 1824. The millers, merchants and other business men of the thriving little village were forced to conduct their banking operations at Canandaigua or other locations distant for that day. The Rochesterians were urgently in need of a bank. Several unsuccessful attempts to obtain a bank charter had only whetted their determination, but rivalry over the choice of an agent to present their plea before the legislature threatened the success of a renewed effort. A dark horse was an obvious necessity, and Samuel G. Andrews suggested Weed. Some of the older men were horrified at the prospect of sending the young journeyman on such a mission, but his friends stood by him and he was sent to Albany, with \$300 to defray expenses, to be on hand for the opening of the legislature in early January, 1824.

Weed's handling of the charter application demonstrated great ability, for he was under serious handicaps. He had had little experience in the arts of political management. Any number of similar bills were being pressed, and he was promoting a project that had been repeatedly defeated. Furthermore, his Rochester sponsors proved to be long on enthusiasm but short on practicality. They omitted giving him letters of introduction. No specific instructions accompanied him to Albany. These business men could not even remember the terms of the previous application, and a bill concocted by friends of the project in Albany was actually reported out of committee in the assembly before a specific proposal was received from Rochester. Thereafter, home support was confined to appearance in Albany of one or two of the interested parties, plus nervous missives about items which ought to be included, but which Weed must not urge if they would endanger passage.<sup>8</sup> It is a tribute to Weed's ability that, under these circumstances, he succeeded in getting for Rochester the only bank charter

that was granted outside of New York City by that session of the legislature.

The acquisition of the charter was due primarily to Weed's capacity for making friends. As a representative of the *Telegraph*, he was given a reporter's seat in the assembly. His geniality enabled him to make friends with Van Burenites as well as Clintonians, and he was careful to cultivate the good graces of the other bank bill sponsors. He crowned his success at Albany by giving a dinner to the legislators which cost no less than \$400.

Weed used the Albany venture to advance his financial and political status. He received a total of \$500 from Rochester business men, and since he also acted as the representative of other interests, including a banking group in Canandaigua, his penury must have been temporarily relieved. "I congratulate you," wrote a friend, "on the reputation you have acquired and the retainers you have rec'd. as a *legislative solicitor*, borrowing an expression from the bar, and which you may prefer to a *lobby member*."<sup>9</sup> Politically, the Rochesterian seized the opportunity to identify himself actively with the Adams' forces, and that gentleman's supporters recognized him as a valuable ally. Weed was entering the ranks of the politicians, ranks that were beginning to swirl and eddy in a political storm that was threatening the disruption of the Republican party.

The cause of this tempest was the presidential succession. Four candidates for the Republican nomination, Crawford, Adams, Clay, and Jackson, had appeared. Each of these gentlemen, particularly the first three, had enthusiastic supporters in New York State, and by 1824 the contest for the electoral vote was keen. The focal point of the battle was the manner of choosing presidential electors. If, as formerly, these electors were to be chosen by the legislature, the dominance there of Van Buren's "Albany Regency" would ensure a Crawford victory. Crawford's opponents promptly rent the heavens with a demand for choice of the electors by the people, a demand the more politic because it was in harmony with the popular clamor for democracy that had already produced an extension of the suffrage in the constitutional convention of 1821. A self-styled People's Party had developed within the ranks of Republicanism in 1823, and had elected several members

of the legislature in that year. The Adams and Clay men formed the nucleus of that party, which thus attracted to itself practically all the friends of internal improvements. And serving valiantly in the ranks was Thurlow Weed.

Weed supported a resolution providing for the popular choice of presidential electors, while he was pressing his bank bill. This resolution passed the assembly, only to be killed by the Crawford majority in the senate. General indignation promptly swelled the ranks of the People's Party, and plans were laid for a convention at Utica the following September. There, the leaders of the movement agreed, they would nominate for governor James Tallmadge, an able politician and eloquent speaker, erstwhile United States senator but now in the New York assembly. The Crawford men, aghast at these developments, sought feverishly for a counter attack. Tallmadge, they knew, hated De Witt Clinton, and this hatred they sought to turn to their advantage.

Suddenly, in April, 1824, the Crawfordite senate passed a resolution removing Clinton from his post as canal commissioner, a post in which he had served faithfully and admirably for years. Then the resolution was hurried down to the assembly. It was a Machiavellian stroke. If Tallmadge and his supporters voted for the resolution, they would offend the advocates of internal improvements. If they voted against it, Tallmadge must count upon the bitter hostility of Tammany, which had long been at war with Clinton.

Weed, a supporter of Tallmadge, was in Albany at the time. He sensed the importance of the choice that confronted Tallmadge and, knowing the force of internal improvements sentiment throughout the state, hurried to the assembly chamber. There he urged Tallmadge and his friends to vote against the resolution. 'You will never be nominated, if you vote for it,' he told the Dutchess County leader.<sup>10</sup> The advice was unheeded, and the resolution passed the assembly. It produced a tremendous outburst of indignation. Tallmadge's star swiftly paled. Clinton became the hero of the hour. Unwittingly, the Regency had started De Witt Clinton on the path to that gubernatorial chair of which it had deprived him two years before.

This is not the place to give the details of Weed's strenuous political activities during that hectic year of 1824. Rochesterians saw him at frequent intervals, when he came back to work furiously on the *Telegraph*. Some of them witnessed an historic meeting that summer when Weed, going to the assistance of travellers whose coach had broken down, first clasped the hand of twenty-three year old William Henry Seward. But mostly they heard of young Thurlow's peregrinations about the state, and of his rising influence. Those travels, during which he proselytized for Adams and sized up the drift to Clinton, convinced him that "Tallmadge for Governor" must be abandoned, and by August he had cast in his lot with the father of the Erie Canal. He was joyfully received. "Gn. Clinton and our friends put the greatest confidence in you," wrote Charles G. Haines from Albany. "We must use rigid economy; but I will see that our friends here defray your expenses, & do anything more that you can require. You will understand this hint."<sup>11</sup> Small wonder that the Rochester printer was a power at the Utica convention that nominated Clinton for governor, with Tallmadge in second place, on the People's Party ticket.

As Weed's political power rose, his influence with the legislature increased. He attended both the extra sessions that year, giving counsel and advice that culminated in the famous printed split ticket that ensured New York for Adams. This shrewd device was achieved by promises to the Clay men that Weed later admitted could scarcely have been made good had their fulfillment been required. But it served its purpose, and Weed must have smiled with something more than Franklinian benevolence when, upon discovery of the trick, the legislative chamber dissolved into a wild uproar, punctuated by a yell of "Treason, by God" from an anguished Crawford supporter.

Weed's rising prestige secured his nomination for the assembly in the fall of 1824. The nomination raised doubts in the minds of some of the local lights, who would have preferred an older man, one who had been longer a resident of Rochester. But circumstances worked in the candidate's favor. The People's Party comprised the majority of the business class in Monroe County. It drew added strength from its democratic stand against nomination by legislative caucus. Finally, Weed shrewdly turned to his advantage the *Monroe Republican's* fling



that he was only a journeyman printer, using this as the basis of an appeal for laboring class support.<sup>12</sup> He came through the hectic struggle with a majority of nearly 500 votes, and on Tuesday, January 4, 1825, when the victorious People's Party marshalled its cohorts in the state capitol, Thurlow Weed answered to the first roll call of the assembly.

The new legislator had arrived in Albany overwhelmed by a flood of importunities. "You have succeeded by some 500 majority," wrote Timothy Childs. "Now where is my insurance bill?"<sup>13</sup> In general, however, the supplicants for place and legislative favors avoided brusquerie, striving rather to be ingratiatingly plaintive. Wistful or demanding, the ominous implication of the majority presaged a short political career if the recipient should prove to be an impractical politician.

Weed had no such aspirations, and from the beginning of the session sought to aid his friends and constituents. Clinton's message had scarcely been read when the Rochester member offered a resolution making Robert Martin (part owner of the *Albany Daily Advertiser* and an old friend of journeyman days) printer for the assembly.<sup>14</sup> As a member of the committee on the incorporation of banks and insurance companies, Weed sponsored a bill for the incorporation of a Rochester fire insurance company, headed by Everard Peck. He introduced a measure establishing the Livingston County Bank at Geneseo — a James Wadsworth project — and another, which was unsuccessful, for the incorporation of the Merchants' Millers' and Mechanics' Bank at Rochester. Such activities evidenced his faith in the economic future of the state; a faith that led him, together with the great majority of the assembly, to vote for the incorporation of almost every bank, canal, turnpike, and insurance company that sought the favor of the law-makers.

Weed's course at Albany was not, however, entirely lacking in discrimination. On one occasion, when a "canal company" sought incorporation simply as a means of starting a bank, he forced into the bill, against great pressure, an amendment requiring the expenditure of \$250,000 in building the Lackawanna Canal before banking operations could begin.<sup>15</sup> And there is a revealing notation on a letter in

the Weed papers soliciting his aid in obtaining the position of clerk of the assembly — a letter which hinted at special favors for Weed if the position were secured: "Mr. Weed cannot adequately express the pain he felt at the perusal of this clause and is compelled to say that the dishonorable intimation conveyed renders [it] utterly impossible for him to give Mr. Segur his support."<sup>16</sup> Such actions and words were not those of a venal politician.

Shortly after the close of the legislative session, Weed went on a mission to Washington for his friend, Lieutenant-Governor Tallmadge. The latter, chafing under his close but subordinate relationship to Clinton, wanted a foreign mission and delegated Weed to interview the President on that subject. The trip by stage and steamboat to Washington gave the Western New York printer an opportunity to see fresh fields and enabled him to make some interesting contacts. He had first hand experience of the charm and fascination of Henry Clay; dined with printer Gales of the *National Intelligencer*; attended a wedding at the home of Postmaster-General John McLean. On one never-to-be-forgotten occasion, before the sun had risen, Weed slipped down to the bank of the Potomac to stand at "a respectful distance" while John Quincy Adams, President of the United States, disrobing as he came, proceeded to plunge stark naked into the river for his morning swim.<sup>17</sup>

Such experiences were, to say the least, interesting. The mission, however, was not a success. It was characteristic of the practical politician in Weed that he should present Tallmadge's case on the ground of political expediency. It was equally characteristic of Adams that he should be little impressed by such an argument. Under the circumstances, a meeting of minds did not result and Weed came back to Albany with only the vague promise of a second class mission which Tallmadge, disappointed and annoyed, refused even to consider.

After his return from Washington, Weed went to Rochester where he spent a considerable part of the next few months. Years later he recalled some good ball games that summer, and on one memorable occasion, at Christopher's hotel, he tasted gingerly of tomatoes, grown for the first time that summer in a Rochester garden. But such experiences were only interludes in a busy life. Weed was determined

to better his financial condition, and he now took a step which concentrated his attention upon his private affairs.

Everard Peck, to whom the hurly-burly of political journalism had never been attractive, wished to sell the *Telegraph*. Weed determined to buy. He had no money, in fact still owed at least \$250 borrowed to help defray his travelling expenses of the year before. But he had friends, and among them none was more important in this crisis than Walter Cunningham, a Poughkeepsie financier and close friend of James Tallmadge.

While working for the Rochester bank charter, Weed had become well acquainted with Cunningham, who was seeking a charter for a similar institution in Poughkeepsie. Whether Weed solicited, or Cunningham proffered aid is not known, but the result of a correspondence carried on in the summer of 1825 was a loan of \$2,500. This enabled Weed to purchase the paper. An agreement was signed by Weed and Peck, the former pledging himself, in consideration of a \$100 payment, to give Peck two newspapers and all the advertising space he might wish for five years and also promising not to start a rival book shop. Peck, on the other hand, agreed to keep out of political journalism for a like period of time.<sup>18</sup>

With the purchase of the *Telegraph*, Weed's hopes soared. At last he was going to get ahead! He would not listen to the importunities of Cunningham and other friends to return to the assembly, but settled down to improving the paper and building up its influence. With the town's growth — it had nearly doubled in population during the three years since Weed's first arrival — both news and advertising were increasing. Political predilections were becoming dangerous, for Clinton, deeply infected with the presidential virus, showed a distressing tendency to flirt with the Hero of New Orleans. But by the use of a little editorial legerdemain, Weed contrived to support Clinton as governor and Adams as president without incurring the ill-will of either man's followers. The *Telegraph* went on a semi-weekly basis and early in 1826 Weed took his old friend Robert Martin into partnership. The paper, so Weed informs us, became the *Rochester Daily Telegraph*, and for several months life flowed along very smoothly. Then the great game of politics and a man named Morgan opened new and exciting prospects.

Early on the morning of September 11, 1826, a man of prepossessing appearance, medium height, high forehead, and intelligent if somewhat shifty eyes, walked down a Batavia street. He wore a blue frock coat, and waistcoat and trousers of the same color. That morning he was arrested, charged with stealing a shirt and cravat from a Canandaigua innkeeper, and was promptly hustled off to Canandaigua.<sup>19</sup> He left behind him a young wife and two small children. They never saw him again. But as he disappeared from his home, William Morgan entered the portals of history.

The accusation of shirt-stealing was only a pretext for the men who were hounding this brick-and-stone mason. A little less than a month before, he had registered for copyright the *Illustrations of Masonry*, a book in which, for reasons of spite and greed, he exposed the "secrets" of the Blue Lodge of Freemasonry. Already he had been subjected to persecution by zealous members of the fraternity. Worse lay in store.

Morgan was arraigned before a justice in Canandaigua at ten o'clock in the evening of the day that he was seized. It was impossible to sustain the charge made against him and he was promptly freed, only to be as promptly rearrested for a debt of \$2.69 by his resourceful enemies. His pockets were empty, and after fruitlessly offering his coat in payment he was committed to the Ontario County jail. The next day his debt was paid, but that evening he stepped out of jail to find himself surrounded by ominous figures. There was a scuffle. Morgan cried "Murder!" but no one came to his aid. He was thrust into a waiting carriage and, gagged and helpless, was whirled away on a mad race through Victor, Pittsford, Rochester, and along the Ridge Road to Fort Niagara and the western frontier. There all certain trace of him disappeared forever.

Morgan became a legend. He was "seen" in Smyrna on the coast of Asia Minor selling provisions to American ships. Men declared that he was living a hermit's life in northern Canada. Stories were told of his career as an Indian chief. Some said that he became a pirate, and was hung in Havana for his crimes. Others were sure that he had died from the effects of rum and drugs in the powder magazine of Fort Niagara. In 1826 and 1827, the belief spread that he had been

drowned by the Masons. Some fifty-six years after the event, Thurlow Weed swore to a statement that, in 1831, John Whitney of Rochester confessed before Weed and other witnesses to participation in the drowning of Morgan at the mouth of the Niagara River.

This statement by Weed gives what is perhaps the most circumstantial account of Morgan's disappearance. But various factors raise doubts as to its credibility. It is impossible to test the veracity of Whitney's testimony. Weed's account of that testimony was made, apparently from memory, half a century after the events it purported to describe, and Weed was then well over eighty years of age. The lapse of so much time and the great age of the narrator raise doubts that are not easily dispelled. Had Weed, at the time of the confession, obtained a sworn statement from Whitney, the case would be considerably stronger. But this Weed did not do. He asserts that, while attending the 1860 Republican convention in Chicago, he almost got such a statement from Whitney, but his two accounts of this<sup>20</sup> show how treacherous his memory had become. In one, he declares that Whitney volunteered a written confession; in the other, that Whitney was asked to put his story in writing, and assented. In one account, Weed says that he could not find time to see to the matter in Chicago. In the other, he says that he forgot, while in Chicago, and then neglected the matter in the heat of the campaign. In one account, Weed says that he wrote to Whitney for the confession in 1869 only to learn subsequently that Whitney had died just before the letter reached its destination. In the other account, Weed places this incident in 1861.

An examination of the Whitney story by no means leads to the conclusion that Weed was consciously misrepresenting the facts. But, the circumstances, taken in conjunction with the fact that he wanted terribly to prove Morgan murdered, create just sufficient doubt to make the tale unacceptable as *prima facie* evidence. Morgan's fate still remains a mystery. His dramatic disappearance, however, set in motion a train of events that were of real significance to Weed and to the political history of the United States.

A rising tumult in Western New York followed hard upon the abduction. When it appeared that stupid Masons, some in responsible positions, were obstructing the inquiries set a-foot, the excitement

intensified and spread. The common man was stirring in the 1820's. Jacksonian democracy, with its exaltation of the masses, was rising to flood tide. As it became apparent that Masonry, a "horrid, oath-binding system," held in its clutches many a prominent man within the state, a wave of Antimasonic feeling was unleashed. Many an honest fellow, and some of them were by no means unintelligent, felt irresistibly impelled to join in this crusade of "republicans against grand kings." Antimasonry, *at its inception*, was a clearly democratic movement.

Weed's position was certainly not that of a leader at the beginning of this excitement. He had been asked to publish Morgan's book, but had promptly told the inquirer that Martin belonged to the craft, whereupon the project had been hastily abandoned. The first notice that the *Telegraph* took of the commotion appeared several weeks after Morgan's disappearance. Then Weed, reporting an indignation meeting in Batavia, remarked that those abducting Morgan "must have been over-zealous members of the fraternity," and called upon all good Masons to help in freeing the captive. For the next month or so, the *Telegraph* apparently held to a middle course that pleased neither side in the controversy and produced a rapid decline in its business. Nor does Weed's name appear upon the earliest Antimasonic committees. The first indication of his active interest appears early in December, 1826, when he served on a committee to raise funds for investigating Morgan's disappearance.<sup>21</sup> Not long afterward he sold out to Martin, and after vainly endeavoring to find employment in Utica and Troy, he started, with the aid of Samuel Works, Frederick Backus, and others, the *Rochester Antimasonic Enquirer*.

The *Enquirer* appeared early in 1828. Weed had gone headlong into Antimasonry the year before. He had become more and more active on Antimasonic committees, tracing the route of the abductors from Canandaigua to Niagara, urging on the prosecution of alleged participants in the crime, sifting the evidence to be found at Lewiston and Fort Niagara, and generally making life very unhappy for the members of the Masonic order. The excitement developed into a political crusade against Masonry, and aspiring printers and editors in New York, Pennsylvania, and neighboring states enlisted in the cause to the number of sixty-eight by 1830.<sup>22</sup> Slowly, an Antimasonic Party

emerged, and in that party, shaping its organization and moulding it into a far more ambitious project than that of crushing a secret fraternity, Thurlow Weed took an active and leading role.

The reasons for Weed's participation in the Antimasonic movement were varied. As was natural in a law-abiding citizen, he felt that the abductors should be brought to justice. That he was not more emphatic on this point during the first month or six weeks of the excitement was probably due to the fact that his partner was a Mason. The proscription of the *Telegraph*, even for its moderate stand, forcing Weed into abandonment of a profitable enterprise, and subsequent failures to obtain positions elsewhere, failures that he could not help but attribute to Masonic influence, were personal considerations that impelled him to take up arms. Finally his subsequent course shows that a very practical consideration presented itself to him, either before or shortly after he began belaboring the Masons.

By 1826, Van Buren and his friends had shifted their allegiance in national politics from Crawford to Jackson. In that year, Clinton, his eye fixed upon the presidential succession, swung into line with his erstwhile enemies behind the Hero. The Adams organization in the state had never been strong, and the internal improvements men were now left leaderless and in a state of confusion. The time was ripe for a new party centering around internal improvements, but with a democratic appeal that would attract mass support. It was to the creation of such a party that Weed now devoted his efforts.

Antimasonry assumed more and more of a political aspect during 1827. Conventions nominating candidates for the legislature were held all over the western part of the state in September and October. Weed was in the thick of the fight, and as passions ran high with the approach of the election he took a leading part in a spectacular investigation that the Antimasons sought to turn to their advantage.

On October 7, 1827, a drowned man's body was discovered, washed ashore where Oak Orchard Creek joins Lake Ontario. The coroner's description indicated a resemblance to the missing Morgan. If Morgan's body had indeed been found, the Antimasons would have a wonderful talking point in the election. Weed and his friends immediately

raised a clamor that resulted in repeated exhumations of the newly discovered corpse. At the first of these ghoulish affairs the identification of the body as that of Morgan seemed to be clearly established. Then it was discovered that a Canadian, Timothy Munroe, had been recently drowned in the Niagara River. The Masons promptly sponsored a final inquest, at which Mrs. Munroe's evidence indicated that the corpse of Oak Orchard Creek had at least been clad in Munroe's clothing.

The pitiful remains, which were probably not those of either Morgan or Munroe, became a political football. Masons, it was asserted, had described the clothes to Mrs. Munroe so that she could assist their cause, while to further their wicked purposes they had substituted a different body for the one originally found. Weed was accused of pulling out the hair and plucking the whiskers of the corpse, so that it would look like Morgan. Oaths were sworn that Weed had jeeringly told a group of Masons that the corpse was a "good enough Morgan until after the election," a charge that Weed indignantly repelled by declaring that he had said that it was "a good enough Morgan until you bring back the one you carried off."<sup>23</sup>

The election of 1827 took place in the midst of the exchange of pleasantries over the disputed corpse, and the Antimasons, somewhat to their surprise, carried several Western New York counties and sent fifteen members to the assembly. Weed and his cohorts immediately began laying plans for the campaign of 1828.

Weed's political activities multiplied during the months that followed the first Antimasonic taste of victory. He was a moving spirit in a series of meetings which culminated in a state convention at Utica in August, 1828. There he was made a member of the party's central committee. While forging to the front in the new party, he became Adams' campaign manager in Western New York, skillfully directing a coalition of Adams and Antimasonic forces. To complete this, Weed tried to carry the Antimasons into support of the Adams' party candidate for governor, Smith Thompson, a man upon whom the mantle of "the blessed spirit," as Antimasonry was now called, had not fallen. This produced a violent uproar among the Antimasonic extremists. They held a convention at Le Roy, nominating a broken-down politician and star gazer, Solomon Southwick. The extremists denounced Weed as



a traitor to the cause, but Southwick made a miserable showing in the election. This result strengthened Weed's control of the new movement, though Masonic Adams men and rabid Antimasons continued to prevent the complete success of Weed's plan for establishing a united opposition to the Van Buren Regency.

Weed fought the battles of Antimasonry in Rochester with a ferocious zeal that was only equalled by that of his opponents. Charges of faithlessness and corruption flew back and forth before elections. The *Antimasonic Enquirer* teemed with advertisements of Dr. Davenport's Bilius Pills and Lorenzo Dow's Family Medicine, but the healing effects of these nostrums could scarcely have relieved the wounds caused by the editor's blasting remarks about opponents in general and "Masons' Jacks" in particular. Weed was in his element on election day. Prompt in action, fertile in expedient, he would plunge into the midst of the raucous, swirling throng about the polls, exhorting the waverers and ridiculing the enemy. "There is no blood on these tickets, gentlemen," he would cry, waving above the crowd hands full of Antimasonic ballots. On one occasion he suddenly appeared with a jackass, symbol of "Masons' Jacks," paraded the animal before the crowd, then thrust a ballot in its mouth and stuck its head into the window of the polling place, while henchmen armed with shears went about snipping at the ears of Masonic voters and calling out, "Long ears, long ears."<sup>24</sup> These rough and tumble antics were orthodox practice in such campaigns as that of 1828, when Jackson's supporters appealed for frontier votes on the ground that the Hero was ready "to go the whole hog" for democracy. But there were depths to which Weed would not stoop, and it is to his credit that he steadfastly refused to distribute the pamphlets attacking Rachel Jackson that figured in that campaign.

Weed apparently utilized his geniality and quickness of wit to avoid any rough and tumble encounters at the polls. At least, no mention of any such event in his life at Rochester has been preserved. His nearest approach to a fight came at the 1828 election, which was held at the Mansion House. There a burly Irish blacksmith, Cavanaugh by name, perhaps outraged by the connection which was sometimes made between Masonry and Catholicism as equally undemocratic and hateful, deliberately sought a victim for his fist. Several times he approached

Weed, who cleverly parried his insults, giving him no opening. The more pugnacious Frederick Whittlesey, fresh from a recent and triumphant assault upon a Niagara County Mason, was not so astute. Whittlesey stood up to the Irishman, only to be felled by a terrific blow that broke every bone in his nose. For this assault, Cavanaugh was fined \$50 and given twenty days in jail, but Whittlesey's fate was worse. For his triumph over his Masonic opponent he paid a \$10 fine in court and a \$100 judgment in a civil action, and he carried the marks of Cavanaugh's fist to the end of his life.<sup>25</sup>

Aside from fisticuffs, the chief salve for wounded feelings was the libel suit. The biting phrases that flowed from Weed's pen and from the quills of Luther Tucker and Henry O'Reilly, proprietor and editor respectively of the rival *Rochester Daily Advertiser*, produced a flourishing crop of such court actions. In October, 1828, the Antimasonic Central Committee issued, apparently from Weed's office, a handbill accusing Tucker, Jacob Gould, and others of raising \$1,500 at Albany with which to bribe Monroe County electors. Tucker promptly announced that the money had been used by him to acquire sole ownership of his paper. He threatened suit, and the authors of the handbill signed and published an apology. That same year, Weed sued Tucker and O'Reilly for libel because of their statements about his having plucked the hair and whiskers of the "good enough Morgan." Not long afterward, Tucker filed a counter libel charge against Weed, which the latter noted in characteristic fashion—"The Grand Jury of this county [has] found a bill of indictment against us, for a libel upon that feeble representative of manhood, *luther tucker!*" Neither suit amounted to anything, although Weed's indictment of Tucker and O'Reilly was kept hanging over their heads for thirteen years.

One suit in which Weed became involved at this time did come to trial. On October 13, 1829, the *Enquirer* accused Jacob Gould, a prominent Rochester Mason, of using a Masonic charity fund to bring witnesses from Canada who would swear that the Orchard Creek body was that of Timothy Munroe. The *Enquirer* further asserted that the Grand Chapter had given Gould \$600 to use in defense of Masons accused of implication in Morgan's "murder." Gould replied, in a letter to the *Daily Advertiser*, denouncing Weed and his partner<sup>26</sup> as men

"whose days from their infancy upward, have been spent in traducing and vilifying the characters of their neighbors and benefactors, and whose nights have been occupied in scenes calculated to fill the virtuous mind with horror and disgust."<sup>27</sup>

Gould's pleasant characterization of his opponent had thrown down the gauntlet with a vengeance, and Weed promptly took it up. He promised "to exhibit Jacob Gould to the world, in an attitude so unequivocally infamous that every *virtuous* mind will turn from him *with horror and disgust*." The enraged editor would prove, he declared that Gould paid \$50 toward bringing Mrs. Munroe and "the convict Cron" to the United States; and that while acting, "or pretending to act," on a committee appointed by the people of Monroe County to investigate the Morgan affair, Gould had "*furnished money to enable at least one of the kidnappers to escape from justice*." The public was informed that Weed had borne Gould's assaults to the point where endurance ceases to be a virtue.

Jacob Gould has gone beyond this point, and it is due more to the good and just cause with which I am connected, than to myself, to make an example of him. And when he shall have been fully exposed to this community, as a perfidious man, a profligate libeller, and a shameless hypocrite, he will be left with a bitter and self-upbraiding spirit, to bewail the folly and falsehood, that led him to cut and season the rod with which he was scourged.<sup>28</sup>

There was but one answer, other than personal violence, for such a castigation as Weed had administered. Gould filed suit for \$10,000 damages, and the case was tried at the Albany circuit in September, 1831, Judge Vanderpoel presiding.

The evidence introduced at the trial of Gould v. Weed showed that Gould had blandly paid out to a Mr. M. at Rochester \$100 from the Masonic charity fund, without inquiry as to the specific purpose for which the money was to be used. But when Weed's counsel offered to prove that the money had been used to enable one of Morgan's kidnappers to escape from justice, the judge ruled that this evidence was inadmissible until it was shown that Gould was directly connected

with, or had definite knowledge of the way in which the money was to be spent.<sup>29</sup> This Weed could not do, and the jury found a \$400 verdict for the plaintiff. Appeal was refused and Weed had to pay, although at least one supporter pledged him fifty dollars as a partial easement of the burden. The angry editor complained bitterly of Judge Vanderpoel's unfairness, but the charges and counter charges in the newspapers had at least made good campaign material for the election of 1829.

That election saw Weed once more a candidate for the assembly. The project of an Antimasonic newspaper at Albany under Weed's direction had been brewing since early in 1829,<sup>30</sup> and to further this plan Weed was once again to be sent to Albany. The campaign, as usual, was spirited. "T-H-U-R-L-O-W W-E-E-D, the representative of Rochester!!!" shrilled the *Daily Advertiser*. "It is an insult to the moral feeling, an outrage on the good sense of this community. . . . The choice of a man so notorious, could not be otherwise than pernicious in strengthening the contempt with which people abroad look upon us of the West." It took "a being of Weed's stamp," snarled Gould, "to spread the foulest libels for the purpose of furthering his own election."<sup>31</sup> "Good enough Morgan! Good enough Morgan!" chanted the Masons. To these thrusts Weed replied in kind, but he was hard pressed and had to exert all of his electioneering powers. Stanton even tells of Weed's attending the First Presbyterian Church to offset the advantage of his opponent who was a prominent member of that congregation. Weed, he writes, "borrowed some garments and came in on time wearing a wretched cravat and a shocking bad hat." Custom required the candidate to keep away from the polls during the actual election, but on the three days of the balloting Weed spent most of his time in a loft overlooking the principal polling place. There he paced feverishly up and down before the window, more than once wringing his hands helplessly and exclaiming as a doubtful voter started for the polls, "Oh, what would I give if I could only see that man for one moment."<sup>32</sup>

Weed won his election by a narrow margin in 1829, and after a spirited fling at Masonic lodge meetings as destroyers of America's home life, he left for the state capital. His strenuous exertions had taken some toll of his health, and he was tortured by stomach trouble,

and by fever and ague. Considerably worried over his own condition, he was also anxious about his little daughter, who was anything but well that winter. But despite these afflictions, he threw himself into the labors marked out for him at Albany.

That winter, in the legislature Weed joined with Albert H. Tracy, Francis Granger, and other leaders of the Antis in a general opposition to the Regency. They pushed vigorously their attack upon Masonry, but at the same time a much wider program was developed. They championed the extension of the canal system and fought the Regency's effort to raise the tolls. They urged a modification of the banking law, thus currying favor with the banking interests of New York City. Weed was especially active in pushing a bill that would end the seizure of a workingman's tools for debt. An Antimasonic state convention was held in Albany on February 25, 1830, where it was resolved to take advantage of the rise of the movement in other parts of the country by organizing on a national scale.<sup>33</sup> The intent to establish a great, new party to take the place of the National Republicans was obvious.

The convention of February 25 also took the final steps in establishing the *Albany Evening Journal*, with Weed as its editor. Southwick was publishing at Albany an Antimasonic sheet, the *National Observer*, that posed as the central organ of the party. An effort had been made to oust him in favor of Weed, but the fiery old extremist had refused to budge. His singlemindedness, as well as his eccentricities, were disliked by Weed and his associates. The cry was raised that Southwick did more harm than good, that he was in the pay of Van Buren, and the convention by its action cast the *National Observer* on the scrap heap. Twenty-five hundred dollars was subscribed by leading Antimasons throughout the state, and the *Evening Journal*, destined to become one of the most powerful political organs in the nation, began its appearance on March 22, 1830.

Weed pledged the *Journal* in its first number "to the cause, the whole cause, and nothing but the cause of Antimasonry." But he went on to assert that Antimasonry was so wide in scope as to include "all the great and cherished interests of our country."<sup>34</sup> Internal improvements, domestic manufactures, temperance, repeal of imprisonment for debt, abolition of the cumbersome and unpopular militia system, all

these found favor in Weed's sight. With such a program, the Anti-masonic party was bound to develop into something rich and strange, even though the metamorphosis should be scarcely to the liking of its fanatical element.

Weed moved his family to Albany shortly after the *Journal* began to appear. His departure from Rochester elicited expressions of "esteem and regret" from a gathering of Antimasonic Republicans, and their best wishes for his continued success in "the cause."

The Rochester period of Weed's career ended in 1830. The magnetic, ambitious, hard-hitting young editor had moved on to fresh fields and pastures new. But he had left, in the rapidly growing town on the banks of the Genesee, a host of friends and enemies who were to watch, with admiration or with bitterness, his rise to national influence and power.

## NOTES

1. Henry Adams, *The Education of Henry Adams* (Boston, 1918), p. 146; H. A. Weed, ed., *Autobiography of Thurlow Weed* (Boston, 1883), p. 96.
2. Milton W. Hamilton, "Thurlow Weed's Nemesis in Norwich," *New York History*, XIX, April, 1938, pp. 124-134.
3. Weed, *Autobiography*, p. 91.
4. H. B. Stanton, *Random Recollections* (New York, 1887), pp. 25-26; *A Directory of the Village of Rochester*, 1827 (Rochester, 1827); F. Follett, *History of the Press of Western New York* (Rochester, 1847), p. 9.
5. Richard Oliphant to Thurlow Weed, August 24, 1823, Weed Papers, MSS. (University of Rochester Library).
6. *Rochester Telegraph*, June 8, 1824.
7. Adams for president and Clinton for governor were not actually put at the *Telegraph's* masthead until the issue of September 28, 1824.
8. M. Brown to Thurlow Weed, January 1, 1824; E. B. Strong to Thurlow Weed, January 19, 26, 1824; E. Pomeroy to Thurlow Weed, January 23, 26, February 3, 1824, Weed Papers.
9. E. Pomeroy to Thurlow Weed, March 9, [1824], *loc. cit.*
10. Weed, *Autobiography*, p. 109.
11. Charles G. Haines to Thurlow Weed, August 3, 1824, Weed Papers.
12. *Rochester Telegraph*, October 26, 1824.
13. Timothy Childs to Thurlow Weed, November 4, 1824, Weed Papers.
14. *Journal of the Assembly*, 1825, p. 23.
15. Weed, *Autobiography*, p. 171.
16. F. Segur to Thurlow Weed, December 12, 1824, Weed Papers.
17. Weed, *Autobiography*, pp. 177-183.
18. Walter Cunningham to Thurlow Weed, August 6, 25, September 19, 1825; Agreement with Everard Peck, August 29, 1825, Weed Papers.
19. Robert Daniel Burns, "The Abduction of William Morgan," *Rochester Historical Society, Publications*, VI: 224, 219-230.
20. Weed, *Autobiography*, p. 334; T. Weed, *The Facts Stated* (Chicago, 1882), pp. 13-14.
21. *Batavia Republican Advocate*, December 8, 1826, cited in R. F. Weller, *Thurlow Weed, the Early Life of a Political Leader*, (Unpublished M. A. Thesis).
22. Milton W. Hamilton, "Anti-Masonic Newspapers: 1826-1834," *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, 1938, XXXII: 71-95.
23. Weed, *Autobiography*, p. 319.
24. T. W. Barnes, *Memoir of Thurlow Weed* (Boston, 1884), pp. 29-31; reminiscence of R. H. Stevens published in the *Buffalo Courier* and preserved in the *O'Reilly Documents*, No. 2154A. (Rochester Historical Society).
25. Barnes, *op. cit.*, pp. 30-31; *Rochester Daily Advertiser*, October 21, 1829.
26. At this time either Samuel Heron or D. N. Sprague.
27. *Antimasonic Enquirer*, October 13, 27, 1829.
28. *Ibid.*, October 27, 1829.
29. *12 Wendell New York*. Gould v. Weed, pp. 12-27.
30. Herman Norton to Thurlow Weed, March 25, 1829; B. D. Packard & Co. to Thurlow Weed, July 1, 1829, Weed Papers.
31. *Rochester Daily Advertiser*, October 12, 15, 1829.
32. Stanton, *op. cit.*, p. 27.
33. C. McCarthy, "The Antimasonic Party," *Annual Report of the American Historical Association*, 1902, I:390-396.
34. Miscellaneous Weed Papers, April 30, 1830, (New York Historical Society).

### Weed's Contract of 1825

Contract and agreement between Sherlow  
Weed & Ebenezer Peck Aug. 29 1825

The said Peck having paid for the said  
Weed One Hundred Dollars the said Weed  
agrees that he will for the above consideration  
be a printer for the said Peck what he may wish  
in the way of his business & give him two news-  
papers during the term of five years for the said  
One Hundred Dollars which is to be in full  
for the same

And the said Weed further agrees that he will not be  
concerned in nor connected with any estab-  
lishment for the sale or printing of books in  
the village of Rochester for the term of five years  
and the said Peck for the like consideration  
agrees on his part that he will not publish  
a newspaper in the village of Rochester for the  
like term of five years unless it be a Religious  
or Literary paper

Sherlow Weed  
Ebenezer Peck