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THE CALHOUN-PRESTON FEUD, 1836-1842 *

By ERNEST M. LANDER, JR.
Clemson College

In November 1833, the General Assembly of South Carolina elected William Campbell Preston to the United States Senate to complete the unexpired term of Stephen D. Miller, resigned. Three years later the General Assembly elected Preston to a regular six-year term. From 1833 until September 1837, Preston and the senior senator from South Carolina, John C. Calhoun, apparently worked in harmony on the major issues of the day, but their ways parted when Calhoun suddenly announced his support of the subtreasury bill espoused by President Martin Van Buren. Prior to that time Van Buren had been generally disliked in South Carolina because of his association with Andrew Jackson. Calhoun's unexpected shift provoked a relentless feud between the two South Carolina senators that continued until Preston resigned his Senate seat in November 1842, thoroughly repudiated by his constituents. The quarrel not only blighted Senator Preston's promising career, but it paralleled and contributed to the extinction of the Whig Party in South Carolina.

A Virginian by birth but a longtime resident of Columbia, South Carolina, William C. Preston was a man of good breeding and varied talents. An able lawyer, possessed of a well-rounded classical learning and skilled in oratory, he was soon widely known throughout South Carolina. Also to his credit politically were his and his brother John's marriages into prominent South Carolina families. It was Preston's work in the nullification controversy that won him a seat in the United States Senate at the age of thirty-eight. There his forensic ability immediately attracted nationwide attention. Contemporaries such as John Quincy Adams, Philip Hone, and James Buchanan praised his elocution and emotional appeal to audiences, while Rufus Wilson wrote: "Not a few claim him as the most finished orator the South has ever produced." On the other hand, Calhoun, Van Buren, and some others thought that Preston's talents were overrated. Nevertheless, Preston was a great favorite of the Senate galleries.¹

* This paper was read at a meeting of the Southern Historical Association in Durham, North Carolina, Nov. 17, 1956.

¹ Charles F. Adams, ed., *Memoirs of John Quincy Adams* . . . (12 vols., Philadelphia, 1874-1877), X, 396; Allan Nevins, ed., *The Diary of Philip Hone, 1828-1851* (2 vols., New York, 1927), II, 524-25; *Diary of Louise Penelope Davis*

the 17th. We received orders to prepare three days cooked rations and hold ourselves in readiness to march. About dark, we took the train for Lake City—arrived there about 8 o'clock next day. At 6 o'clock in the afternoon took the train for Madison. Train ran off the track—only one man hurt. While putting the cars on the track, a tree fell upon one of our lieutenants, mortally wounding him.

We arrived at Madison about 1 a. m. and left at 2 p. m. for Quitman, Ga., a distance of 26 miles across the country. The ladies in Madison were very pressing in their invitations for me to stay with them until I sufficiently recovered from my sickness to attend to my duties, but I preferred remaining with the regt., so I hobbled into an ambulance and went on to Quitman, where we arrived 24 hours after we left Madison. Quitman is a town on the A[lbany] & G[ulf] R[ail] R[oad]—plenty of young ladies and, of course, very lively. They all invited me to stay there until I got strong enough to travel. I refused. They spoke of getting up a Ball for our Regt. on Monday night. Troops are something new to them. Our Regt. is the second one they ever saw, and as for our Band, it struck them with surprise and amazement, from which I am afraid they will never recover.

I got the Surgeon to send me on in advance of the Regt. to Charleston (where the Regt. is destined). I took the A[lbany] & G[ulf] R. R. at 2 a. m. Passed some very pretty towns on the way—principal one is called Valdosta, consisting of about 3 or 4 hundred inhabitants. Arrived at Savannah at 4 o'clock p. m. Spent the night there and took the train at 7 a. m., for Charleston, at which place I arrived at 11:30 p. m. Am now waiting for the arrival of the Regiment.

(To be continued)

The first inkling of ill feeling between Calhoun and Preston appeared during the campaign of 1836. Preston was up for re-election to the Senate. It was rumored that the two senators were about to have a rupture, that Calhoun was suspicious of Preston, and that Preston was inclined to support Van Buren. Calhoun left no record of the impending rift, and Preston tried to pass it off as lightly as possible.²

Unfortunately for Preston, his character and his actions easily aroused suspicions about his motives. His friend the elderly Dr. Thomas Cooper thought him to be "too much non committal; too Van Beurenish" for people to trust. James H. Hammond's brother warned that "suspicions of [Preston's] integrity (as a Politician) have been generally awakened." Several years later Pierce Butler wrote that Preston was insincere, heartless, deceitful, and intriguing. Butler said that Preston was not a bad man and that he went to church, but "[he] is notorious all his life—for sacrificing old friends—for new allies—never does an act—political or personal—without a personal purpose."³

In September 1837, President Van Buren called Congress into special session to consider the economic ills lately befallen the nation. In describing the ensuing congressional fight, Charles M. Wiltse points out that the real division lay between those who felt that the way to economic recovery was through a national bank and those who did not. The opponents of a national bank were split between those who wished to continue Jackson's system of depository banks and those who favored the

Preston (Mrs. W. C. Preston), (MS. in South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, S. C.); Rufus R. Wilson, *Washington the Capital City* . . . (2 vols., Philadelphia, 1901), I, 294; Martin Van Buren to John Van Buren, Jan. 29, 1834, Van Buren Papers (Division of Manuscripts, Library of Congress); Diary of Benjamin F. Perry, Sept. 2, 1840 (MS. in Southern Historical Collection, Chapel Hill, N. C.); Calhoun to A. Burt, Aug. 20, 1840, J. Franklin Jameson, ed., *Correspondence of John C. Calhoun*. Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1899. Vol. II (Washington, 1900), 463-64.

² Pierce Butler to J. H. Hammond, Oct. 30, 1836, Jan. 13, 1837; Waddy Thompson to Hammond, Feb. 23, 1837; Preston to Hammond, Jan. 4, 1837, James H. Hammond Papers (Division of Manuscripts, Library of Congress); *Charleston Courier*, Dec. 1, 1837.

³ Cooper to Nicholas Biddle, May 14, 1837, Nicholas Biddle Papers (Division of Manuscripts, Library of Congress); M. C. M. Hammond to J. H. Hammond, Nov. 23, 1836, Hammond Papers; Butler to Waddy Thompson, April 23, 1841, Waddy Thompson Papers (Division of Manuscripts, Library of Congress). E. W. Johnston, a prominent Columbia lawyer, felt that Preston's greatest fault was laziness, which had mastered his ambition. Johnston held that Preston's little finger had "more capacity in it, more real ability, more wisdom than the whole bodies of a dozen Calhouns and Clays." To Hammond, March 24, 1836, Hammond Papers.

subtreasury scheme, proposed in 1834 by William Gordon of Virginia. Calhoun believed the Whig Party, supporter of a national bank, was irrevocably committed to consolidation of the national government. He in turn favored the subtreasury. To this scheme Van Buren also adhered, having come over to a state rights viewpoint in an attempt to erect a new North-South alliance that would oppose Clay and Harrison in the West.⁴ The subtreasury bill was bitterly contested and blocked twice in the House before Van Buren emerged victorious in the summer of 1840.

During the September debate on subtreasury Calhoun's and Preston's divergent positions became clearly revealed. Calhoun anticipated the division, and he likewise realized that some of the House members from South Carolina would vote against subtreasury. Once the issue was joined, Calhoun brought down upon himself the wrath of the Whigs, who had counted on his allegiance. Unworried, he wrote: "As I acted with them to put down executive usurpation on Congress, I now act with the opposite side to repel theirs on the State." He regretted, however, that Preston had not gone along with him. "I think both he and Gnl [Waddy] Thompson have acted badly, but I leave it to them and their constituents."⁵

Preston, too, foresaw the rift between Calhoun and himself over subtreasury. At the end of the special session he wrote Willie P. Mangum that he was happy that he had had no personal collision with Calhoun during the debate. However, but for Calhoun's adherence to the subtreasury plan, Preston said he would pronounce it to be the "most monstrous compound of fraud and folly ever attempted to be palmed upon a people."⁶

Preston believed that Calhoun considered Van Buren defunct and hoped to succeed him as the party leader. And Preston further stated that Calhoun's support of Van Buren "has kept him alive and protracted his existence until I fear he will live long enough to kill my colleague." For Calhoun's political calculations Preston blamed Duff Green.⁷

When the House of Representatives voted 120 to 107 to postpone action on subtreasury, only Robert Barnwell Rhett and Francis W. Pickens of the South Carolina nine-man delegation favored the measure. The issue did not provide immediate division of the South Carolina

⁴ Charles M. Wiltse, *John C. Calhoun, Nullifier, 1829-1839* (New York, 1949), pp. 344-50.

⁵ Calhoun to James Edward Calhoun, Sept. 7, 1837; Calhoun to Anna Maria Calhoun, Sept. 30, 1837, *Calhoun Correspondence*, 377-80.

⁶ To Willie P. Mangum, Oct. 4, 1837 (photostat in South Caroliniana Library).

⁷ *Ibid.*

press. At first editorials were restrained; then they became sharper. By the end of October the line was being drawn. Senator Preston's chief support came from the *Columbia Telescope*, whose editor, A. S. Johnston, was his kinsman, and from the *Charleston Courier*, a paper with commercial and Whig leanings. Senator Calhoun's ablest defender was the highly influential *Charleston Mercury*. Its lead was followed by many small weekly papers.⁸

Also in the fall of 1837 division arose among the state's other political leaders. Preston was backed by James L. Petigru, Langdon Cheves, former Governor James Hamilton, Jr., and the majority of the South Carolina delegation in Congress. Ex-Governor Robert Y. Hayne and Governor Pierce Butler seemed inclined toward Preston's position. Petigru believed the state would oppose Calhoun on subtreasury, and Dr. Thomas Cooper estimated that three-fourths of the state's businessmen quietly favored a national bank. It is little wonder that Preston was sanguine over his position. On the other hand, the *Mercury* warned: ". . . the vote of our Delegation for postponement was no unerring index of their opposition to the separation. We know facts which show that more than one who so voted is undecided."⁹

However, Preston was too cautious and slow. He advised his chief henchman, Congressman Waddy Thompson, not to take the stump. Preston said he was "earnestly inclined to preserve both political and personal relations with everybody."¹⁰ Yet, at the same time some of his supporters lashed out at Richard Crallé's paper, *The Reformer*, for criticizing Preston's anti-subtreasury stand.

For his part, Calhoun believed that the attack against *The Reformer* was indirectly aimed at him. He persuaded Crallé to take a more temperate stand, and in early November published a complete explanation of his views on subtreasury. This exposition was widely circulated throughout the state and was apparently influential in winning public support to his position.¹¹

⁸ *Charleston Mercury*, Sept. 12, 14, 20, Oct. 4-7, 24, 1837; *Charleston Courier*, Sept. 19, Nov. 22-25, 1837; *Pendleton Messenger*, Sept. 29, Nov. 3, 1837.

⁹ T. D. Jervey, *Robert R. Hayne and His Times* (New York, 1909), p. 446; Wiltse, *Calhoun, Nullifier*, p. 359; *Charleston Courier*, Nov. 15, 1837; Cooper to Biddle, Oct. 20, 1837, Biddle Papers; *Pendleton Messenger*, Nov. 3, 1837, quoting *Charleston Mercury* [n. d].

¹⁰ Preston to Thompson [Oct. or Nov.] 1837 (photostat in South Caroliniana Library).

¹¹ *The Reformer* editorial reprinted in *Charleston Mercury*, Oct. 26, 1837; Calhoun to Duff Green, Oct. 27, 1837, *Calhoun Correspondence*, 383-84; Calhoun to J. Bauskett and others, Nov. 3, 1837. This letter appeared in the *Charleston Courier*, Nov. 23, 1837, and in many other papers throughout the state.

When the state legislature convened in late November 1837, most of the South Carolina congressmen were also present, including the two senators. There was much behind-the-scenes jockeying, and the battle was quickly joined when C. G. Memminger introduced resolutions in the lower chamber favoring subtreasury and opposing a national bank. A heated debate lasted for several days, but Calhoun's partisans were so well organized that they easily overwhelmed the anti-subtreasury group. Only three members of the upper house, including former Governor James Hamilton, Jr., voted against Memminger's resolution. James L. Petigru complained: "The unanimity of the Legislature and of the people is unnatural." The Calhoun forces threw a crumb to the Preston adherents in the form of an accompanying resolution disclaiming any intent to censure the anti-subtreasury opposition. Calhoun, himself, jubilantly confided to daughter Anna Maria that "the action of our State in the Divorce [subtreasury] has made a deep impression out of the State, and will do much to rally the South on our position. It has added much to my strength, and means of saving the country."¹²

Considerably later a pro-Preston writer declared in a post-mortem that all the great powers of Calhoun's gigantic mind had been employed to vindicate his conduct and win back the state to his support. Members of the legislature had been "dragooned for their refractoriness" by a political clique that assumed to govern South Carolina. The legislators had been "persuaded and menaced, caressed and buffeted alternately," while congressmen hung around the lobbies "scenting out the path which that body might pursue."¹³

The political clique to which the editor referred was the so-called Rhett-Elmore machine, headed by Congressman Robert Barnwell Rhett, later a rabid secessionist, who had supported subtreasury in the special congressional session, and by Congressman Franklin H. Elmore, a lawyer-planter-businessman of considerable wealth and talent, who had been won over to subtreasury afterwards. Their respective brothers,

¹² Petigru to H. S. Legaré, Dec. 17, 1837, in J. P. Carson, *Life, Letters and Speeches of James Louis Petigru* . . . (Washington, 1920), p. 193; A. Patterson to Hammond, Nov. 23, 1837; F. H. Elmore to Hammond, Dec. 11, 1837, Hammond Papers; *Charleston Courier*, Dec. 12, 18, 1837; Calhoun to Anna Maria Calhoun, Dec. 24, 1837, Calhoun Papers (Clemson College Library, Clemson, S. C.).

¹³ *Columbia Southern Chronicle*, Sept. 15, 1841. As a by-product of the controversy Governor Butler, trying to steer a neutral course, was accused of being responsible for the Preston's group's "treason against Calhoun." Butler privately asserted that he did not "care one damn for them both & wd not turn on my heels to elevate or destroy them both." To Hammond, Dec. 27, 1837, Hammond Papers.

Albert and James Rhett and Benjamin T. Elmore, served in the state legislature. Also in the clan was John A. Stuart, editor of the *Charleston Mercury*. Stuart had married a sister of the Rhett's, while Albert Rhett had married a sister of the Elmore's. Besides the support of the Rhett-Elmore clique, Calhoun was backed by his relatives Patrick Noble, Francis W. Pickens, and Armistead Burt and by Joel R. Poinsett. It should not be inferred, however, that the entire group always worked in harmony.¹⁴

Shortly after Congress opened its session in December 1837, Calhoun found Preston cooperating with Henry Clay. He described his colleague's actions as "ungenerous and unpatriotic" but vowed he would not quarrel publicly with him. Calhoun believed the younger senator to be totally alienated "without any act of mine to justify it."¹⁵

The occasion of Calhoun's increased resentment grew out of his six pro-slavery resolutions introduced in the Senate, December 27. The first four were adopted, but Clay blocked the fifth, respecting slavery in the District of Columbia, with a substitute resolution that restricted the issue. Preston came to Clay's assistance on the fifth and then moved successfully to table Calhoun's sixth, concerning slavery in Texas. Preston had already advised the Senate that he intended to present resolutions for the annexation of Texas. Calhoun resented this interference. In his stead, Preston foresaw a "long and ardent struggle" in which Calhoun would see among his adversaries "the familiar faces of those gallant gentlemen who for ten years past have fought under his banner." Preston concluded that Calhoun's course had been "disastrous to his friends," and Calhoun's position was "most mournful." Mrs. Preston thought Calhoun was merely trying to steal the lead from her husband on a popular issue; that is, slavery.¹⁶

During the winter of 1838 there was comment in South Carolina that the Preston-Calhoun quarrel was embarrassing to their mutual friends and injurious to the state. F. H. Elmore and James H. Hammond unsuccessfully tried to mediate the dispute. Congressman Francis Pickens believed that Preston, banking on a Whig victory, had allied himself

¹⁴ The Rhett-Elmore clan was weakened by the deaths of Benjamin Elmore in 1841 and Albert Rhett in 1843. Furthermore, I. E. Holmes defeated James Rhett's bid for Congress in 1843.

¹⁵ Calhoun to A. Burt, Jan. 24, 1838, *Calhoun Correspondence*, 388-90.

¹⁶ Wiltse, *Calhoun, Nullifier*, pp. 371-73; Diary of Mrs. Preston, Jan. 23, [1838]; Preston to John Tyler, Dec. 30, 1837, in L. G. Tyler, *The Letters and Times of the Tylers* (2 vols., Richmond, 1884), I, 586.

with Clay and was trying to build up Clay in the South.¹⁷ At the same time Preston was embarrassed to find himself supported by a Washington paper for vice-president on a Clay ticket. Mrs. Preston, much worried, told Clay that her husband would be killed politically in South Carolina by having his name linked with Clay's on the Whig ticket. Unfortunately for Preston, this report was published by the *Mercury* just as the state legislature convened in special session, May 28, to consider matters not connected with subtreasury.¹⁸

In his address to the legislature Governor Pierce Butler did not mention subtreasury, but resolutions on the subject were immediately introduced. In essence they advocated the establishment of the subtreasury, the separation of the national government from all banks, and the notification of the state's congressional delegation of the same. The resolutions were the work of a Rhett-Elmore legislative caucus, which was engineered by Congressmen Robert B. Rhett and F. H. Elmore. They did not expect to influence Preston and Congressman Waddy Thompson, but they apparently hoped to prod Congressmen John Campbell and Hugh Swinton Legaré into line. As events turned out, the subtreasury resolutions passed both houses by large majorities. The minority, headed by Petigru and Hamilton, helplessly filed a dissenting report, especially criticising the practice of instructing congressmen.¹⁹

As the subtreasury squabble was mainly among former Nullifiers, the old Union Party group seized the opportunity to increase their political power. They threw their support to Calhoun and set up a newspaper in Columbia as a rival to the *Telescope*, the Preston organ.²⁰ Thus began the rapprochement between the Union Party and the Calhoun-Rhett-Elmore faction of the Nullifiers. It led to the election of Unionist John P. Richardson as governor in 1840.

On June 25 the subtreasury bill was defeated in the national House of Representatives for a second time, with Thompson, Legaré, and Campbell of the South Carolina delegation voting against it. A few days later

¹⁷ Pickens to Hammond, Feb. 9, 1838; Hammond to F. H. Elmore, March 22, 1838; Elmore to Hammond, April 2, 1838, Hammond Papers; J. P. Richardson to J. L. Manning, Feb. 19, 1838, Williams-Chesnut-Manning Papers (Southern Historical Collection).

¹⁸ Diary of Mrs. Preston [n. d.]; Preston to W. P. Mangum, April 7, 1838 (photostat in South Caroliniana Library); Charleston *Mercury*, May 28, 1838.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, May 28, June 5, 13, 18, 25, July 6, 10, 1838; Edgefield *Advertiser*, June 14, 1838; Columbia *Telescope*, June 2, 1838; Diary of Mrs. Preston [n. d.]; Butler to Hammond, June 16, 1838, Hammond Papers.

²⁰ John Chesnut to James Chesnut, May 30, 1838, Williams-Chesnut-Manning Papers.

many Fourth of July celebrations throughout the state witnessed numerous toasts of condemnation for the three congressmen and for Senator Preston. The latter was vilified as an "alien by birth," "a traitor to the state," and an associate of Clay's "dirty gang." He was called upon to repent or perish.²¹ This popular outcry combined with the earlier legislative resolutions signified that the junior senator's influence had been thoroughly undermined.

In an effort to rally sentiment behind Preston his Richland District friends gave a barbecue in his honor July 28. Other prominent politicians were invited but for various reasons most of them were absent. Calhoun's refusal was curt: he would not attend a dinner in honor of a man whose course he disapproved. The rally, however, seems to have generated very little pro-Preston sentiment. The *Mercury* reported that Albert Rhett drew as much applause for his subtreasury toast as did Senator Preston for his lengthy speech. Calhoun simply called the barbecue a "great failure."²²

As the fall elections approached, the South Carolina congressional fight centered on three men: Waddy Thompson, of the Greenville-Pendleton region, Hugh S. Legaré, representing the Charleston area, and John Campbell, from the Pee Dee. These three anti-subtreasury congressmen were marked for slaughter by the Calhoun-Rhett-Elmore forces, further strengthened by the announced support of Chancellor William Harper and former Governor George McDuffie.²³

Calhoun was particularly anxious to defeat Thompson, a Whig in whose congressional district he lived. He accused Thompson—with Preston—of having done "much mischief—more than they ever can repair, if they were to live 100 years." Early in July Tandy Walker of Greenville decided to run against Thompson. Calhoun was optimistic of Walker's success, especially should the Greenville *Mountaineer* assist him. Nevertheless, within a few weeks Calhoun's mood changed. He reluctantly admitted that Walker was no match for Thompson in stump speaking. Walker withdrew from the race, and Calhoun's hopes rose again when General J. N. Whitner entered the contest. Calhoun believed that Thompson's advantage would be offset by Whitner's having "the

²¹ Charleston *Mercury*, July 7, 15-20, 1838; Columbia *Telescope*, July 7, 21, 1838; Edgefield *Advertiser*, August 9, 1838; Pendleton *Messenger*, June 29, July 13, 1838.

²² Niles' *Register*, LIV (Aug. 18, 1838), 392; Charleston *Mercury*, Aug. 1, 1838; Pendleton *Messenger*, Aug. 10, 24, 1838; Calhoun to Duff Green, Aug. 10, 1838, *Calhoun Correspondence*, 398.

²³ Pendleton *Messenger*, July 27, 1838; Edgefield *Advertiser*, Aug. 30, 1838.

cause" and "the intelligence of the district" with him. As the campaign progressed, Calhoun imagined that Thompson was "giving ground daily." But much to the senator's mortification Thompson was re-elected by a large majority. Calhoun then admitted that Whitner had entered the race too late, for Thompson had visited all the militia musters "and told his own story without opposition, or contradiction."²⁴

In Charleston Joel R. Poinsett, the Rhett-Elmore machine, and Calhoun collaborated to support Isaac E. Holmes for Congress in place of Legaré. After Legaré's defeat, the *Columbia Telescope* stated that he had supported Van Buren on every issue except that of subtreasury, about which he had doubts. Calhoun had therefore "commanded his menials to execute the doubter." Calhoun later admitted that he had viewed Legaré's defeat as "almost indispensable" for the purpose of future unity within the state whenever such questions as abolition arose. Albeit, he added: "I certainly never expected that my name should ever be connected with any communication he [Poinsett] might make to his friends." Moreover, Calhoun denied any personal collaboration with the national administration.²⁵

Although Calhoun suffered defeat in his own district, after the fall elections of 1838 were over, he looked upon public opinion as fully settled on his side. He expected Clay's demise and with it the "complete prostration" of Preston, Thompson, and other Clay adherents in South Carolina. Apparently, he desired no further agitation on subtreasury in the General Assembly. His friends in the lower house felt otherwise and with near unanimity again endorsed subtreasury and condemned a national bank.²⁶

As Congress convened in December 1838, Preston began undercover work for Clay's candidacy for president on the Whig ticket in 1840. In March 1839, he dropped the mask when he addressed a Whig meeting in Philadelphia. There he called for Whig Party unity and praised Clay's virtues as a party leader. In view of previous public denials that he favored Clay, Preston's Philadelphia speech immediately evoked a tirade

²⁴ Calhoun to James Edward Calhoun, April 21, to Poinsett, July 4, to Duff Green, Aug. 10, Oct. 11, to R. B. Rhett, Sept. 13, 1838, *Calhoun Correspondence*, 395-400, 405-06; *Pendleton Messenger*, Aug. 31, 1838.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, Sept. 28, Oct. 5, 19, 26, 1838; *Columbia Telescope*, Oct. 27, 1838; Calhoun to Dr. Danall (?), Oct. 26, 1838, *Calhoun Correspondence*, 406-10. John Campbell survived the attempted purge in a close contest, but he did not break with the administration nor did he later join the Whig ranks.

²⁶ *Pendleton Messenger*, Dec. 21, 1838; Calhoun to A. Burt, Nov. 17, 1838; *Calhoun Correspondence*, 416-18.

of abuse from the opposition press in South Carolina. It was suggested that Preston's motive was purely for personal gain in event of a Clay victory.²⁷

In the midst of this buffeting came a report that Preston had advised Clay to soften a proposed speech against abolition. One editor scornfully asked: "Can any South Carolinian read without indignation that a Senator from this State could thus place the vital interests of the South in the balance with the petty plans of an office seeking clique and deliberately suggest the expediency of sacrificing our safety to the chance of abolition support?"²⁸

Preston strenuously protested against this new wave of criticism. He asserted that the Philadelphia papers had misquoted him, that he had merely told Clay the speech might be offensive to the "ultras" of both parties. Preston apparently became so anxious to soften the clamor that he headed off a small Clay rally proposed at the Charleston Commercial Convention in April lest the entire meeting be labeled a Clay conspiracy.²⁹ The uproar soon subsided, and during the summer and fall of 1839 the press was silent about Preston's support of Clay. On November 27 the editor of the Columbia *Telescope* announced that his paper was suspending publication. Thus collapsed Preston's most sedulous backer and the only newspaper in South Carolina endorsing Clay's candidacy. When the Whig Convention met in Harrisburg the following month, Preston remained in Columbia.³⁰

The South Carolina governor's race of 1840 clearly pointed up the low level to which Senator Preston's political fortunes had sagged. The chief contender for the governorship was Unionist John P. Richardson, supported by the Rhett-Elmore faction. Congressman Francis W. Pickens, currently feuding with the Rhetts, persuaded ex-Congressman James H. Hammond to enter the race. A weak third candidate in the contest was Judge David Johnson, another Union Party leader.³¹

²⁷ Preston to Henry Bowyer, Jan. 11, 1839, Preston Family Papers (Division of Manuscripts, Library of Congress); *Niles' Register*, LV (March 23, 1839), 55; *Charleston Courier*, March 29, 1839; *Charleston Mercury*, March 18, 21, 1839; *Pendleton Messenger*, March 29, 1839.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Charleston Mercury*, April 3, 4, May 7, 1839; *Charleston Courier*, April 22, 1839. Even the *Mercury* strangely commended Preston for his "patriotism" in blocking the Clay demonstration. May 11, 1839.

³⁰ *Pendleton Messenger*, Dec. 6, 1839; *Charleston Courier*, Dec. 7, 1839.

³¹ J. H. Hammond to Marcellus Hammond, Aug. 6, 1839; Pickens to J. H. Hammond, Dec. 15, 1839, Hammond Papers.

Hammond tried his best to secure Calhoun's public endorsement, but to no avail. His friend Congressman Sampson Butler declared that the Rhett-Elmore faction hated Calhoun but did not dare denounce him. He further stated that Calhoun did not agree with the Rhetts and Elmores, "but like all politicians, he dont want to break with them, if he can avoid it."³²

Actually, Calhoun regretted Hammond's entry into the race, for he preferred to support Richardson in an effort to close ranks between his wing of the Nullifiers and the Union Party completely. Such a move he believed would neutralize Preston, Thompson and their handful of followers. Consequently, Calhoun played no active part in the canvas.³³

While seeking Calhoun's support, Hammond shied away from Preston. Nevertheless, the *Charleston Mercury* circulated a report that the Clay-Preston faction had projected Hammond into the race in order to divide the Nullifiers and throw the election to Judge Johnson. This charge Hammond and Johnson both repeatedly and vigorously denied. But when the election was over and Hammond surveyed the wreckage, he attributed his defeat in part to the ill-founded rumor that he had been "bought out" by the Preston faction.³⁴

Preston took no part in the contest, although he did prefer Hammond or Judge Johnson to Richardson. He considered that latter a "mere man of straw stuffed by Calhoun," a "booby" in fact. Preston's interest was centered on the presidential contest rather than the South Carolina governor's race. He attended a Whig conclave in Baltimore, May 4, at which time he promised to work for Harrison's election. Returning to South Carolina he was soon praising the Whig candidate at every opportunity, and throughout the summer months of 1840 spoke in Georgia, New Jersey, Delaware, Virginia, and possibly elsewhere—states where his services might be productive of more good for Harrison's cause than in his home state.³⁵

As for Calhoun's course, Preston pictured Benton and him as rivals for the Democratic succession. He wrote: "They daily shake their heads

³² Butler to Hammond, Feb. 5, 1840, *ibid.*

³³ J. H. Hammond to Marcellus Hammond, April 30, 1840, *ibid.*; *Edgefield Advertiser*, March 19, 1840; Calhoun to J. H. Hammond, April 2, 1840, *Calhoun Correspondence*, 451-54.

³⁴ *Charleston Mercury*, Feb. 10, 12, 14, June 30, 1840; *Charleston Courier*, Feb. 15, 1840; *Edgefield Advertiser*, March 19, 1840; *Camden Journal*, July 4, 11, 1840; Hammond to Marcellus Hammond, Dec. 14, 1840, Hammond Papers.

³⁵ Preston to Francis Lieber, March 1, 1840 (microfilm copy in Southern Historical Collection. Original MS. in Huntington Library); *Niles' Register*, LV4II (May 9, 1840), 159; *Edgefield Advertiser*, May 21, 1840.

at each other like . . . two bulls in the same cowpen—they low—they shake their tails . . . and it is manifest that ere long—the fatal shock will take place—fatal to my colleague doubtless, who will be tossed over the fence, while Benton will remain acknowledged monarch of the hurd.” Preston believed Calhoun’s “selfish and sinister” policy had aroused the suspicions of the Van Buren administration, which watched him with “undisguised jealousy—It is the fate of a traitor to be suspected by those who enjoy his treason.” Calhoun in turn affirmed Preston’s bitter feeling against him, “and the more so, because I have neglected to notice him. He has carried this enmity so far that he does not recognize me.”³⁶

The Democratic press, which had eased its attacks against Preston the last six months of 1839, kept him under ceaseless fire during most of 1840. His efforts for Harrison were belittled; his group in South Carolina was sneeringly called a “minority so contemptible as to excite pity”; and, as already mentioned, he was charged with underhanded dealings in the gubernatorial campaign. Several times Preston was falsely accused of consorting with abolitionists; a large Preston-Thompson barbecue in Greenville was proclaimed a “noisy and vulgar display”; and the senator was ridiculed as having made an ineffective speech on that occasion, while he “not infrequently took his glass of gin water, which added to his theatrical gestures and strong language.” Preston was even accused of “unpardonable dereliction of duty” for having missed a Senate roll call on a Calhoun pro-slavery resolution in April.³⁷

In spite of victory in the national election in 1840, the Whigs lost ground in South Carolina. They carried only one congressional district—Greenville-Pendleton—and one county in another congressional district. Even these meager returns disappeared in 1842, at which time the Whigs failed to elect a single congressman and probably no more than four or five state legislators.³⁸

In December 1840, the state legislature gave Preston another verbal lashing, and some members even talked of asking for his resignation. Preston ignored the strictures as he temporarily enjoyed a little nation-

³⁶ Preston to Henry Bowyer, March 29, 1840, Preston Family Papers; Preston to Francis Lieber, March 1, 1840 (microfilm copy in Southern Historical Collection); Calhoun to A. Burt, Aug. 20, 1840, *Calhoun Correspondence*, 463-64.

³⁷ *Camden Journal*, Sept. 12, 1840; *Charleston Courier*, Sept. 4, 1840; *Charleston Mercury*, May 26, June 24, July 1, Sept. 3, 1840; *Greenville Mountaineer*, Sept. 18, 25, 1840.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, Oct. 16, 23, 1840, Oct. 21, 1842; *Yorkville Compiler*, Oct. 31, 1840; *Edgefield Advertiser*, Dec. 17, 1840.

wide publicity. His role in the Harrison campaign had earned for him consideration as a possible cabinet member. Nonetheless, he was not so favored. According to his friend Waddy Thompson, Preston, after some deliberation, asked President Harrison not to consider him, for the reason that his vote was needed to help the Whigs control the Senate. However, his excuse is difficult to believe; for Preston surely realized that his chances of re-election to the Senate in 1842 were almost nil.³⁹

In the spring of 1841 Preston was chastised by the pro-Calhoun press for the last time. It was due to his support of Clay's bank bill, an issue he had repeatedly sidestepped and which he privately acknowledged to be "very distasteful." On this issue Preston charged Calhoun with trying to stir up a "violent excitement" against him and with trying to procure a special session of the General Assembly to censure him. The movement, Preston declared, had been forestalled by President Harrison's death and by public apathy. Nevertheless, Preston was evasive whenever questioned about his position on the national bank. As the roll call was taken in the Senate, July 28, he apparently wavered at the last moment before voting "aye."⁴⁰

In September and October 1841, the *Charleston Courier* and the *Columbia Southern Chronicle*, a new Whig paper, ran a series of articles defending Preston's political actions. Politically, the senator was so feeble by that time that his enemies ignored the attempted rejuvenation. Even the Fourth of July celebrations in 1842 failed to produce the usual toasts of condemnation, and his former friend Pierce Butler called him the "deadest man" in Congress.⁴¹

³⁹ *Charleston Mercury*, Dec. 7, 23, 1840, Feb. 17, 1841; *Charleston Courier*, Dec. 2, 3, 9, 11, 1840, Jan. 29, 30, Feb. 11, 1841; *Camden Journal*, Dec. 2, 1840; *Columbia South Carolinian*, Feb. 18, 1841; *Yorkville Compiler*, Feb. 19, 1841; Waddy Thompson to John Tyler, Jan. 30, 1843, in Tyler, *Letters and Times of the Tylers*, II, 17.

⁴⁰ Preston to W. P. Mangum, May 3, 1841 (photostat in South Caroliniana Library); *Camden Journal*, May 19, Aug. 4, 1841; Calhoun to J. H. Hammond, Aug. 1, 1841, *Calhoun Correspondence*, 483-85. The *Mercury*, June 11, 1841, sarcastically named Preston "The Hon. William Circumstance Preston," while the *Courier*, same date, addressed the senior senator as "John Crisis Calhoun."

⁴¹ When Preston was given a favored seat at a presidential levee, Editor Samuel Weir remarked that this gave "great offense to the two lower joints of 'Mr. Calhoun's tail' in this State, and set them wriggling in all sorts of style. They cannot bear that any mark of distinction should be paid to their master's great eye-sore." *Columbia Southern Chronicle*, July 21, 1841; Butler to J. H. Hammond, Sept. 29, 1841, Hammond Papers. The extant correspondence of Poinsett, Hammond, and Calhoun for the 1841-1842 period shows that scarcely any prominent South Carolina politician was concerned about Preston or his actions.

During the 1841-42 session of Congress, Preston was in poor health; he considered the session protracted and profitless; and he expressed relief over his impending retirement. He broke with his old friend Hugh S. Legaré, whom he now regarded as a "base pimp," for supporting Calhoun and Van Buren. As for Calhoun, Preston informed Waddy Thompson that some of Calhoun's friends "have proposed a reconciliation between us but our respective conditions induces me to decline it positively." Thus Preston resigned his Senate seat, November 29, 1842, still much embittered against his colleague. A few days later Calhoun likewise resigned. Of all the newspapers in the state only the *Southern Chronicle* had a kindly parting word for Preston, soon to resume his law practice in Columbia.⁴²

In sum, with the South Carolina Whigs looking to Preston for leadership, his defeat on subtreasury greatly aided in the collapse of that party in his state. In fact, no Whig candidate for Congress from South Carolina was successful after the election of 1840, and the party's influence was completely dissipated after 1842. Senator Preston's undoing was partly due to his own deficiencies of character, his lack of candor in dealing with his friends and constituents, his connection with Clay's program, and his failure to act energetically against subtreasury before the meeting of the state legislature in November 1837. At that time the political balance shifted permanently and overwhelmingly against him. Preston's small clique, centered around Columbia, proved to be no match for the Rhett-Elmore-Calhoun combination, whose editorial support skilfully exploited every weakness in the Whig Party's armor. The struggle over subtreasury not only hastened the Whig's collapse in South Carolina, but it hurried up a rapprochement between the Nullifier and Unionist wings of the Democratic Party. This in turn made Calhoun's position more secure in the state and achieved one of his desired goals—political unity within South Carolina on national affairs.

⁴² Preston to Thompson, July 10, Aug. 29, 1842, Waddy Thompson Papers; *Charleston Mercury*, April 16, 1842; *Columbia Southern Chronicle*, Dec. 28, 1842.

LETTERS OF MARTHA LOGAN TO JOHN BARTRAM, 1760-1763 *

Edited by MARY BARBOT PRIOR ¹

Martha Daniell Logan was born December 29, 1704, the daughter of Robert Daniell, Landgrave and Deputy-Governor. She married George Logan, Jr., July 30, 1719. The *South Carolina Gazette* carried advertisements in November 1753 of "seeds, flower roots, and fruit stones" for sale at her house "on the Green, near Trotts point." Her "Gardners Kalender" has appeared in a number of Almanacs.²

Mrs. Logan carried on a lively exchange of letters and seeds with John Bartram, the noted botanist, who in a letter to Peter Collinson in May 1761, wrote of "the favor of a elderly widow Lady who spares no pains or cost to oblige me; her garden is her delight and she has a fine one: I was with her about 4 minutes in her company yet we contracted such a mutual correspondence that one silk bag of seed hath repast several times."³ Bartram thrice visited Charleston, contracting a close friendship with Thomas Lamboll, Dr. Alexander Garden, and Dr. Lionel Chalmers as well as with Mrs. Logan.⁴

Of early Charleston gardeners, "The first that can be recollected is Mrs. Lamboll, who, before the middle of the 18th century, improved the south west extremity of King-street, in a garden which was richly stored with flowers and other curiosities of nature in addition to all the common vegetables for family use. She was followed by Mrs. Logan and Mrs. Hopton, who cultivated

* These letters, published with the permission of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, are copied from photostats presented the Charleston Museum by Miss Emma Richardson. Only a minimum of punctuation has been supplied and "and" substituted for "&".

¹ Mrs. Granville T. Prior.

² This *Magazine*, XX, 205. Trott's Point "extended from the channel of Cooper river westwardly to King-street, embracing both sides of Hasell-street, on the south, and both sides of Wentworth-street, on the north." Joseph Johnson, *Traditions and Reminiscences*. . . . (Charleston, 1851), p. 273.

Records in the Charleston County Courthouse show that Mrs. Logan owned the south half of lot 128 and that she bought from Sarah and Richard Beresford (her sister and brother-in-law) the north half on April 3, 1770, for 900 pounds currency. Office of Mesne Conveyance, Book C-3, p. 109.

³ Bartram Papers L, 53, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, quoted in a letter to the editor from Francis D. West. Mr. West, vice-president of the John Bartram Association and a direct descendant of Bartram, was instrumental in first directing our attention to the existence of these letters.

⁴ For a notice in the *S. C. Gazette* of the visit to Charles Town in 1765 of "Mr. Bartram, his Majesty's botanist for North America," see this *Magazine*, III, 115.