

# CHAPTER III

## THE POPULARIZATION OF THE PRESIDENCY AND PARTY POLITICS

### The Elections of 1824 to 1852

Eleven additional states had joined the union by the presidential election of 1824 and by 1852 the electoral votes of the original thirteen states accounted for less than half of the total divided among 31 states. Population in the United States more than tripled in 40 years increasing from 9,638,453 in 1820 to 31,443,321 by 1860. The movement and focus of the country was westward and politics naturally reflected and reacted to this national thrust. It became important for the business and mercantile centers located on the eastern seaboard to establish transportation links and commercial ties to the heartland. The opportunities of the western frontier were equally as important to the eastern banker and the prairie settler. Politically, the new territories and states represented the potential for increasing strength or changing existing alignments. The slavery question was as much a political and economic issue as a social or moral concern to the drafters of the Missouri Compromise in 1820 and the Kansas-Nebraska Act in 1854.<sup>1</sup> During this dynamic period of growth and expansion, presidential elections and political parties were also transformed.

The popularization of the Presidency and increase in voter participation is generally associated with the three presidential campaigns of Andrew Jackson in 1824, 1828 and 1832. In 1828 Jackson, a backwoods war hero from Tennessee, did become the first President from west of Appalachian Mountains and the first from other than Virginia or Massachusetts. A strong personality with galvanizing leadership qualities he was able to accomplish this task by running as an outsider to the Washington establishment and taking advantage of the increased use of popular voting for presidential electors.<sup>2</sup> Although voter turnout had been higher in some states prior to 1824 and 1828 and voter participation reached record peaks after Jackson had stepped down from office,<sup>3</sup> the "Jacksonian era" did mark a turning point in presidential elections and American political parties.

The country had begun without national political parties in 1789 and by 1820 there was only one surviving party. As a result of the Jackson era, a system of more than one political party became a fixture in the United States. In the 1824 contest Jackson campaigned against the Congressional caucus system of nominating presidential candidates and his efforts, along with others including Baltimore journalist Hezekiah Niles,<sup>4</sup> doomed that method of presidential selection. In its place arose the national party convention which had its birthplace in Maryland.<sup>5</sup> Baltimore was the nation's convention city during this period hosting the first national convention on September 26, 1831,<sup>6</sup> the only National Republican conclave in December 1831, the first six Democratic Conventions from 1832 to 1852 and two of the four Whig National Conventions (1844 and 1852).