

The party's former Congressional leader, Henry Clay, who felt the 1840 nomination should have been his, finally received his chance for the nation's highest office.

The Democrats also assembled on Baltimore several weeks later for their first open convention. Former President Van Buren was denied nomination although he received a majority of the votes on the first of the nine ballots taken before any candidate received the required two-thirds vote for nomination.⁵² On the last ballot the former Governor of Tennessee, James K. Polk, achieved nomination as a compromise candidate.

With the Whigs divided and having abandoned their own incumbent, the Democrats recaptured the White House with Polk parlaying a slim 39,490 national popular vote plurality into a larger electoral college victory (170-105). Maryland held to the Whig column in 1844 with Clay winning 35,984 to 32,676. Clay, who had married the daughter of a prominent Washington County resident, was popular and well known in the state carrying all but three of Maryland's 21 subdivisions. Allegany County joined Baltimore City and County in the Democratic column. The anti-slavery Liberty party which prevented a national majority in the popular voting did not run a slate of electors in Maryland.

1844 ELECTION SUMMARY

Candidate (Party)	Popular Vote		Electoral Vote	
	Md.	U.S.	Md.	U.S.
Henry Clay (W)	35,984	1,300,004	8	105
James K. Polk (D)	32,676	1,339,494		170

1848

The Polk administration has been favorably received in retrospect but the hard working President was not popular with the political leaders of his day.⁵³ The Democratic administration had lowered tariffs and created a stable Federal treasury but its successes in westward expansion created as many problems as benefits by rekindling the debates over slavery and highlighting a north-south political division within the country. With the major parties seeking the middle ground, the anti-slavery forces rallied behind the "Free Soil Party" which opposed the extension of slavery into any new territory or state.⁵⁴

The Democrats, meeting for the fifth consecutive time in Baltimore, nominated Senator Lewis Cass of Michigan for President who had made the proposal in Congress that the settlers of each territory should be allowed to decide on the prohibition or tolerance of slavery in their respective territories. This middle ground appeared safe to many politicians as it rested on American ideals of self-determination and self-government but the practical politics and morality of the slavery issue would not disappear. Reflecting the difficulty of the issue was the lack of representation from New York to the Democratic convention because two opposing factions refused any effort at compromise.⁵⁵