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Chase Tate

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Tate: The Broad River Group of Georgia: Transforming the Pioneering Fro

## **The Broad River Group of Georgia: Transforming the Pioneering Frontier of Huntsville, Alabama**

Chase Tate

“It is not merely a rude frontier, thinly peopled with hunters and herdsmen, the mere precursors of the tillers of the earth, but it is the tillers of the earth themselves, who bring with them the pleasures of social life, the arts of industry, the abundant means of easy and comfortable subsistence.”

This triumphant rhetoric was a portion of a July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1811, speech delivered by the up and coming lawyer John Williams Walker, one of the most successful and influential men in the first few decades of settlement in Huntsville, Alabama. Walker belonged to a group of families that shifted west to North Alabama from the Broad River area of Georgia to reap the benefits of the fertile Tennessee Valley. There was no single group to have so great an impact on Huntsville than this “Georgia Faction”.<sup>1</sup>

The Broad River group was the primary catalyst in the transformation of the pioneering frontier in Huntsville, resulting in its development into the major economic and political center that it became within the first three decades of the nineteenth century. Through close inspection of a series of chronologically consecutive events, the influence and effect of the Broad River group on Huntsville and the state will be made clear. This entity essentially affected the establishment of the city of Huntsville, among others, produced the financial means and atmosphere by which the economy saw a major boom and subsequent bust, and effectively forced the creation a two party political system in the state through controversy over their personal and banking practices.

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<sup>1</sup> Dupre, Daniel. *Transforming the Cotton Frontier: Madison County, Alabama, 1800-1840*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997. 25.; Shearer, Benjamin. *The United States: Alabama to Kentucky*. Greenwood Publishing Group, 2004. 39.

The Broad River group had a history of influence and affluence in their home state of Georgia that they brought with them to Huntsville in 1809. The group consisted of a number of wealthy families that all lived in and essentially dominated Petersburg, Georgia. They were the elite of the town, and they were all closely associated with each other by way of business transactions, intermarriage, and political unity. The key members of the group were Leroy Pope, Thomas and William Bibb, John Williams Walker, Charles Tait, Robert Thompson, William Watkins, James Manning, and Peyton Cox. Many of the bonds connecting the group ran through Leroy Pope in some fashion or another. Likewise, it was Pope who was said to be the patriarch of the group, referred to by some in Petersburg as the “Royal Family”. This name was so pervasive that group member John Williams Walker even referred to it as such in a letter to his friend, Larkin Newby.<sup>2</sup>

The fact that this collection of families either voluntarily or involuntarily co-opted that name (the Royal Family) portrays exactly how much power they either possessed in the town or at least were perceived to have possessed. And in many ways, they operated as if royalty, making alliances through marriage and trade to strengthen ties and increase economic and political success. One of the key members of the group, the aforementioned John Williams Walker, married Matilda Pope, the daughter of Leroy Pope, the group’s leader and patriarch. However, it seems that his desire to marry

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<sup>2</sup> Rogers, William, and Robert Ward, Leah Atkins, and Wayne Flynt. *Alabama: the History of a Deep South State*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2010. 61.; Taylor, Judge Thomas Jones. *A History of Madison County and Incidentally of North Alabama, 1732-1840*. University: Confederate Publishing Company, 1976. 30.; Dupre, Daniel. *Transforming the Cotton Frontier: Madison County, Alabama, 1800-1840*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997. 30.

Pope's daughter may not have been as much about her as the bond that was forged between he and his new father-in-law. While this is said with slight reservation, Walker himself did say in a letter to a friend that, "I shall get me a wife from the concern of Pope & Watkins." So either girl seems to have been sufficient so long as he made a familial bond with men of such clout as Pope and his partner Watkins. A similar alliance was forged when Thomas Percy, a former schoolmate of Walker's at Princeton, moved to Huntsville and married another of Pope's daughters, forging a strong alliance with Pope, Walker, and the Broad River group. He later used that alliance to his advantage in his acquirement of a seat on the board of directors for the Planter's and Merchant's Bank.<sup>3</sup> This is the weight which a relationship with this group carried.

In any case, Pope and his Broad River group's reputation as heavy handed pushers and movers in Georgia preceded them, and they brought all of their political, social, and economic clout to Huntsville with the land sales of recently ceded Native American territories in the first and second decades of the nineteenth century. Word had spread of the fertile land in the Great Bend of the Tennessee River, and this caught the attention of Pope and his neighbors after he and Thomas Bibb journeyed through the territory in route to New Orleans. Between the possibilities of high cotton profits in the Tennessee Valley, the near exhaustion of their own soil with of the growth of tobacco in Petersburg, and the appearance of a strong new trade competitor in Augusta, Pope and his neighbors made the decision to shift their economic pursuits and focus to

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<sup>3</sup> John Williams Walker to Larkin Newby, April 1, 1804, in Larkin Newby Papers, DU.; Dupre, Daniel. *Transforming the Cotton Frontier: Madison County, Alabama, 1800-1840*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997. 54.

Alabama. It is worth noting that the Broad River group's absence in Petersburg was felt so deeply upon their Exodus that it resulted in a power vacuum and economic slump that the town never recovered from, ultimately losing all economic vitality in a matter of decades. This again speaks to the political power and economic worth that Pope and his neighbors' possessed, which was then transferred to Huntsville where it would be wielded just as effectively.<sup>4</sup>

The Broad River group had a hand in every aspect of Huntsville politics and economics after the land sale. Immediately, their presence was felt as just ten men purchased nearly half of the Huntsville area land sold at public auction in 1809, with half of those men being from the Broad River region of Georgia. Pope and his group bought some of the best lands available, speculating on the high prices of cotton and land in the region. They were certainly capable as some of the wealthiest families to move to the Tennessee Valley, with Pope being the absolute wealthiest resident. Pope himself bought a large amount of spring acreage around Hunt's Spring, as it was then called for the squatter, John Hunt, who originally settled there and came to be known as the grandfather of the town. Pope joined forces with two other men, William Anderson and James Jackson of the Nashville group of speculators, and they purchased the land surrounding the spring at the unbelievably high rate of \$23 an acre, speculating of course that they could resale for a profit. In addition to his joint purchase, Leroy Pope acquired 1,120 acres around and beyond the spring.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Dupre, Daniel. *Transforming the Cotton Frontier: Madison County, Alabama, 1800-1840*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997. 28-29.

<sup>5</sup> Taylor, Judge Thomas Jones. *A History of Madison County and Incidentally of North Alabama, 1732-1840*. University: Confederate Publishing Company, 1976. 31.; Dupre, Daniel. *Transforming the Cotton*

Pope's intention with his purchases was to lay out a town to be the county seat and commercial center of the region. And he did just that through his newfound connections. The territorial legislature appointed five men on a commission to determine the county seat. Among those five men were William Dickson and Edward Ward, both of whom were part of the Nashville group of speculators. Through his alliance with the Nashville group, Pope was able to influence the choice of location for the seat along with his new partners, Anderson and Jackson. In addition, he had the new town named Twickenham in the territorial legislature in 1809 after the name of the home of the English poet Alexander Pope, who some say Leroy Pope claimed as a relative. Hunt's Spring, which they had all invested heavily in, would be the location of the county seat and the center of the new town. And of course, Pope also owned many of the new town plots due to his additional purchases. He and his new partners sold the commissioners the northern section of town plots for no profit, on which the town's public buildings would be constructed. The rest of the town plots they kept to sell for a handsome profit, making good on their speculative efforts. This political, speculative, and financial maneuvering of Leroy Pope to lay out Huntsville and cause it to be made the county seat earned him the reputation early on as the father of the town.<sup>6</sup>

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*Frontier: Madison County, Alabama, 1800-1840*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997. 29.; *Alabama: The Sesquicentennial of Statehood*. Washington D.C.: Library of Congress, 1996. 19.

<sup>6</sup> Taylor, Judge Thomas Jones. *A History of Madison County and Incidentally of North Alabama, 1732-1840*. University: Confederate Publishing Company, 1976. 31-34.; Record, James. *A Dream Come True*. Huntsville: John Hicklin Printing Company, 1970. 30-36.; Betts, Brigadier General E.C. *Early History of Huntsville, Alabama*. Huntsville: Minuteman Press, 1998. 18-30.

In a variety of ways, the different aspects of the land sales of 1809 reveal the beginnings of an economic and political evolution in Huntsville at the hands of Pope and his Broad River Group. Economically, the region was flooded with wealthy planters and merchants including several of the men in the Broad River Group, bringing with them commercial and agrarian production and potential. Pope and his partners' establishment of Twickenham (later Huntsville) as the county seat of Madison was of equal importance for the economic success of the region. This provided a politically stable and organized economic center for local market trade and commerce and also offered area planters and merchants a central waterway by which they could ship their cotton and merchandise down the Tennessee to larger markets, all of which made the land and city that much more successful. That new economic and political base was also essential for the work of the area's newest professional men such as the Broad River group's doctors and lawyers, one of which was Leroy Pope's future son in law, John Williams Walker, who only followed him to Alabama because of his close ties to Pope and his daughter. Pope's alliances and ties to Georgian and national legislators also assisted in the economic success of the region but for reasons which will be discussed in a later section of this study. For now, let it simply be stated that Leroy Pope and his "Royal Family" provided for the county the means and direction for political and economic stability and subsequent growth in the structuring and political leadership of the new town. Colonel E.C. Betts best described the new town leader and his effect on the community in his book about Huntsville's early history when stating that "the moving spirit and the dominant influence of nearly all positive in the life of the settlement was Leroy Pope."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> John Williams Walker. Letter to Larkin Newby. April 1, 1804. Larkin

The Broad River Group's entry into Madison County through the land sales of 1809 also marked the beginning of a societal evolution in its creation of social stress and disagreement within the community. The initiation of that social strain came upon the massive land purchases of speculators and planters like Pope and his Georgia neighbors. Prior to Pope, the region was home to a multitude of squatters, most of whom were by no means wealthy. They were simple subsistence farmers (most of them) that came in search of new frontier possibilities and the opportunity to control their own destiny and forge their own success out of the wilderness. With one of the two largest slaveowners, Littleberry Adams, holding no more than about twenty slaves prior to the land sales, massive cotton production was not a reality. Rather, a simple trade and bartering economy existed, made up of settlers still struggling to clear the land under their own power with the occasional assistance of a slave or two.<sup>8</sup>

This pioneering struggle was quite different from the efforts exhibited by Pope and company upon their entry into the area. They relied much more heavily on slave labor and monetary wealth to build their success in Madison County, and in as much, they established the foundations of a plantation society that was at odds with the yeomen class of farmers. It must be noted here that while the focus of this work and others like it is clearly centered on the white men of power, the exclusion of the perspective of women and slaves is not by choice. Just as the slaves were robbed of their freedom, so are we

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Newby Papers, DU.; Dupre, Daniel. *Transforming the Cotton Frontier: Madison County, Alabama, 1800-1840*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997. 29-30.; Betts, Brigadier General E.C. *Early History of Huntsville, Alabama*. Huntsville: Minuteman Press, 1998. 29.

<sup>8</sup> Dupre, Daniel. *Transforming the Cotton Frontier: Madison County, Alabama, 1800-1840*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997. 21.



subsequently robbed of their voices. Despite this, many of their deeds are well known and often recorded, if only we take the time to read between the lines of history and historical studies such as this. Upon closer inspection into the lives of the great political, economic, and social pushers and movers like Leroy Pope and the Broad River group, the lives of the slaves can be seen. They made up the workforce that cleared the land, planted the seed, and collected the harvest. The success of Huntsville's elite was, more often than not, literally on the backs of slaves. Furthermore, many of the great estates and commercial structures of Huntsville and the surrounding area were constructed with the labor of slaves and made with bricks formed by the hands of the slaves. Behind the economic success pushed by agriculture and trade was often the toil of the slave, clearing the trees across the once untamed wilderness and reaping the harvest for the benefit of his or her owner. And while the slave population of Madison County was sparse in the squatter days of John Hunt, it quickly doubled time and again with the augment of such wealthy planters and traders as Leroy Pope and company.

The influx of new settlers, planters, and elite merchants like Pope with his large slave holding posed a threat to that life and the squatter's future in the area by blocking them out of the sale of the very land that they had settled and cleared for the possibility of creating a prosperous life for themselves and their families. Many of the squatters, whose families were already well established on the land, had to give up their fields and homes because they could not compete at auction with the much wealthier planters, merchants, and speculators. That was, of course, if they could even get to the auction as it was held in Nashville. This location was notably convenient for the many speculative groups that participated and effectively pushed the squatters and many small farming settlers out. Thomas Freeman had something to do with this, as he, in his directorship of the

land office, suggested to Albert Gallatin that it be located in Nashville so as to be far enough away from Hunt's Spring to ensure an orderly auction free of squatter's bids to keep the prices low. For some squatters, the distance to the land office prevented their ambition of owning their land. For others, it was the high prices driven by wealthy, speculators, planters, and the like. The latter occurred when Leroy Pope and his partners pushed John Hunt out of the area of the spring on which his cabin sat. While Pope and others brought economic and political advancement and opportunity, they simultaneously created class conflict as they were essentially a threat to the squatter and his financially limited subsistence lifestyle. Only 34 percent of the original squatters managed to win the bid and begin payment to own land in Madison County by the end of 1809. The wealthy newcomers and speculators became the enemy of many when they dashed the work and dreams of many squatters upon driving up the prices of land to levels which the squatters couldn't afford.<sup>9</sup>

That early class conflict along with newly developed social stratification laid the first steps to the creation of a two party system political system in Huntsville. The presence of Pope and his "Royal Family," along with a flood of other newly arrived settlers, planters, merchants, lawyers, and doctors, effectively stratified the population in Madison County. Where there was little social stratification prior to the land sales, the emerging differences in social status of the county's citizenry became painfully obvious. The

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<sup>9</sup> Dupre, Daniel. *Transforming the Cotton Frontier: Madison County, Alabama, 1800-1840*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997. 12-13, 29.; Taylor, Judge Thomas Jones. *A History of Madison County and Incidentally of North Alabama, 1732-1840*. University: Confederate Publishing Company, 1976. 39.; Roberts, Francis. "Background and Formative Period in the Great Bend and Madison County". Dissertation. 234-235.

situation was adequately described as early as 1811 by John Williams Walker in the opening quote of this paper. In his July 4<sup>th</sup> speech, Walker made mention of the progress that had occurred with the entrance of the opulent and cultured citizens such as himself and his Broad River associates. This assumes that previous settlers, or the squatters, were of a less cultured and basically less civilized and mannered social status living on a “rude frontier”. That arrogance was the subject of many in the years to follow, being a key topic for the criticism of Leroy Pope and his allies. The group’s own rhetoric and lifestyle created an “us versus them” mentality among many of the citizens of lesser means in the county. This perceived arrogance would become fodder for future political debates and division. According to sources, Leroy and his close friend and fellow Georgian Thomas Bibb were said to have wheeled around town in four-wheeled carriages, leaving out of their finely built brick mansions. Pope had a fine estate built on the highest hill overlooking the town which still stands today, commanding a geographical location above the downtown area just as he commanded social superiority over his fellow citizens. There, he entertained such guests as General Andrew Jackson and company. As stated by scholar Daniel Dupre, Huntsville was rapidly developing into a plantation society of planter and merchant elite, with an ever-widening cultural rift between the top of the social order and the yeoman farmer.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Dupre, Daniel. *Transforming the Cotton Frontier: Madison County, Alabama, 1800-1840*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997. 11-12, 35-37.; Roberts, Francis. “Background and Formative Period in the Great Bend and Madison County”. Dissertation. 234-235.; Anne Royall. *Letters from Alabama*. Washington, 1830. 244-245. Record, James. *A Dream Come True*. Huntsville: John Hicklin Printing Company, 1970. 48.

The debate over the new town name displays some of the tension that was building as a result of the new social stratification. As previously stated, Leroy Pope managed to have the town named Twickenham by the appointed commissioners for the territorial legislature. However, the original squatters and settlers to the area wanted to serve justice for the sake of the downtrodden John Hunt, who was unable to purchase either his original homestead, which Pope bought at a premium, or another parcel of land in the county. Adding insult to injury, Hunt had even begun paying payments on two sections of land at the spring, but it was recorded that Pope swooped in and took over those payments and the land. As a result, Hunt had to move on with the burden of finding a means to provide for his family of eight in addition to his five slaves. To honor Hunt for his original settlement in what was then called Hunt's Spring and take a shot at the all-too-powerful moneyed aristocracy that was so quickly established on former squatters' lands, many of the townspeople urged a name change from Twickenham to Huntsville. And on November 25<sup>th</sup>, 1811, the Mississippi Territorial Legislature granted that change. The division of the county had begun with a social conflict, but it would progress rather quickly into the political realm and create a rift between the interests of the planter and merchant elite and smaller subsistence farmers along with others of lesser social status. The settler had different social values than the speculator. The speculator pushed the growth of the market economy for the sake of increased economic opportunity for profit, while in stark contrast, the settler often just sought a piece of land by which he could support he and his family. These divisions were the early foundations laid by the coming of Huntsville's social elite led by Leroy Pope and his

associates that would culminate in the development of a two-party political system in Huntsville and Alabama.<sup>11</sup>

The next major event with associated with the Broad River group was one that transformed Huntsville, Madison County, and the state. This one event had wide reaching implications that later brought Huntsville to its highest point of economic success only to give falter and nearly lead the town to the brink of devastation. It was the chartering of the Planter's and Merchant's Bank in Huntsville. It would be the first chartered bank in the state. And not surprisingly, this next step in the economic progression of Huntsville came with the efforts of Leroy Pope. Pope, through his connection to the United States Secretary of the Treasury, William Crawford, had the bank granted a charter by the Mississippi Territorial Legislature on December 11<sup>th</sup>, 1816. This opportunity came on the heels of renewed economic growth and activity in Huntsville and the whole cotton frontier following the conclusion of the War of 1812 and other European hostilities. This growth realized a steep climb of cotton prices and land prices to match. And with the anticipation of another federal land sale in 1818, Crawford permitted the opening of the Planter's and Merchant's Bank. Certainly, the intent was for the bank to facilitate buyers for land sales. Simultaneously, the bank would inject its own notes of currency to facilitate other trade and commerce in regular town and regional activity.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Betts, Brigadier General E.C. *Early History of Huntsville, Alabama*. Huntsville: Minuteman Press, 1998. 32.; Dupre, Daniel. *Transforming the Cotton Frontier: Madison County, Alabama, 1800-1840*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997. 37. Record, James. *A Dream Come True*. Huntsville: John Hicklin Printing Company, 1970. 37.

<sup>12</sup> Brewer, Willis. *Alabama, Her History, Resources, War Record and Public Men*. Spartanburg: The Reprint Company, Publishers, 1988. 347.; Dupre, Daniel. *Transforming the Cotton Frontier: Madison County*,

At the helm of the Planters and Merchants Bank were the Broad River group and its allies. Leroy Pope was the president from the moment the bank initiated operation on October 17<sup>th</sup>, 1817. And many of the bank's directors were his fellow natives of Petersburg, Georgia, while the rest of the list was a who's who of power and wealth in North Alabama. The board of director's consisted of Pope, his sons-in-law John Williams Walker and Thomas Percy, Broad River neighbors Thomas Bibb and James Manning, doctors David Moore, Thomas Fearn and Henry Chambers, new business partners of Pope, John Hickman and Jesse Searcy, and receiver and register of the Huntsville Federal Land Office John Brahan and John Read.<sup>13</sup>

Pope utilized his Broad River group connections in his opening of the bank, as Crawford was yet another Georgia neighbor of the now prominent Huntsville citizen. Crawford was a key national connection to the group that empowered the bank to operate with as much vigor as it did with its lending practices in the Tennessee Valley. And its lending practices are the key to its great impact on Huntsville and North Alabama.<sup>14</sup>

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*Alabama, 1800-1840*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997. 40.

<sup>13</sup> Dupre, Daniel. *Transforming the Cotton Frontier: Madison County, Alabama, 1800-1840*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997. 76,81.; Betts, Brigadier General E.C. *Early History of Huntsville, Alabama*. Huntsville: Minuteman Press, 1998. 40.

<sup>14</sup> Betts, Brigadier General E.C. *Early History of Huntsville, Alabama*. Huntsville: Minuteman Press, 1998. 35.; Dupre, Daniel. *Transforming the Cotton Frontier: Madison County, Alabama, 1800-1840*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997. 84.; Rogers, William, and Robert Ward, Leah Atkins, and Wayne Flynt. *Alabama: the History of a Deep South State*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2010. 61.

The greatest benefit of Pope's relationship to Crawford was Crawford's subsequent choice of the Planters and Merchants Bank as a depository of federal funds the year of its opening. The reasoning for the choice of the North Alabama bank was two-fold. As stated, Huntsville's market economy and land sales were soaring. By 1815, the end of the War of 1812, many international cotton markets and trade routes out of the U.S. were reopened, allowing for booming cotton prices here and throughout the various American markets full of cotton. And the renewed spike in cotton value sent interest in land speculation and planting sky high. That upward tick continued until early in 1819, when the economy collapsed. But in 1816, Crawford granted the charter for Pope's bank and later placed millions in it for the use of area planters, speculators, and the like to borrow from the bank. That money was borrowed only to turn around and pay the federal government for land purchased in the federal land office, then located in Huntsville. Crawford saw it as an opportunity for the federal government to make good on land sales while Pope saw it as an opportunity for he and his bank directors to make good on profits through their banking practices. And they certainly did make good on those practices in the bank's second year of operation.<sup>15</sup>

1818 was a monumental year in the life of Huntsville, and like the year 1809, the city saw exponential expansion due to federal land sales. The price of cotton was at an all time high along with land value that naturally followed the cotton curve. From 1809 to 1817, the average price of land was around two

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<sup>15</sup> Betts, Brigadier General E.C. *Early History of Huntsville, Alabama*. Huntsville: Minuteman Press, 1998. 38-39,42.; Taylor, Judge Thomas Jones. *A History of Madison County and Incidentally of North Alabama, 1732-1840*. University: Confederate Publishing Company, 1976. 39.

dollars an acre. But in 1818, that shot up to an average of seven dollars and fifty cents an acre. This alone reflects the increased interest in land purchases in Huntsville and the surrounding Tennessee Valley. The cotton value that steered the price of land was sitting somewhere around twenty three cents a pound by 1818. But cotton value wasn't the only attraction for purchasers of large land tracts. While cotton was the backbone of the land value spike, many land speculators bought up massive tracts for the sole purpose of profit on resale to planters and merchants, just as Pope and the many land speculation companies had done in 1809. Many sought to replicate Pope's success in the sale of town plots at other newly established towns. Pope himself joined some Broad River partners and others in that land speculation for the settling of a town when the Cypress Land Company was formed before the land sale of 1818. The group bought 5,515 acres in Muscle Shoals for \$85,235, which group member John Coffee then surveyed in his official capacity as land surveyor for the federal land office.<sup>16</sup>

The Broad River group and the rest of the upper echelon of Huntsville had created a network of associations with each other based on individual wealth and power that they could then utilize corporately for the realization of greater wealth and control in the Huntsville and North Alabama. Even with Andrew Jackson's advice to John Coffee to stay independent of these groups and sell his knowledge of the land, Coffee was sucked in by the powerful men and possibility of serious profits. This is a fine example of the phrase, "money talks." After they purchased that land in Muscle Shoals and had it

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<sup>16</sup> Dupre, Daniel. *Transforming the Cotton Frontier: Madison County, Alabama, 1800-1840*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997. 43-45.; Taylor, Judge Thomas Jones. *A History of Madison County and Incidentally of North Alabama, 1732-1840*. University: Confederate Publishing Company, 1976. 45.



surveyed, they plotted out the town of Florence and opened up sale of the town lots on July 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1818. The value of land in the Tennessee Valley was so valuable at the time, these town lots attracted such national figures as former President James Madison, future President Andrew Jackson and many others. Between mercantile firms who sought centrally located shop and office sites, planters who sought downtown space for town homes, and prominent men such as the aforementioned presidents who sought profit through speculation, 400 town lots sold for \$280,891.<sup>17</sup>

The Cypress Land Company, made up of men such as Pope and Coffee, more than tripled their money immediately. Of course, the heavy volume of buyers of such prominence was also due in part to their connections nationally and regionally through which they pushed their agenda, which was the sale of the land. It is beyond doubt that figures such as Coffee bent the ears of Jackson and the like to express the profitable possibilities of the land for sale in the new town of Florence.

In addition to owning, organizing, and selling half of the town of Huntsville through wealth and political/business alliances, Leroy Pope and his Broad River group also tested the waters of the shipping industry, assisting in the transport of much of the town's economic goods. Pope, along with Broad River ally, Dr. Thomas Fearn, joined with a few others in chartering the Indian Creek Navigation Company in 1812.<sup>18</sup> Through their efforts, the commercial shipping of goods to markets outside of Huntsville was made easier and more efficient. They created a canal out of the Indian Creek which began

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<sup>17</sup> Dupre, Daniel. *Transforming the Cotton Frontier: Madison County, Alabama, 1800-1840*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997. 43-45.

<sup>18</sup> Taylor, Judge Thomas Jones. *A History of Madison County and Incidentally of North Alabama, 1732-1840*. University: Confederate Publishing Company, 1976. 60.

at Hunt's Spring and eventually found its way out to Triana, where the creek met with the Tennessee River. The end result was a much more navigable waterway by which Madison County farmers and merchants could ship and receive goods directly from the local market in downtown Huntsville. This gave Huntsville a major advantage over the towns surrounding in the rest of the county. Not only did it make shipping of cotton and other crops easier and, more importantly, cheaper for the farmers and merchants due to the close proximity of a water route, but it also attracted new investors and businessmen to Huntsville for the promising new local market that was quickly developing downtown. In essence, Leroy Pope had assisted in the development of a strong local market where one had not previously been. It was yet another push and boost for Huntsville's economy initiated by Leroy Pope and his Broad River allies.

The judicial and political realms were not immune to the influences of the Broad River group either, as they were quite involved with such matters in the city and state. Many important judicial matters were being heard and acted upon by Leroy Pope and company. The Broad River group provided at least two justices of the peace and quorum, Leroy Pope and Thomas Bibb. But Pope's Nashville associates William Dickson, Edward Ward, and David Moore served as well in that capacity. This position allotted Pope and his allies much more authority than the lesser justices of the peace. While most of the local justices of the peace were middling farmers who settled small personal disputes, the justices of the peace and quorum were the wealthier elite who settled more substantial and impactful matters. Author Daniel Dupre reports that of the forty-nine justices of the peace that appear on the 1815 tax list, twelve owned no slaves while the other thirty-seven owned less than twenty, with only one exception. While they were not poor, they were

clearly not in the same class as Pope. Indeed there was a slave population of about 4,200 by 1816, and these justices of the peace owned only a small portion of that group. In contrast, Leroy Pope and the other justices of the peace and quorum were the elite of Huntsville and Madison County, each owning vast tracts of land and large numbers of slaves. Pope himself owned more than one hundred slaves. Chosen to serve from January of 1810 until 1820, Pope and his fellow justices of the peace and quorum settled land disputes, answered questions of mill and dam placement, determined slave ownership, and decided on mercantile contracts.<sup>19</sup>

This position, for obvious reasons, was one of great responsibility and gave Pope and his allies' great control over the city of Huntsville and surrounding Madison County. Mill placement and merchant contracts were vastly important for the success of the city and even more so its planter/merchant classes. And the dichotomy of the different justice positions reflects very well the dichotomy that was rapidly developing socially and economically in the town. The yeomen farmer class that had dominated the region prior to Pope and company's entry were still a major force within the population, and they still operated on a local level as they had done before. However, Leroy Pope, his Broad River Group, and others of the elite planter class had arrived and developed an overarching social, political, and economic system in Huntsville and Madison County that went beyond the scope and control of the former isolated settlement of John Hunt and the early settlers. Pope and his elite associates linked the new town to the greater territory and the country economically, politically, and socially. It was the definition of progress and the

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<sup>19</sup> Dupre, Daniel. *Transforming the Cotton Frontier: Madison County, Alabama, 1800-1840*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997. 35-36.

transformation of a rude frontier into a capitalist market economy.

Beyond the service of Pope and Moore as justices of the peace and quorum, the Broad River group was well represented in the area of law and justice. This was due to the number of lawyers that were either a part of the group or aligned with the group politically, financially, and socially. The most prominent of this bunch was undoubtedly the young John Williams Walker, who made the most of the thriving new city. He studied law at Princeton and then began practicing in Petersburg, Georgia. But soon after, Leroy Pope and his Broad River partners, including Walker, moved to Huntsville where Walker bought a town lot and opened a law office. Like Pope, he took part in the speculative efforts of the Broad River group, buying land in and around Huntsville in addition to town lots in newly established Florence.<sup>20</sup>

Also like his father-in-law, John Williams Walker became very involved and influential in local and state political matters. As early as 1810, Walker was nominated by the Broad River group for a position in the Mississippi Territorial Legislature along with Louis Winston and Peter Perkins, the latter a member of the Nashville group who by this time had aligned himself with the Georgia faction. But unlike future endeavors of the Broad River group, two of their nominees did not make the cut, including Walker. Their loss was not representative of the next decade, however, which granted Walker and his associates' great political success.

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<sup>20</sup> Brewer, Willis. *Alabama, Her History, Resources, War Record and Public Men*. Spartanburg: The Reprint Company, Publishers, 1988. 353.; Dupre, Daniel. *Transforming the Cotton Frontier: Madison County, Alabama, 1800-1840*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997. 45.

But the loss did foreshadow the political division that was slowing brewing in Huntsville.<sup>21</sup>

Just as the dichotomy of justices represented the social rift that was developing, so did this election reveal the same two divided groups. Opposing the Broad River group and using Pope's choice of Twickenham as the town name against him were Hugh McVay and Gabriel Moore. Moore was a new arrival, not aligned with either the powerful Nashville or Broad River groups while McVay was one of the original settlers in Huntsville who, like John Hunt, had squatted on the federal lands with hopes of one day owning it. These two men were both elected with Perkins to represent the county. McVay and Moore used the Broad River group's power grab in the area and Leroy Pope's name change of the town to vault them to election by the majority of yeomen farmer population who certainly held resentment for the new wealthy elite that barged into the area, taking their land and now the name of their settlement. And McVay and Moore pushed for retribution as the county's delegation, seeing the issue of the name brought forth and the city renamed Huntsville after John Hunt. This was an attempt to restore the original balance of power that was lost when the wealthy planters, merchants, and speculators, led by Leroy Pope, moved into Madison County. However, it was no more than a jab at the side of the powerful Broad River group and their elite alliances in the city. Pope and his associates would run the town for the next decade while the social stratification continued and the subsequent tension built.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Dupre, Daniel. *Transforming the Cotton Frontier: Madison County, Alabama, 1800-1840*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997. 37.

<sup>22</sup> Dupre, Daniel. *Transforming the Cotton Frontier: Madison County, Alabama, 1800-1840*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997. 37-38.; Betts, Brigadier General E.C. *Early History of Huntsville, Alabama*. Huntsville: Minuteman Press, 1998. 32.;

Walker went on to lead the regional efforts to push Alabama to statehood by 1819. He did his part in initiating this process in the year prior when he sent correspondence to his close friend and Broad River ally, Charles Tait, a Georgia senator. In this correspondence, Walker urged Tait to request that the Alabama territory be reviewed for entry into the Union as a state. And with those pleas, Walker sent information collected by way of a census to accompany the effort, revealing to Congress the population and economic vitality of the territory. This bid for statehood was a successful one, as thirty delegates from twenty counties were meeting in the summer of 1819 to draft a state constitution.<sup>23</sup>

The Broad River group reigned supreme in their representation at this event which shaped the state and displayed Huntsville's place therein. Huntsville and Madison County provided the most delegates with eight present. Huntsville also provided the location for deliberation in what is now known as Constitution Village. As for the Broad River group, Henry Chambers, John Williams Walker, John Taylor, and Thomas Bibb were all present from the faction. In addition, Clement C. Clay, a fellow lawyer friend of Walker's and associate of the group was also in attendance, representing Madison County. At the same time, Hugh McVay and Gabriel Moore were also representatives in attendance, still the driving forces for the interests of the small farmer. And what better display of the social and political situation at hand in Huntsville and the state, than to see John Williams Walker, son-in-law of Leroy Pope and key member of the Broad River group, sitting atop the

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*Alabama: The Sesquicentennial of Statehood.* Washington D.C.: Library of Congress, 1996. 19.

<sup>23</sup> Dupre, Daniel. *Transforming the Cotton Frontier: Madison County, Alabama, 1800-1840.* Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997. 37-38.

delegation of representatives as the convention president. This justly represents the power which the Broad River group had in constructing our state and its constitution, and it even more clearly illustrates the significance which Huntsville demanded under their guidance and leadership.<sup>24</sup>

Walker remained at the helm of politics for the city and the state throughout his life. Prior to Alabama's acceptance into statehood, future president and General Andrew Jackson of Tennessee recommended John Williams Walker as the governor of the new territory, as he possessed the necessary "honesty & talents". However, Walker declined the position. He turned down a similar nomination by President James Monroe to make him the United States Attorney in the Alabama Territory following Mississippi's adoption as a state in 1817. Walker instead later ran and was elected as the new state's senator to serve Alabama in 1819 in Washington D.C. He was able to take the interests of Huntsville, Alabama, and his Broad River group to the nation's capital. In the new Alabama state capital, the newly elected governor was William Wyatt Bibb. Of course, Bibb was also a former resident of the Broad River region like his brother and future governor, Thomas Bibb, a close associate of Leroy Pope in his capacity as a fellow director of the Planters and Merchants Bank in Huntsville. So the Broad River group had spread their tentacles like an octopus into every level of political

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<sup>24</sup> Rogers, William, and Robert Ward, Leah Atkins, and Wayne Flynt. *Alabama: the History of a Deep South State*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2010. 61.; Dupre, Daniel. *Transforming the Cotton Frontier: Madison County, Alabama, 1800-1840*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997. 47-48.

organization, pushing the interests of Huntsville and themselves within the state and the country.<sup>25</sup>

As of 1818, Pope and the Broad River group had essentially organized and developed multiple towns within North Alabama, planted themselves firmly in the center of Huntsville's economy, politics, social life, and justice system, and created a bank in Huntsville that would give legs to the local economy that would have it propped up far above all others in Alabama. Huntsville had risen to the forefront in Alabama with speed unmatched by any before it. And at the heart of that rise, or possibly pushing from the back, was the Broad River Group. These former Georgia neighbors had simultaneously affected the adoption of the state of Alabama through their connections on the national level, and they then only upped their efforts in their leadership of the body of constitutional convention delegates. In almost every way, they placed Huntsville on the map for its economic and political success. But that success was soon to be tested. And the legs on which the bank had propped up Huntsville were soon to break and crumble, leaving the people of Huntsville looking away from Leroy Pope and the Broad River Group for their leadership and economic stability.

The positivity, prosperity, and opportunity of the eighteen tens were soon erased with the coming of the Panic of 1819, and much of the blame for the economic

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<sup>25</sup> Record, James. *A Dream Come True*. Huntsville: John Hicklin Printing Company, 1970. 54,64.; *Alabama: The Sesquicentennial of Statehood*. Washington D.C.: Library of Congress, 1996. 32.; Taylor, Judge Thomas Jones. *A History of Madison County and Incidentally of North Alabama, 1732-1840*. University: Confederate Publishing Company, 1976. 71.; Brewer, Willis. *Alabama, Her History, Resources, War Record and Public Men*. Spartanburg: The Reprint Company, Publishers, 1988. 353.



collapse that followed was due to the banking practices of the Broad River Group in Huntsville. The Panic of 1819 brought economic collapse and financial instability to nearly all of the United States much like the stock market crash of 1929 brought the Great Depression. At the heart of the financial disaster was the drop in the price of cotton. Cotton in Madison County saw a drop in value from 20-25 cents per pound to an all time low of 13 cents per pound on average. This drop in price came after the U.S. Treasury began limiting the number of bank notes in circulation and building up specie to stop the growing depreciation of bank notes. The formerly inflated values of cotton, land, and other goods dropped drastically with the sudden withdraw of available bank notes.<sup>26</sup>

The devastation of that price drop was two-fold. Besides the initial drop in cotton value, a massive decrease in land value followed as a result. Logically, if land value was drawn from its ability to sustain valuable cotton growth, a drop in cotton prices would result in a weakening land value. As a result of this drop in land and cotton value, all of those speculators, planters, and yeomen farmers who had purchased property in the land sales of the previous decade or privately from other landholding individuals or groups found themselves at a loss, unable to make good on their debts. Massive amounts of money were still owed to the government as many land purchases were made in payments over a series of a few years, and many had only begun to pay those debts off. In addition, hopeful speculators who had sought large profits from land purchases along with middling and yeomen farmers who had sought to push themselves into the wealthier elite status through land purchases and cotton growth found themselves seriously

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<sup>26</sup> Dupre, Daniel. *Transforming the Cotton Frontier: Madison County, Alabama, 1800-1840*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997. 50.

indebted to banks such as the Planter's and Merchant's Bank. This is because many had come to the bank for loans on the eve of such events as the federal land sale of 1818 with stars in their eyes at the thought of turning around the heavy interest loans quickly, fueled by the sky-rocketing price of cotton.<sup>27</sup>

While the bank was not responsible for the collapse of cotton and land value in 1819, they were certainly culpable for their hand in the massive prices of land sold, in addition to their unscrupulous lending practices. Many, if not most of the lenders were involved in the speculative land companies that drove up the prices of land around the time of the land sales in 1818 and previous years. The bank itself encouraged such practices. They each participated in competitive bidding wars that, in addition to driving out original settlers whose subsistence practices didn't provide enough money for them to purchase land and stay, also drove the prices through the roof for those who decided to take the risk and acquire a loan just to purchase land. Good land sold at the federal land sale for as much as \$50-100 per acre while average land brought a price of \$20-30 per acre. If you will recall, Leroy Pope paid what was then an outrageous amount of money at \$23 per acre for his downtown lots in the federal land sale of 1809. The set minimum for this new acreage to sell was a mere \$2 per acre, but speculative fever dashed those smaller prices and with them the hope of hundreds of yeomen and subsistence farmers looking for more.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Taylor, Judge Thomas Jones. *A History of Madison County and Incidentally of North Alabama, 1732-1840*. University: Confederate Publishing Company, 1976. 27.

<sup>28</sup> Abernethy, Thomas Perkins. *The Formative Period in Alabama, 1815-1828*. Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1990. 68.; Taylor, Judge Thomas Jones. *A History of Madison County and Incidentally of North Alabama, 1732-1840*. University: Confederate Publishing Company, 1976. 32-33.

But to find the key to the Planter's and Merchant's Bank and the Broad River group's involvement in the mess, a closer eye must be paid to the work of the legal efforts of John Williams Walker in 1818. That year, John Williams Walker and his fellow lawyer and bank director, Clement C. Clay, spearheaded an effort to repeal the 1805 Mississippi Usury Act. The law prohibited outrageous interest rates on private loans, setting the cap at 8% interest. Walker and Clay pushed a motion through to repeal the bill in the Alabama Territorial legislature. This repeal had disastrous effects. It allowed creditors within private loans to place any interest rate on the borrowed amount that they so chose. Walker and Clay both stood to profit greatly along with the other members of the Planter's and Merchant's Bank. With land and cotton prices at an all time high, citizens of the county were not intimidated by the massive interest rates then applied, but rather, they made full use of the available money in the federal land sale of 1818. John Williams Walker even commented in a letter to his friend, Georgia senator Charles Tait, that "30 to 40% could be got" for loaned money. In just one of countless examples of this terrible policy, a man acquired a loan of only \$4,200 but owed \$24,570 after four years due to interest. At that point, loans became yet another speculative tool which anyone come use to turn a serious profit so long as the market remained healthy.<sup>29</sup>

The problem, of course, is that the market did not remain healthy and this legislation eventually became the arrow that pierced the side of the debtor, leaving him in deep debt to the creditor for an outrageous amount of interest on top of an already large principal balance. And

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<sup>29</sup> John Williams Walker. Letter to Charles Tait. September 22, 1818. Tait Family Papers, ADAH Dupre, Daniel. *Transforming the Cotton Frontier: Madison County, Alabama, 1800-1840*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997. 87.

with the value of cotton and land dropping to less than half of what it had been, paying off that amount of money was impossible for most. While other western states were hit hard with the Panic of 1819, Madison County was the worst off of any region in the Union, defaulting on a considerably larger percentage of land purchased from the federal government than anywhere else. And this was due in large part to the added debt and pressure applied by high interest loans following the repeal of the Usury Act. As late as 1820, seven western states owed over 21 million to the federal government, with half of that debt being in Alabama and 6 million on Huntsville citizens alone. There are countless cases of people losing their land and money to boot. But the damage was not isolated to planters and small farmers. Indeed, merchants were hit first as they were holding mass amounts of cotton fresh from Huntsville's market en route to be sold at other national markets. Two well established merchant houses fell almost immediately under the pressures of the economic collapse, one being Leroy Pope's own son, Willis Pope. Taylor and Foote was another Huntsville mercantile firm that had just overextended themselves before the value of cotton collapsed, and they were stuck with the loss. The amount of cotton they had just purchased was the largest on their books to that point, a risk taken for the chance of similarly large profits from the soaring cotton prices. But eating the loss was more than the firm could manage, and they had to sell off everything, including a personal town house.<sup>30</sup>

Over seven million dollars of land were sold in the federal land sale of 1818. But of that, only about one and a half million were paid initially. And not much more of that seven million was ever seen by the federal

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<sup>30</sup> Dupre, Daniel. *Transforming the Cotton Frontier: Madison County, Alabama, 1800-1840*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997. 51-53, 101.

government. In addition, most of the initial payments were made in Mississippi scrip. This was equally bad news for the success of the contracts as the scrip and banknotes used from Mississippi, Tennessee, Georgia, and eventually Huntsville all depreciated with the events that unfolded in the Panic of 1819 due to the run on banks for specie payments. Consequently, nearly all banks, including the Planter's and Merchant's Bank, eventually suspended specie payments.<sup>31</sup>

The initial result of the economic collapse of the Panic in Huntsville and Madison County was the loss of the previous decade's air of positivity, prosperity, and progress. Historians theorize that the citizenry lost their sense of control and mastery over their own lives and destiny. While the years prior promised the opportunity for each man to carve out his own piece of the pie, the Panic rendered the people impotent and powerless for their inability to make good on debts and build wealth for the future. The situation was so grim for one Huntsville citizen, Llewellyn Jones, that he hung himself on the rafters of his newly built home. As seen in the pages of the *Alabama Republican*, many called on informal debts and obligations to be resolved for the sake of making good on others. A majority of the citizenry were anxious of their entire holdings being auctioned off at sheriff sales for the repayment of debt which they could not manage to settle.<sup>32</sup>

This time of strife and fear following the Panic of 1819 is the key to understanding the most lasting effect which the Broad River group had on Huntsville and the state, and it similarly had major effects on the future success of the group. While the Panic of 1819 was by no

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 43-44.

<sup>32</sup> Dupre, Daniel. *Transforming the Cotton Frontier: Madison County, Alabama, 1800-1840*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997. 6-7, 57, 62.; *Alabama Republican*, 1819.

means entirely the fault of the Broad River group or their Planter's and Merchant's Bank, they certainly deepened the disastrous effects of the event in Huntsville and Madison County by way of their lending practices and push of speculative efforts. Regardless of fault, when people are hurting and wounded, they tend to seek out an offender to be made the enemy. In this case, the Planters and Merchants Bank and the Broad River group along with their fellow bank directors of different origins became the offender and subsequently the enemy. This was a rather logical conclusion, whether justified or not. The fact was that much of the outrageous and inflated debt was due to either the Planters and Merchants Bank or its board members, therein including key members of the Broad River group.

Aiding this new war against the bank, its directors, and the Georgia faction was the work of William Long, editor of the Huntsville newspaper entitled the *Democrat*. Long took to the pages of his paper in 1823 with hopes of squashing this group, whom he referred to as the Royal Party. This should draw back memories of the aforementioned name of Pope's group of associates from Georgia, satirically referred to as the Royal Family. Long waged a war of words against the Royal Party and their newspaper defender, the *Alabama Republican*. His enflamed and emotional rhetoric was no doubt influential among the lower classes of Huntsville as the language was superbly strong and poignant. It is reminiscent of political radio talk show hosts of today. Indeed, the rhetoric is similar to many of their arguments. From the very beginning, Long makes his intentions known by stating that he intended to destroy the bank and expose the Royal Party, protecting Huntsville's common man from the "nobility". He claimed himself a champion for the common man, fighting the monied aristocracy whom he claimed, "hesitate not to sacrifice upon the

altars of their unhallowed ambition, everything that stands in the way of their exaltation.”<sup>33</sup>

In reply, John Boardman, editor of the *Alabama Republican*, provided an avenue by which readers could write in to defend the bank and its practices as he did. In reference to efforts such as those by Boardman, Long wrote, “With a yielding sycophantic, accommodating spirit, he could bow to, and lick the feet of the monied *aristocracy* of the country, and for a few pieces of silver, betray, and sell to them, the honest, unsuspecting multitude.”<sup>34</sup> As is more than obvious here, the social and political dichotomy previously mentioned is becoming more and more clear and distinguished here in the early 1820s.

A social and political rift had developed and grown from the arrival of Pope and the Broad River group up to the post Panic years. This rift, or dichotomy, was composed of two opposing social classes, each with their own individual pursuits and perspectives on issues. On the one hand was the Broad River group and the social elite of Huntsville who made up what would become known as the Whig Party. And on the other hand was the class of the yeomen farmer and the populists that would make up the Democratic Party. The arrival of Leroy Pope and company into North Alabama initiated much of the social division with their political and economic power grab upon entry and settlement in Huntsville. They furthered that process of division in the

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<sup>33</sup> Abernethy, Thomas Perkins. *The Formative Period in Alabama, 1815-1828*. Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1990. 116-117, 135.; *The Democrat*. October, 1823.; Rogers, William, and Robert Ward, Leah Atkins, and Wayne Flynt. *Alabama: the History of a Deep South State*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2010. 79.

<sup>34</sup> *The Democrat*. October 21, 1823.; Dupre, Daniel. *Transforming the Cotton Frontier: Madison County, Alabama, 1800-1840*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997. 79.

development of a planter society in Huntsville that created an ever growing gulf between the common yeomen or middling farmer and the elite planter and merchant elite with their town homes and vast plantations. The process was only spurred by the Panic of 1819 when the Broad River group and the bank became the enemy for the extreme financial pressure they placed on many in the town. Simultaneously, Long and the *Democrat* rallied the voices and efforts of the downtrodden and debt ridden masses in opposition to the elitist Royal Party and their bank. Boardman's passive defenses of the group in his *Alabama Republican* were ineffective in quelling the outrage, and did little to nothing to stop Long and company with his emotionally charged rhetoric from blowing the gulf wide open between the two, now very distinct, social classes and assisting in the creation of class conflict. Following the end of the *Alabama Republican*, a new Huntsville paper picked up where Boardman left off upon resignation in 1825. This paper, known as the *Southern Advocate* provided the radical rhetorical opposition to Long that the *Alabama Republican* had failed to do for so long. To give you an exemplary sample of the inflammatory writing style, the *Advocate* reports in 1825 that the Kelly-Long faction are a "violent gentry" who "render republican service with their lips, while their hearts are inflamed with the fires of anarchy." Here, the *Alabama Republican* claims that Long with his associate William Kelly, a Huntsville lawyer unaligned with the Broad River group, speak out against the elite of Huntsville to incite a popular revolt. This only further accentuated the division and delineated the desires of the two opposing Huntsville parties that had arisen out of the verbal gunfire.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> *Southern Advocate*. May 27, 1825.; Dupre, Daniel. *Transforming the Cotton Frontier: Madison County, Alabama, 1800-1840*. Baton Rouge:



The social division of the previous decade took a very political turn in the 1820s thanks to the actions of the Broad River group and the Planter's and Merchant's Bank during and after the Panic of 1819 along with the advent of the politically charged newspapers. The issues of the bank and land relief became the talking points of two different political efforts following the Panic. Initially, the members of the Broad River group were focused on several key points. They wanted to see internal improvements such as a canal in Muscle Shoals to make shipping of cotton and other goods to market cheaper. In addition, they were against a valuation law that would serve as a relief for many landowners' issues of debt. Despite the pleas for such relief by his friends John M. Taylor and Larkin Newby, John Williams Walker opposed any such relief because he believed it risked an onslaught on the economy that would weaken the social order. He sought to preserve the rights of the creditor. The last concern of the group was the preservation of the bank through its ability to remain in private control and suspend specie payments as long as necessary. In stark contrast, the rapidly developing populist party in Huntsville (the Democrats) was focused on the reverse side of those issues. Their first sticking point was the need for land and debt relief, and the second was the sure destruction of the bank (likely in part due to the enflaming words of Long). From the Panic of 1819 onward, the Broad River group and the Planter's and Merchant's Bank was fighting a losing battle due to the strength and size of the planter and farmer population in Huntsville. Despite concerns about the sanctity of legal binding contracts voiced by readers such as "Old School" of the *Alabama Republican* in the debt and land relief debate, both were eventually granted in different forms. The federal government gave way on pleas for

land relief, allowing indebted farmers to buy back land at cheaper rates and relinquish some land as payment for other. They also dismissed cases of extreme debt acquired through creditor's interest rates after the cases were seen in the Alabama Supreme Court from 1825-1827. William Kelly, lawyer and friend of William Long, represented the debtors in those cases against the creditors, who were represented by none other than bank director and Broad River ally Clement C. Clay.<sup>36</sup>

At the same time, Royal Party patriarch and Planter's and Merchant's Bank President Leroy Pope lost his good name with his former Broad River neighbors, U.S. Secretary of the Treasury William Crawford and Alabama state governors William and Thomas Bibb in 1819 and 1820, respectively. This loss of alliances was because of his refusal to resume specie payments at the bank and his hand in the devastation the North Alabama economy with the Usury Law. While John Williams Walker, David Moore, and Clement C. Clay all later ran and acquired public office, they each in some way distanced themselves from the issues that arose with the bank and the Royal Party. David Moore went so far as to vote against fellow bank director Henry Chambers in favor of the opposition's leading candidate, William Kelly, for the U.S. Senate seat. C.C.Clay, along with others, later attempted to fashion himself a man of the people much like Andrew Jackson, and it was met with some success as he was politically active in the decade that followed. Regardless, the accusations against the group that were made visible in Long's writings became

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<sup>36</sup> Dupre, Daniel. *Transforming the Cotton Frontier: Madison County, Alabama, 1800-1840*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997. 89-90, 107-108.; John M. Taylor. Letter to John Williams Walker. December 8, 1819, January 26, 1820. Walker Papers.; John Williams Walker. Letter to Larkin Newby. April 1, 1804. Larkin Newby Papers, DU.; *Alabama Republican*. July 28, 1820.

the rallying cry against any politician with any association with the Broad River group or the Planter's and Merchant's Bank. In the end, the self proclaimed leader of a populist majority in the state, Israel Pickens won the election for the governor's office in his defeat of bank director and Broad River ally Henry Chambers, signaling the end of the Planter's and Merchant's Bank and moreover, the dominance of the Broad River group and its allies. Pickens took issue as Crawford did with the Huntsville bank not resuming specie payments and gave an ultimatum in the form of a legislative act in 1823 for Pope to lift the suspension of those payments or face forfeiture of the bank's charter. After two years of noncompliance, the bank's charter was forfeited on February 15<sup>th</sup>, 1825.<sup>37</sup>

While the Broad River group lost its political, economic, and social grip on Huntsville and the state with the effects of the Panic of 1819, they had provided an antithesis and an enemy to the populist Democratic party that emerged politically in the 1820s. And that emergence was due greatly to the group's actions in that decade and the one previous. So over the course of nearly twenty years, the Broad River group and its allies slowly effected the creation and evolution of a two party political system in Huntsville and Alabama through social and economic conflict and division. Out of the events of the 1810s and 1820s, led and impacted by the Broad River group, the Democratic and Whig parties emerged. The Whig party was that of the Broad River group and its elite ally

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<sup>37</sup> Rogers, William, and Robert Ward, Leah Atkins, and Wayne Flynt. *Alabama: the History of a Deep South State*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2010. 80.; Dupre, Daniel. *Transforming the Cotton Frontier: Madison County, Alabama, 1800-1840*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997. 94.; Taylor, Judge Thomas Jones. *A History of Madison County and Incidentally of North Alabama, 1732-1840*. University: Confederate Publishing Company, 1976. 50.

planters and merchants, with its defender in the *Alabama Republican*. And the Democratic Party was the champion of the common man, led in Huntsville by William Long, William Kelly, and the *Democrat*, poised against the Whig elites.<sup>38</sup>

The Broad River group fundamentally changed the fabric of Huntsville and the state as a whole. They transformed Huntsville from a pioneering frontier of yeomen subsistence squatters into the economic, social, and political epicenter of Alabama in the first ten years upon their arrival. With the leadership of Leroy Pope, the group initiated the development of a town that would lead the territory to statehood and national representation. That same leadership and group of allies guided Huntsville on its crash course to economic collapse out of which the group came to its inevitable demise as a powerful entity. But through that success and subsequent failure, Leroy Pope and his allies drove a stake through the political and social unity of the city, region, and state. And in that capacity, Pope and his Broad River group were the ultimate catalyst for the creation of a two party political system in Huntsville and Alabama in the 1820s.

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<sup>38</sup> Dupre, Daniel. *Transforming the Cotton Frontier: Madison County, Alabama, 1800-1840*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997. 6-7.