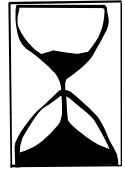




# IT'S ABOUT TIME

## Archival Newsletter



Issue VIII

ROCKLAND COUNTY, N.Y.

Summer 2013

### Rockland County Elections: 1813-1842

The Rockland County Archives is an invaluable resource for anyone interested in local history. One of the most interesting historical records in the Archives is a book that was used in the early nineteenth century to record election results in the County. Entirely handwritten, this book provides detailed records of how voters in each of Rockland's towns chose to cast their ballots in local, state, and national elections. It provides an interesting window into how early Rockland residents felt about the major political issues of their time.

This hardcover book, *Rockland County: Record of Election Transcripts*, consists of 168 pages and includes all of the results for Rockland County elections between 1813 and 1842. For each election year, the number of votes received by candidates for various elective offices were recorded for Rockland County and its towns. All of these results were signed by the County Clerk and other local officials at the time who certified that they were accurate. It is interesting to note that this book does not mention which political party each candidate belonged to. A researcher must use other sources to find out this information.

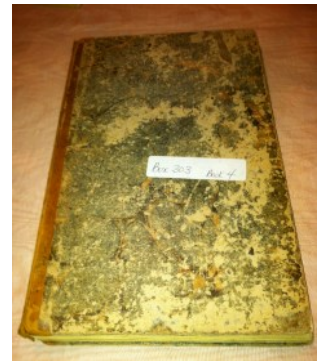


Photo of *Rockland County: Record of Election Transcripts*

According to Philip Lampi of the American Antiquarian Society, counties in New York State were required to maintain election books beginning in 1799. These books were used both to preserve the historical record and as an official source for newspapers reporting election results at that time.

This book is a tremendous resource that provides a significant amount of information concerning how Rockland County fit into the early political history of this country. This article uses information from this book to gain insight into how Rockland residents may have felt about two pivotal events in American history: the construction of the Erie Canal and the rise of the Jacksonian Democrats. These two events would have been very significant to all New York residents in the early nineteenth century.

	Governor		Lieutenant Governor		Senator		Congress		For One		Members of Assembly			
Towns	Deloit Clinton	Samuel Young	James Salonga	Erastus Root	Peter Van Orden	Wells Lake	Joshua Sands	John T Bergen	Abraham Gurne	Edward Suffer	Rocky & Vanhooker	Savi Sherwood	James B. Montoya	31
Hampstead	192	86	260	63	236	60	274	37	64	100	32	64	9	
Blanchetown	22	107	51	152	67	135	32	167	31	0	73	62	42	
Orangetown	26	153	53	120	36	124	23	154	5	17	130	20	—	
Waverstraw	129	94	144	00	100	92	146	03	145	2	—	—	93	
Total	369	520	500	423	447	419	475	441	245	215	243	146	144	
Aggregate	089		931		066		916				993			
David Pyle Secretary													Benj <sup>o</sup> Coe Jr Chairman	

Sample Page: Chart Summarizing Election Returns in 1824

### Who Was Allowed to Vote?

Before discussing the politics of the day, it is important to recognize just who was allowed to vote in New York State when Rockland County was founded in 1798. Male property owners or tenants who paid a certain amount of rent were allowed to vote for members of the U.S. House of Representatives and the State Assembly. Only men who owned a substantial amount of property could vote for Governor, Lieutenant Governor, and State Senator.<sup>1</sup>

Many of the political offices that are currently elected positions, such as U.S. Senator, were selected by the New York State Legislature. The legislature also chose the members of a special body, the Council of Appointment, whose job was to appoint most local political offices. These political appointments were often chosen based on political loyalty and family connections. Even the mayor of New York City was appointed during this time.<sup>2</sup>

New York electoral laws changed in 1821 when a convention altered the state constitution. The Council of Appointment was disbanded, and many of the previously appointed positions became elected ones. The property requirement for white males was abolished. African-American males were required to own a substantial amount of property to vote, but the majority were effectively disenfranchised because the property requirement was too stringent. Women

were not permitted to vote.<sup>3</sup>

As today, the electoral college system was used to elect the President of the United States. Under this system, each state selects a certain number of presidential electors who then vote for a particular presidential candidate. In the early nineteenth century, New York electors were chosen by the state legislature.<sup>4</sup> Beginning in 1828, voters were first given the right to cast their ballots for these presidential electors. This meant that 1828 was the first year that New Yorkers were able to vote in presidential elections. This election book covers four presidential elections: 1828, 1832, 1836, and 1840.

### *Bucktails, Clintonians, and the Politics of the Erie Canal*

For the first few decades of this country's existence, there were two distinct political parties. The Federalists, whose intellectual leader was Alexander Hamilton, favored a strong centralized government. The Democratic-Republicans were supporters of Thomas Jefferson's vision of a limited federal government.<sup>5</sup> It should be noted that the followers of Thomas Jefferson usually called themselves Republicans. However, modern scholars often use the term Democratic-Republican instead, partly to avoid confusion with the entirely separate Republican Party of Abraham Lincoln. For simplicity's sake, the term Democratic-Republican is used in this article.

In the first few decades of its existence, Rockland County was a Democratic-Republican stronghold. For example, Rockland voted by a 284 to 36 margin for Democratic-Republican Robert Livingston over Federalist John Jay in the 1798 governor's race. This type of result was typical for elections involving Federalists in Rockland County. By the 1810's, the Federalist party had begun to lose prominence around the country. As the Democratic-Republican Party became the dominant force in New York politics, it split into two competing factions in the state: Clintonians and Bucktails.<sup>6</sup>

The Clintonians consisted of DeWitt Clinton and his allies. Clinton had previously run for president in 1812 with the support both of Democratic-Republicans who opposed the War of 1812 and the fledgling Federalist Party. Clinton's signature issue when he was elected governor of New York in 1817 was the construction of the Erie Canal. Once it was completed, it would create a water route between Buffalo and Albany, thus connecting Lake Erie and the Hudson River. It would be integral to the economic development of the state, as it greatly facilitated trade between the West and the port at New York City.<sup>7</sup>



Portrait of DeWitt Clinton  
by Rembrandt Peale

When first proposed, the Erie Canal project faced significant opposition from Tammany Hall, whose supporters were known as Bucktails. This was due to a tradition of Tammany Hall members wearing hats with deer tails on them. While some readers are likely familiar with the dominant role that Tammany Hall played in New York City politics starting in the 1850's,

this organization was a smaller, albeit significant, political force in the early nineteenth century. Democratic-Republican Aaron Burr first transformed Tammany Hall from a social group into a political organization that helped him get elected Vice-President in 1800. The leaders of Tammany Hall subsequently engaged in an ongoing feud with DeWitt Clinton once he became mayor of New York City in 1803 due to conflicts over political appointments. When Clinton was elected governor in 1817, Tammany Hall and the Bucktail candidates that it supported strongly opposed Clinton policies that would increase state government expenditures. Opposition to the Erie Canal was initially a critical component of the Bucktail political platform.<sup>8</sup>

This election book indicates that Rockland County was a strong supporter of the Bucktail faction of the Democratic-Republican Party. It is difficult to know how Rockland voters felt about DeWitt Clinton when he ran for governor in 1817, as he was largely unopposed in the race. Rockland's opposition to Clinton is apparent in subsequent races. In 1820, Rockland voted by a 731 to 102 margin for Bucktail Daniel Tompkins over Clinton. In 1824, Rockland voted for Bucktail Samuel Young over Clinton by a 520 to 369 vote margin. In 1826, Rockland voted for Bucktail William B. Rochester over Clinton by a similar 509 to 345 margin. Despite Rockland opposing him by large margins each time, Clinton won each of these statewide elections.<sup>9</sup>

Since the Erie Canal project was Clinton's signature issue, did Rockland voters' opposition to him indicate that they opposed the project? Not necessarily. As historian Evan Cornog notes, some farmers along the Hudson River feared that the Erie Canal would hurt business due to increased "competition from the rich lands to the west." However, the matter is complicated by the fact that the Bucktails ended their opposition to the Erie Canal in 1819 once the project became too popular (although many voters were undoubtedly suspicious of this sudden policy reversal).<sup>10</sup> It is thus difficult to know, based solely on these election results, how Rockland residents may have felt about Clinton's canal project.



Mural of DeWitt Clinton pouring water from Lake Erie into the Atlantic Ocean at the 1825 opening ceremony for the Erie Canal<sup>11</sup>

It is also worth noting that Clinton's policies generally involved the expansion of government programs, which had traditionally been the platform of the Federalist Party. Indeed, the Clintonian coalition included many former Federalists, and Rockland County had repeatedly voted against the Federalist Party throughout its history.<sup>12</sup> It thus makes sense that Rockland County would be firmly Bucktail territory during the time of DeWitt Clinton.

### *The Rise of the Jacksonian Democrats*

By the 1820's, a new political leader had risen to prominence in New York State to oppose the Clintonians. Born in Kinderhook, New York, Martin Van Buren created what is often considered to be America's first major political machine. Philosophically opposed to large

government expenditures, Van Buren became the leader of a number of politically powerful men known as the “Albany Regency,” who formed an alliance with Tammany Hall and came to dominate New York politics during the 1820’s and 1830’s. The Clintonian faction in New York politics, having been so focused around a single individual, disintegrated after DeWitt Clinton’s death in 1828.<sup>13</sup>

That same year, Martin Van Buren decided to put his entire political muscle into getting Andrew Jackson elected President of the United States. Nationally, the Federalist Party had disappeared by this time and the Democratic-Republican Party had divided in two. President John Quincy Adams, who believed in a strong federal government, ran for reelection calling himself a National Republican. Andrew Jackson favored limiting the power of the federal government as part of his newly created Democratic Party. Jackson, who had previously lost to John Quincy Adams in the 1824 election, was victorious in 1828.<sup>14</sup> Tammany Hall subsequently transformed itself into a political machine that supported Jackson’s Democratic Party. By 1836, opponents of the Democratic Party had abandoned the National Republican label and became known as the Whigs.<sup>15</sup>



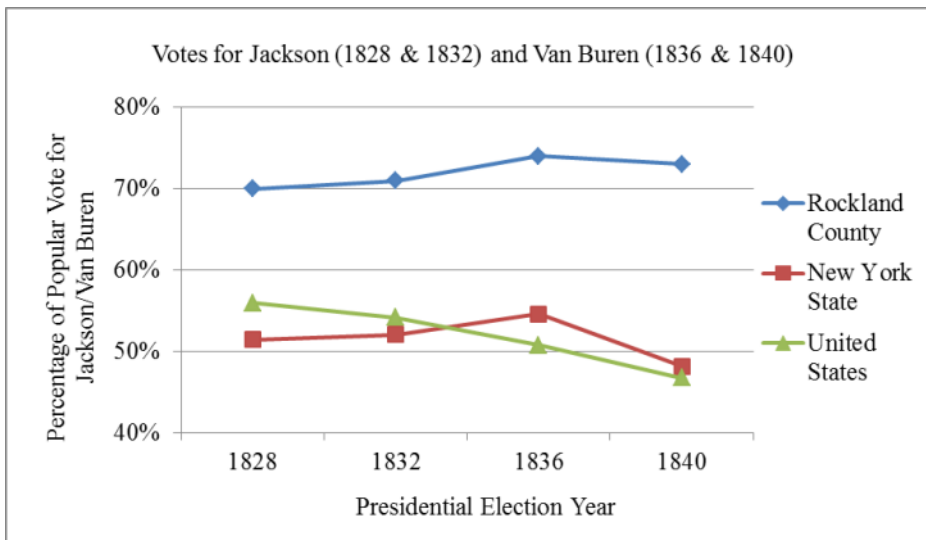
Gubernatorial Portrait of Martin Van Buren by Daniel Huntington

As has been previously noted, 1828 was the first year that New York’s presidential electors were chosen by its voters rather than its legislature. With the weight of his political machine behind him, Van Buren was able to deliver New York to Jackson in that election. Van Buren himself was elected governor that same year, a position which he only occupied briefly before joining Jackson’s cabinet as his Secretary of State.<sup>16</sup>

Rockland County was a strong supporter of Democrats Jackson and Van Buren when they ran for president. In 1828, Rockland voted for Jackson over Adams by a 1040 to 436 margin.<sup>17</sup> When Jackson ran for reelection in 1832, with Van Buren as his vice-presidential candidate, he won Rockland by a 975 to 392 margin. Rockland similarly supported Van Buren when he ran for President in 1836, voting for him by a 1045 to 371 margin. In 1840, perceived ineptitude in the face of a poor economy led to Van Buren losing his presidential reelection bid to Whig William Henry Harrison. Van Buren even lost his home state of New York!<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, Rockland County stayed loyal to Van Buren, voting for him by a 1657 to 637 margin that year.<sup>19</sup>

The following graph shows how Rockland County voted in these four presidential elections compared to New York State and the United States as a whole. Note that the graph indicates the percentage of the popular vote received by the Democratic candidate for president during each election year. It thus indicates the amount of votes received by Jackson in 1828 and 1832 and Van Buren in 1836 and 1840. It is clear that Rockland County was an unusually strong supporter of the Democratic Party during these years, as it voted for Jackson and Van Buren at a far higher rate than the rest of the state and the country did.<sup>20</sup>





Based on this book of election results, it is clear that Rockland voters opposed the Federalist Party and supported the Democratic-Republicans in the early history of the County. When DeWitt Clinton caused a split of the New York Democratic-Republican Party, Rockland supported Tammany Hall's Bucktail faction. Rockland became a major supporter of Andrew Jackson's Democratic Party once it was founded in 1828. For the researcher interested in doing further work into Rockland's early political history, this book is an invaluable asset that will be of tremendous value to future generations.

- Jason Schachter

<sup>1</sup> Exemptions existed for some residents of Albany and NYC. "Constitution of New York." April 20, 1777. <http://www.nhinet.org/ccs/docs/ny-1777.htm>; "Voting Rights and Citizenship." City University of New York. [http://www1.cuny.edu/portal\\_ur/content/voting\\_cal/the\\_constitution.html](http://www1.cuny.edu/portal_ur/content/voting_cal/the_constitution.html)

<sup>2</sup> Oliver Allen, *The Tiger: The Rise and Fall of Tammany Hall*, (Reading: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1993), pg 18.

<sup>3</sup> Evan Cornog, *The Birth of Empire: DeWitt Clinton and the American Experience, 1769-1828*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), pg. 143

<sup>4</sup> Allen, pg. 13

<sup>5</sup> Sandy Maisel, *Political Parties & Elections in the United States*. Vol. 1. (New York: Garland Publishing, 1991), 364-365

<sup>6</sup> Cornog, pg. 137

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pg. 90-101, 127-163

<sup>8</sup> Allen, pg. 7-26

<sup>9</sup> Cornog, pg. 140-142, 152-153, 178-79

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pg. 116, 137-138

<sup>11</sup> Mural, "The Marriage in the Waters" (1905) by C.Y. Turner, is located at the DeWitt Clinton High School, Found on NYS Canals website. <http://www.canals.ny.gov/history/history.html>

<sup>12</sup> Cornog., pg. 135-144

<sup>13</sup> Ted Widemer, *Martin Van Buren*, (New York: Time Books, 2005), pg. 23-24, 45-72

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, pg. 61-72

<sup>15</sup> Allen, pg. 39-46

<sup>16</sup> Widemer, pg. 69-72

<sup>17</sup> It should be noted that the election book does not actually mention any presidential candidates by name, but only the votes received by presidential electors (without even indicating who these electors were pledged to). In 1828, New York election districts each selected a presidential elector to represent them. That year, a majority of New York's electors supported Jackson. Confirmation that Rockland's elector, John Garrison, was pledged to Jackson was found in: Henry R. Stiles, *History of the City of Brooklyn, Vol. II*, (Brooklyn, 1869), pg. 79-80.

<sup>18</sup> Widemer., pg. 131-139

<sup>19</sup> In 1832, New York began allocating its presidential electors on a winner-take-all basis. This meant that Rockland voters chose between two groups of electors, with each group pledged to a single candidate. The group that received the most votes in the entirety of New York became the state's electors, meaning that one presidential candidate would win all of the state's electoral votes. The following was consulted to determine whether the group of electors that received the most votes in Rockland was ultimately selected by New York State: Edgar Werner's, *Civil List and Constitutional History of the Colony and State of New York*, (Albany: Weed, Parsons, & Co, 1889), 589. The "American Presidency Project" was referenced to determine which candidate New York's electors voted for.

<sup>20</sup> Vote totals for the USA and NY found at: "American Presidency Project." <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/elections.php>

## *Acknowledgements*

*Philip Lampi is an expert on early American election results, and I would like to thank him for providing valuable information about New York's early political history and for sharing data regarding Rockland's earliest elections. Since the 1813 election is the first one covered in the election book, the data that he provided filled in the critical gap of how Rockland voted between 1798 and 1812. I would also like to thank Marie Koestler for providing valuable feedback on a draft of this article.*

*Mr. Lampi has provided the following information about the New Nation Votes Project for anyone interested in learning more about early elections in America:*

### New Nation Votes Project

The New Nation Votes Project is a joint venture of the American Antiquarian Society in Worcester, Massachusetts and Tufts University, which is making available in a searchable database on the internet, voting returns for the United States during the time period of 1787-1825 and includes returns for federal, state, legislative, county and local elections. The collecting of this data was started in 1960 as a hobby by Philip J. Lampi, but has over the years expanded, grown and evolved into a lifetime work.

The data is broken down whenever possible to the lowest level, either by townships or wards. During the period from 1787-1825, seventeen of the twenty-four states and territories had annual elections, and two, Connecticut and Rhode Island, voted twice every year. Virtually every state has something unique about their election process which makes this period especially interesting for studying our political development as a democratic nation.

Election material and information in the New Nation Votes Project is free and available to everyone and can be accessed through the American Antiquarian Society Website, on Google [New Nation Votes] or from Tufts University:  
<http://elections.lib.tufts.edu/>

## A Message from Archivist Peter J. Scheibner



**C. Scott Vanderhoef**  
County Executive



**Paul Piperato**  
County Clerk



**Peter J. Scheibner**  
County Archivist

Deputy County Clerks  
**Donna Gorman Silberman**  
**Jamie Maraia Graham**  
**John O'Connell**

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**Jason Schachter**  
Writer & Editor

As a political science major at the University of Arizona, I've always had a fascination with politics and government. When we were inventorying dusty boxes located in the wooden garage behind the County Clerk's Office in the early 1990's, we found a collection of court ledgers and an election canvass book in one box going back to the early 1800's. This collection of material was microfilmed and safeguarded as we started to preserve our earliest records.

Over the years, I received requests from Philip Lampi, of the American Antiquarian Society, and several other researchers that were looking into early Rockland election results. When Jason Schachter agreed to write articles in "It's About Time," I immediately thought of doing a piece on early election results of Rockland County. I am pleased that this issue will bring some of this to light.

### Information on the Rockland County Archives

**Telephone:** (845) 364-3670 **Fax:** (845) 364-3671  
**E-mail:** [scheibnp@co.rockland.ny.us](mailto:scheibnp@co.rockland.ny.us)

### Directions

Directions off major roads: From NYC-Palisades Parkway north to Exit 11, left on New Hempstead Rd., through traffic light at the intersection of Rt. 45 to next traffic light (Summit Park Rd.), make right turn. Continue for approximately 4/10 of a mile to the fork in the road, bear right to Building S Parking lot, make right into lot and another quick right in front of Building N (old white house) and proceed straight into Archives Building parking lot.

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County of Rockland, County Clerk/Archives  
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