

**NEWSPAPERS AND NEWSPAPER  
WRITERS IN NEW ENGLAND, 1787-  
1815: READ BEFORE THE NEW  
ENGLAND HISTORIC, GENEALOGICAL  
SOCIETY, FEB. 4, 1880, PP. 3 - 38**

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**DELANO A. GODDARD**

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*IN NEW ENGLAND.*

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BY  
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## NEWSPAPERS AND NEWSPAPER-WRITERS

IN

### NEW ENGLAND.

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ON the morning of the 4th March, 1801, the "Columbian Centinel," then enjoying a pleasant distinction as "our leading journal," printed a stately epitaph on the death of the Federal Administration.

YESTERDAY EXPIRED,  
deeply regretted by MILLIONS of grateful Americans,  
And by *all Good Men*,  
The FEDERAL ADMINISTRATION  
of the  
GOVERNMENT of the *United States*  
Animated by  
a WASHINGTON, an ADAMS, — a HAMILTON, KNOX,  
PICKERING, WOLCOTT, MCHENRY, MARSHALL,  
STODDERT, and DEXTER,  
*Æt.* 12 years.

Then followed, with similar ingenious display, a statement of the virtues, achievements, and unexampled trophies of the departed, set off by parallel passages of indignant judgment for the multitude who were at that moment exulting over its departure. Thomas Jefferson became President that day, and the great party which had given the nation a Constitution, and had nurtured it during its "mighty

youth," now divided against itself and rejected by the people, went into an early and most unhappy decline.

There is nothing more depressing — one might almost say nothing more tragic — in political history than the story of the rise and fall of the Federalist party, as it appears in the newspapers from 1787 to 1815. Pure in its origin and motive, elevated, patriotic, honorable in all its purposes, with the name of Washington and his immortal example as its guide and beacon, sustained by the wealth, education, and social influence of the time, — men of books and men of affairs together sharing its counsels, — it nevertheless lost its hold upon public confidence almost at the moment of obtaining it, and ceased to exist while its principles were still full of life and power.

The event for which the "Centinel" had clothed itself in sables marked the turning-point of the first political epoch under the Constitution. It was long doubtful whether Massachusetts would sustain the Constitution or not. The majority of the towns in Rhode Island rejected it with every mark of contempt and discredit. In New Hampshire there was a powerful minority against it; as there was also in both the Carolinas. Virginia, though consenting at last, did so against the wishes of a large part of her people. Patrick Henry was a host against it, and many of the large planters were with him. The settlements in the backwoods and mountains were solid against it. New York, under the sway of George Clinton, offered a stalwart opposition. Pennsylvania, as in many a later struggle, stood loyally with Massachusetts. In this contest, and in the election of the first Congress that followed it, the two parties took their places, and established their character as history and tradition represent them. The Federalists, under the lead of Washington, Hamilton, Marshall, and Jay, and for a time of Madison and the elder



Adams, were in search of a safe, strong, and independent government. The energy and masterly power with which they asserted and expounded the principles of the Constitution earned for them the gratitude of all later generations. The anti-federalists, encouraged by a deep popular distrust of central power, and stimulated by adroit leaders whom it is no longer the fashion to call by their right names, resisted with pertinacious zeal to the last.

The newspapers, — crude, impulsive, discourteous to one another, and in great part badly written, — took sides for and against the Constitution, dropping all other issues. There were among them no trained journalists in the modern sense, and very few bold and strong intellects capable of dealing adequately with the large issues precipitated upon the young republic. Fenno's "Gazette," Bache's "Aurora," and a little later Philip Freneau's and Peter Porcupine's "Gazettes," were the best the seat of government had to offer, — and they were all bad enough. The Federalist journals, with their headlong and abusive spirit, bound up with their own petty interests, often magnifying the less at the expense of the greater, fighting over trifles and with one another while the citadel itself was in danger, were often the despair of the wise and prudent men who had the public destinies in their charge. The anti-federalist journals, equally infirm of temper, drew together, as their party became crystallized, a group of able outside writers, who, having done everything in their power to kill the Constitution at its birth, now with impertinent presumption assumed to be its god-fathers, and filled the country, then and afterwards, with idle tales of treason and conspiracy on the part of its real authors and most loyal defenders.

The current affairs of the world were at that time exceptionally turbulent. Our new institutions were shaken by the passions of the Old World to a degree that now

seems incredible. In spite of their recent great experience, the people were far from self-reliant. Though nominally and actually free, the habit of dependence was not easily outgrown. Large classes of them lost their heads upon slight provocation. If they had been in the Paris barricades, they could not have been more unreasonable than they were over the insanities of the French Revolution. Some of them hated it with mortal hatred: it was saluted by others as the final deliverance of liberty. The war between France and England created new complications. The French faction was stricken with "statute madness." Citizen Genet, a bouncing Frenchman, full of conceit and absurdities of every kind, ran up and down the country, drunk with the adulation of multitudes of excited people, defying the Government, and doing his little utmost to precipitate another war with Great Britain. Tom Paine, base and insolent, his bad natural passions and "distorted imaginations inflamed by habitual drunkenness," was conspicuous among the defamers of Washington, and among those most active in stirring up sedition among the people. It was Jefferson's invitation to Paine to revisit this country as the guest of the nation, while his scurrilous libels on the character of Washington and his scoffing assaults on the religious faith of the people were still freshly remembered, that deepened the disgust and quickened the wrath with which the Federalists regarded Jefferson's advent to power. Here in New England the French frenzy long raged without check. The extreme anti-federalists had civic feasts, processions, and nightly carousals in honor of every fresh excess of the Revolution. Nothing more absurd, nothing more foreign to all our Puritan traditions, or more deserving to be blotted out and forgotten, ever transpired on our soil. The adjustment of our commercial relations with England, under

Jay's treaty, excited them to fresh outrages. There has been no folly of a political nature to compare with it since that time.

To the Federalists, on the other hand, the French Revolution was odious. The varying phases of French power following in quick succession were equally odious. It made no difference to them whether Danton, or Robespierre, or the First Consul were at the fore,—in their eyes the result was equally an insult to the name of Liberty, and a flaunting outrage upon human nature. Still later, they looked upon the military progress of Bonaparte over the Eastern world as an unmitigated calamity; and in spite of the slights and injuries Great Britain had inflicted upon this country, their sympathies returned to her when she in her turn was threatened by this military monster, who recognized no law but his own will and no reason but his ambition. Time has vindicated the justice of the Federalist position in regard to Napoleon. It seems incredible that the United States should ever have drifted into an alliance with him, or ever have regarded such an egotist as a fit minister of any cause with which its interests and welfare were concerned.

Domestic questions were at the same time exciting more intense and absorbing interest. The funding system, the alien and sedition laws, the Resolutions of '98, the embargo, the non-intercourse Acts, followed one another with great rapidity, and, with the frequent elections and the perpetual jealousies of the leaders with each other, kept the political current seething during the best part of that first generation. For many reasons the excitement in New England was at once most concentrated and most universal. There were here a greater number of active and able men who took a deep interest in public affairs, and the newspapers, such as they were, were more widely read