Membership in the Organization was intentionally kept a secret, but it is likely that the following belonged: J. Knox Walker, R. J. Walker, W. L. Marcy, Beverley Tucker, Edmund Burke, John Y. Mason, George Ashmun, L. C. Levin, and G. M. Dallas. All but the last two were what might be called original members. There may also have been others, but their names have not come to light. The acknowledged leader was Joseph Knox Walker (1818–63). His contemporary epithet, 'Prince of the Lobbyists', belies his comparative anonymity. Standard works of reference and biography ignore him. If his name appears in a work of history it is usually as a nephew of President James K. Polk, since Walker’s father, James, was married to one of Polk’s sisters. Walker entered Yale University in 1835, graduating in three years. One of his Yale classmates later made a revealing comment about him in his diary:

Had a visit in the afternoon made me by William Stuart Fleming and Joseph Knox Walker two of my Late College classmates. (Knox has perhaps less genius, but occasionally more industry, – besides, he has a practical business kind of sense which will make him succeed anywhere in any business.)

Knox then began to study law with Gen. Gideon J. Pillow in his home town of Memphis, Tennessee, but soon became involved in Polk’s efforts to be elected State Governor. During two unsuccessful election campaigns he served as Polk’s private secretary, and when Polk eventually returned to Memphis in 1841 to resume practising law Knox joined him. For the next few years life remained quiet. However, in the Presidential election of 1844 Polk was the ‘dark horse’ nominee of the Demo-
cratic Party, and the following spring Knox found himself in Washington as the Private Secretary of a President. At this time he was in his late twenties and although trusted by Polk he never really settled down, as Polk recorded in his diary in 1847.2

I learned with surprise that, without giving me any notice, he had gone to Annapolis on a party of pleasure. I was vexed at the occurrence, and think it so thoughtless and inexcusable on his part that I must require an explanation when he returns. In truth he is too fond of spending his time in fashionable and light society, and does not give that close and systematic attention to business which is necessary to give himself reputation and high standing in the estimation of the more solid and better part of the community. This I have observed for some months with great regret.

Knox's sociability was one of his chief assets when he turned his attention to lobbying after Polk's term of office was over. In the spring of 1849 Polk departed from Washington, but Knox stayed on. Having made numerous political contacts while assisting the President with backstairs negotiations, he saw before him a promising career as an attorney and claims agent. The extent to which he was already involved in lobbying is brought out in a letter to Lewis Coryell dated May 1849, in which he described the summer as a slack season with small political profits. However, he urged Coryell to join him in Washington as there were still things to be done.3

Anthracite and Cumberland Coal are articles much in demand and advertised for. What will it cost you to deliver the best of each kind here, and also what in Philadelphia? And what is the bidding price at which you would be willing for me to contract for you on joint account. The Mississippi Steamer is ordered to the Mediterranean – soon sails and must have coal there. Can't you come down and look after this?

I am anxious to have settled up our unfinished venture to California – can't it be arranged? There ought to be about $2,000 coming from this source. Did you ever look to it?

During the next few years he built up an apparently successful claims agency. There was no doubt that he was one of the upper crust among influence-pedlars. A fellow agent indicated that he considered him too casual and slipshod, but this judgment did not seem to hinder his dividing the profits of a Mexican claim with him. That Walker was able to persuade three of Polk's former cabinet members, R. J. Walker, J. Y.
Mason, and W. L. Marcy to join the Organization speaks for itself. Walker's prestige was further enhanced when he and Beverley Tucker served as unofficial managers for Stephen A. Douglas's campaign to become the Democratic nominee for President.

One of Walker's cases was cited in the Borland Report as an example of the kind of corruption prevailing among claims agents. He had collected over $4,000 from naval officers and seamen in return for securing legislation whereby they would receive extra pay for having served off the West Coast of North America during the Mexican War. For doing this he charged an average of $10 per sailor and $50 per officer. When the Senate Committee of 1852–3 learned of this they accused him of defrauding his naval clients and exerting improper influence on Congress. The fact of the matter was that no member of Congress had taken any interest in the sailors' claims until Walker came along. Grudgingly the Report admitted that Walker had performed the services for which he had been hired and had signed no contract with the sailors but left his fee up to their discretion. Confident that without his efforts the sailors would have received nothing, his defence rested on the assertion that his legal activities were no secret but were publicly advertised in the Washington press. Eventually the investigating committee acknowledged that Walker had exerted no more influence than others similarly employed and concluded that if anything was at fault it was the system of influence which pervaded American politics and society.

Towards the end of 1852 Walker left Washington to return to Memphis where he continued his agency for claims. A few years later a city directory listed Brown, Stanton, & Walker as Attorneys at Law with offices in both Memphis and Washington. Frederick P. Stanton, their Washington partner, was a former Tennessee Representative to Congress.

Walker himself finally held public office in 1857 when he was elected a State Senator. Like many faithful Democrats in the South he was against secession, but when the Civil War broke out he sided with the Confederacy. As a Confederate colonel he had his own regiment. When severe illness overpowered him in 1863 he was treated as an officer and gentleman by the commander of the Northern troops that occupied Tennessee and given safe conduct to Memphis where he died at the home of his brother-in-law. His career was thus cut short, as had been so many others, before its promise materialized. Although a contemporary described him as one of the worst bank managers Memphis
ever had, if he had lived Walker would probably have played a major role in either state or national politics.

Of the younger members of the Organization, Beverley Tucker like Knox Walker had built up a considerable reputation peddling influence. Born in 1820 and named after his uncle Nathaniel Beverley Tucker, the well-known judge and author, he always went by his middle name. Brought up in Virginia, he attended school in Richmond and entered the university there in 1835. Apparently he was an indifferent student and soon left to take a job with some construction engineers. After a short while the lure of the land brought him back to his family and he managed one of his father's plantations. Married in 1841, he continued as a gentleman farmer until in 1844 a fateful change occurred. His wife told the story years later.5

I don't know how the desire for a change came about. Crops had failed some security debts . . . pressed for payment; and an offer to go into business in Richmond was made and accepted. He saw afterwards that it was a mistake. Wholly unsuspicious, not trained to careful business habits, confiding implicitly in the honor and integrity of others, he entered into mercantile life with a firm that was afterwards found to be already tottering. He put in his capital and he gave enthusiastic work and energy to this new business. He was sent by the partners to New Orleans, and on his return found that failure was imminent and that the house would have to close up. The other partners had no moneys – creditors came forward to compromise; but [Tucker] . . . said he would pay one hundred cents on the dollar, and thus after six months' effort his whole life and career was changed, and he was, besides, under promise to pay this large indebtedness.

The Mexican War created new opportunities for Tucker. He contracted to supply the Government with munitions, afterwards finding someone who could make them, displaying a natural inclination to arrange matters first and then persuade people that he could perform whatever he undertook. This penchant worked strongly in his favour as a lobbyist. Through John Y. Mason, a friend of the family who happened to be Polk's Secretary of the Navy (and later a member of the Organization) Tucker secured another valuable war contract to supply the Navy with coal, again serving as middleman between the suppliers and the Government. His financial position remained desperate, however, and to help remedy this he made frequent trips to the Capitol in order to meet influential members of Congress and the Administration. Late
in 1847 he moved to Washington to become a partner with another young attorney, practising law and acting as a claims agent. A year later he apologized to his uncle and namesake for not spending Christmas with him as planned.

It is not for one just rising from my prostrate condition of three long and weary years, inflicted by Debt and embarrassments, to follow the bent of his inclinations and his pleasures! My Business since my return to Washington has quadrupled itself – and it is Business which allows not a moment for Holidays.

The seriousness of his efforts to extricate himself from debt could also be measured by his not having gone hunting all fall, and when another Christmas season came around (December was also the month when Congress convened) he again disappointed his uncle by not joining him for the holidays: ‘Alas! however, a poor man is the slave of circumstances and the vassal of necessity’

Not long before his uncle’s death Beverley wrote him the following letter, remarkable for its insight into the activities and attitudes of a lobbyist.

Washington, D.C.
April 1851

I have postponed answering your letter until I felt determined definitely to go to California. This I have now done and there remains but one contingency, and that the arrangement of some matters, so as to leave with an easy mind. I prepare to sail from New York in the steamer of the 11th, and shall be gone five months, which will give me two months in that country! I have acquired considerable property there in the way of fees, and go there mainly to look after it. I expect too, to get a heavy business here for the next Session, and as I have resolved to take no cases unless attended with a retainer fee, I hope to gather in some cash by the Excursion. Even these two considerations might not form a sufficient inducement to make me leave my family and encounter the other risks of such a journey, were I not lured by the fact that I can go and return free of charge.

As to your sending any money out, I frankly say if you have to borrow it at any or much inconvenience, don’t do it – if otherwise and if you can entrust me with $2,000, I will promise to make it ‘another two’ or ‘five’ if possible. My own private opinion is that I might do well with it. But of this be the judge yourself and estimate in your calculations only by my own integrity
and fruitful stewardship. I do much wish to see you easy and comfortable in your old days, to see your latter and all your days peaceful and happy and your brilliant mind undimmed, and your generous heart unoppressed, by the belittling theme and struggle after the ways and means, that induce me to hold out to you the Bird of promise in that distant Eldorado. So do as you think right, only write to me.

I have sometimes thought that if it were possible, even for a man of my limited capacity, to devote all his time and energies 'soul, mind, body, passions, feelings, strong and weak,' to any one subject of literature, science, or philosophy, as I have had to do for ten years to this arduous and lowering struggle after the almighty Dollar – that Daniel Webster would have been an idiot to me! My Sir, it is my waking, my sleeping, my walking, my talking, my sitting, my eternal, all-absorbing, and haunting, yet hateful thought. I can't help it! Would to God I could.

As it turned out, Beverley never made the trip to California. Instead he and Knox Walker threw themselves into organizing Senator Douglas's campaign to secure the Democratic nomination for the Presidency as well as trying to persuade R. M. T. Hunter of Virginia to be his running-mate. Somewhat defensively he wrote to the latter:

Young America is to speak out and is to be heard and heeded too at the coming election, and we intend to prove to you that it is not necessary to be professional men in Politics or Science to be felt in the country. I know that is the estimate you among others have put upon a parcel of us, who were driven (in my case at least) to seek our daily bread by Lobbying in Washington. We therefore enter this contest with a little feeling.

Tucker devoted much of 1851 and early 1852 to promoting Douglas's candidacy prior to the Democratic nominating convention but it was to no avail for the Party again fastened on a dark horse, Franklin Pierce, rather than the more prominent and notorious Cass and Douglas.

During this period Beverley was far from idle as a claims agent. His financial situation steadily improved but he longed to free himself completely from past burdens, especially as ill health overtook him at the end of 1851. He confided to his brother, Randolph, that he was not afraid to die but dreaded the thought of leaving his wife and family unprotected. Someone must know how his affairs stood, in particular those ventures which might materialize in future commissions if they were successful. Reflecting on his great expenditures of energy in both politics and handling claims he lamented: 'I never have had such a year
of anxiety and trouble in all my life.' He went on to say that he was insured for $10,000 which would go to his wife and children if anything happened to him. As for his debts, they amounted to about $10,000 but this figure could be reduced to about $6,000 if his household possessions, horses, and carriage were sold. His wife Jane could always return to Virginia and live with her mother, and he was particularly proud that amidst all the debts he had taken upon himself he had never jeopardized ‘all Jane’s interest in her father’s Real Estate’. If all went well during the coming year he hoped to realize $20,000 to $25,000: a bond worth $5,000 from a Philadelphia firm when the Texas debt was settled; another $5,000 from a client who would pay as soon as money and credit eased sufficiently; $2,000 to $10,000 from a business speculation; and as much as $8,000 once the contract for supplying marble for the Capitol was signed. Beverley explained to his brother that he would certainly be able to discharge the last of his debts and once again be a free man could he but live a year or two more. If, on the other hand, the worst should occur, ‘Knox Walker is intimately acquainted with these things’, and could help collect what was due him.  

When Douglas failed to secure the Democratic Party’s nomination, Tucker threw his support to the official candidate, Franklin Pierce, hoping for some kind of patronage reward. Through an old family friend, Jefferson Davis, he applied for the post of Marshal for the District of Columbia, and although Davis was a member of Pierce’s Cabinet Tucker was passed over, reflecting the fact that he was still sufficiently impecunious that party patronage was beyond his reach. Probably resenting this, he allowed himself to become the centre of a nascent revolt within the Democratic Party when the full session of Congress met for the first time under the Pierce Administration in December 1853. One of the minor patronage decisions which each House traditionally made at the commencement of a new term was the appointment of a printer. Ordinarily the job went to the proprietor of the Washington newspaper that was acknowledged as the spokesman for the majority party. Often the same printer enjoyed contracts from both the House and the Senate. However, in December 1853 the House contract was renewed, while the Senate’s contract went to Beverley Tucker, highlighting the presence of a split within the party. Tucker qualified for the contract because in September he had become the proprietor of a new Washington daily, the Sentinel. Whether the paper was established in anticipation of securing the printing contracts of
both Houses is uncertain, but mystery surrounded its financial backing and its Congressional support.\(^9\)

By this time Tucker was \textit{persona non grata} with Pierce's followers who realized that he was beginning to cast about for a candidate to support for President in 1856. He finally chose James Buchanan who strongly urged him to keep the \textit{Sentinel} going in spite of the heavy financial burden. Buchanan knew that Tucker represented strong Southern states' rights sentiment and he wanted this support in order to offset the attitudes of Northern Democrats. The paper continued as long as Tucker could manage, for though he disclaimed opportunism, he no doubt anticipated eventually running the Administration's official paper. However, a brief illness in June 1856 followed by Tucker's absence from Washington for four days in August sufficed to close down the impoverished \textit{Sentinel}.

As President Buchanan was more mindful of his obligations than Pierce had been, Tucker finally received an appointment. He would have preferred something near Washington so that he could maintain his claims agency, but he accepted what was offered: the Consulship at Liverpool. In the autumn of 1857 he sailed there to replace Nathaniel Hawthorne, the novelist.

The remainder of Tucker's life resembled a second-rate melodrama more than the career of a first-rate lobbyist. When the Civil War broke out he resigned his post in Liverpool to return to Virginia via Canada. There he offered his services to the Confederate President Jefferson Davis and was sent back to Europe to purchase supplies and negotiate loans for the South. Once again he eluded the Northern blockade, transacted various commissions in Britain and France, and eventually returned home. Towards the end of the War he was sent to Canada to negotiate an exchange of Southern cotton for Northern meat. Shortly afterwards President Lincoln was assassinated, and because Tucker was in Canada he was implicated in the plot. Canada seemed the natural destination for one who had conspired with John Wilkes Booth, and although he vehemently denied any involvement he dared not return to the United States since there was a price on his head. The temper of the times was such that he was not safe even in Canada, and so eventually he and his family reunited in Great Britain. Finding little to do there he tried Mexico for a while but his sojourn there coincided with the withdrawal of French troops and the consequent execution of Emperor Maximilian at the hands of Juárez. Next he went back to Canada to
manage a resort hotel, quite a comedown for a leading Washington lobbyist of ten or fifteen years before. Finally the charges of treason were dropped in the early 1870s and he was permitted to return to the United States where he soon resumed the only profession he really knew, that of a claims agent in Washington, and this occupied him until his death in 1890.

Of the three former Cabinet members who were attached at one time or another to the Organization Robert J. Walker was clearly the most successful speculator and financier. Born in Pennsylvania in 1801, he was no relation of Knox Walker of Tennessee. He was far better known than Knox, and lent considerable prestige to the Organization. After studying law at the University of Pennsylvania he went south to set up a joint practice with his brother in Mississippi. There he made some shrewd investments in plantations, slaves, and undeveloped land. He also became a staunch supporter of Andrew Jackson and looked to him for political favours. Walker's election to the Senate in 1836 and subsequent re-election in 1841 stemmed in part from this connection.

As early as 1837 he showed annexationist tendencies in urging the acquisition of Texas, and by so doing undermining Van Buren's bid for the Presidency. By the same token it secured him a prominent place among the coterie who succeeded in getting the Democratic nomination for James K. Polk in 1844. When Polk was elected he appointed Walker Secretary of the Treasury. This troubled some who felt that Walker's well-known banking connections and financial manipulations would pose a conflict of interest, but on the whole he managed to avoid this predicament. 10

By the spring of 1849 Walker, together with other members of the Polk Administration, was out of office. However, he decided to remain in Washington, prosecuting claims and enhancing his personal finances. It may be recalled that the original purpose of the Organization was to secure patents for American inventors at the Great Exhibition. As it turned out, Walker was the only representative of the group willing to go to London, and his principal client was Samuel Colt who invented the ‘repeating pistol’ and wanted help convincing the British that his revolver was superior to any weapon then available. 11 When Walker arrived in London in August 1851 his interests and those of the Organization had broadened considerably. Having undertaken to raise $15 to $17 million for the construction of the Illinois Central Railroad, and realizing that investment capital was more plentiful in Europe than
ever before, they aimed to raise one-third of this amount abroad. Accordingly, Walker asked W. W. Corcoran, the Philadelphia banking magnate, for an introduction to the British banking family of Baring and to George Peabody, the American merchant banker who had made such a success in London. He stayed in London from September 1851 to January 1852 meeting Baring and Peabody, becoming a guest member of the Athenaeum Club, and through its Secretary being introduced to Cabinet officials and other Members of Parliament. Besides collecting a $20,000 retaining fee from the railroad, Walker stood to gain $150,000 if the venture ultimately succeeded. As far as one can tell, however, little was achieved in London. Had it been otherwise, the Organization would then have played its part in securing Congressional support.

A year later when Crampton broached the topic of a Reciprocity Treaty, Secretary of State Marcy suggested that he get in touch with Walker. Not being a member of the Pierce Administration he was free to assist Crampton in a way which a Cabinet member like Marcy could not.¹²

Like Beverley Tucker, Robert J. Walker had a falling out with President Pierce. Initially he accepted an appointment as Special Envoy to China, but because he felt that Pierce deceived him, he declined it shortly thereafter. In the Presidential election of 1856 he joined other members of the Organization in supporting James Buchanan. Buchanan’s gratitude was double-edged, however, for it was a dubious honour to offer Walker the Governorship of the explosive Kansas Territory. Though not an ardent abolitionist, he had freed his own slaves as early as 1838 and had openly advocated national unity which ran counter to states’ rights. His tenure as Governor lasted less than a year and by the end of 1857 he had resigned. The South charged him with treachery for becoming reconciled to self-determination for Kansas as a free state.

During the Civil War Walker strongly supported the cause of the Union and devoted much of his time to raising $250 million in Great Britain. His old financial touch had not left him. Neither did it after the War when he assisted Secretary of State Seward in negotiating the purchase of Alaska from the Russians.

Of equal prominence with R. J. Walker in Democratic Party circles was William L. Marcy. Born in 1786, he was the oldest man in the Organization. After graduating from Brown University he settled in upstate New York, gradually making his way into state politics and eventually becoming Governor in 1833. President Martin Van Buren,
a fellow New York Democrat, appointed him to the Mexican Claims Commission of 1840–2 before their estrangement over the issues of Texas and slavery. With the election of President Polk in 1844 Marcy was chosen Secretary of War, but he was acutely unprepared for the hostilities which broke out a year later with Mexico and made a number of political enemies during the war. At the conclusion of the Polk Administration he returned to New York as a private citizen.

However, Marcy had Presidential ambitions. He witnessed the fragmentation of the Democratic Party in 1848 and the subsequent electoral victory of the Whigs, and harboured the hope that as a moderate he could restore party harmony. Like R. J. Walker he was a strong believer in preserving the Union against the extremes of rabid Southern slave-holding and radical Northern abolitionism. In order to finance his political ambitions he resumed his legal career, supplementing his income by advocating claims although his biographer says 'he was deeply prejudiced about claims agents and their business'. Nevertheless, by the opening months of 1851 Marcy was to be found in Washington pressing several claims, 'despite his hostility to such employment', and it was at this time that Knox Walker, R. J. Walker, and J. Y. Mason approached him about the Organization.

A scrutiny of both his correspondence and his working diaries for the years 1849–51 does not necessarily bear out the notion that he shrank from prosecuting claims, using influence, and speculating in business. According to these, he spent the first part of November 1850 overseeing the affairs of the Canal Bank of New York State and then he attended the meetings of two Boards of Directors of which he was a member; the possibility of opening a railway line from Toledo, Ohio, to Chicago, Illinois, prompted him to invest about $25,000 in the two companies: the New York Railroad Co. and the Northern Indiana Railroad Co. In December he made some notes on Christmas Day concerning his moral and financial assets, listing among the former that perhaps he should have spoken out more for the cause of moderation in the great political turmoil associated with the Compromise of 1850. But then he admitted that being in the limelight was a mixed blessing. 'Though my life has been decidedly that of a public man, I have a disrelish for public affairs.' As for his financial balance sheet he commented: 'I have turned my labour during the year now closing to some account in a pecuniary point of view.' Besides his business and legal services which would net him about $3,000 he would receive $500 for pressing
the Leggett claim and there was the prospect of a further $2,000 from a number of claims which he agreed to handle for James H. Causten of Washington. Causten was a successful claims agent who had operated in the Capitol for a number of years representing certain of the Latin American states diplomatically and specializing in claims against other Central and South American republics. Marcy had the experience of the 1840–2 Mexican Claims Commission. Together they were in an excellent position to co-operate in the pursuit of their clients' claims following the Treaty of 1848 ending the war with Mexico. A Commission established by Congress to arbitrate these claims met briefly in June 1850 but Causten told Marcy not to bother coming to Washington then since the main adjudication would occur from December 1850 to April 1851. Accordingly, Marcy was sent for in late December and arrived in Washington on 6 January. On 13 January he noted in his diary: 'prepared to go at the cases which I am to examine for Mr. C. Went to the Capitol, saw many of the Senators, but few of the members [of the House]'. That evening he dined with Robert J. Walker and the next day wrote: 'entered on the examination of Mr. C.'s cases. Dined with Beverley Tucker.'

A month later he was still working on Causten's cases by day and attending parties every evening. This pattern continued through March when he was finally able to get away from Washington, and in May drew upon Causten for $2,000. That June he went to Chicago on railway business, returning only briefly to Washington. Most of 1851 he spent in Albany, but he continued working on the Mexican claims. In November Causten informed him of clients who were dissatisfied with their awards from the Commission and wanted further compensation directly from Congress. Some of these claims came via J. Knox Walker who wanted to split the expected proceeds three ways.

Marcy may not have liked the business of a claims agent but he certainly worked hard at it and had good results. Since nothing could be less certain than securing the Democratic Party nomination for President, he had to do something in the meantime which would provide for himself and his family as well as keep his political lines of communication open. With the election of Franklin Pierce in 1852, Marcy was in a strong position for a Cabinet appointment since he had not done as several other members of the Organization like Knox Walker and Beverley Tucker had, and supported Stephen A. Douglas's candidacy. Pierce offered him the most prestigious Cabinet post, Secretary of State,
which he readily accepted. When Pierce left office Marcy also stepped down, having no special claims on the new President, James Buchanan. He died later that same year.\textsuperscript{15}

John Y. Mason became involved in the Organization by much the same route as the others: a combination of political activity and pecuniary need. Born in Virginia in 1799, he took his university degree at North Carolina and was admitted to the Virginia Bar in 1819. In 1831 he was elected to the House of Representatives, and served there until 1837. For the next seven years he was a federal judge, but in 1844 he returned to political life as President Tyler’s Secretary of the Navy. Under President Polk he held the office of Attorney General for a year and then was reappointed head of the Navy Department for the remainder of Polk’s Administration.

For the next few years he lived in Richmond, resumed his legal practice, and presided over the Virginia Constitutional Convention of 1850–1. He also became President of the James River and Kanawha Co. with the expectation that a canal would be built connecting Virginia and West Virginia with the Ohio River. At this time Mason was apparently in debt and seeking ways to improve his position. According to a letter dated September 1850 he was obliged to assure one of his debtors, H. B. Grigsby, that the interest on a loan would be paid promptly twice a year. He wrote an even more revealing letter to James Buchanan: ‘Since May 1849 I have been incessantly occupied and even as much annoyed, and always anxiously employed, under pressure to meet engagements and provide for a numerous household’.\textsuperscript{16}

Like other members of the Organization, Mason may have turned lobbyist primarily to improve his financial position. However, he clearly enjoyed playing an active role in politics. As Chairman of the Democratic Party’s Committee for the State of Virginia, he exerted considerable influence on party affairs and doubtless had a hand in swinging his delegation to Pierce at the convention in Baltimore in 1852. Presumably as a reward Pierce appointed him American Minister to Paris where he died unexpectedly in 1859.

Still another member of the Organization once served under President Polk. This was Edmund Burke. Born in 1809, he was admitted to the Bar in 1829 and soon thereafter took up residence in Newport, New Hampshire, where for many years he controlled and edited the \textit{Argus and Spectator}, one of the leading state newspapers. In 1838 he was elected to the House of Representatives and began to spend increasing amounts
of time in Washington. At the end of his third and final term in the House, Polk appointed him Commissioner of Patents which lasted until the spring of 1849, when he accepted the co-editorship of the Democratic Party newspaper, the *Washington Union*. Burke was supposed to restore party unity regarding slavery and the admission of new states. However, the Party was already too badly split, and Burke was soon forced out.¹⁷

After this he devoted most of his time to New Hampshire affairs although he also maintained a law office in Boston. He was the first member of the Organization to work for the nomination of Franklin Pierce which was natural since both of them were from New Hampshire, and as much as anyone Burke was responsible for Pierce’s success at Baltimore in June 1852. Burke’s expectations of gratitude from his Party leader were dashed, however, because Pierce chose not to support him as Senatorial candidate the following autumn, thereby helping Burke’s local political enemies who claimed most of the party patronage. Increasingly he became critical of the Administration and finally broke completely with Pierce by publishing some correspondence which showed that the President was far from the unsuspecting, last-minute candidate he had made himself out to be.¹⁸

George Ashmun of Massachusetts (1804–70) was the only Whig among the original members of the Organization. Like almost all of the others he was a college or university graduate (Yale) and then studied law. By 1828 he had established himself in Springfield, Massachusetts, where he resided till his death. During the 1830s he served in both Houses of the Massachusetts legislature, later going to Washington as a US Representative, whose term coincided with Polk’s and many of his claims agent colleagues. However, his views strongly contrasted with those of R. J. Walker, Marcy, and Burke who were compromisers on the issue of slavery. Ashmun was strongly against the extension of slavery and consequently against the war with Mexico. As a Whig he tried to curb Polk’s power of patronage although he didn’t necessarily condemn all such political influence. In fact he may have lost his Congressional seat because he publicly defended Daniel Webster against charges of bribery and corruption. In 1860 he presided over the Republican Party convention at Chicago which nominated Lincoln, and was also the last person to discuss a matter of business with him on 14 April 1865 before the President went to Ford’s theatre. The subject of this last meeting confirmed Ashmun’s continuing activities as a claims agent since it
dealt with whether Lincoln would be willing to set up a commission to judge the case of one of Ashmun’s clients in Massachusetts.¹⁹

A somewhat later recruit to the Organization was George M. Dallas who figured prominently as Vice-President in the Polk Administration. After his term of office he returned to Philadelphia to prosecute claims and represent the interests of the Pennsylvania Railroad. In 1852 he was a strong contender for Secretary of State, but Pierce decided to choose Marcy instead. A year later he was asked by one of the members of the Organization to help with the Reciprocity Bill. Alternating as a friend and rival of Buchanan, he was appointed Minister to London in 1856.²⁰

Although not an original member of the Organization, Lewis Charles Levin deserves particular attention since he became personally responsible for trying to get a Copyright Bill through Congress. Born in 1808 in Charleston, South Carolina, he availed himself of the opportunity of an education at South Carolina College. In his early twenties he taught school in Mississippi, and later studied law. Eventually he made his way to Philadelphia and was admitted to the Bar there in 1840. He practised law sporadically for the rest of his life, but it became apparent that his real vocation was as an entrepreneur, especially in politics. In the 1840s he published two newspapers. The first was called the Temperance Advocate, but this was soon replaced by a penny daily called the Sun. The Sun became the official spokesman of a new political coalition with which Levin had become involved, the Native American Party.

The Native American Party came into being as a reaction against the growing numbers of immigrants who began to arrive on America’s shores. Since many of these were Roman Catholic, the Nativists combined their anti-foreign sentiments with anti-Catholic ones. They regarded the Democratic Party as an arch enemy because it made a special effort to recruit immigrants into its ranks, and they viewed the Whigs as nominal friends who were, however, unable to adequately represent working-class people threatened by the tide of immigration and resulting competition for jobs. In July 1844 riots broke out in Philadelphia directed against Catholics, and although Levin tried to restrain his followers he was implicated and later indicted for treason by a Grand Jury. This only served to enhance his popularity among those supporting him as a candidate for the House of Representatives. Efforts were made by his enemies to bring him to trial but he was duly elected from the First District of Philadelphia and took his seat in Congress the following year.²¹
As a lobbyist he came into his own as a result of a lengthy and involved case that arose during the course of 1849–50. He was still a Representative at the time and therefore the natural recipient of many requests for assistance from his Philadelphia constituents. One of those seeking his support was William D. Lewis, a banker and Whig party member who wanted to be Collector of Customs for the Port of Philadelphia. As a member of the House Committee on Naval Affairs Levin was a logical Congressman to approach, and it was known that he had been instrumental in promoting the construction of a dry dock for Philadelphia in 1848. The Collectorship represented more than a lucrative job. It carried with it the responsibility of dispensing a number of lower-level appointments, thus endowing the office with political power through local patronage. With the Whigs in power in Washington, men like Lewis looked forward to sharing the political spoils, but so did other influential Pennsylvania Whigs who were not about to let the Collectorship go unchallenged.

Although not a Whig himself, Levin found it convenient to co-operate with them at election-time. This had been especially true in 1848 when the Native Americans struck a bargain of mutual assistance with the Whigs whereby the Nativists would support Whig candidates throughout the State in return for support by them in the First District of Philadelphia where Levin’s strength lay. The compact succeeded and Pennsylvania went both Whig and Nativist: moreover the State was one of two crucial determinants in the election of Zachary Taylor. Thus, when the new Administration assembled for the first time in March 1849 Levin anticipated wielding more power than he had during the previous Democratic régime. Office-seekers like Lewis were anxious to solicit Levin’s support because he presumably had more influence than the newly elected Whig Senator from Pennsylvania, James Cooper.

A political appointment such as the Collectorship of Philadelphia had to go through two phases. One was securing nomination by the new Cabinet and the other was confirmation by the Senate. Accordingly Levin began making the rounds of the new Cabinet members, urging them to consider the merits of William D. Lewis. At the same time he began to establish himself as a man of influence who was willing to assist members of Congress with their pet projects if they would acquiesce in Levin’s requests. It was axiomatic that during the first few months of a new Administration much time was taken up with political patronage. A measure of this preoccupation was finding President Taylor...
interrupting a conference with the British Minister in order to chat with Levin about the Collectorship of Philadelphia! Because the name of Lewis had been slandered it was essential that the President as well as the Cabinet be told the truth. Levin advised Lewis: 'a committee of merchants, upon whom you can certainly rely, should come on (to Washington), and if they will see me in advance, I will arrange all matters for an interview with the President'.

Not satisfied with his dexterous manipulation of patronage, Levin had a compelling desire to believe in the righteousness of his cause and conversely the perfidy of his opponents. The perpetration of gross calumnies about Lewis provided this pretext, and Levin threw himself wholeheartedly into clearing Lewis’s name.

I need not tell you how my heart leaped at this declaration which showed that your good name, like polished steel, had flung off from its bright surface the opprobrious breath that sought to stain it. What a vindication! What a triumph! How true it is that slander, take what form or shape it may, not only furnishes its own antidote but, like empty sound among barren hills, receives its best answer from its own dying echo... I scarcely know to what cause to attribute the deep interest I have felt in this matter, for if it had been my own father I could not have done more. A friend first stirred my blood and awakened and aroused my energies in behalf of a much injured man. My reward will be the consciousness of having discharged my duty.

As Levin reported to Lewis, 'I continued to pile influence upon influence, cautiously watching and tracing the effect of every move', but though he succeeded in lining up the tacit support of about half of the Cabinet members, the Secretary of the Treasury, William Meredith, was not so easily won over, and it was under his jurisdiction that the Collectorship fell. Meredith’s tactic was to delay whereas Levin sought to push through Lewis’s nomination as quickly as possible. Delay would allow time for the anti-Lewis Whigs in Pennsylvania to settle on an alternative candidate, while at the same time dismissing the claims of those who were pro-Lewis. It was a typical intra-party struggle, but Levin hoped that as an outsider he could tip the scales in Lewis’s favour.

The fact is, that with the co-operation of a few active-minded and energetic men, I have succeeded in bringing about an entire change in the policy of the Administration, so far as appointments are to be made. They begin to see the importance of appointing men to office who can concentrate political power and combine dissident elements. They began to see and feel the
difference between appointing a man merely qualified to discharge the duties of the office and one who, while he will discharge its duties, will also look to the considerations of political power.

There was another explanation for Levin’s influence, and he was the first to acknowledge it. If a Whig other than Lewis were appointed, Levin would withdraw his own as well as the Nativist Party’s support from the Administration, or alternatively, if the Administration appointed a member of the Native American party over Levin’s head, so to speak, Levin would be forced to repudiate such a candidate, split his own party, and destroy the effectiveness of the Whig-Nativist alliance. In either case the Democrats would carry the First Congressional District in the next election and perhaps the whole state. Only by approving Lewis’s nomination could the Taylor Administration sustain the support of the Native Americans as well as most Whigs. It was not exactly political blackmail but it served the same purpose, and on 9 May the Cabinet gave their approval.

Congress reconvened in December 1849 at which time the Senate’s Committee on Commerce was formed. Lewis’s nomination was now in their hands. Memorials for and against him poured in to the Committee. But trouble loomed from another quarter. During the previous spring the Whig Senator from Pennsylvania, Cooper, had tacitly supported Lewis’s nomination. However, during the intervening months Lewis and Cooper had a falling out over local patronage. Cooper had made a list of party faithfuls who he felt deserved jobs from the prospective Collector and Lewis preferred to make his own choices in the interest of Whig party harmony and co-operation with the Nativists. Cooper resented this and determined to block Lewis’s Senate confirmation.

By January 1850 it was all-out war between the supporters and the enemies of William D. Lewis; and by extension between Levin and Cooper. In his struggle to influence the Commerce Committee and ultimately the entire Senate, Levin’s true personality came out. A combination of demagogue and crusader which had manifested itself on the public platform before large crowds now found an outlet in the corridors and ante-chambers of the nation’s Capitol. In secret letters sent to Lewis by a trusted friend he gave full vent to his animosity and frustration. Of Cooper he wrote:

difference between appointing a man merely qualified to discharge the duties of the office and one who, while he will discharge its duties, will also look to the considerations of political power.

the poor, miserable, unscrupulous scoundrel is hard at work and will have his labor for his pains. . . . [He is] an infamous and unprincipled liar. . . . You
see how the infamous villain is cutting his own throat, or more aptly, preparing a gallows on which he is destined to swing. How I should like to reach his sensorium, by the application of a raw-hide to his recreant limbs.

A few days later he reported: 'Oh! How I love this fight! It braces my nerves! It operates like a shower bath upon my entire system!' And again,

*I am breaking Cooper's political neck, and before I am done, he will not have a political bone in his body, unmashed. It has become what I supposed it would - a fight - bold, fearless, manly, and honest on one side - cowardly, sneaking and stealthy on the other. He will soon be hemmed in on all sides, and when he begins to beg - why, I may take pity on the wretch and teach him a lesson of humility.*

Never since the origin of this Government has there been such a struggle.

Ordinarily the Senate respected a member's recommendation not to confirm, but Levin managed to show that Cooper's opposition was personally motivated. Matters dragged on for month after month because the Commerce Committee was reluctant to alienate either faction. In the meantime Lewis recruited additional lobbying support. By April Levin reported to Lewis that Cooper was becoming desperate.

*Cooper evidently relies on a bargain which I am sure cannot be carried into effect, simply because the Southern Senators are not willing to degrade themselves. His plan is as follows. He came into the Senate a strong anti-slavery man, and now thinks that by a surrender of his fixed political principles on that subject, he can so commend himself to the South as to secure certain votes against you.*

And a few weeks later: 'The low cunning of Cooper is overmatched by superior skill, while his groveling malignant purposes are hourly thwarted by the efforts of those whose motives are pure and whose objects are lofty.'

In July President Zachary Taylor suddenly died and Vice-President Millard Fillmore assumed office. A thorough reshuffle of the Cabinet took place. This in itself did not directly affect Lewis's nomination, but it did prolong the session of Congress as did the 'Compromise of 1850' which dealt with the expansion of slavery and the balance of power among the states. Thus Congress was still sitting in September, a good month after it might otherwise have adjourned, and during that month the Commerce Committee finally and unanimously recommended
Lewis. Cooper did all he could to prevent a vote, even absenting himself a week. Out of courtesy the Senate waited until he returned and then approved Lewis's appointment by a vote of 37 to 7. Cooper was the only Whig in opposition. After this victory Levin seriously considered leaving the House of Representatives to concentrate on lobbying as a full-time occupation. On 6 August 1850 he confided to Lewis:

I have determined not to run. But I desire the nomination because Cooper has reported that my advocacy of yourself has destroyed me in the first district. . . . I do not wish it known that I intend to decline, for then they would give me the empty compliment in anticipation of it. I want it bona fide, and then decline.

The Native American Party re-nominated him and he agreed to run again for a fourth term. His prospects were good as long as the Whigs and Nativists co-operated, but if Cooper's wing of the Pennsylvania Whigs supported its own candidate, he was in trouble. This was precisely what happened, predictably splitting the Whig-Nativist vote and thereby throwing the election to the Democrat.

Out of Congress but far from out of influential Washington circles, Levin tried briefly to play the part of king-maker. It was an open secret that Daniel Webster, Fillmore's Secretary of State, coveted the Presidency. Learning that Webster would be passing through Philadelphia he offered to promote his candidacy.

I am anxious for you to spend the evening at my house, and will undertake to have ten thousand friends in front of my house to greet you. A demonstration, on your arrival, is not the thing; our friends, are the working men, the bone and sinew, and they cannot be brought out during the day. It will all be done, in a quiet way, and the effect will be startling.

Webster failed to secure the Whig party nomination in 1852 but was supported for the Presidency by the Native American nominating convention.

It was sometime in 1851 that Levin allied himself with the Organization. Although he lacked the prestige and status of ex-Cabinet officers like Marcy and Robert J. Walker, he made up for this in determination and contacts. Whereas most of the other members were Democrats at a time when a Whig held the Presidency, Levin still carried influence among the Whigs. No matter what the topic he seemed to know the right people from whom to elicit help and advice. How he
became the liaison between Henry Bulwer’s nephew, Robert Lytton, and the Organization is difficult to say, but as was so often the case it probably stemmed from a personal acquaintance with Thomas William Charles Moore, the courier for the British Legation in Washington.

In 1856 Levin was seriously afflicted by mental illness which plagued him periodically until his death in 1860.

The careers and attitudes of those who made up the Organization give some clue as to its nature and how it functioned. Judging by the way members came and went from Washington it was never a fixed quantity for very long and its exact membership was a subject of conjecture at any given moment. Most of the original members were closely affiliated with the Polk Administration and the Democratic Party: R. J. Walker as Secretary of the Treasury, Marcy as Secretary of War, and Mason as Secretary of the Navy. Knox Walker was Polk’s nephew and private secretary. Tucker, though not an ardent Democrat, got his start in politics through the help of Mason and others in the party. Burke became Commissioner of Patents. Only Levin and Ashmun had no close ties with Polk, although they were both in Congress throughout his Presidency. By 1852 even Levin had swung over to the Democrats and for a time linked his political and patronage fortunes with theirs. As he explained to Marcy shortly before Franklin Pierce was elected President and well before Marcy had been chosen Secretary of State, ‘When I consented to become a Candidate for Congress I well knew that neither of the old parties [Democratic or Whig] would give me their support, and hence, defeat to a local party was inevitable.’ The Pennsylvania Whigs thought they had a bargain with the Catholics of Philadelphia to support one another, and thus the Whigs had no intention of backing Levin and his Native Americans. However, the Democrats were confident they still could control the Catholic vote. ‘Knowing my position in the Native American Party, I determined to run in the face of defeat, for the purpose of transferring our whole strength to the support of Pierce and King.’ Levin was sure that 14,000 of the 15,000 Nativist votes in Pennsylvania would go for Franklin Pierce.29

Ironically the strength of the Organization was greater under the Whigs than under the Democrats. Perhaps this was due to the need felt by the Taylor-Fillmore Administration to arrive at a better working understanding with the Democrats in Congress, especially after the elections of 1850 when the Whigs lost their slim majority. Although the Democrats retained a majority under Pierce, factional disputes within
the Party reduced what effectiveness the Organization might otherwise have had.

Something else bound many of the members together: their impecuniousness. As we have seen, Tucker and Mason were especially badly off, but all except Robert J. Walker and William L. Marcy were in need of funds. Paradoxically, most of the lobbyists helped their clients to obtain great wealth, though they themselves were struggling attorneys and ex-politicians trying to stay afloat or get themselves out of debt. For example, a contemporary lobbyist for the Reciprocity Bill, I. D. Andrews, spent well over $100,000 and had to devote the rest of his life collecting about half that amount.

In general the Organization was in favour of preserving the Union and not giving way to the extreme demands of states’ rights’ advocates. On the other hand none of them except Ashmun was sympathetic to the Free Soil platform which they felt would equally tear the Union apart. Mason, Tucker, Knox Walker, and perhaps Levin were prepared to see slavery endure for an indefinite time, while R. J. Walker wanted to phase it out gradually and the others a bit more rapidly. Like many of their contemporaries they thought that slavery would eventually die because of economic and geographical reasons, therefore why precipitate a confrontation between the North and South.

Their stand on slavery in addition to their strong support of the Democratic Party meant that many of them found James Buchanan a congenial candidate in the election of 1856. As President he retained Mason as Minister to France, appointed Dallas Minister to London, assigned Tucker to the Consulship of Liverpool, gave R. J. Walker the dubious privilege of trying to govern the Kansas Territory, and might have found a post for Levin if he were not indisposed.

One further principle was at work for those who became Organization members: friendship and family connection. Tucker was a close associate of Knox Walker and a family friend of Mason’s. His brother married one of Dallas’s daughters, and Dallas’s niece married Robert J. Walker. All shared the common experience of Washington life and society.

This was the group, then, that seemed so formidable to the British Legation in 1851 when it offered its services through T. W. C. Moore to Crampton and Robert Lytton for the purpose of pressing for copyright legislation. With the political climate in Washington such as it was, there is little wonder that the Organization’s assistance was accepted, for a price.