IV. The Big Family

Once Joseph Ellicott had entered politics to solve the land problems of the Holland Land Company, it was almost inevitable that he would be dragged further into other aspects of political life. This is just what happened.

Specifically, there evolved three new areas of politics in which Ellicott felt that he was forced to participate: campaigning in state elections, establishing working arrangements with other political figures, and sharing responsibility in the distribution of political appointments. In considering the first area, he realized that state elections were important; he could expect political favors from the Council of Appointment only if he had helped to elect the legislators who chose this patronage-dispensing council. He understood, secondly, that he would have to deal harmoniously with other politicians who were bound to emerge on the purchase or, failing to gain their cooperation, would have to be ready to fight them. Finally, he knew that his position as Resident-Agent in western New York required loyal and responsible friends who would form a tightly knit political hierarchy obedient to him. To make this organization possible, he needed considerable personal influence in the apportionment of political offices. Thus, the problems of land sales steadily pushed Ellicott into his initial political mold which, in turn, pressured him into newer and broader spheres of political activity.

In the process of meeting his increasing political responsibilities, Ellicott faced his first problem in the state election of 1804. Until that date, Ellicott had had no reason to campaign actively for a particular candidate for governor. He had accepted the office of Resident-Agent in 1800, and felt that it was unnecessary to take part in the gubernatorial election of 1801. He had helped to organize Genesee County in 1803, however, so the election of state officials in 1804 was of particular importance to the Holland Land Company. If the voters chose a majority of Federalists to the state assembly, the followers of Alexander Hamilton would then control the Council of Appointment. The council, conscious of the importance of patronage, would in all probability select mostly Federalists to fill key offices in the
recently created Genesee County. Aware of the serious consequences of a Federalist victory, the Republican-oriented Ellicott watched the developments in 1804 with considerable interest.

The election produced a serious battle within the Republican party rather than an interparty contest between the followers of Hamilton and those of Jefferson. The disunited Federalists declined to advance their own candidate for governor in 1804 because his chances for victory were slender; the annual election of 1803 had given the Democrats such a large majority that the Federalists decided to avoid the embarrassment of a certain and crushing defeat. When the Federalists defaulted in this gubernatorial election, the results were a foregone conclusion. The Republicans needed only to dictate who would occupy the governor's chair, for the campaigning and voting became formalities. This apparently minor matter of naming the new governor, however, erupted into an intra-party brawl as the Republicans disagreed among themselves regarding the choice of their candidate.

In the search for a gubernatorial candidate, the Republicans wavered between two kinds of contestants. On the one hand, there were advocates of the type of man who sought the office but lacked the popular support of the party. On the other hand, there was a demand for candidates whom the majority of the party would accept, but who declined the office. George Clinton and John Lansing belonged to the latter category. Clinton, the incumbent governor, had held that office for seven terms, six of which had been successive. Anxious to become vice-president of the United States, Clinton had accepted an offer to serve as a running mate with Jefferson in 1804 and therefore refused an eighth term as governor. The Republicans then asked Lansing to agree to be a candidate. After many years in state politics, he had climbed to the highest judicial office of the state—that of chancellor—and would be an attractive nominee. He accepted the call of his party reluctantly because the tenure of the chancellorship was virtually for life. Lansing withdrew his name shortly afterward, however, when he learned that some Republican legislators were opposed to him and had come out for Aaron Burr in a special caucus.

Aaron Burr was typical of the candidate who wanted the office, yet failed to have the confidence of the party. Small in stature but large in talent, Burr had successfully applied his great energy to two vocations: law and politics. As a lawyer, his agile mind, careful preparation of prudently selected cases, and shrewd court tactics had brought him earnings in excess of $10,000 a year, a large sum sur-
passed by few in those days. As a politician, Burr had made good progress, holding the offices of attorney general of New York, United States senator, and state assemblyman. He was now completing his term as vice-president of the United States but had no hopes for renomination to that office; his seemingly evasive tactics in 1801, when the House of Representatives was forced to choose between Jefferson and Burr, had lost him the backing of many Republicans. Despite this defection, enough of his Republican friends remained loyal to Burr to place his name in nomination for the office of governor.

The bulk of the Republicans, however, turned to the brother-in-law of the influential Livingston family, the amiable but lackluster Morgan Lewis. Although he was far from a first choice of the Republican party, the followers of Clinton and Livingston again joined forces against Burr; they chose Lewis as their candidate for governor and John Broome, member of the 1804 Council of Appointment, for lieutenant-governor. When the Lewis-Broome ticket was placed in nomination, the election of 1804 developed into a bitter battle between the supporters of Lewis and the followers of Burr.

Until now, Ellicott had watched the nomination of the gubernatorial candidates without taking sides. However, when Oliver Phelps accepted the invitation to run for the office of lieutenant-governor on the same ticket with Aaron Burr, Ellicott found himself increasingly involved in the election. Like Ellicott, Phelps was an ardent Jeffersonian, and the two men had supported each other on several occasions. One of the earliest frontiersmen in the western part of New York, Phelps understood political tactics, and had become the first judge of Ontario County soon after the legislature had created that county. In 1801, less than one year after Joseph Ellicott had come to the purchase as Resident-Agent, Phelps had offered to get him appointed as a judge of Ontario County. In return, Ellicott had given Phelps valuable support in 1802, when the latter had won election to Congress. Phelps always recognized the value of this help.

Not only were his personal relations with Phelps pulling him into that state election, but Ellicott also felt pressure from other people who urged that he play an active role in the election of 1804. For example, his older brother Andrew, who was living in Pennsylvania, warmly endorsed Burr's candidacy as an end to the "equalising and leveling mania." Moreover, Andrew regarded his brother's position as so pivotal that Joseph could determine the actual victor. "In New York," Andrew continued, "it is supposed that if you take an active part in favor of Mr. Burr, his election will be certain." On the other
hand, Jeremiah Munson, the surrogate of Genesee County, and Simeon DeWitt, the surveyor-general of New York State, both of them friends of Joseph Ellicott, wanted him to support Morgan Lewis.

Since Phelps and Burr were running as a team, Joseph Ellicott found himself in the dilemma caused by his desire to support Phelps and his unwillingness to back Burr. His antipathy to Burr, like his friendship for Phelps, antedated the 1804 election. Ellicott's dislike for Burr stemmed from the latter's checkered relations with the Holland Land Company. In 1796, Burr had contracted for 100,000 acres of land from the Company and, as evidence of his good faith, had agreed to pay a penalty of $20,000 if he defaulted in his payments. The boom in land sales collapsed by the end of 1796, and Burr was in trouble. Unable to pay the Dutch owners for the land, he was also threatened by a heavy penalty for defaulting.

Aaron Burr and the Holland Land Company were involved in a much more serious problem. Aliens, like the Dutch owners, could not legally own land in New York State. New York was not unique, for the only state in the union that permitted aliens to own property was Pennsylvania. The Dutchmen were aware of the legal restrictions but minimized its seriousness. Sophisticated businessmen, they were confident that the state legislature could be persuaded to rescind the law barring alien ownership, and if the lawmakers refused, the Dutch owners had great trust that the state would never resort to confiscation. Thus the Holland Land Company empowered American trustees to hold their lands in western New York.

Less confident than the Dutch owners was Theophile Cazenove, the first Agent-General of the Holland Land Company and predecessor of Paul Busti. Patiently and persistently, Cazenove had tried various methods to get the state legislature to rescind the limits on aliens owning land. His direct proposal was overwhelmingly defeated by the lawmakers in 1793. He then employed legal counselors to serve as lobbyists, but the legislature in 1794 again voted down Cazenove's proposal. By now, the Dutch bankers were becoming uneasy and instructed Cazenove to continue his efforts. The prestigious Alexander Hamilton was added to the staff of legal advisors. Despite their skillful stratagems, the Company lobbyists gained only a compromise from the legislature in 1796: "said lands," read the law, "after the expiration of seven years from the passing of this act ... shall be forfeited to and vested in the people of this State." \(^2\) Alien landowners were granted a seven-year tenure to keep their lands.

The act of 1796 was better than not having any law at all. But the
Holland Land Company still lacked adequate legal protection so essential in such a large real estate operation. At the end of seven years, according to the law, the unsold land could revert to the state. Looked at another way, the Company must survey and sell its 3.3 million acres in western New York within seven years. There was little likelihood that the Company could do this in so brief a period.

Still dissatisfied, Cazenove continued to fight for a law without any restrictions on alien ownership of land. At this time, Philip Schuyler, Hamilton's father-in-law, had offered to use his political influence with the legislature to support Cazenove's measure if the Holland Land Company would reciprocate by supplying money to the Western Inland Navigation Company. Schuyler was president of that company and needed funds to advance his plans for the construction of a canal. As a result of Schuyler's great efforts in Albany, the legislature, in 1797, extended its alien land tenure "to the term of twenty years" provided the Holland Land Company furnished the Western Inland Navigation Company with $250,000 either as a loan or in purchase of stock. Cazenove and the Dutch owners, however, saw too many flaws in the arrangement and refused to agree to this loan.

Determined to make an all-out effort to mobilize support in the legislature to eliminate all restrictions on land tenure, Cazenove, at this juncture, asked help from Aaron Burr. A key member of the New York State Legislature in 1797, Burr agreed to help Cazenove. So well did Burr succeed that on April 2, 1798, the legislature passed the Alien Land Holding Act that permitted foreigners to own land in the State of New York "forever." In the process of persuading the legislature to approve this law of 1798, Burr had distributed $10,500 of Holland Land Company money for "counsel fees." A sizable sum in those days, the $10,500 was parcelled out to several people. $3,000 was given to Josiah Ogden Hoffman, the attorney-general of the state, $1,000 went to Thomas Morris to reimburse him for fees he had paid, and $1,000 was accepted by a Mr. L—— who stubbornly refused to give a receipt or to reveal his name. The remaining $5,500 went to Aaron Burr. However, Burr did not get this money outright but received it as a loan with the understanding that he would refund this sum within two years.

The previous good relations between Burr and Cazenove now began to sour. In 1798, when Burr did not pay his installment on the 100,000 acres which he had bought two years earlier, Cazenove pressed him for the money. Burr simply did not have the cash to pay, so in December, 1798, he offered to return the land and thus cancel the
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contract. Cazenove, however, insisted that Burr pay the $20,000 penalty clause. After considerable haggling, the two men agreed to rescind the contract of 1796. According to their agreement of May, 1799, Burr returned the 100,000 acres of land and paid a penalty by giving the Company an additional 20,000 acres of land that he already owned in another part of the purchase; Cazenove, in return, cancelled the $5,500 loan which had been part of the "counsel fees" for lobbying in 1798. The transaction left a bitter taste in Cazenove's mouth because he felt that he had already compensated Burr very well for the latter's efforts to support the law of 1798.

Sharing Cazenove's distaste for Burr's conduct involving the contract of 1796, Joseph Ellicott enumerated his own reasons for opposing Oliver Phelps's running mate. Burr's "baseness of principle in relation to his conduct toward the Company," Ellicott admitted to Busti, was "a circumstance alone, were there no other sufficient to render him too obnoxious to us." Moreover, Ellicott had a genuine fear that if Burr won the 1804 election, he would join the State of New York with those of New England in a secession movement. The Resident-Agent favored law and order; the secession of states from the federal union, he felt, would remove the strong central government so essential to the protection of large landowners with property in more than one state. Although this belief held by Ellicott was also a cardinal doctrine of the Federalists, he remained a Republican because of his basic Jeffersonian convictions. Finally, the Resident-Agent knew that his superior, Paul Busti, also strongly opposed Burr's candidacy. In making his choice, the Resident-Agent decided to sacrifice his friendship with Oliver Phelps for the welfare of the Company and to oppose the Burr-Phelps ticket. Ellicott was determined to stop Burr by using every means at his disposal.

Despite Busti's similar strong feelings against Aaron Burr, the Agent-General's characteristic caution took precedence over his personal preference for Morgan Lewis. Busti used the 1804 election to enunciate his general policy on the place of Company agents in politics. He believed that the agents should remain aloof from political elections; and, although Busti greatly opposed the election of Burr, he maintained that he could not exclude this election from his over-all principle of nonintervention. This position he clearly explained to Ellicott, instructing him as follows: "Notwithstanding my dislike that agents should meddle with the election (for in case of success no favor can be favored for the Company, and much harm in case of a failure) I am almost tempted in the case of B. [Burr] to deviate from
my system. For the sake of consistency I confine my request to you not to come forward as a champion for 'B' in the struggle and neither to oppose publicly his nomination, even if from your private opinion you should be inclined to do so." Busti concluded his instructions advocating caution and noninvolvement in political elections by reminding Ellicott: "The situation in which you are placed makes you so conspicuous, and with so much preponderance that it becomes necessary to you to act with as much circumspection as a prime minister of England."

For a time, Joseph Ellicott was as circumspect as a British prime minister and obeyed Busti's instructions. As the campaign became more bitter, however, Ellicott correspondingly grew more concerned about the effects of the election on his position as Resident-Agent for the Holland Land Company. The fight in 1804 had not only caused a rift in the statewide Republican party, but it also was affecting the unity of that party on Company land west of the Genesee. When state party discipline declined as a result of Burr's disregard of the gubernatorial choice of the regular Republican leadership, this schism was felt on a smaller scale in western New York. The split became accentuated when the influential brothers Augustus and Peter Porter threw their support behind Burr and Phelps.

Augustus and Peter Porter were active western New York businessmen whose political power had been steadily growing as a result of their ability and experience. Augustus, the elder of the two, had arrived at the frontier earlier than Peter, and for ten years had familiarized himself with the land by surveying activities. He surveyed East Bloomfield in 1789; in 1791 he marked boundaries for the Phelps and Gorham Purchase; and in successive years, he did the same kind of work for Robert Morris and Oliver Phelps. In 1798, Augustus continued his surveying, first for the Connecticut Land Company, and then for the Holland Land Company under Joseph Ellicott. Peter Porter, a graduate of Yale College, first came to New York's western frontier in 1793. Two years later, he started to practice law in the bustling village of Canandaigua. At this time, Peter preferred Republican principles and quickly involved himself in the political life of that party. The Republican-dominated Council of Appointment in 1797 rewarded him with the office of clerk of Ontario County. In addition to keeping this political sinecure, Peter won election to the state assembly in 1802, and his political star showed glowing potential.

The split between the Porter brothers and Joseph Ellicott over
the gubernatorial election of 1804 was an unexpected one. Prior to this, the Porters and Ellicott had all supported Oliver Phelps in the congressional election of 1802. One year later, Augustus had sought Ellicott’s backing for the assembly slate that he favored; and in 1804, Augustus had offered to endorse Joseph Ellicott for the assembly. Yet, in the 1804 gubernatorial campaign, the close friendship that the Porter brothers felt for Burr outweighed the strength of their attachment for Ellicott. Thus, in opposition to Ellicott’s stand, Peter and Augustus came out in support of Aaron Burr’s candidacy.

With the Porters’ swinging to the side of Burr, Ellicott’s fear of the consequences of a Burr victory grew to nightmare proportions as the election day neared. He even prophesied that, if Burr could increase his prestige by being elected governor of New York State, he might be tempted “to bring about a separation of the Union, which if ever effected cannot otherwise be than destructive to all the great Landholders that might fall in the Northern Section.” This thought so distressed the Resident-Agent that he decided to disregard Paul Busti’s explicit instructions to remain neutral during the election campaign. He now openly announced and publicized his opposition to Burr’s candidacy, justifying his actions to the Resident-Agent by stating: “This belief [that Burr was dangerously ambitious] produced such an effect upon my mind that it was impossible for me to avoid in some measure a little activity at the Election.”

The gubernatorial campaign of 1804 was sordid and one of the most savagely fought in the annals of the state’s history. Not since the American Revolution had there been such coarse vilification of candidates. As the election day drew nearer, irresponsible journalists and opportunistic politicians filled the air with lies, insinuations, innuendoes, and half-truths. Burr’s curious conduct in Jefferson’s 1801 election was dredged up and smeared, and his private life was exposed and maligned. Burr’s followers countered with an especially effective broadside signed “Plain Truth,” which enumerated in malicious detail the gross nepotism of the Clinton and Livingston families. Party spirit infiltrated nonpolitical channels. Friends of long standing stopped talking, business partners wrangled, and commerce declined sharply.

In contrast to the turbulence of the New York campaign, the presidential election of 1804 was relatively quiet. The Republicans, predictably, renominated Thomas Jefferson, while the Federalists, without much enthusiasm, selected Charles C. Pinckney. Jefferson approved of George Clinton as candidate for vice-president, thus recognizing the importance of the New York vote. Clinton did what was expected.
He helped carry the state in 1804 the way that Burr had done four years earlier. Clinton's aid, however, proved less essential. The Federalists suffered a crushing defeat; Jefferson received 162 electoral votes whereas only 14 went to Pinckney. Thousands of Federalists, pleased with Jefferson's actions, had deserted to the Republicans. Even the most partial Federalists had to admit that, under the sage of Monticello, executive power had increased, the constitution had been given a broad interpretation, and the Bank of the United States, the federal debt, and the navy had been retained.

Jefferson's reelection pleased Ellicott, but the victory of Lewis over Burr relieved and delighted the Resident-Agent. Morgan Lewis won by the comfortable margin of nearly 9,000 out of a total of some 53,000 votes cast. The regular Republicans, who supported Lewis, also triumphed in the legislature. Whatever power Aaron Burr still wielded among the voters ended completely when he killed Alexander Hamilton in a duel on July 11, 1805.

Like the rest of the state, the majority of the voters west of the Genesee favored Lewis. As reported in the New York *Evening Post*, on June 9, 1804, western New Yorkers gave Lewis 197 votes to 123 for Burr. The election results in Batavia showed that the voters had overwhelmingly supported the regular Republican candidates. Lewis obtained 111 to Burr's 11 votes, while Broome received 115 for the office of lieutenant-governor to the 7 votes won by Phelps. The Porters' opposition in this election had presented Ellicott with the first challenge to his position of power among the regular Republicans west of the Genesee. The election returns proved that, in this case, they did not have sufficient support of the rank and file voters to defeat the men whom Ellicott favored.

While Ellicott's influence in the 1804 election cannot be specifically weighed, the Resident-Agent, of course, interpreted the results as being highly favorable to him. The election convinced Ellicott that he had made a wise move when he disobeyed Busti's directive and openly opposed Burr. He cited the election results to his employer as proof that the voters of western New York had shown very little sympathy for Burr's philosophy. Furthermore, Ellicott felt that the election had strengthened the Company's position with the government elected to power.

Another consequence of the 1804 election was the separation of Peter Porter from his position as clerk of Ontario County. The Council of Appointment that selected the holder of this job had originally chosen Porter in 1797 as a reward for his services to the Republicans.
As a result of their victory in 1804, the regular Republicans now chose council members who opposed Burr and his cohorts. By the rules of the political game, Porter, who had supported the insurgent Burr, faced the loss of his clerkship. A friend of Ellicott's described Porter's mental state after Lewis' victory in the following manner: Porter "appears very sorry, and as sore, as he is sorry. He knows that he ought, and most probably will lose his office, which [has] so often warped his opinion, and [which he] has been very accommodating to save." Notwithstanding Porter's regret, the Council of Appointment punished him for his political heresy by taking away his position.

The battle between Burr and Lewis had drawn Ellicott into a political area that was novel to him: participation in a state election. The election struggle of 1804 also revealed to him that several challenging political figures were emerging on the purchase, and that he would have to maneuver to retain his political strength. Ellicott, therefore, prepared to handle another major problem of political life—establishing satisfactory relations with other political leaders.

One of the rising political figures who sought additional power in western New York was Erastus Granger. He first appeared in Buffalo during the election campaign of 1804. Prior to this, Granger had lived in Connecticut, where he had vigorously supported Thomas Jefferson. Moreover, Granger had the good fortune to have as a cousin Gideon Granger, the postmaster-general in Jefferson's cabinet. Because of Erastus Granger's industry and his cousin's prominent political position, Jefferson appointed him superintendent of Indian affairs.

Joseph Ellicott's contact with Erastus Granger began during the series of conferences and discussions that were held over the disposition of Company land to the Tuscarora Indians. The Tuscaroras had fled from North Carolina in 1711 and had joined the Iroquois Confederacy a year later. Living on the territory of the Senecas, the Tuscaroras had not received land for their reservation in the 1797 Treaty of Big Tree. The Holland Land Company and the Senecas, therefore, each donated two miles square to the Tuscaroras. This grant was not sufficient, so the Tuscaroras sought more land. However, in 1803, when the Tuscaroras applied to purchase land from the Company, they had to obtain the advice and approval of the federal government before they could buy it. Henry Dearborn, secretary of war, had the duty of advising the Tuscaroras on the wisdom of such a purchase. In this case, the Secretary of War gave his opinion that the Company was asking too high a price for this projected piece of land.

Dearborn's action so disconcerted Busti that the Agent-General
angrily responded to the Secretary of War. He did not realize, Busti heatedly told Dearborn, that the Secretary of War's advice to the Indians was based on his judgment whether the Company price was a just one. Busti maintained that the price of the land was justified and objected to Dearborn's decisive role in blocking the sale. But the Secretary of War clung to his position and insisted that it was his task to protect the Indians against their buying land at prices that he judged to be "considerably too high." 14

Dearborn's position prevented the consummation of the land sale to the Tuscaroras so Busti sought help to complete the transaction. It was only natural that he should turn to Erastus Granger, who had just assumed the office of superintendent of Indian affairs. In February, 1804, Busti talked with Granger in Philadelphia in an effort to enlist his support; he, however, agreed with Dearborn's original opinion that the "prices and conditions appeared too high." 15 Busti persisted in his plans for this sale, and urged Ellicott to try to influence Granger to take action favorable to the Holland Land Company. Ellicott and Granger met in March to discuss the projected sale. Ellicott now learned that part of the trouble stemmed from Oliver Phelps, the 1804 candidate for lieutenant-governor and friend of Burr, whom Ellicott had opposed. Granger claimed that Phelps had suggested to Dearborn that the Company had asked too high a price for the land. After considerable discussion, Ellicott succeeded in convincing Superintendent of Indian Affairs Granger that the price asked by the Holland Land Company was a fair one, and that Phelps's conduct was highly irregular. Granger therefore decided to support Ellicott; thus, with Granger's assistance, the Holland Land Company finally completed the sale. The Tuscaroras purchased 4,329 acres of land, paying the Company $13,722. The money came from a trust fund held by the United States as a result of a settlement of the Indian claims against North Carolina. The decisive role that Granger had played in that affair earned for him the gratitude of Ellicott and Busti.

After participating in the Tuscarora purchase, Granger sought to advance himself further. On September 3, 1804, he became the first postmaster of New Amsterdam (Buffalo) and held this office without interruption until 1818. He also accepted the position of financial agent in 1804 for some of the Seneca chiefs, a job which required Granger to receive the chiefs' annuities and to turn over the money to the Indian leaders. Since these annuities were paid by the Holland Land Company, Ellicott again came in contact with Granger and successfully developed working relationships that proved to be exceed-
ingly harmonious. Indeed, Ellicott was so pleased with Granger's cooperation that he demonstrated his gratitude by selling him three choice lots in Buffalo at a low price.

In addition to his friendly relations with the politically important Erastus Granger, Joseph Ellicott got along well with other western New York politicians. Alexander Rea, for example, had come under obligation to Ellicott soon after the latter became Resident-Agent. In 1801, Rea humbly solicited from Ellicott "any job he may have to offer next season." Two months later, Rea went to work for the Resident-Agent. Rea added to his obligations to Ellicott by borrowing money from him. Already $250 in debt to him, Rea, in 1804, asked Ellicott for an additional loan of $80. The job and loan paid large dividends to Ellicott, for Alex Rea soon rose in political stature. He had progressed from assessor and commissioner of highways for the town of Batavia, in 1803, to supervisor of the same town one year later. The voters then elected Rea to the state assembly in 1804, and reelected him to that office until 1808; in that year, the electorate sent him to the state senate where he served two terms until 1817. While a senator, the assembly elected him to the Council of Appointment in 1809.

When Alex Rea acquired a position of considerable political strength, he was quite ready to repay Ellicott for his earlier favors to him. As soon as he gained the seat in the state assembly, Rea sought Ellicott's advice on lawmaking matters. "I shall also be glad to have your concile [sic]," he told the Resident-Agent, "on Legislative business." Furthermore, Rea recognized Ellicott's paramount role in the choosing of candidates for county position by informing him: "I would be glad to have any nominations that may be forwarded as soon as it was convenient. I presume they will mostly come through your hands." On several occasions, Rea repeated this same type of request to Ellicott: "I would wish you to make the nomination." Rea even offered to do whatever Ellicott desired, assuring the Resident-Agent: "Should you have any commands to Albany I will be happy to serve you."

Another western New York politician who cooperated with Joseph Ellicott was Joseph Annin. A state senator from Aurelius, who served in the upper house from 1803 through 1820, Annin, like Alex Rea, willingly granted favors to Ellicott. Grateful for Ellicott's support in the early stages of his career, Annin often waited for Ellicott to choose the nominees for county posts, and offered to use his senatorial influence in the promotion of people whom the Resident-Agent wanted.
Thus, Ellicott had worked out arrangements with several politicians from western New York, and in the main these men cooperated with the Resident-Agent. Granger, Rea, and Annin supported Ellicott in many matters, their loyalty proving to be of considerable assistance in the operations of Holland Land Company policies.

Once he had established a cooperative climate with other politicians, Ellicott felt that he now needed the loyalty of family relations to assist him to direct his political affairs. For as the number of land sales increased, Ellicott's tasks as Resident-Agent rose proportionately, and he had correspondingly less time in which to care personally for his numerous obligations. Moreover, as the settlers spread out and populated the various parts of the vast purchase, he could not possibly maintain alone the close contact with local political figures so essential to an understanding of the residents' political thoughts. If Ellicott wished to fulfill adequately his duties as Resident-Agent and also to continue to attend to his political needs, he required the most trustworthy help. For this kind of support, Joseph Ellicott turned to his family.

Joseph depended heavily on the wise counsel and the constant support of his youngest brother, the tall, spare, good-natured Benjamin. Their association had been close and their interests identical. Together, they had spent numerous hours and walked many miles surveying new areas. Together, they had shared the hazards of the wilderness, the heat of the summer, and the frost of the winter. Side by side, the brothers had slept in heavily timbered land, on rocky soil, and near mosquito-infested lakes. Bachelors, they lived under one roof, risking their moneys together and sharing equally their fortunes. The intense and impatient Joseph needed the tact and grace of Benjamin in handling the settlers. Coming from diverse parts of the country, some of the pioneers of western New York confused individualism with anarchy. However, they respected Benjamin Ellicott as judge of Genesee County for his sweet reasonableness, his imposing size, and his relationship to the Resident-Agent of the Holland Land Company. The voters also elected Benjamin to two terms in Congress from 1817 to 1821.

The warm attachment that Joseph felt for his family led him to recruit from among relatives other lieutenants to share his political and economic responsibilities in western New York. He came to rely on his nephew, David Ellicott Evans. In 1803, David Evans, the son of Rachael Ellicott Evans (the twin sister of Benjamin Ellicott), had left his home in Maryland and had come to Batavia at the age of fifteen.
Starting as a clerk in his Uncle Joseph’s office, he made rapid progress and was soon promoted to cashier and then to accounting clerk. As a result of his close associations with Ellicott, Evans learned the intricate details of the land business as well as the political and economic problems of western New York. Then, with his uncle’s approval, Evans ran for the state senate in 1818. Elected as a senator, he promoted the best interests of his uncle and the Holland Land Company. Evans frequently sought Ellicott’s guidance, beginning each request for advice by stating: “I would wish your advice on.” Evans continued in politics and won a seat in Congress in 1826, but resigned his post the following year when the Company appointed him to an important administrative position. For many critical years, Evans worked closely with Ellicott, who so greatly respected the ability of his nephew that he granted him power of attorney to transact all of his personal business.

While Ellicott watched with pride the steady advancement of his nephew David Evans, the Resident-Agent was also impressed by the work of William Peacock. Peacock had entered the Company’s service in 1803, beginning as a clerk in the Batavia office under the exacting tutelage of the Resident-Agent. In 1804, Peacock, a skilled surveyor, laid out the street arrangement for much of the village of Buffalo, and then performed the same tasks for the county seats of Mayville and Ellicottville. Several years later, he also marked the boundaries of most of the towns of Chautauqua County. In 1807, William Peacock officially joined the Ellicott family when he married Joseph’s niece, Ann Ellicott Evans. He continued to climb in the Company, and in 1810 Ellicott sent him to Mayville, the county seat of Chautauqua, where he became a subagent directly responsible to the Resident-Agent. He held this office until the Company sold the rest of its land in 1836. Peacock, like Evans, became involved in politics and, with Ellicott’s permission, accepted the position of county treasurer from the Chautauqua County Board of Supervisors; he retained this post for ten years, until he resigned in 1821. Peacock also served as a county judge. In all his dealings with the Resident-Agent, Peacock worked hard for the Company and remained loyal to Joseph Ellicott.

David Goodwin also had married a daughter of one of Ellicott’s sisters and had joined the Holland Land Company as a clerk in the Batavia office. In 1817, the Resident-Agent showed his confidence in Goodwin by appointing him subagent for the County of Cattaraugus.

Finally, although James W. Stevens bore no relationship to Joseph Ellicott by birth or marriage, Stevens had worked so closely with him as his office assistant in Batavia that Ellicott considered him as much
an ally in the organization as he did Evans, Peacock, Goodwin, and his brother Benjamin. The association between the two men had begun in 1800 and continued until Ellicott died in 1826. During this period, he had learned to appreciate Stevens' efficiency, industry, honesty, and sound advice. Above all, Ellicott cherished Stevens' constant devotion to the Company and the family.

This inner family circle of Joseph and Benjamin Ellicott, David E. Evans, William Peacock, David Goodwin, and James W. Stevens soon became known as the Big Family. It was a tightly knit family group that held considerable economic and political power in western New York and, by working closely together, succeeded in increasing and consolidating its strength. At the head of the Big Family towered the dominating figure of Joseph Ellicott, part father, part instructor, part counselor—but always in command.

With the incorporation of family relations into a smoothly operating organization, Joseph Ellicott had added a major accomplishment that merged well with his other successes in the field of politics and politicians. It supplemented the effectiveness of the role that he had taken in the state election of 1804; it implemented his valuable work in establishing friendly ties with other politicians; and it strengthened considerably his position of power in western New York.

At all times, however, Joseph Ellicott clearly maintained that he had entered politics only as a means of increasing land sales, and not because of the attractiveness of political power. As Resident-Agent of the Holland Land Company, he never lost sight of the fact that it was his primary job to sell property, not to gain political laurels for the sake of personal prestige. He rubbed shoulders with political figures not because he envied them their occupational garments, but because he wished to demonstrate the strength and quality of his own. He would need all of the political respect that he could obtain if he were to overcome the three major problems still facing the Holland Land Company—the creation of new county seats, the lack of roads, and the high taxes that threatened to extinguish Company profits.