In spite of being one of the most talked-of men in the country early in 1825, because of his part in the Clay-Adams scandal episode, George Kremer has sunk into oblivion, even locally. He sometimes gets a line in the general American histories, when the authors are talking about the "Corrupt Bargain"; often he is not even given mention. Homer Cary Hockett, in his widely-used college textbook calls Kremer "a dull-witted member [of the House of Representatives] from Pennsylvania." Both Wayland Fuller Dunaway and Frederick A. Godcharles fail to list him in the indexes of their works. Marquis James refers to him as follows: "George Kremer, a quaint little rustic from a 'Pennsylvania Dutch' district, in private life a crossroads storekeeper and in his official capacity hitherto conspicuous only because of the leopard-skin coat he wore on the floor of the House." In short, before and after his great day in 1825 Kremer was obscure. Even at the time when he came to Jackson's defense by charging Clay and Adams with corruption, Jackson spelled the name as "Kreamer."

4 *The Life of Andrew Jackson* (Indianapolis, 1938), p. 434.
5 *Ibid.*, p. 461. Of course this is not too strong evidence of Kremer's obscurity, because Jackson was not a Dr. Samuel Johnson at spelling. In Snyder county the name is usually spelled "Kreamer."
The local histories are replete with crude errors about the essential facts of Kremer's life.\(^6\)

The facts about his early life seem to be as follows: He was born at Middletown, Dauphin county, November 21, 1775. His father and his uncle (General Peter Shuster) came from Germany where the latter had seen military service. Shuster kept a store at Middletown, and Kremer was his clerk until 1792 when he went to Selinsgrove. There he was employed by his uncle, Simon Snyder, who ran a grist mill, store, farm and warehouse. He lived at Selinsgrove until 1806 when he went to Derrstown (Lewis-town) and started a store; he made that town his home until 1827 when he moved to Middleburg. In 1812 he was elected to the legislature of Pennsylvania.\(^7\) He was chosen to sit in the Eighteenth, Nineteenth and Twentieth Congresses, serving from March 4, 1823 to March 3, 1829. It was during his first term that he charged Adams and Clay with bartering the Presidency for the Secretaryship of State, and was suddenly catapulted into notoriety, if not fame.

It is not the purpose of this essay to rehash the story of Kremer and the Corrupt Bargain episode; that is well known. Rather it is the purpose to explain, upon the background of his Congressional career (both before and after the Corrupt Bargain affair), how natural it was for him to take the attitude he did when he charged Clay with corruption.

Kremer's chief ideal was economy. One of his earliest speeches was in opposition to a $25,000 item for a White House portico.\(^8\)

\(^{6}\) For instance, the anonymous *History of That Part of the Susquehanna and Juniata Valleys, Embraced in the Counties of Mifflin, Juniata, Perry, Union and Snyder, in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* (2 vols., Philadelphia, 1886), II, 1560-61, has him elected to Congress for two instead of three terms. The same error was made by George W. Wagenseller in *Snyder County Annals* (Middleburgh, Pa., 1919), pp. 8-9.

\(^{7}\) The above facts are taken from Wagenseller, *Snyder County Annals*, and from John Blair Linn, *Annals of Buffalo Valley, Pennsylvania, 1775-1855* (Harrisburg, 1877), pp. 405 and *passim*. They are probably fairly correct. The more authoritative *Biographical Congressional Directory* (Washington, D. C., 1913), p. 788, has a short statement on Kremer's career.

\(^{8}\) This speech, made on March 13, 1824 and to be found in the *Annals of the Congress of the United States* (18 Cong. 1 Sess.) pp. 1778-81, is of considerable local interest. The most famous incident in Kremer's life, as known in Snyder county, is his supposed answer to John Randolph of Roanoke, who is credited with angering Kremer because of the use of Latin which the modestly educated Kremer did not understand. The story goes that Randolph was speaking on the Corrupt Bargain and that Kremer rose to reply in a tirade of Pennsylvania Dutch. Kremer is said to have refused to trans-
He said he was a believer in the old Jeffersonian doctrines of 1798 and feared the newer trends towards show, display and unrepublican wastefulness. This attitude characterized most of his acts and speeches in Congress. Kremer was always at hand to object to and eliminate pork barrel items when an appropriation bill was under discussion, and his short, sharp speeches were filled with homely illustrations and sometimes rather uncouth language, as befitted a Congressman who believed in the common everyday man and who stood for Jacksonian democracy. No frills, or pose about him; rather was there the shrewd, calculating common sense of the country storekeeper, which he had been, who believed in thrift, paying debts, and not getting into debt in the first place. As his thrust at Cushman shows, he distrusted elegance, learning and the tricks of eloquence; not highly educated, he disliked college men and, perhaps as a defense mechanism, gloried in his lack of higher education. For instance, on January 4, 1828, Kremer tangled with some opponents over a private bill to pay one Marigny D'Aunterive for losses accruing to him when his slave had been impressed into the service of the United States at the Battle of New Orleans and for hospital costs when the slave had been wounded. Opponents of the claim said that payment would recognize property in slaves; Kremer ridiculed this attitude, declaring that it was a just claim and should be paid. To argue otherwise, he said, was "the logic of College-learned gentlemen." In this shaft Kremer was expressing his as well as his Pennsylvania-Dutch constituency's dislike of education, a feeling that he carried into action after leaving Congress, for in 1834
he was a leader in the anti-free-school movement of Union county. The same distrust of education, this time military education, characterized his statements on February 15, 1828, when he opposed a $1,500 appropriation for the Board of Visitors to make its annual tour through the Academy at West Point. He also declared that the Board was useless, that it was destitute of military talent, and that its report had always been prepared for the members who then signed it without question. "The Government might as well send so many wooden men," concluded Kremer.

In this instance, Kremer was criticizing not only education, but the army as well. As a good Jeffersonian Democrat, he did not like a large military establishment. In the interest of retrenchment, he wished to abolish the post of major general of the army, under the theory that the President was commander-in-chief and that two army heads were needless. Moreover, said he, no matter how good the general was, Washington would soon spoil him. In spite of his calculating attitude toward military preparation, Kremer was anxious to help those who had fought for their country. As a rookie Congressman, just a few weeks after he was first admitted, he spoke feelingly in favor of an annuity to Sarah Perry, mother of O. H. Perry.

Kremer considered himself a committee of one whose duty it was to cut down expenses, prevent extravagance and limit the expansion of governmental power through the reduction of the number of useless officials. In all his speeches can be seen the fear that the federal government, by use of money and patronage, was spreading the tentacles of its power into everything; in fact, was becoming monarchical. Much of this campaign on his part was political, a fact which became particularly noticeable in 1828 when it was wise to smear President Adams and thus help Andrew Jackson to the Presidency. An item of $9,000 to be appropriated for an "outfit" for Joel Poinsett, minister to Mexico, aroused his fury. It seems that President Adams had asked for funds to be used for the establishment of a house for the Amer-

Gales and Seaton (*20 Cong. 1 Sess.*), IV, 1522-24.
*Annals*, January 9, 1824 (*18 Cong. 1 Sess.*), p. 984.
More will be said of this phase of Kremer's career later.
can minister, at Tacubaya, six miles from Mexico City. Kremer, recalling that he had opposed the Panama mission, used the present request as a handle to berate Adams. "Are we to be told that this House has nothing more to do than to register the acts of the Executive?" he asked. He believed that such an "outfit" was striking at "the very foundation of republican principles." What, he asked, of "old-fashioned economy?" Only the advocates of monarchy desired that ministers to foreign countries be outfitted profusely; and he charged that Adams had gone away as minister to the Court of St. James a republican, and returned an admirer of monarchy. The item failed, 45-119, and temporarily at least monarchy had been prevented in the United States.\(^1\)

In one of the last speeches of his stormy Congressional career, Kremer made another thrust at monarchy by opposing the postponement of consideration of an amendment to the Constitution to limit the presidency to one term. In answer to those who said there was no time in this short session to consider such an important matter, Kremer answered that, inasmuch as "our whole Government [is] but an experiment," it would do no harm to try this experiment of limiting presidents to one term.\(^2\)

This belief that the federal government was becoming too powerful because of the trend towards more extravagance, more jobs and more centralization is also clear from Kremer's opposition (opposition was his accustomed rôle) to a bill to increase the number of judges in federal courts. He maintained that the more judgships Congress created, the more were needed. In the course of his remarks he put into the record his objection to the power of the Supreme Court to declare acts of Congress unconstitutional. Moreover, he thought that the present system of courts was a denial of justice because of the prohibitive cost of carrying a case to the Supreme Court—an amount which he accepted as being, on the average, $6,500.\(^3\) On the other hand, he demanded rigid prosecution in the courts that already existed. Speaking on a bill to establish a new criminal code, he favored strict and exact punishment of all culprits. "As to the objection from persons sometime suffering innocently," he said, "it might

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\(^1\)Gales and Seaton, Feb. 15, 1827 (19 Cong. 2 Sess.), III, 1273.
\(^2\)Ibid., Feb. 6, 1829 (20 Cong. 2 Sess.), V, 321.
\(^3\)Ibid., Jan. 19, 1826 (19 Cong. 1 Sess.), II, 1053-54.
as well be said that you must not have a razor to shave your beard, because, forsooth, you might by chance cut your throat.”19 This was typical of the homely illustrations that accompanied his utterances on the floor of the House.

Something of the same desire for as little government as possible characterized Kremer’s opposition to a bill to establish a new territory to be called Huron which would be carved out of the western part of the then territory of Michigan. He estimated that such a government would cost between $25,000 and $30,000 annually just to suit a few worthless traitors, adventurers, debtors who had fled from justice, and ne’er-do-wells. In all Michigan there were only 18,000 people, and sufficient government existed for their purposes already. This attack upon the integrity the people of Michigan forced Delegate Austin E. Wing to rise and defend his constituents from Kremer’s insinuations.20

Also inherent in all Kremer’s speeches, usually objecting to something, was a sentiment that was typical for many years of the attitude of most country Representatives, namely, a dislike of spending money upon the improvement and beautification of the City of Washington. In spite of the feeling that it is unfair to tax poor people in the interior in order to allow office-holders to live in comfort and luxury, Washington has become a beautiful capital city. But it has become so not because of, but in spite of, members like Kremer. This feeling was clearly evident in his refusal to vote for a new portico on the White House—an incident which has already been discussed. Shortly after paying his compliments to the needlessness of more handsome quarters for the President, he turned his attention to another item in the same appropriation bill. This was $5,000 for the construction of public walks in the city. Kremer, undoubtedly remembering how the people of his district had to trudge through the mud knee-deep in the roads around Lewisburg and Middleburg, arose to protest against such effeminate improvements as sidewalks. He said, as the reporter got his words: “He had, for one, found no difficulty whatever in going about the city, or in getting up to the House; and, if ladies do muddy their toes, why let them e’en stay home, and not come crowding the galleries of this

19 Ibid., Jan. 25, 1825 (18 Cong. 2 Sess.), I, 355.
20 Ibid., Jan. 20, 1829 (20 Cong. 2 Sess.), V, 244-45.
Here Kremer was not only expressing his doubt of the need for such extravagance, but was also giving vent to the Pennsylvania-Dutch feeling that woman's place was in the home. Some of the same back-country philosophy can be seen in his objection to a resolution which would have allowed public worship in the Hall of Representatives on Sundays. He asked if it was "true that we cannot go to Heaven unless we have preaching here?" He reminded his hearers that the city was no longer new and that now there was no scarcity of churches. People brought so much mud and litter into the House on Sundays that the place always needed cleaning. Two weeks before, he recalled, he had spoken in favor of adjourning for a day in order to take up the carpet and remove the filth from the floor. In other words, Kremer did not want to spend money for sidewalks because he believed in economy; nor did he believe the government should pay money to clean out mud brought in while people went to church in public property. Let the churches pay for cleaning out their own mud. A resolution from the library committee to order a painting of the Battle of New Orleans for the rotunda of the Capitol was one of the few extra expenses he was willing to vote for, probably because, being a Jacksonian Democrat, he was willing to honor his hero who had won the battle. Nevertheless he probably did not really favor the resolution, because he declared he would vote for it only if beside the painting glorifying Jackson's great victory, another painting was made of the Hartford Convention. He must have made the latter suggestion with his tongue in his cheek, for the government of the United States would hardly wish to honor the Hartford Convention by embellishing its record permanently upon the Capitol walls. Not only did he oppose appropriating money for the improvement and beautification of the city and the public buildings; he also objected to permitting the city to raise money by lotteries to accomplish the same purpose. He declared that lotteries were bad, and criticized the fact that the city had been allowed to hold a lottery ten years before.

21 *Annals*, March 13, 1824 (18 Cong. 1 Sess.), p. 1783.
22 *Gales and Seaton*, March 1, 1828 (20 Cong. 1 Sess.), IV, 1701-02.
On the great national issue of internal improvements through the use of federal funds in the states, Kremer could be expected to be consistent by opposing such extravagance. In general he was consistent, and yet this issue touched him in home territory. He did not like the pork barrel, but if pork was to be had, his district had a right to some. Early in Kremer's Congressional career, Representative James Buchanan wanted the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers cleared by expenditures of federal funds. Strangely enough, Kremer favored the proposition because he said his experience in trying to remove sand bars from the Susquehanna River had resulted in failure; therefore he was willing to see if it could be accomplished in the Ohio and Mississippi.\(^2\) This was peculiar reasoning, and yet Kremer probably figured that in view of the fact that the Ohio River rose in Pennsylvania, his state would receive some of the political pap. This supposition is borne out by his attitude on the Cumberland Road. In one speech he declared his objection to the use of federal money for internal improvements, because he said the United States made survey after survey, raised the hopes of the people along the projected routes, and then disappointed them because it had no means to carry out its promises.\(^3\) In spite of this declaration, Kremer naturally wanted a share for his district if any money was to be expended. Thus on February 12, 1829, speaking on the Cumberland Road, he said: "There was no reason why this road should be the cream of the milk; and Pennsylvania ought to have her share of the plunder. He should withhold his vote for the bill till some of the public money was sent his way along the road to Buffalo."\(^4\) He cannot be blamed too severely for his apparent inconsistency. Like many a Congressman today, he wanted economy, but if money was to be spent, he demanded, as he said, his "share of the plunder."

There is no reason to suspect that Kremer was not sincere in his advocacy, day in and day out, of economy, retrenchment and honesty in government. He was sincere; perhaps too sincere. As John Blair Linn says: "Too honest to take a part in the intrigues of his fellow-partisans at Washington, he could not

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\(^2\) *Annals*, May 10, 1824 (18 Cong. 1 Sess.), p. 2588.
\(^3\) *Gales and Seaton*, Feb. 14, 1828 (20 Cong. 1 Sess.), IV, 1516-17.
make himself of any further use to them, and was pushed aside to make room for those who knew how to make the best use, for selfish purposes, of his services." After granting his honesty of purpose, one is still forced to the conclusion that he was using his obstructive tactics to help elect Jackson in 1828. Maybe it would be nearer the truth to say, as Linn does, that others were using Kremer as a tool. But that point is not so important in this connection because J. Q. Adams's entire administration saw one continued, unrelenting campaign on the part of the Jacksonians, of whom Kremer was one, to smear Adams and avenge Jackson for what they thought was a sell-out in 1825. Whether he was being used as a tool or whether he was acting for himself, Kremer in all the activities so far noticed in this paper was on the firing line to aid Jackson and embarrass Adams. In practically every one of his accustomed speeches “objecting” to something or other, he was fighting Clay and Adams. Whether it was the Panama mission, an appropriation for an “outfit” for Minister Poinsett, or a portico for the White House, he was bedevilling the President. Fiercely as the anti-Adams war waged during 1825, 1826 and 1827, it began with renewed vigor and venom in the election year of 1828 when it would be decided whether Adams would be reelected or Jackson avenged.

With obvious intent to secure a fishing expedition, Representative Thomas Chilton of Kentucky had offered a resolution in favor of economy, retrenchment and payment of the debt. On January 23, 1828, Kremer rose jubilantly to favor the motion, saying he had been fighting for those very things for years. Envisaging the resolution as a means whereby Jackson’s fortunes might be advanced, Kremer declared that “we old fashioned Republicans are getting corrupt, and are extravagant.” He suggested as first steps the reduction of salaries, the limitation of the number of judges, and the requirement that officials stay on their jobs and do their work. Three days later, Kremer was at it again, only this time charging not only extravagance but graft. “Who is there that does not know,” he asked, of cases of graft? “Talk to me of purity existing here!” he challenged belligerently. President Adams had sent useless ministers abroad and had done many other acts, all of which would end up in his getting exactly what

28 Lynn, Buffalo Valley, p. 478.
the first Adams got. "Are we to be told there is no corruption here?" asked Kremer again. He instanced John Binns who had opposed Adams for President and then suddenly had changed his tune. Why? Kremer answered his own question: "the mystery was soon explained—the dog had got his sop—some $1,500 or $2,000 per annum." He then waded into the monstrous extravagance of the contingency fund, a sum of money which was given to the President regularly for his use in diplomacy and which he could spend as he saw fit. Of this Kremer shouted: "What! Sir: Secrets in a Republic!" He pleaded that "although we can't reach the bottom of this stinking pool, let us go as far into it as we can." He ended up his day's activities on January 26 by be-rating one of Adams' defenders, John C. Wright of Ohio, in the following choice words: "He [Wright] never speaks, but he reminds me of an old hen, who is eternally cackling, cackling, and never lays an egg."28

This session was merely a sounding board for the presidential canvass that was to come later in the year. Kremer did his part nobly. On February 6, 1828 Wright of Ohio was attacking Jackson and John Randolph of Roanoke. Kremer answered by saying that the people in the coming election would decide exactly as they had in 1800; he rehashed the old charge against Clay and Adams of a corrupt bargain in 1825; and read an extract from a letter written by Wright to Charles King, speaker of the Ohio House of Representatives, in which Wright had indicated his dislike of Adams. Kremer wanted to know the reason for the change. Wright, in reply, offered to read the copy of an indictment against Kremer for perjury in Northumberland County, but the chair said Wright was not in order. Kremer yelled out that the indictment should be read, and admitted that he was the person named therein. The Speaker called him to order. After some wrangling over the rules, Kremer was allowed to explain. He admitted that he had been prosecuted for perjury as a witness in November, 1806, in the case of Snyder vs. Snyder, but had later been freed of all charges; furthermore, in order to show that the case did not hurt his reputation, he recounted to the members of the House how he had been elected to the Pennsyl-

28 Gales and Seaton, Jan. 23 and 26, 1828 (20 Cong. 1 Sess.), IV, 1087, 1175-76, 1195.
vania legislature; had been made manager of the Northumberland Bridge Company, and president of the Lewisburg Bridge Company; and had been three times elected to Congress, losing only 300 votes out of 12,000 in his last contest. He concluded by saying that "none other than the base pander of a corrupt coalition" would have used such a charge to embarrass him, and again the Speaker called him to order. Wright was allowed to get up and at once repeated the indictment charge, declaring that the copy he had in his hand referred to another indictment, not the one explained by Kremer. Unfortunately the reader is not told any more about this second indictment, because both men were squelched by the chair.

Kremer retired from Congress a disillusioned man. For years until his death in 1854 he made speeches on the corruption at Washington and boasted about "My Letter to the Columbian Observer." Although he had helped Jackson into power, and was the second to congratulate Old Hickory at his inauguration, he received no reward for his efforts. A local movement in Union county nominated him for governor of Pennsylvania and delegates were appointed to support him at the coming Democratic convention in 1829, but nothing came of it; he was also defeated for Assembly. In 1834, as mentioned, he led the local forces against free schools. Strangely enough, he presided over a local Taylor-for-President meeting in 1847.

Something of his position, as seen by one of his family (presumably his daughter), can be gleaned from a memorandum, never before published, which was picked up from litter on the floor during the recent sale at the old Kremer or Bower place at Middleburg. Someone at the auction had used the back of the manuscript for jotting down what he had purchased. The paper reads:

I have a cane belonging to my father; (presented him by Gen Jackson) with ("Friendship) engraved on it;—

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20 Ibid., pp. 1453-47.
21 Linn, Buffalo Valley, p. 479.
22 Marquis James, Andrew Jackson, p. 494.
23 Ibid., pp. 479 and 499.
24 Ibid., pp. 514-18.
25 Ibid., p. 548.
26 The author is indebted to Mr. Charles Herrold of the Sunbury Daily Item for the privilege of copying this memorandum.
My father never changed his position [;] was in favor of Gen, Taylor because he viewed him as the Peoples Candidate. He was very even tempered kind and indulgent to a fault to his own family and always open handed to the poor; not avaricious. I remember of often hearing him say he did not wish to make any more money [the words “only to k” erased.] He was a well built man tall and as straight as an Indian over six feet. I remember of hearing mother say he was a fine looking young man—had a remarkable memory, in his younger days when he [read?] the papers, could repeat the whole—the reason he went out of politics was because he was disgusted with the corruption he saw at Washington, and not because he was thrown aside, as Mr. Linn said [Cf., footnote 28] and the reason he did not appear before the committee, was because he had been warned by one of his friends not to, as they intended to gag him by putting but one question to him, which was who his author was and rather than betray a friend he would take it upon himself as he had given his word of honor not to give his friends name in the transaction—it is [claimed?] that he wrote a letter of apology to Clay; on the contrary he to his dying day he [sic] reiterated what he had said in the beginning and it was that, that defeated Clay for President—

Aside from Kremer’s role in the famous Corrupt Bargain episode and apart from local interest in one of pre-Snyder county’s most noted residents, his Congressional career is interesting because so many of the problems that he dealt with sound so modern. He never ceased making charges of corruption at Washington in his time. Similar charges have not been absent in more modern times. Certainly his fight for economy, retrenchment, and decrease in federal power sounds familiar. He did not like extravagant use of Federal funds in pork barrel internal improvements. What would he say today of billions of dollars of federal funds being poured into local areas? He desired no luxury or display at the capital of the country but both of them are present nevertheless. He criticized executive centralization whereby Congress might become merely a rubber stamp. He wanted to reduce the debt. He favored taking away from the Supreme Court its power to nullify acts of Congress, and wished to reduce the number of judges. And mirabile dictu, he fought to limit the President’s tenure to one term!