ONE of the major fascinations of the study of history is that past events possess the property of continuing relevance to the problems of the present. Any human experience of the past has locked within it the power to illuminate and clarify other events, if man has the wit and patience to fashion the key. In this sense a historical event is something like an atom. Split it apart and it can release unbelievable intellectual energy. We can divide it into innumerable parts any of which, when properly viewed, may provide entertaining or useful insights into the quality of man.

At the 1958 meeting of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association, I had the pleasure of hearing a group of papers on the Era of Good Feeling which suggested opportunities for further research especially in the middle states region. These papers considered three phases of the Era of Good Feeling: Monroe's view of party politics, the election of 1820, and sectional aspects of the tariff problem from 1816 to 1824. Briefly summarized and consolidated, they showed that Monroe wanted to eliminate political parties; to base federal action not upon the claims of states or sections, but squarely upon the will of the national populace; and to strengthen the tradition that federal officials should divest themselves of partisan or local obligations and play the role of national servants unselfishly dedicated to the general welfare. Monroe considered his nearly unanimous re-election in 1820 to be a vindication of this policy. The general appearance of party consolidation seemed to him to outweigh in importance certain minor conflicts of the time. But historically, some of the minor contests were to prove more durable and

*Dr. Klein is Professor of American History at the Pennsylvania State University, and a past president of the Association.

significant, especially the slavery and the tariff issues, both of which generated growing sectional hostility in this era.

The most remarkable fact about the papers was that, although each differed from the others in scope and approach, all agreed on one important point, namely, that sectionalism was a decisive quality of the Era of Good Feeling. All agreed that President Monroe was face to face with an issue the dangerous portent of which he did not fully apprehend or appreciate. In this article, I want first to speculate about the broad problem of sectionalism in American history, and then to suggest some questions and research possibilities for Pennsylvania historians which arise from these studies of the Era of Good Feeling.

The tendency of man to grant his ultimate loyalty to the smaller rather than to the larger group has been a persistent problem of organized society, and no head of state, whether in a free land or in a tyranny, has ever been free of the dangers which the tendency creates. How can conflicting local demands be reconciled peacefully, or be prevented from sapping the national strength? By idealism? By diversion? By purchased agreement? By compromise and co-existence? By force? This is a problem which knows no limit of time or place. Perhaps we can learn something more about it from the American experience of 1816-1824 when, to all outward appearances, there was the fairest prospect of rational solution.

President Eisenhower has had a brush with sectionalism over the integration issue, and also spoke of it in his TV address on unification of command in the armed services. "To reward parochial loyalty with promotion," he said, "is to invite disunion." Monroe had to grapple with the same problem when called upon to take his stand for or against internal improvements, the tariff, the extension of slavery, or the incorporation of Federalists into his administration.

There are some elements of comparison between these two administrations. In both cases the nation still kept a vivid memory of the near-loss of a war. In both cases, the danger of another attack from across the sea persisted, requiring sharp attention to strong defense and a balanced budget. In both cases the nation willingly placed uncommon confidence in the president. And in both cases the administration maintained many of the domestic policies which the opposite party in a former generation had initiated amid near revolutionary resistance.
We have, then, the uniting elements of the memory of disaster, the threat of war, and confidence in a personality. We have the disuniting element of traditional party hatred; the suspicion that to accept once detested policies, or to acquiesce in their administration by the other party, is to invite a double-cross. Inject into this situation an issue upon which alternate sides are geographically unified, and now give the president good advice what to do. Timing here becomes important. The executive needs to guess whether the outside pressure and other unifying forces remain strong enough to justify a postponement of facing the local crisis; or, conversely, whether the local pressure is so strong as to require immediate action even at the risk of an explosion which would weaken the government and dangerously expose it to attack from the outside. I am hesitant to ascribe the personal qualities of vacillation or courage to administrators whose judgment dictates either delay and compromise, or action and coercive settlement in such circumstances. This discussion is to suggest that Monroe's wish to ignore sectional excitement may not have been an act of ignorance or omission, but of judgment and decision based on timing.

I find it interesting to review how great sectional controversies have been viewed and handled by our presidents. There was none who, while president, sought to bring such disputes to a crisis, but most tried to compromise the issue and prevent an outbreak. Several took strong action and solved the problem by force, but only after sectional resistance had locally unseated the government. Washington thus adjusted the Whiskey Rebellion, Jackson the nullification threat, and Lincoln the sectional issue of his day. These examples suggest the hypothesis that the sensitiveness of a malcontent group or the likelihood of its resort to violent resistance bears a direct relationship to the geographical concentration of its members, whether the group is a majority or a minority of the whole.

This observation leads to another question, whether it is not one of the serious weaknesses of the national constitution that it permits representatives only of geographic fragments to initiate legislation. No one in the entire legislative structure of government is explicitly responsible, or authorized, to propose laws primarily for national ends, nor is any legislator who imposes upon himself the voluntary performance of this duty ever
free of the risk of local reprisal in his home state or district. While many legislators have taken the risk and shouldered the burden of national policy, many more throughout the years have become talkers and breeders of sectionalism. Dr. Paul Nagel's paper illustrated to what degree the sectional tariff split was fomented in Congress, and Philip F. Detwiler's article in the April, 1958, issue of the *American Historical Review* entitled "Congressional Debate on Slavery and the Declaration of Independence, 1819-1821" further enforces the point.

One result of the constitutionally imposed localism of Congress has been that the president has assumed the duty of representing the needs of the entire nation. In fact, the president, through his messages, has become the primary initiator of national legislative policy, a function which I doubt that the framers intended to bestowed on him.

Monroe clearly played down the sectional issues of his day, ignoring them in his public addresses, compromising them in his practical, day-to-day political contacts, and seeking to overpower the sectional spirit by appeals to broader national loyalty. Why did he act thus, instead of focusing on the problem and attacking it head on?

On April 28, 1958, our government released a new stamp commemorating the 200th anniversary of Monroe's birthday. This recalls the fact that he was the only one among his staff who was a Revolutionary veteran. Monroe joined the Continental Army at the age of eighteen and served with it for four years. In the year that liberty was proclaimed throughout the land, Calhoun, Clay, and Rush had not yet been born; Tompkins was only two years old; Wirt and Crawford were four; Crowninshield, six; Adams, nine; and Meigs, twelve. Monroe was senior to all his advisors, and was the only one of them who had personally risked his life to create the Union over which he now presided. The Union was Monroe's child; it was a grandchild to the others—dear, but theirs only by inheritance.

A second factor of importance is Monroe's long service in diplomacy, both in the field and in the State Department. This form of public service impresses upon its agents the practical value of national unity and the fatal effect of internal strife upon bargaining power at the international council table. While I can find no American president who made it a point of policy to pur-
sue ardently the advantage of a particular section, I wonder whether those who had extensive diplomatic experience before attaining the White House have not exercised more delicacy and caution in dealing with sectional rivalries than those who never knew the frustration of representing a divided nation before others.

A third aspect of Monroe’s policy arouses my curiosity. In the spring of 1958, many American salesmen were wearing on their coat lapels a little button proclaiming that “Business is good.” This little exploitation of group psychology is based on a principle as old as man: that to express a thought tends to create in the hearer a suspicion that it might be true. As dictators and teachers know, repetition backed by the appearance of authority often conveys a conviction of truth to the hearer, whatever the assertion. Carl Sandburg, in a speech several years ago, selected “irresponsible utterance” as the most baneful and dangerous of American habits. Did Monroe believe, with many of his contemporaries, that the surest way to develop exaggerated sectional spirit and eventual disunion was to talk about it continually? He did ignore the subject; that is demonstrable. But was it from lack of appreciation of its import, or from a certainty of its fatal tendency?

Monroe used the principle I have mentioned. As we say “Business is good,” he said “Parties are dead.” His public expressions are full of compromise, forbearance, and a spirited confidence in national loyalty. The first inaugural is a frank and glowing eulogy on national unity and its golden promise. The second inaugural congratulates the republic that “powerful causes” had surmounted all divisions, and contributed to draw the people together. “That these causes exist and that they are permanent,” he proclaimed, “is my fixed opinion.” He did not even mention the Missouri question in this address, certainly an omission of intent and not of unconcern. In his fifth annual message he met the rising tide of conflict over the tariff with the suggestion that as domestic manufactures developed and revenue from imports declined, the deficiency in import duties ought to be made up by taxes on home manufactures. This may have been dubious economics, but it was an unmistakable propaganda effort to quiet complaints of sectional advantage.

Did Monroe fail to hear the fire-bell in the night which so
alarmed Jefferson, or did he hear it all too clearly and, instead of 
wringing his hands, try because he was the responsible officer to 
keep the flame from spreading? I am disposed at this point to 
compare Monroe's policy on sectionalism with the statement by 
Professor Hicks: "Only by compromise and conciliation, even 
to the point of occasionally dodging issues that seem to many 
people to be fundamental, can American political parties continue 
to exist as national rather than sectional organizations."2

It is curious that in the election of 1820 the most intense 
sectional feeling developed at the very center of the Union, New 
York, Pennsylvania, and Virginia, and seemed least vigorous at 
the extremities of New England and the deep South. I have no 
ready explanation for this, and suggest it as a topic worthy of 
study by regional historians of the Middle Atlantic area. Also, 
why was the general public of Pennsylvania so little attracted in 
1820 by the vociferous mouthings of Duane and others on such 
obviously potent issues as anti-slavery, high tariff, and aid to 
internal improvements? I can offer the hypothesis that if almost 
anyone other than Duane had come out on these issues in the 
manner of the Philadelphia Aurora, there would have been a 
stronger following. To be mixed up with Duane in the Pennsyl-
vania politics of 1820 was almost to embrace the devil. He had 
been in every party, and had upset every one he entered, until 
his name throughout the state was one to ridicule or to detest. 
Even in a Quaker Commonwealth with so powerful a weapon 
as the slavery issue at his disposal, Duane could raise only a 
pitiful following. Still it is odd that with such dynamic issues in 
contest none but Duane tried to use them. Further study of this 
question might prove rewarding.

The tariff issue of Monroe's day raises the question whether the 
evidence exposes more sectional or more vocational division over 
the doctrine of protection. The early tariff debate incorporated at-
titudes which were to become sectional, but were not primarily 
such during Monroe's first administration. The industrial or the 
agrarian dreams did not yet, in 1817, automatically imply a 
North-South division of activity or opinion. The duty of the 
minority to capitulate to the majority on questions of larger public 
interest was precisely the appeal of Southern nationalists of 1818

2 Our Federal Union, 2nd Ed., 414.
to New England; and the same was true of a liberal interpretation of the constitution. By 1823, these views, of course, had been reversed and become strongly sectional. An extremely important question in American history is to ascertain more precisely how and where and when and why such a remarkable and ultimately tragic set of new and geographically separate opinions and loyalties developed.

Frederick Jackson Turner’s technique of microscopic examination applies here, its main fault being that scholars have failed to carry it to the logical conclusion. In short, to carry investigation of tariff sentiment down to the county level does not go far enough. There was scarcely an eastern county in 1820 which offered a scene of manufacturing activity co-extensive with the county area, nor were there in the Middle States, at least, many counties where all was agriculture and no manufacturing existed.

Election returns of congressional districts and counties often obscure rather than expose useful truths. Thus, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, shows up regularly in the 1820’s as a protectionist region, and from this fact it is often assumed that manufacturing was supplanting agriculture there, and that because of the regularity of the vote the county was strongly protectionist. But examined by townships a different set of facts emerges. Townships where farmers were experimenting with hemp or wool wanted a tariff; wheat and general farming townships were indifferent or opposed. Townships with iron forges wanted a tariff, but those producing Conestoga wagons or buggies or bricks were indifferent or opposed. The returns from the county seat showed a 2-to-1 preference for tariff candidates, while outlying townships divided almost equally on the issue, some going one way, some another. The county entered the protectionist ranks because of the votes of the protectionists in the county seat, enough to control the rest of the county whose townships, voting pro or con, cancelled each other out. This condition gives scant justification for a political manifesto that the region was united in support of protection.

With all the tabulating apparatus now at our disposal, I think we need to do some more detailed work, plotting the vote of county subdivisions in order to determine not the total impact of the vote, but the relationship of voting to the economy of small localities. In these early days, individual townships had a distinct economic character which county-wide statistics com-
pletely overlook. Gazetteers, local histories, local newspapers, tax records, and census reports will provide the essential source material to keep students working in almost any location which had a political organization in the 1820's to discover what we do not now know from considering county returns, namely, whether voting followed a vocational or a regional pattern. The cumulative result of such studies might show that the sectional spirit of the tariff grew from words rather than works, and that the concepts of regional disadvantage or benefit hung on a much more slender thread of popular support than consolidated election returns or the votes in Congress seem to prove.

If this seems an inconsequential result of extensive research, it occurs to me that the data might also have a bearing on a much larger concept. In an address at the Civil War Symposium at Gettysburg, November, 1957, the proposition was advanced that the defense of the slavery system was really a dodge to enable the southern whites to postpone facing the racial issue. Could it be that the northern concept and use of a sectional defense of the tariff was a dodge to enable the new managerial class to sidetrack the rising problem of a class-conscious factory labor force? A study of the early industry of Pennsylvania from this viewpoint would provide valuable clues to that still unsolved problem—the cause of the Civil War.