

A FULL  
AND  
COMPLETE ACCOUNT  
OF THE LATE  
LAWFUL RIOT  
IN PHILADELPHIA.



EMBELLISHED WITH TEN ENGRAVINGS.

PHILADELPHIA :  
JOHN B. PERRY, No. 198 MARKET STREET.  
HENRY JORDAN, Third and Dock Street.  
NEW YORK :-- NAFIS & CORNISH.

## VIOLENCE IN PHILADELPHIA IN THE 1840'S AND 1850'S

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VIOLENCE is an old story in Philadelphia, although the city has been fantastically successful in concealing its wild side from the rest of the world. Never has one city fooled so many observers for so many centuries. “. . . [Philadelphia] is Quaker all over,” Thomas Hamilton, a visiting Englishman, decided in 1843. “All things, animate and inanimate, seem influenced by a spirit of quietism as pervading as the atmosphere.”<sup>1</sup> The city produced in Hamilton a peculiar tendency in the region of his mouth, “which ultimately terminated in a silent but prolonged yawn.”<sup>2</sup> He epitomized what may with some fairness be considered a rather widespread reaction. Another English traveler, Captain Frederick Marryat, a few years earlier had noted with some surprise, “The first idea which strikes you when you arrive at Philadelphia is that it is Sunday.”<sup>3</sup>

Actually, the Sabbath had been a favorite day for organized and spontaneous mayhem in Philadelphia at least since 1702, when a grand jury reported that young men and servants were taking the “licencous liberty” of robbing orchards and “committing unruly actions, especially on the first day of the week, commonly called the Lord’s Day.”<sup>4</sup> By the mid-1840’s the *Public Ledger* found it so unusual as to be worthy of a special announcement in the newspaper when a certain March 31 was a “QUIET SUNDAY.”<sup>5</sup>

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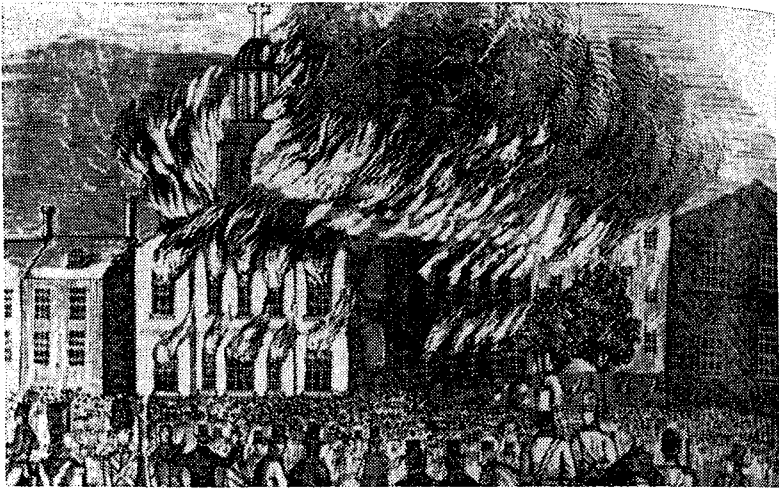
<sup>1</sup> Thomas Hamilton, *Men and Manners in America* (Edinburgh and London, 1843), 196. However, Carl and Jessica Bridenbaugh believed it was “an anachronism to speak of Philadelphia as the Quaker City” after 1735. Carl and Jessica Bridenbaugh, *Rebels and Gentlemen: Philadelphia in the Age of Franklin* (New York, 1962), 17.

<sup>2</sup> Hamilton, *Men and Manners*, 193.

<sup>3</sup> Frederick Marryat, *Diary in America*, ed. Jules Zenger (Bloomington, Indiana, 1960), 172.

<sup>4</sup> J. Thomas Scharf and Thompson Westcott, *History of Philadelphia, 1639-1884* (Philadelphia, 1884), I, 180.

<sup>5</sup> *Public Ledger and Daily Transcript* (Philadelphia), April 1, 1844, p. 2, col. 4. Hereinafter cited as *Public Ledger*.



*St. Augustine's Church on fire, Wednesday, May 8. From A Full and Complete Account of the Late Awful Riots in Philadelphia. (1844)*  
*Photo by Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania*

Pastorius in the Philadelphia suburb of Germantown in 1688; and "The Pennsylvania Society for promoting the Abolition of Slavery, for the relief of free Negroes, unlawfully held in Bondage, and for improving the Condition of the African Race," founded in Philadelphia in 1775, was the first antislavery society in the United States. In 1780 Pennsylvania became the first state to legislate the gradual emancipation of its slaves. The preeminence of Philadelphia in the abolition movement together with the city's central location made it a natural meeting place for national organizations, and of the twenty-four antislavery conventions held in the United States from 1794 to 1828, twenty were held in Philadelphia. William Lloyd Garrison organized the American Anti-Slavery Society there in 1833.<sup>14</sup>

All of these factors combined to make the city a mecca for black people, both free and slave, escaping from Southern bondage. In 1847 an inquiry revealed that 47.7% of the Negro population of Philadelphia had been immigrants to Pennsylvania.<sup>15</sup> A reverse traffic from North to South, created by slave-catchers and

<sup>14</sup> For a general treatment of the history of the Negro and the abolition movement in Philadelphia see William E. B. DuBois, *The Philadelphia Negro* (Philadelphia, 1899) and Edward R. Turner, *The Negro in Pennsylvania* (Washington, 1911).

<sup>15</sup> DuBois, *Philadelphia Negro*, 25, 304.

kidnappers, had provided a major target for the Pennsylvania Abolition Society from its founding in 1775, but the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1820 had so stimulated this illegal trade that the Pennsylvania Assembly had passed laws against it in 1826 and 1827.<sup>16</sup> The kidnapping of Negro children for sale in the South became so frequent in the same decade that Philadelphia City Councils passed a resolution in 1827 offering \$500 reward for the arrest and conviction of anyone involved in such a crime.<sup>17</sup> Stronger than such terrors, however, the Philadelphia abolitionist tradition, the numerous charitable organizations widely known for their generosity to all unfortunates, the lure of the city's burgeoning economy, continued to attract more and more black people to Philadelphia.

Unfortunately, Philadelphia turned out to be something less than the Promised Land. The condition of the city's Negroes indeed improved statistically. They established many small businesses, engaged in trades of all kinds, and by 1838 held \$322,532 in city and county real estate.<sup>18</sup> However, this economic well-being did not extend to all black people, most of whom were wretchedly poor. In 1837, although only 7.4% of the population, they provided 14% of the inmates of the County Almshouse.<sup>19</sup> The black population of Philadelphia County had grown from 2,489 in 1790 to 19,833 in 1840.<sup>20</sup> In 1790 approximately one-half of them had lived between Market and South Streets, from Fifth to Eighth Streets, mostly in the alleys between Lombard and South, while another 25% lived between Market and Vine Streets, east of Ninth. They had begun to push northward in the mid-1790's, only to be forced back by hostile whites, until by the 1840's they were effectively segregated in four wards centering at Sixth and Lombard Streets, in Moyamensing and Southwark.<sup>21</sup> Here they lived in extreme wretchedness, overcrowded into run-down tenements or hovels in back alleys and courts. Of 302 Negro families living in Moyamensing, from Fifth to Eighth Street, South to Fitzwater, in 1847, 176 owned a total of \$603.50 worth of personal prop-

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 25, 416; Scharf and Westcott, *Philadelphia*, I, 617.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 617.

<sup>18</sup> DuBois, *Philadelphia Negro*, 180.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 270.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 37, 299-305.

erty, or \$3.43 per family.<sup>22</sup> Meanwhile, additional immigrants continued to pour in from the South, ignorant, poverty-stricken, unused to urban living. Such conditions inevitably produced a high rate of vice and crime. For the period 1830-1850, Negroes, constituting less than 1/14 of the population, were held responsible for about one-third of the serious crimes.<sup>23</sup> This fact provided a favorite excuse for white violence directed against Negroes, while the black community's physical concentration in one area made it tragically vulnerable.

The first major attack upon the Negro quarter occurred in 1829, in reaction to the increased influx of refugees from the Southern reprisals following the Nat Turner insurrection. So bitter was public hostility at this time that Quakers advised against the sending in of any more fugitives until those already in the city had been accepted.<sup>24</sup> The mood of much of the white community in its relationship to Negroes and the question of their emancipation had changed radically from the general benevolence of the eighteenth century to open hostility by the 1830's.<sup>25</sup> The quality of Negro life had admittedly deteriorated as overcrowding and unassimilable immigration had diluted the effectiveness of normal social controls. Paradoxically, those black men who fought their way out of the depths—and they owned real estate in the city and county with an estimated value of \$531,809 by 1848—irritated many whites even more than did their impoverished fellows, for success was interpreted as a claim for social equality.<sup>26</sup> Political recognition of the change in black-white relations was made when the Pennsylvania Constitutional Convention in 1838 added the word "white" to the qualifications for voters, thus depriving free

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 303. St. Mary Street and its courts, for example, had 80 families, with 281 persons living in 35 houses.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 235-238. Negroes furnished one-third of all commitments for crime in 1837, one-half in 1847. *Ibid.*, 37. An interesting sidelight on crime and punishment, as well as the "humour" of the day, is provided by the case of a Negro boy arrested on August 21, 1842, for sitting in the "private back building" of a house at 51 South 3rd Street, "for which his Honor . . . gave him the privilege of the Moyamensing [prison] easement for 30 days." *Public Ledger*, August 23, 1942, p. 1, col. 6.

<sup>24</sup> DuBois, *Philadelphia Negro*, 26-27; Scharf and Westcott, *Philadelphia*, I, 624.

<sup>25</sup> DuBois, *Philadelphia Negro*, 25-31.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 180.

Negroes of civil rights which had been theirs in Pennsylvania since 1790.<sup>27</sup>

Long, hot summers filled with rioting are no innovation of the mid-twentieth century. Philadelphia had them as long ago as the 1830's and probably for many of the same reasons that produce them today.<sup>28</sup> The heat in the city is alone enough to turn peaceful men to violence. Dirty, ugly, crowded slums outraged human sensibilities and dulled human decency, while the gap between the promise of the American Dream and the reality suffered by the poor produced frenzied frustration in both white and black men, then as now. The major difference between the 1960's and the pre-Civil War decades is that the Negroes were the target of white rioting a century ago.

In a typical incident, in August 1842 a white mob from Southwark, "chiefly Irish," beginning with an attack upon a procession of the Negro Moyamensing Temperance Society, laid completely waste the Negro area from Fifth to Eighth Street near Lombard, assaulting black people on the streets, looting their homes, burning down a Negro hall and church.<sup>29</sup> When the police made arrests, the mob attacked the police in efforts to rescue those arrested. The following day Irish laborers in coal-yards on the Schuylkill River attacked Negroes working nearby, repelling a *posse* of sixty men led by the Sheriff. The mob then moved on to Moyamensing and attacked Negroes in the general area between South and Fitzwater Streets, from Thirteenth Street eastward, being driven off only by the muskets and artillery of the militia, which was not called into action, however, until the rioters had accomplished their purpose. Hundreds of Negroes, including women and children, the elderly and the sick, fled the area, some to the police station for protection, others crossing the river to the woods and swamps of New Jersey, where some were sustained by charitable farmers, while others starved.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>27</sup> *Pennsylvania Inquirer and Daily Courier* (Philadelphia), January-February, 1838.

<sup>28</sup> DuBois, *Philadelphia Negro*, 27-29; Scharf and Westcott, *Philadelphia*, I, 623, 637-638, 641-642, 644-645, 654-655. The State Assembly passed an act in June, 1836, holding the County of Philadelphia liable for damages, "In case any dwelling-house or any other building or property, real or personal, shall be injured or destroyed . . . in consequence of any mob or riot therein at any election, or at any other time. . . ." *Ibid.*, I, 639.

<sup>29</sup> *Public Ledger*, August 2 and 3, 1842; Scharf and Westcott, *Philadelphia*, I, 660-661; DuBois, *Philadelphia Negro*, 29-30.

<sup>30</sup> *Public Ledger*, August 3 to 11, 1842.

The general disorder surrounding the election of October 9, 1849, turned into an anti-Negro riot when a mob including members of two Moyamensing gangs, the Killers and Stingers, armed with stones, clubs, knives, and pistols, attacked California House, a hotel on St. Mary Street (below Lombard) between Sixth and Seventh, frequented by Negroes and operated by a mulatto married to a white wife.<sup>31</sup> The battle raged for a night and a day. The hotel and many adjacent houses burned down in a twelve-hour blaze attended by firemen fighting each other while the mob fought the firemen, cut fire hoses, and dragged fire engines away. Tearing up paving stones and bricks and also using guns, the blacks defended themselves vigorously, but the unarmed city police were run off by the mob. Once more the militia had to be summoned, and a strong force of infantry, cavalry, and artillery finally occupied the district, remaining for two days. The toll was nine whites and sixteen blacks taken to the hospital, three whites (including two firemen) and one Negro killed.

George Lippard, perhaps the first American muck-raking novelist, professed to "tell it as it was" in his phenomenally successful novel, *The Quaker City*, published in 1844. Two of his cutthroat characters discussed the Philadelphia racial situation:

"Why you see, a party of us one Sunday afternoon, had nothin' to do, so we got up a nigger riot. We have them things in Phi'delphy, once or twice a year, you know? I helped to burn a nigger church, two orphans' asylums and a school-house and happenin' to have a pump-handle in my hand, I aksedentially hit an old nigger on the head. Konsekance wos he died. . . ."

"And you was tried for this little accident?"

"Yes, I was. Convicted, too. Sentenced, in the bargain. But the Judge and the jury and the lawyers, on both sides, signed a paper to the Governor. He pardoned me. . . ."<sup>32</sup>

The census figures eloquently summarize one result. From 1840 to 1850, while the white population of Philadelphia and the sur-

<sup>31</sup> *Public Ledger*, October 10 to 12, 1849; Scharf and Westcott, *Philadelphia*, I, 692-693; DuBois, *Philadelphia Negro*, 32. The interracial marriage had marked this hotel as a special target.

<sup>32</sup> George Lippard, *The Quaker City* (Philadelphia, 1876), 409.



*Fight between rioters in Kensington, from A Full and Complete Account of the Late Awful Riots in Philadelphia. (1844)*  
 Photo by Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

rounding area increased from 238,204 to 389,001, the Negro population declined slightly, from 19,833 to 19,761.<sup>33</sup>

Meanwhile, demographic developments contributing to violence were also occurring outside the Negro ghetto. Both centrifugal and centripetal patterns of growth caused trouble. The city of Philadelphia until 1854 officially included only the two square miles incorporated under the original charter granted by William Penn in 1701, between the Delaware and Schuylkill Rivers, from Vine Street on the north to Cedar (South) Street on the south. In 1840 a population of 93,665 lived within these limits, while "spill-over" into the adjoining area making up Philadelphia County totalled 164,372. By 1850 the City's residents numbered 121,417, the County's 238,121, with the center of the area's population no longer in the city itself but north of Vine Street, where 206,885 persons lived between the two rivers as compared with 188,802 who lived south of Vine.<sup>34</sup> An estimate of the rate of increase made in 1854 for the preceding decade foretold still greater disparity, for while the city's population had increased 29½% since 1844, the northern district of Spring Garden had

<sup>33</sup> DuBois, *Philadelphia Negro*, 32, 36.

<sup>34</sup> Samuel Hazard (ed.), *United States Commercial and Statistical Register* . . . (Philadelphia, 1841), IV, 393; Eli K. Price, *The History of the Consolidation of the City of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1873), 57.



grown 111½% and Kensington, in the northeast, 109½%, with only slightly lesser rates in the other neighboring communities.<sup>35</sup> In 1854 the city was surrounded by nine incorporated districts, six boroughs, and thirteen townships. The relationship between them was an unhappy one. As one Philadelphian pointed out in 1853, "The parent city . . . often evinced an illiberal policy toward her surrounding children, which they . . . more than requited by a spirit of retaliation."<sup>36</sup> In direct contrast to twentieth century patterns of urban growth, most of the "best people" of Philadelphia in the early part of the nineteenth century lived, at least part of the time, in the original heart of the city, south of Market Street and east of Seventh, while the "suburbs" to the north and south of this enclave housed the great bulk of the poorer classes.<sup>37</sup> City elections were usually dominated by Whigs, the surrounding districts by the Democrats, so that any effort to consolidate city and suburbs was immediately rejected by the city Whigs as a Democratic plot.<sup>38</sup>

With the city's jurisdiction restricted between the two rivers, Vine and South Streets, the maintenance of public order was impossible, since up to 1850 lawbreakers needed only to dash across the narrow limits of the city to become immune from arrest and punishment, while even within the city the provisions for law enforcement were inadequate. Under the Ordinance of 1833 twenty-four day policemen and 120 night watchmen were appointed, but the daytime force was later reduced because it was considered both too expensive and "unsatisfactory."<sup>39</sup> The districts' systems were worse, many having a single law officer, to whom no funds were given for hiring or arming citizen *posses*, nor was there any way in which volunteers could be forced to

<sup>35</sup> Price, *History of The Consolidation*, 57.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 26. Incorporated districts: Belmont, Kensington, Moyamensing, Northern Liberties, Penn, Richmond, Southwark, Spring Garden, West Philadelphia; boroughs: Aramingo, Bridesburg, Frankford, Germantown, Manayunk, Whitehall; townships: Blockley, Bristol, Byberry, Delaware, Germantown, Kingsessing, Lower Dublin, Moreland, Northern Liberties, Oxford, Passyunk, Penn, Roxborough. (Some names appear in more than one category. They refer to distinct, different areas.)

<sup>37</sup> Sam Bass Warner, Jr., *The Private City: Philadelphia in Three Periods of Its Growth* (Philadelphia, 1968), 56-57.

<sup>38</sup> Nicholas B. Wainwright (ed.), *A Philadelphia Perspective: The Diary of Sidney George Fisher Covering the Years 1834-1871* (Philadelphia, 1967), 179. Hereinafter cited as *Fisher Diary*.

<sup>39</sup> Scharf and Westcott, *Philadelphia*, III, 1779.

serve. Innumerable organized gangs, such as the Killers, Stingers, Skinners, Blood-Tubs, and Rats, terrorized their neighborhoods.<sup>40</sup> Events moved to a climax in 1844.

In February, the Board of Commissioners of Moyamensing received petitions "setting forth the riots and disorders which have disturbed the Township, and asking for the appointment of a police officer whose special duty it should be to preserve the peace by arresting all rioters, and dispersing all unlawful assemblages."<sup>41</sup> The Moyamensing Board of School Directors complained at the same time about "the collection of mobs, and the perpetration of outrages" in the neighborhood of Sixth and Catharine Streets.<sup>42</sup> Later in the same month a letter to the editors of the *Public Ledger*, signed "Many Subscribers," called the attention of the authorities to "the gang of outlaws and desperadoes (all of whom appear to be at least 21 years of age) who nightly assemble at the N.W. corner of Christian and Second Streets, insulting in the most obscene and profane language, indiscriminately, all persons passing, in particular unprotected females, going and returning from Church on Sabbath evenings. . . ."<sup>43</sup> In April the *Ledger* reported that for some time past the neighborhood of Franklin Street and Germantown Road had been the scene of "great outrages by large mobs of boys, whose conduct on some occasions, in throwing stones and other missiles, has made it unsafe for persons to pass anywhere near them."<sup>44</sup> A letter published in the *Ledger* on April 9 announced that the writer was moving across the river, where people were more orderly, for he found it useless any longer to try to live in Southwark. Not only were property values depreciating because of the widespread disorder, but "In fact, the whole district pass their lives 'in terroram' of supernumerary, would-be firemen, half-grown blackguards, and young rowdies."<sup>45</sup>

From the earliest years of the city, increasing population and rising land values had encouraged the subdivision of Penn's orig-

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 691. One picturesque departure from "horror" names was the gang called the Dock Street Philosophers. *Public Ledger*, April 13, 1846, p. 2, col. 4.

<sup>41</sup> *Public Ledger*, February 6, 1844, p. 2.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> *Public Ledger*, February 28, 1844, p. 1, col. 5.

<sup>44</sup> *Public Ledger*, April 1, 1844, p. 2, col. 4.

<sup>45</sup> *Public Ledger*, April 9, 1844, p. 1, col. 3.

inal spacious plan, wherein each square was rimmed by individual houses, each with its own garden. During the eighteenth century both the center of the city and the surrounding neighborhoods had gradually developed a maze of alleys and courts where by 1840 thousands of the poor, white as well as black, were jammed into miserable hovels without light, air, or sanitation of any kind. Gradually, as many of the well-to-do had begun to move westward, many of the better houses they vacated were razed to be replaced by commercial construction; others deteriorated under absentee landlordism, often converted into multi-family tenements.<sup>46</sup>

Into this rapidly worsening situation came not only great numbers of Negroes but also increasing numbers of Europeans, the latter reaching flood proportions in the 1840's with the advent of the Southern Irish fleeing from the famine in their homeland. Most of them were forced by lack of housing in the city to seek homes in the outlying districts. There these new arrivals, impoverished, unskilled, and Catholic, immediately confronted an ancient enemy, the Protestant Scotch-Irish, longtime resident in Philadelphia, proud of their "in" status, mostly skilled workers, and ready, eager, and able to renew the political, economic, social, and religious feuds of the old country. During the 1830's they had organized an Orange Society for that express purpose.<sup>47</sup>

Still another factor adding to the explosive potential of Philadelphia's demography was the steady trend cityward from the rural hinterland, encouraged by the economic developments of the Industrial Revolution. Although farmers traditionally regarded all cities with suspicion, many of their sons and daughters came to Philadelphia seeking jobs and remained there even when the jobs failed to materialize.

The birth rate was high for all social and economic groups. The death rate, although high enough to keep everyone in a state of chronic apprehension, still permitted a net growth of population in excess of that which the economy could adequately support. A

<sup>46</sup> The concentration of population within the city increased until the 1860's, when the organization of the street railway system made possible a large-scale exodus to the suburbs. Warner, *Private City*, 16.

<sup>47</sup> Ray A. Billington, *The Protestant Crusade, 1800-1860* (New York, 1938), 61, 78; Hugh J. Nolan, *The Most Rev. Francis Patrick Kenrick, Third Bishop of Philadelphia, 1830-1851* (Washington, 1948), 307 *et seq.*; Scharf and Westcott, *Philadelphia*, I, 663-668.

special grand jury investigating the "Mysteries and Miseries of Philadelphia" reported on January 21, 1853, "[t]he existence of such a scene of destitution in our midst [as] had never entered the mind of any of our body."<sup>48</sup> Typical was one house on Baker Street below Seventh in Moyamensing, containing a number of small rooms, without windows or other ventilation, in which the numerous occupants of both sexes huddled together, half naked, with no furniture, not even straw to lie upon. Casper Souder, Jr., a reporter for the *Evening Bulletin*, conducted his own investigation of "the infected districts" with a guide and guard, and found conditions so terrible that he felt unable adequately to describe them.<sup>49</sup> Within a few blocks of the most fashionable section of town he found an estimated 4,000 to 5,000 "miserable wretches," many of them homeless, others crowded into tenement rooms rented for 12½ cents a day, with spaces on the floor sublet at two cents each. Slum shops begged for food at the back doors of the wealthy and then sold it for one cent per meal. Such was one extreme of the economic spectrum, but every segment of the population experienced to some degree the profound disturbances produced in every phase of Philadelphia's life by the Industrial Revolution.

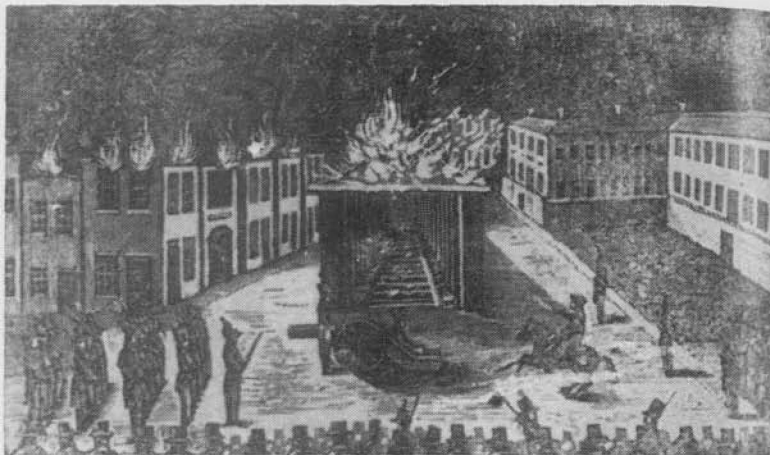
Equipped to become an industrial leader by natural resources and steadily augmented technological developments, Philadelphia had begun to fulfill that potential by 1840. The \$8,896,998 invested in manufacturing that year increased to \$33,737,911 by 1850, to \$73,087,852 in 1860.<sup>50</sup> Anthracite coal sent to the port of Philadelphia, beginning with 365 tons in 1820, had increased to 5,490,146 tons by 1853.<sup>51</sup> New private fortunes accumulated, and in 1845 the anonymous author of *Wealth and Biography of the Wealthy Citizens of Philadelphia* reported that there were in the city at that time ten fortunes of \$1,000,000 or more, eleven between \$500,000 and \$1,000,000, nineteen between \$250,000 and \$500,000, and 205 between \$100,000 and \$50,000, the latter being the minimum

<sup>48</sup> Anon., *The Mysteries and Miseries of Philadelphia, as Exhibited and Illustrated by a Late Presentment of the Grand Jury . . .* (Philadelphia, 1853), 7.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 11-18.

<sup>50</sup> Scharf and Westcott, *Philadelphia*, III, 2236, 2238.

<sup>51</sup> *Twenty-first Annual Report of the Directors of the Philadelphia Board of Trade . . .* (Philadelphia, 1854), 37.



Scene of fire in Kensington, Tuesday, May 7, from *A Full and Complete Account of the Late Awful Riots in Philadelphia*.

Photo by Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

which entitled one to be classified as "wealthy."<sup>52</sup> In the same year, however, a salesman could be employed for \$450 per annum and at the bottom rung of the mercantile ladder a bright lad could "prove" himself by working six days of twelve to fourteen hours each per week for a cash stipend of 75 cents.<sup>53</sup> A common male laborer could earn 80 cents for a 14-hour day, female labor 40 cents.<sup>54</sup> Paradoxically, while Jacksonian political orators assured the voters that the Age of the Common Man had come and equalitarianism was here to stay, the cleavage between the socio-economic classes began to widen to an unprecedented degree. The development of the corporate form of enterprise not only by its very nature limited individual responsibility but added insult to injury by its inevitable depersonalization of the relationship between employer and employee.

With Jackson's defeat of Biddle in the Bank War of the 1830's, Philadelphia had in 1837 fallen into an economic depression that, with periodic flurries of recovery, was to last for fifteen years. It plunged into the abyss in February, 1841, when Biddle's Bank

<sup>52</sup> Anon., *Wealth and Biography of the Wealthy Citizens of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1845), 5-23.

<sup>53</sup> Joseph Sill, *Diary*, VI, 24, VIII, 13, HSP.

<sup>54</sup> John R. Commons et al., *Documentary History of American Industrial Society* (New York, 1958), VII, 75.

under its Pennsylvania charter closed its doors for the last time.<sup>55</sup> "If a volcano had opened its fiery jaws in our midst," wrote Job R. Tyson in 1852, "or an earthquake had shaken the firmest edifices to their foundations, the popular terror could not have been more complete, the distress and dismay could not have been more painful and pervading."<sup>56</sup> Boom-bust cycles had occurred throughout the Western world during the early nineteenth century, and Philadelphia had experienced recessions in 1824, 1829, and 1833. Always wage cuts and unemployment had caused misery among the working class, while in periods of recovery, prices had always out-run wages. The depression beginning in 1837 and reaching its lowest depths in 1841-42 lasted longer than any of its predecessors. The upper classes counselled optimism, one theory being that the sooner the bottom was reached, the sooner the upswing would begin. One clergyman quoted Bunyan to the effect that "He that is down needs fear no fall."<sup>57</sup> The clergy in general tended to remind the faithful that the economic order was the will of God. Other Philadelphians, however, remembered two early American teachings: the Lord helps those that help themselves, and in union there is strength.

The labor movement which had begun to organize local, single trade unions in Philadelphia in the 1820's tried political action through the Workingmen's Party, but without notable success.<sup>58</sup> During the 1820's and 1830's many strikes were called, demanding higher wages, shorter hours, and free public education. Employers retaliated with lock-outs, court actions, and sustained propaganda in the press, school, and pulpit. Professor Henry Vet-hake of the University of Pennsylvania stated in his best-selling

<sup>55</sup> Hazard, *Register*, IV, 96.

<sup>56</sup> Job R. Tyson, *Letters on the Resources and Commerce of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1852), 15.

<sup>57</sup> James W. Alexander, *The American Mechanic and Workingman* (New York and Philadelphia, 1847), 197.

<sup>58</sup> The labor history of this period is covered by the following: John R. Commons *et al.*, *History of Labour in the United States* (New York, 1918), I, 169-218; Edgar B. Cale, *The Organization of Labor in Philadelphia, 1850-1870* (Philadelphia, 1940); Leonard Bernstein, "The Working People of Philadelphia from Colonial Times to the General Strike of 1835," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, LXXIV (July, 1950), 322-339; Louis H. Arky, "The Mechanics' Union of Trade Associations and the Formation of the Workingman's Movement," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, LXXVI (April, 1952), 142-176; William A. Sullivan, *The Industrial Worker in Pennsylvania, 1800-1840* (Harrisburg, Pa. 1955).

textbook, *Principles of Political Economy*, in 1838: "No one will deny that the existence of all combinations of the nature of trades' unions is an evil, of no little magnitude. . . ." <sup>59</sup> The Rev. James W. Alexander in a book of advice for American mechanics in 1847 cautioned that trades unions, "that fearful system which is beginning to spread itself among our happy yeomanry," were "*the beginning of the end!*" <sup>60</sup> [Italics his] The degree of general confusion can be estimated from Vethake's conclusion: "Shew me a people who estimate highly the advantages of religion, of morals, and of education, and . . . I will shew you a people among whom wages are high." <sup>61</sup>

George Lippard established in Philadelphia in 1847 a labor organization with highly militant potential. <sup>62</sup> Calling themselves the "Brotherhood of the Union" and following a complicated secret ritual including ceremonial robes and countersigns, these workers began an organizational drive in 1849 with Lippard's issuance of a newspaper bearing the same name as his best-selling novel, *The Quaker City*. Lippard called upon labor "to go to War, in any and all forms—War with the Rifle, Sword and Knife!" if peaceful means failed, for "The War of Labor—waged with pen or sword—is a Holy War." <sup>63</sup> That no holocaust developed suggests that Lippard was too far ahead of his time—he fervently admired Fourier, Louis Blanc, and Michelet, although he was apparently unaware of Marx. <sup>64</sup>

The nationally organized Industrial Congress established in 1845-46 held its fourth meeting in Philadelphia in 1848. Prominent on its agenda was its discussion of the European revolutions of that year and the possible applicability of revolutionary meth-

<sup>59</sup> Henry C. Vethake, *Principles of Political Economy* (Philadelphia, 1838), 326.

<sup>60</sup> Alexander, *American Mechanic and Workingman*, 123.

<sup>61</sup> Vethake, *Political Economy*, 310.

<sup>62</sup> Roger Butterfield, "George Lippard and His Secret Brotherhood," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, LXXIX (July, 1955), 285-301.

<sup>63</sup> *The Quaker City*, September 29, 1849.

<sup>64</sup> Butterfield, "George Lippard . . .," 291. The Brotherhood eventually established branches in twenty-three states and survived into the twentieth century, but with modified aims. Butterfield considers it the parent of the Noble and Holy Order of the Knights of Labor, founded in Philadelphia in December, 1869, for the first Grand Mason of that organization was Uriah S. Stephens, who had been working as a tailor in Philadelphia in 1845 and knew Lippard well. *Ibid.*, 298.

ods to American problems.<sup>65</sup> Philadelphia's workers, however, felt they had won a major victory when, after two decades of agitation, Pennsylvania passed a ten-hour law in March 1848.<sup>66</sup> The continuing influx of unskilled workers and the increasing employment of women and children in factories contributed to the decision of the skilled workers in the 1850's to give up the idealistic drive for the betterment of all workers and to seek higher wages and better working conditions for themselves. By the mid-1850's the forty-one organized trades in Philadelphia specifically barred unskilled labor in general and a few barred women.<sup>67</sup> John Campbell, one of the city's prominent labor leaders, declared in 1850 that Philadelphia workingmen showed "*too much caution.*"<sup>68</sup> [Italics his] Actually, they were typical of American labor in general at this time, barely conscious of their common cause and sharing middle class aspirations. Labor's chief problem in the 1840's and 1850's was the Industrial Revolution and they shared the general public ignorance of what to do about it.

Just as baffled as everyone else but angrier than most, some workers kept the city simmering with sporadic acts of unorganized violence. On August 26, 1842, for example, arsonists set fire to the wooden bridge of the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad Company at the Falls of the Schuylkill and totally destroyed it. This "diabolical Act," according to one commentator, was believed to have been done by the "lower classes, Irish probably," because their wages had been cut in the course of the Reading's "ruinous competition" with the Schuylkill Navigation Company for control of the anthracite coal trade.<sup>69</sup> In another area of the city the expression "riotous weavers" became by repetition practically one word in the annals of Philadelphia violence. "God knows some of the poor fellows had great cause to feel rebellious," stated one report.<sup>70</sup> "Empty stomachs and empty purses are not the best advocates of good order." Skilled hand weavers, owners of their own looms and working in their own homes, they stub-

<sup>65</sup> Commons et al., *History of Labour*, I, 564.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 543.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 575, 596, 607.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 516.

<sup>69</sup> *Public Ledger*, April 27, 1842, p. 2, col. 2; Still, *Diary*, IV, 79-80.

<sup>70</sup> William A. Sullivan, "The Factory Operative in Pennsylvania," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, LXXVIII (October, 1954), 484.



bornly resisted the mechanization of the textile industry in which Philadelphia had been a leader since the 1820's. As early as August, 1828—during another long, hot summer, one can imagine—the weavers had erupted in an affray which killed one and wounded many.<sup>71</sup> In 1842 large numbers of them went on strike in protest against the inhuman conditions of their craft. In that year an average weaver, with the necessary full-time assistance of his wife or another relative, could in a 14-hour day weave twenty yards of cloth, for which he was paid the average rate of three cents per yard. Even this miserable sum was paid in store orders, which deducted eight to ten percent through overpriced merchandise. In the general economic distress of 1842, when some employers reduced wages still further, some workers were driven to accept what the *Public Ledger* called “the awful doctrine of ‘blood or bread.’”<sup>72</sup> In August, 1842, and January, 1843, they rioted extensively in Kensington and Moyamensing, attacking in the streets those who refused to join them, raiding the homes of non-striking weavers, destroying looms and all the goods they could find, beating even the women and children of non-sympathizers. The climax came on January 11 and 12, 1843, when the mob forced the Sheriff's *posse* to flee, severely beat the Sheriff, and took control of the streets. Four companies of volunteers had to be called out, backed up by eight companies of General Cadwalader's brigade at their armories, before the riot ended.<sup>73</sup>

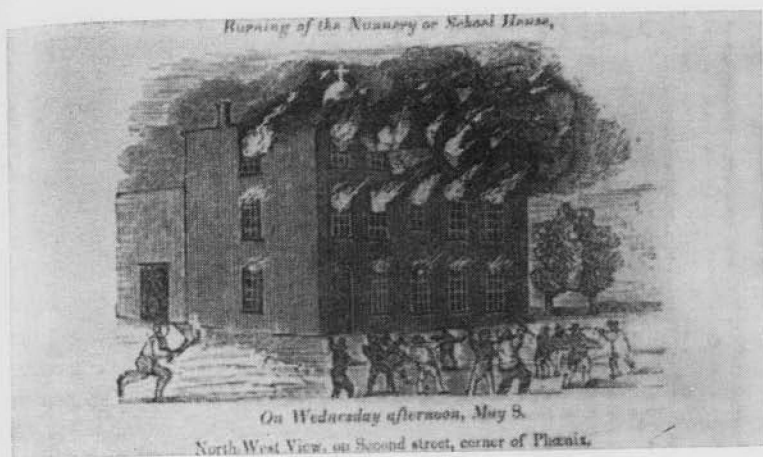
The many pressures combining to make life unpleasant, insecure, hazardous, and frightening for thousands of middle class and poor white Philadelphians did not enlarge the city's already limited capacity for religious tolerance. Of the city's 128 churches in 1840, 121 were Protestant, most of them convinced by the combined efforts of anti-Catholic journalists, politicians, clergy, and laity that they were about to be wiped out by an inundation of Catholicism. Philadelphia became a major center, during the 1840's, of what has been called “the Protestant Crusade.”<sup>74</sup> The Union of Protestant Associations combined many local groups of

<sup>71</sup> Scharf and Westcott, *Philadelphia*, I, 623.

<sup>72</sup> *Public Ledger*, August 29, 1842, p. 2, col. 2.

<sup>73</sup> *Public Ledger*, August 19, 26, and 29, 1842, January 10 to 13, 1843; Scharf and Westcott, *Philadelphia*, I, 661.

<sup>74</sup> Nolan, *Kenrick*, 311 *et seq.*; Billington, *Protestant Crusade*, Chapter IX.



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anti-Catholic agitators and by 1842 established a Protestant Institute to distribute anti-Catholic literature.<sup>75</sup> Several newspapers began publishing with the same purpose.<sup>76</sup> Meanwhile, a new political coalition, to be called the Native American Party, was organizing, dedicated to the proposition that no immigrant should be admitted to full participation in the rights and privileges of American life until he had lived on American soil for twenty-one years. It held its first meeting in Germantown in 1837, finding many men happy to be given a scapegoat for their troubles in that depression year.<sup>77</sup>

On November 8, 1842, the American Protestant Association was organized, with ninety-eight Philadelphia clergymen ultimately appending their names to its constitution, pledging an unremitting war on Popery, through their own pulpits and in books, tracts, and pamphlets.<sup>78</sup> Most unfortunately, on November 14,

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 168.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 169, 218 n.; Nolan, *Kenrick*, 315 n.

<sup>77</sup> Scharf and Westcott, *Philadelphia*, I, 663; Billington, *Protestant Crusade*, 132. It took the name "Native American Party" at its first national convention, held in Philadelphia on July 4, 1845. *Proceedings and Address of the Native American State Convention . . . February 22, 1847* (Philadelphia, 1847) includes the Declaration and Principles of the 1845 organizational meeting bound in at the end of the volume.

<sup>78</sup> *Address of the Board of Managers of the American Protestant Association; with the Constitution and organization of the Association* (Philadelphia, 1843), 5-12.

1842, the Right Rev. Francis P. Kenrick, Irish-born Bishop of Philadelphia's Roman Catholics, wrote a letter to the Board of Controllers of the Public Schools, asking that Catholic children be allowed to use their own Bible and be excused from other religious instruction while attending the public schools.<sup>79</sup> During the subsequent discussion of this subject by both Catholics and Protestants, the anti-Catholic agitation assumed the character of a holy war in defense of Sacred Writ. One contemporary Protestant critic commented that the crusade "arose in probably the least religious section of the city" [Kensington] and most of those inspired to fight for the cause "would not have known the difference between the Protestant and Catholic Bible if it had been placed in their hands."<sup>80</sup>

In December, 1843, political nativists organized the American Republican Association, which proceeded to set up branches in almost every ward and township of the city and county.<sup>81</sup> On May 3, 1844, one of their meetings in Kensington was broken up by a group of foreigners, mostly Southern Irishmen, armed with clubs.<sup>82</sup> A continuation of this episode at the same place three days later ended with the wounding of eleven nativists and the fatal shooting of one of them, a young man named George Shiffler, who was promptly elevated to the status of martyr. That night a counterattack was made on a school of the Sisters of Charity at Second and Phoenix (Thompson) Streets, and two passersby were killed by shots fired in the melee. The battle continued back and forth, with thirty Irish homes destroyed by fire and many on both sides killed and wounded on May 7. The Sheriff called for volunteer troops but they refused to respond, apparently because they had not been paid for the last time they had served, among other reasons. Bishop Kenrick did what he could to stop the violence,

<sup>79</sup> Anon, *The Truth Unveiled; or, A Calm and Impartial Exposition of the Origin and Immediate Cause of The Terrible Riots in Philadelphia, on May 6th, 7th and 8th, A.D. 1844* (Philadelphia, 1844) is composed of two pamphlets highly critical of the American Protestant Association, setting forth the Catholic side of the Bible-reading issue, by "a Protestant and Native Philadelphian." See also Nolan, *Kenrick*, 311-312.

<sup>80</sup> Alexander K. McClure, *Old Time Notes of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia, 1905), I, 203.

<sup>81</sup> Henry R. Mueller, *The Whig Party in Pennsylvania* (New York, 1922), 104-105.

<sup>82</sup> *Public Ledger*, May 4, 1844; Scharf and Westcott, *Philadelphia*, I, 663-668.

having placards posted on all Catholic churches during the day, urging no retaliation, but nativists tore down the signs and made cocked hats out of them which they wore to battle.

The next day, May 8, the apex of fury was reached when the mob burned down St. Michael's Church and rectory at Second and Jefferson Streets, the Female Seminary of the Sisters of Charity at Second and Phoenix, St. Augustine's Church on Fourth Street below Vine, with an adjoining school, and several private homes of Irishmen. The troops finally brought into action were openly defied by the mob. Convinced that the weakness of law enforcement had encouraged the rioters, City Councils finally appropriated \$20,000 for police to maintain the peace. "Peace police," civilians wearing white muslin badges around their hats, were organized in every ward for patrol duty and were given authority to fire upon the mob if necessary. Sporadic vandalism continued on May 9. A division of troops stayed on duty in the area for several days.<sup>83</sup>

On May 10 Bishop Kenrick had ordered that no public worship be held by Catholics until the city was safe and he had then left for a short visit to Baltimore. His departure angered not only the city fathers, who considered it a rebuke for their weakness, but also his more militant parishioners, who compared him unfavorably with Bishop Hughes of New York, who declared that if a single Catholic church was burned in his city, New York would become a second Moscow.<sup>84</sup> However, it would seem that Kenrick acted wisely, for Catholics were a weak, unorganized minority in Philadelphia, while Orangemen were numerous, well organized, and had many friends, police protection was inadequate, and the city had no jurisdiction over the district where the rioting had begun. The general mood of the city was reflected, moreover, in the Grand Jury's presentment on June 18, 1844, which blamed the riots on Bishop Kenrick's protest concerning Bible reading in the public schools. The toll of the riot was estimated at fifty wounded, three dead, and a property loss of \$150,000.<sup>85</sup>

The Native American Party made enormous gains in membership as a result of the riot, increasing from approximately five

<sup>83</sup> *Public Ledger*, May 4 to 10, 1844.

<sup>84</sup> Nolan, *Kenrick*, 317-320; Billington, *Protestant Crusade*, 231-232.

<sup>85</sup> Nolan, *Kenrick*, 324; Joseph Jackson, *Encyclopaedia of Philadelphia* (Harrisburg, 1931), I, 87-88.

hundred to many thousands, with members in every ward. When 4,500 of them paraded on July 4, 1844, with fifty ward and township associations represented, escorting the carriages of the widows and orphans of those killed in the May rioting, many feared a new outbreak. It did not erupt until the following day, when a mob moved on St. Philip de Neri's Church on Queen Street between Second and Third in Southwark.<sup>86</sup> The arrival of troops broke up this attack before any damage was done beyond sporadic firing of shots, fighting, and running through the streets. The troops remained on guard until Sunday morning, July 7, when most of them were withdrawn. The mob returned and forced an entry into the church with a battering ram. It now became clear that the Native American movement had attracted two different major groups of followers, one sincerely patriotic, believing that foreigners endangered the national welfare, while a second group, described by *The Spirit of the Times* as "the very dregs of society,"<sup>87</sup> simply wanted sanction for violence. A force of conservative Native Americans defended the Church on July 7, while the rowdies finally managed to precipitate a riot. The troops returned to the Church in the afternoon, were harassed by the mob, and by 8:30 p.m. soldiers and civilians were engaged in deadly conflict. Sheriff McMichael issued a proclamation.

Whereas, certain evil disposed persons have resorted to the use of firearms in open defiance of the laws; now therefore, this is to give notice that all such persons and all others aiding, abetting, assisting, or in any way giving any encouragement or countenance to such persons, are hereby declared in open rebellion to the laws, and will be dealt with as traitors and insurgents.<sup>88</sup>

More troops were ordered in by the Governor. Heavy discharges of cannon, firing of small arms in irregular reports and regular volleys continued throughout the night until two o'clock

<sup>86</sup> *Public Ledger*, July 8 to 29, 1844; Scharf and Westcott, *Philadelphia*, I, 669-673. The Native American version is given in *Proceedings of the Native American State Convention, held at Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, February 22, 1845* (Philadelphia, 1845) and a view favorable to the Native Americans appears in *A Full and Complete Account of the late Awful Riots in Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1844).

<sup>87</sup> *The Spirit of the Times*, July 9, 1844, lead editorial.

<sup>88</sup> *Public Ledger*, July 8, 1844, p. 2.



From *A Full and Complete Account of the Late Awful Riots in Philadelphia.*  
(1844)  
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Monday morning, by which time two soldiers and thirteen civilians had been killed, eighteen soldiers and twenty-six civilians wounded. Complete order was not restored until July 9. The lead editorial of *The Spirit of the Times* that day declared:

We are in the midst of a civil war! Riot and anarchy are around us! Death and destruction stare us in the face; and for once we behold the strange anomaly in this country, of an open and regularly organized rebellion on the part of a certain faction against the constituted authorities of the law. . . .

Altogether an estimated 5,000 soldiers were on duty during this emergency. On July 19 the *Public Ledger* editorialized:

Our city and suburbs are now a garrison. Military companies are continually arriving from distant counties, to relieve those of our own and adjoining counties and we exhibit to a stranger almost every appearance of a town besieged or threatened with an attack from an invading army. . . . But we are in the midst of something still worse. The State is at war, and it is at war with treason, raising a parricidal hand against the law. This is worse, much worse, than a foreign war. [It indicates that] some-

thing is rotten in the state of Pennsylvania. Corruption is at work within us; the elements of mischief are among us, a part of ourselves.

The troops were gradually withdrawn within the next two or three weeks. On July 11 the City passed an ordinance providing for its own armed force of one battalion of artillery, one regiment of infantry, and one or more full troop of horse, subject to call when necessary, "to provide for the preservation of the peace of the city."<sup>89</sup> By September 26 the full complement was enlisted, consisting of 1,350 men. The State legislature recognized the seriousness of the situation when on April 12, 1845, it adopted an act requiring the provision of at least one police officer for every 150 taxable inhabitants of Philadelphia, the districts of Spring Garden, Northern Liberties, and Penn, and the township of Moyamensing.<sup>90</sup> This failed to pacify the area, and in 1849, during serious rioting in Moyamensing, an organized gang from a rival district was employed by the Moyamensing authorities to put down the disturbance. Even a critic who felt this was a bad policy, conceded that it was the only thing possible at the time, for the mayor and sheriff, being elective officers and needing votes, would not act against the rioters.<sup>91</sup>

The State Assembly acted more vigorously in 1850, creating a Philadelphia Police District with an organized police force under the direction of a police board consisting of a marshal and four lieutenants, which had authority not only in the city but also in the districts of Northern Liberties, Spring Garden, Kensington, and Richmond, and the townships of Southwark, Moyamensing, and Penn.<sup>92</sup> At a ratio of one policeman per 400 inhabitants, this force was independent of the old watch and the regular police of the city and districts. In spite of all of this, however, one citizen acidly remarked in 1852 that the police were "like angels' visits, few and far between."<sup>93</sup>

The special virulence sponsored by the Native American Party gradually died down in the city after its national conven-

<sup>89</sup> Scharf and Westcott, *Philadelphia*, I, 673.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 674-675.

<sup>91</sup> *Fisher Diary*, 226.

<sup>92</sup> Scharf and Westcott, *Philadelphia*, III, 1779.

<sup>93</sup> R. A. Smith, *Philadelphia As It Is in 1852* (Philadelphia, 1852), 369.

tion was held in Philadelphia on July 4, 1845, although a Native American leader, Lewis C. Levin, was elected to Congress from Philadelphia three times between 1844 and 1848, a Native American was elected Sheriff in 1846, and the Party continued to elect minor city officials for several years.<sup>94</sup> However, other potent forces of disorder still remained in full operation.

On July 25, 1844, the *Public Ledger* noted that "frequent discharges of firearms have been heard in every quarter of the city and county. What does it mean?" The question can only have been asked for rhetorical purposes. The most indefatigable of all Philadelphia rioters had long been the volunteer firemen. Charles Godfrey Leland, remembering his boyhood in Philadelphia in the 1830's, recalled that the firemen were always "at deadly feud among themselves, and fighting freely with pistols, knives, iron spanners, and slung shot, whenever they met, whether at fires or in the streets." Leland charged that they included many incendiaries among their "runners" and hangers-on, permitted looting by their friends, and frequently blackmailed householders for "protection."<sup>95</sup> An investigating committee organized January 25, 1853, stated: "There is scarcely a single case of riot brought before the court that has not its origin in the fire companies, their members, or adherents."<sup>96</sup>

Sheer animal vitality and lack of anything legally permissible to do, plus an otherwise commendable pride in skill, must be granted as motivations for much of the volunteers' misbehavior. Probably no intent to desecrate the Sabbath prompted their uproarious performances on that day but simply the fact that this was their day of leisure. The expression "visiting firemen" might well have originated at this time, for volunteer companies from other areas did exchange visits, usually on Sunday, and the local hosts often set fires in order to entertain their guests as well as to show off their own extinguishing prowess. Unhappily, they fell victim to overweening pride, fought constantly and violently with

<sup>94</sup> McClure, *Old Time Notes*, I, 89-91; Mueller, *Whig Party*, 108-111, 118-120, 155, 160-161, 163-164, 176, 198.

<sup>95</sup> Leland, *Memoirs*, 216-217.

<sup>96</sup> Andrew H. Neilly, "The Violent Volunteers: A History of the Volunteer Fire Department of Philadelphia, 1736-1871," Ph.D. dissertation, the University of Pennsylvania, 1959, p. 87.



Major General Patterson and the First City Troop of Cavalry passing by Chestnut street, on the morning of the 12th.



being Sunday, the detachment marched through our streets without the accompaniment of martial music and the scenes of apprehended attack, and the Catholic churches throughout the different parts of the city were guarded by the militia.

From *A Full and Complete Account of the Late Awful Riots in Philadelphia*.  
(1844)

Photo by Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

each other, defied the law, terrified police and judges, and in general considered themselves above the law.

Volunteer companies had first been organized in Philadelphia in 1736 and until 1871 they provided the only regular fire protection the city had.<sup>97</sup> They had an honorable history, included in their membership many leading citizens, and performed a vital function, in many cases extremely well. Unfortunately, by the 1830's there were too many of them, many composed of what one gentleman called "the young and hardy of the lower classes."<sup>98</sup> By 1852 there were 35 engine, 33 hose, and two hook and ladder companies. Between 1826 and 1857 a total of 64 new companies were founded.<sup>99</sup> Competition for business produced an increasing number of false alarms, together with increasingly frequent bloody warfare between the companies, which often endangered innocent bystanders. The firemen became regularly involved in racial and religious rioting as well. Growing public protests secured regulatory legislation from City Councils in 1840 and 1844, but with little effect because of the firemen's alliance with ward politics.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>98</sup> *Fisher Diary*, 122.

<sup>99</sup> Smith, *Philadelphia . . . 1852*, 395; Scharf and Westcott, *Philadelphia*, III, 1912

The close connection between the volunteer fire companies, local politics, and organized gangs is clearly illustrated in the career of William MacMullin, known as "Bull," leader of the Moyamensing Hose Company and of the gang called the Killers, later a lieutenant in the Marshal's police, and still later an alderman.<sup>100</sup> It was claimed that the firemen controlled all candidates for political office in 1843.<sup>101</sup>

Finding it impossible to get strong enough legislation through City Councils, reformers bypassed the local politicians and got the State legislature to pass a law on March 7, 1848, which included the provision that if convicted of riotous conduct a fire company could, for a first offense, be ordered out of service for six months and its firehouse closed, a second offense to be punished by the disbanding of the company and the prohibition of its reorganizing again.<sup>102</sup> Other provisions forbade the use of fire apparatus by minors and declared the destruction of fire company apparatus or property a felony, punishable by a prison sentence of six months to a year. By 1853 twenty-five companies had been put out of service under this law, but riots still continued, sixty-nine connected with firemen being started in 1852 alone.<sup>103</sup>

Many Philadelphians believed that peace had finally been won when the consolidation of the city with the outlying districts was accomplished in 1854 after many years of strenuous effort.<sup>104</sup> Enlarged police powers were given to the Sheriff of the County under the new charter and the police department was reorganized by an ordinance passed July 28, 1854, making each ward a separate police district, with a police station in each one and a central station in City Hall.<sup>105</sup> On January 30, 1855, City Council created a single Fire Department to have jurisdiction over the volunteer companies. Forty-seven companies immediately refused to comply, but many of them eventually capitulated, presumably

<sup>100</sup> Willis P. Hazard, *Annals of Philadelphia and Pennsylvania in the Olden Time* . . . (Philadelphia, 1900), III, 42; Neilly, 70-72.

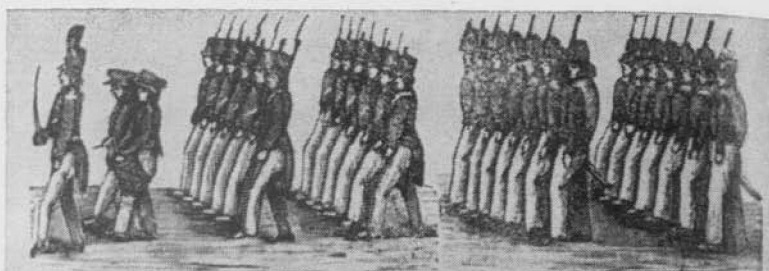
<sup>101</sup> Neilly, "Violent Volunteers . . .," 62-64, 69, 70 *et seq.* William Welch made the statement referred to, speaking at the Spring Garden Institute's annual meeting, April 14, 1870. *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>102</sup> Hazard, *Annals*, III, 412; Scharf and Westcott, *Philadelphia*, I, 689; Neilly, "Violent Volunteers . . .," 54, 90.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>104</sup> Price wrote *The History of the Consolidation of the City of Philadelphia* at the request of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

<sup>105</sup> Price, *History of the Consolidation*, 90, 94.



*Detachment of Volunteers and the Boarders attached to the Princeton.*

The latter, when in a body, presented a formidable appearance, attracted much attention and looked like men who intended to use their weapons, should there be occasion for them, and we noticed their presence tended to cool the angry spirit of the mob, as much if not more, than all the rest of the armed military and civil power put together. Each "Boarder" was armed with a brace of pistols, of no mean size, a large knife of the "Bow" order, some twelve inches in the blade, a cutlass which, when wielded by a powerful and active hand, would cleave a man to the shoulders, and a boarding pike or lance, about six or eight feet in length; an ugly instrument to deal with, and quite convenient to dig a hole under a fellow's ribs. This fine body of men were under the immediate command of a gallant lieutenant of the Princeton, and several distinguished, all armed capable, who looked and behaved remarkably well, eliciting the admiration of the thousands who witnessed their erect and warlike bearing, as they marched through our streets. Captain Stockton, his officers and men, deserve the thanks of the community, for their prompt and efficient aid in the hour of need.

*From A Full and Complete Account of the Late Awful Riots in Philadelphia.*  
(1844)

*Photo by Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania*

with the intention of "boring from within," for they were shortly operating again almost as freely as before. Not until 1864 was effective action taken against false alarms, when the new Fire Marshal, Dr. Alexander M. Blackburn, began filling the jails with weekend offenders. However, technology and not legislation finally destroyed the volunteer system, for the new, sophisticated, steam-driven engines which began to arrive in 1859 required professional and full-time operators. This they got when the Philadelphia Fire Department became a full-time, paid organization under the City ordinance of March 5, 1871.<sup>106</sup>

As technology, the independent variable of social change, underwent the transformation of the Industrial Revolution, it demanded radical changes in the social order which was to administer the development and use of the new sources of energy now made available. Vigorous and enlightened leadership was needed, but Philadelphia's political establishment fell spectacularly short of what the times required. Both major parties were chronically split within their own ranks, fighting each other for various reasons at various times. As for the relationship between the two parties, according to one astute observer, Horace Binney, Whig

<sup>106</sup> Neilly, "Violent Volunteers . . .," 55-57, 60-61, 93, 104.



The above is a faithful portrait of one of the steamer Princeton's rough and ready for battle jack-tars, armed and equipped as a "Boarder," who, among some two hundred others similarly arrayed for active service, promptly obeyed the orders of their commander, Capt. R. F. Stockton, to render efficient aid, in quelling the late riots

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Photo by Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

and leader of the Bar, "there [was] no obvious characteristic difference in the nature of their respective bids." Both cared only for power, and "There [were] few or no sacrifices of constitutional principle that the Whigs [would] not make to gain power, as rapidly as the Democrats."<sup>107</sup> Philadelphia's social elite during this period notably withdrew from active politics, as many began to suspect that the business of America was business, and much of the best talent and energy of the city was directed toward the exploitation of economic resources and the accumulation of wealth made possible by the Industrial Revolution.<sup>108</sup>

The social adjustments demanded by the technological breakthrough were not made either promptly or thoroughly enough. The ideological machinery of churches, schools, colleges, the arts, communications media in general, failed to render either desirable, acceptable, or even comprehensible, to the public the upheaval in which they were involved. Individualism, *laissez-faire*, equalitarianism, optimism, romantic escapism and sentimentality, were offered as answers to the problems of living in a society characterized by the growth of corporations, the gradual development of government protection of industry, the increasing maldistribution of wealth, and the slow frustration of the hopes of the masses.

The violence of the 1840's and 1850's in Philadelphia testifies to the destructive force of that era's overpowering ignorance of social dynamics. The good people of Philadelphia were terrified by the spectacle of near-anarchy in their streets. They demanded law and order, imposed by military force if necessary. They eased their frustrations by bloody attacks upon scapegoats. But there was no peace. Only unendurable social misery, painfully, slowly, forced the social order to begin the necessary adjustments to the new technological facts of life. One hundred years later, many of the basic problems of the Industrial Revolution still remain unsolved. Now a new and infinitely greater revolution powered by atomic energy challenges the social order. Can man learn anything from History?

<sup>107</sup> Charles C. Binney, *The Life of Horace Binney . . .* (Philadelphia, 1903), 452.

<sup>108</sup> E. Digby Baltzell, *Philadelphia Gentlemen: The Making of a National Upper Class* (Glencoe, Ill., 1958), 12, 88-89.