THE DEMOCRATIC SOCIETIES AND THE WHISKEY INSURRECTION

The Democratic Societies that arose in America between 1793 and 1795, created quite a furor during their short existence. They were essentially political propaganda societies with strong republican and Francophile sympathies, but with no material party connections. Organized in the first instance to combat the monarchical and Anglophile tendencies they discovered in Federalist policy after the Proclamation of Neutrality of 1793, they were also strongly interested in securing the free and uninterrupted navigation of the Mississippi River and the repeal of the excise on distilled liquors. Their activities consisted mainly in composing, passing, and publishing manifold resolutions and addresses presenting their views on the conduct of government. But they also took a direct hand in politics, and they played an influential part in the elections of 1794, earning the bitter hatred of the Federalists thereby. It is probable that Federalist efforts to link the societies with the Whiskey Insurrection and thereby to destroy their public prestige was an attempt politically rather than judicially motivated.

The first intimation that the Democratic Societies were to be held officially responsible for fomenting the Whiskey Insurrection came in Washington's private letter of August 10, 1794, to Charles M. Thurston. Then on August 26, he wrote to Governor Henry Lee of Virginia: "I consider this insurrection as the first Formidable fruit of the Democratic Societies." In almost the same words he wrote to Burges Hall on September 25, from Philadelphia: "The insurrec-

1 Cf. William Orlando Lynch, Fifty Years of Party Warfare, 1789-1837 (Indianapolis, 1931), 47.
2 Cf. notes 41 and 45 below. The most comprehensive account of the history and activities of the societies, though careless and scanty in details, is in George D. Luetscher, Early Political Machinery in the United States (Philadelphia, 1903). Far better for particular phases of their activity, are, for their fight against neutrality, Charles D. Hazen, Contemporary American Opinion of the French Revolution (Johns Hopkins Studies in Historical and Political Science, Extra Vol. XVI, Baltimore, 1897); and for their struggle to open the Mississippi, E. Merton Coulter, "The Efforts of the Democratic Societies of The West to Open The Navigation of the Mississippi," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XI. No. 3, p. 376-89.
4 Ibid., XII. 454.
tion in the western counties of this state . . . may be considered as the first ripe fruit of the Democratic Societies. And on November 1, he wrote to John Jay: “That they [the societies] have been the fomenters of the western disturbances admits of no doubt in the mind of anyone who will examine their conduct.”

An examination of the conduct of the societies, as revealed in the available material, however, seems to indicate that if they were at all responsible for the insurrection, it was only in the most indirect fashion and that if they were thus only indirectly responsible, the onus must be borne as well by others—by Hamilton and his Federalist retinue for first imposing the hated excise; by the Federal District Court in Philadelphia, for its needless precipitancy in issuing the seventy-five writs of May 13, 1794; by the Third Congress, for not making retroactive its Act ameliorating one of the worst features of the excise law.

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5 Ibid., XII. 465.
6 Ibid., XII. 486.
7 As early as November 27, 1787, Hamilton had written in The Federalist (No. 12): “In most parts of it [America] excises must be confined within a narrow compass. The genius of the people will ill brook the inquisitive and peremptory spirit of excise laws.”

How well Hamilton anticipated the response to an excise law is illustrated by the following extract from the resolutions of the meeting of opponents of the law of March, 1791, held in Pittsburgh on September 7, 1791. Among other things, this meeting resolved that “It is insulting to the feelings of the people to have their vessels marked, houses painted and ransacked, to be subject to informers, gaining by the occasional delinquency of others . . .” (American Daily Advertiser, September 30, 1791; also quoted in Pennsylvania Archives, Second Series, IV. 20-22. All subsequent references to these Archives are to this series and volume.)

But the tax was not only contrary to the “genius of the people,” but severely oppressive to their purses, for it could be paid only in money and not in whiskey which had indeed become the money or medium of exchange in the western counties. Cf. John B. McMaster, History of the People of the United States from the Revolution to the Civil War (8 Volumes, New York, 1914), II. 189.

8 After the earliest violent opposition to the excise in Western Pennsylvania, North Carolina, Virginia and Maryland in 1791 and 1792, Congress, in May of the latter year, amended the original Act so as to reduce the tax materially, especially on small stills. This amendment, however, was still unsatisfactory to the farmers of Western Pennsylvania, since it left “the great popular grievance,” as Henry Adams calls it, yet unmitigated; Life of Albert Gallatin (Philadelphia, 1879), 88-89. This great grievance was the fact that those who were prosecuted for infractions of the law, were forced to stand trial in the nearest Federal Court at Philadelphia for offences they “had committed in a district three hundred and fifty miles away.” McMaster, op. cit., II. 190. Cf. The Writings of Albert Gallatin, Henry Adams, ed. (Philadelphia, 1879), III. 8-9. Not only did this oblige farmers to halt all work on their farms, to attend court, but the trip itself was “equivalent to a serious pecuniary fine, owing to the distance and difficulty of communication.” (Adams, Gallatin, 124.)
If Washington’s charges against the societies are to be taken seriously and not as political expressions, in the light of available data they can only mean that he identified the Federalist party with law and order in the country and that he believed the societies’ attacks upon the activities of that party to be attacks upon the very foundations of the government, thereby producing a general tendency toward rebellion that was first crystallized in the insurrection in Western Pennsylvania. For there is no indication that the societies ever specifically recommended disobedience to or violent demonstrations against any law of Congress. As far as the excise itself is concerned, it was obvious to Washington and to Hamilton himself, that from the very moment the law was proposed in January, 1791, there was widespread opposition to it in Pennsylvania, as well as in Virginia, North Carolina, and Maryland, and that from the very moment it went into effect in July, 1791, there were violent opera-

It was not until April, 1794, that the House once again considered amendments to facilitate the collection of the excise, and this time, in the amending Act of June 5, 1794, it recognized this grievance and, in the ninth section of the Act it was provided that state courts should have jurisdiction “over cases which arose more than fifty miles from the nearest Federal court.” (McMaster, op. cit., II. 190). But it was also held that this provision did not “apply to distillers who had previously to its enactment incurred a penalty” (Adams, Gallatin, 124). So when the Federal District Court at Philadelphia issued seventy-five writs dated May 13, and hence returnable only at that court, its Marshal, who had delayed until July to serve the writs, was mobbed by a crowd shouting: “‘The Federal Sheriff is taking away men to Philadelphia!’” (McMaster, op. cit., II. 191) and the insurrection had practically begun. (Cf. Note 78, below).

A short time later, after the insurrection, Albert Gallatin declared, concerning this granting of jurisdiction to the state courts: “A wish might perhaps be innocently indulged that the policy of this measure had undergone a fair experiment. . . . What would have been the effect in three of the counties I can only conjecture; but I will assert that the experiment would have produced every beneficial consequence that could be expected to flow from it, in the county in which I reside [Fayette], and with the disposition of whose inhabitants I am best acquainted.” (Gallatin, Writings, III. 9.)

* See Washington’s Proclamation of August 7, 1794 (Washington, Writings, XII. 445-46).


* The legislatures of all these states passed strong resolutions denouncing the excise while it was still being debated in the House. (McMaster, op. cit. II. 42.) The resolutions of the legislature of Pennsylvania were written by Gallatin and introduced by Francis Gurney on the 14th of January, 1791, “and intended to affect the bill then before Congress. . . . Strong as they were,” writes Henry Adams, “the House of Representatives [of Pennsylvania] adopted them by a vote of 40 to 16.” (Adams, Gallatin, 87-88; these resolutions are given in Pennsylvania Archives (as cited), 19.)
tions against its collection. On the other hand, an examination of the conduct of the societies, as reflected in their published addresses and resolutions, reveals that before the insurrection broke out, they had been almost completely silent about the excise, and after the first shots were fired in July, 1794, their publications contained only frequent denunciations of the rioters, expressions of whole-hearted support of the government, and demands for moderation and for constitutional efforts to repeal the excise which only then did they begin to condemn.

The earliest expression of any of the societies concerning an excise law was that of the Democratic Society of Pennsylvania, on May 8, 1794, and it is very clear that in its resolutions on this subject, the society referred not to the excise of 1791 on distilled liquors, but to the excises of 1794, "on salt and coal, on sugar and snuff, on boots and shoes, on spirits, coffee, carriages and cheese." These resolutions declared:

... that the infant manufactures of this country require the fostering care of government, and that those articles of domestic manufacture which are proposed in a report to the House of Representatives of the United States to be excised cannot bear the burden; and that such a tax will tend to the ruin of many individuals and the impoverishing of the country.

... that taxation by excise, has ever been justly abhorred by freemen; that it is a system attendant with numerous vexations, opens the door to manifold frauds and is most expensive in its collection; it is also highly objectionable, by the number of officers it renders necessary, ever ready to join in a firm phalanx to support government even in unwarrantable measures.

... that we cheerfully concur in the sentiment expressed by our fellow citizens at a general meeting this evening and will join in any constitutional measures


14 It is true however, that though the Democratic Societies themselves took no part in the insurrection, some of the members of the Democratic Society of Washington County, Pennsylvania, did. But apparently not in their capacity as members of the club. For a discussion of this aspect see below.

15 McMaster, op. cit., II. 188. On May 19, 1794, Madison wrote to James Madison: "The discontent as to the excise law has probably been stirred up for some electioneering purpose, and will subside, of course, unless fostered by other excises now in agitation here, to wit, on manufactured tobacco and refined sugar. . . ." (Letters and Other Writings of James Madison (Congressional Ed., 4 Volumes, Philadelphia, 1865) II. 16. Cf. Madison to Jefferson, May 11, 1794, ibid., II. 14-15.

16 American Daily Advertiser (Philadelphia) May 13, 1794; Boston Gazette, May 26, 1794.
to prevent the final adoption of the system of excise now contemplated by Congress.

The only other pronouncement of the societies on the subject of excise taxes before the insurrection broke out, was a Fourth of July (1794) toast of the Philadelphia society, which declared: "Excise, may this baneful exotic wither in the soil of freedom!"\(^{16}\)

Shortly after the beginnings of the insurrection—after the Mingo Creek meeting of July 23, and David Bradford's robbery of the mail on July 26, but before the armed meeting at Braddock's Field on August 1—the Democratic Society of Pennsylvania, on July 31, 1794, resolved:\(^{17}\)

\[\ldots\] That altho we conceive Excise systems to be oppressive, hostile to the liberties of this Country, and a nursery of vice and sycophancy; we, notwithstanding, highly disapprove of every opposition to them, not warranted by that frame of government which has received the sanction of the people of the United States. 

\[\ldots\] That we will use our utmost efforts to effect a repeal of the excise law by constitutional means; that we will at all times, make legal opposition to every measure which shall endanger the freedom of our country; but that we will bear testimony against every unconstitutional attempt to prevent the execution of any law sanctioned by the majority of the people.

In an address, dated August 14, 1794, to that part of the society

Before these resolutions of May 8, 1794, were passed, condemning excise not so much as a tax hateful in its operation, but as one hindering the growth of domestic manufactures, the Pennsylvania Society, on April 10, 1794, had resolved: "That this society, considering and believing that the general welfare of our country is involved in promoting necessary manufactures as far as is consistent with our situation in giving full employment and comfortable support to our fellow citizens; it is expected that the members of the Democratic Society will have sufficient patriotism to prefer and make use of the manufactures of their own country, confident that by creating a demand for them we shall afford them that substantial encouragement and support particularly necessary at this time. Resolved that it be recommended to the friends of Democracy throughout the United States to take immediate measures introducing the use of American and excluding the use of British manufactures." (Mss. Minutes of the Democratic Society of Pennsylvania in The Historical Society of Pennsylvania, p. 75-76.)

An excellent example of the very meager basis for Federalist charges against the societies is the following: William Cobbett, perhaps their most violent attacker, writes: "To convince any candid man that the Western insurgents were connected with the Democratic Societies, and were by those societies encouraged to take up arms against the government, there needs nothing more than the following extract from the proceedings of the mother club . . ." and he goes on to quote only the very inoffensive resolutions of the Philadelphia Society of May 8, 1794, that we have presented above. William Cobbett, "A Summary View of the Politics of the United States . . . to 1794" in Porcupine's Works (12 Volumes, London, 1801) I. 117, note.
located in Washington County, the Democratic Society of Pennsylvania declared:18

With regard to the law which has given birth to so much general uneasiness ... indeed, fancy wants a figure, and language words, to convey our detestation of excise-systems in this country. . . .

It is a matter of surprise and indignation to us, that a system of taxation so apprehensive, should, in the very infancy of our government, have received the approbation of a majority of our representatives. They certainly were not sufficiently acquainted with the genius, situation and circumstances of their constituents. Without, however, considering the motives which led to the adoption of it, let us endeavor to apply a constitutional remedy to the evil, by obtaining a repeal of the law. In the meantime, Fellow-citizens, we earnestly recommend prudence and moderation; with a sincere desire, that the Supreme Ruler of the Universe will so direct our affairs that this destructive Exotic may be speedily and peaceably eradicated from the American code.

Before this, on August 7, Washington had announced in a Proclamation that he was going to call out the militia to suppress the insurrection, and about the same time, he and Governor Mifflin of Pennsylvania selected a commission of five to treat with the insurgents. On August 14 occurred the meeting at Parkinson's Ferry at which two committees were chosen by the insurgents, one a committee of sixty to draft a remonstrance to Congress and with power “in case of any sudden emergency, to take such temporary measures as they may think necessary,” and the other a “committee of twelve,” “to meet any commissioners that have or may be appointed by the government.”19

This meeting between the insurgents' representatives and the commissioners took place on August 21 at Pittsburgh, and there the commissioners presented the “very liberal terms offered by the government.”20 These terms were accepted by eleven of the twelve western Pennsylvania representatives as well as by the three from Virginia, David Bradford alone, dissenting.21 On August 28 they

19 Brackenridge, Incidents, I. 96-97; Adams, Gallatin, 134. The second was really a committee of fifteen and not twelve. There were three representatives from each of the four counties of Western Pennsylvania and three from Ohio County in Virginia. Report of the Commissioners Appointed by the President . . . to confer with the Insurgents (Philadelphia, 1794), p. 4.
20 Adams, Gallatin, 135; McMaster, op. cit., II. 201. These terms are given in full in the Report of the Commissioners, 20-21.
21 Adams, Gallatin, 135. Cf. Henry Marie Brackenridge, History of the Western Insurrection (Pittsburgh, 1859), 191. Bradford complied later, and he explained his first refusal in a letter to Governor Mifflin on October 4, 1794. He wrote: “Had I acquiesced in the terms when first offered by the Com’rs, the people, I am convinced, would have believed I had been bribed . . .” Pennsylvania Archives, 396.
were presented to the committee of sixty, where, after long and sharp
debate, they were accepted by a vote of 34 to 23 on a secret ballot. This
was very unsatisfactory to the commissioners, and they deter-
mined to submit their proposals directly to the people of the four
western counties, in order "to encourage and oblige the friends of
order to declare themselves—to recal [sic] as many of the dis-
affected as possible, to their duty, by assurances of pardon dependent
on their individual conduct—and to learn with certainty what op-
position government might expect if military coercion should be
finally unavoidable."

Accordingly, on September 11, the vote was taken among the
people of the four counties. The results were very unsatisfactory: there is no indication, wrote the commissioners, "that there is so
general a submission in any of the counties that an office of inspection
can be immediately and safely established therein." "No report
came from Allegheny," writes McMaster. "From Westmoreland
came word that no excise officer could with safety enter it. From
Washington and Fayette nothing which could be considered an ex-
pression of opinion was received, and the commissioners, much dis-
heartened, turned their steps homeward." On September 25, Wash-
ington ordered the militia to march.

While these events were in progress, the Democratic Society of
Pennsylvania did not convene till September 11. Other clubs, how-

22 Report of the Commissioners, 9; Adams, Gallatin, 137; H. H. Brackenridge, Inci-
dents, I. 117.
23 Report of the Commissioners, 10. Cf. McMaster, op. cit., II, 201-202; Adams, Gallatin,
138.
24 Report of the Commissioners, 11-12. A request was made to extend the date for
this popular vote to October 11, but it was denied. (For the exchange of letters on this
subject, see ibid., 27-32; H. M. Brackenridge, op. cit., 233-35.) It has been suggested
that the short time that intervened between the announcement of the date of public
subscription to the government's terms and that date itself, was responsible for the un-
satisfactory results. (See, H. M. Brackenridge, op. cit., 246-50; Findley, op. cit., 129-30,
135-36.)
The first resolution of the meeting at Parkinson's Ferry, on October 2, 1794, declared
"that if the signature of the submission be not universal, it is not so much owing to any
existing disposition to oppose the laws as to want of time and information to operate a
correspondent sentiment." Pennsylvania Archives, 389.
25 Report of the Commissioners, 12.
26 McMaster, op. cit., II. 202; Report of the Commissioners, 12-15; Gallatin, Writings,
III. 21-22.
27 Washington, Writings, XII. 467-69; Adams, Gallatin, 138.
ever, were not silent. The German Republican Society, in Philadelphia, on July 29, resolved that...

...this society highly disapproves of the resistance of the citizens of the western counties of Pennsylvania to a law of the United States, as such hostility is contrary to the constitution of our country, and repugnant to every principle of liberty.

On September 2, the Baltimore Republican Society, resolved:

...that the attempt in the Western part of Pennsylvania to oppose the collection of duties on distilled spirits merits disapprobation and censure, as its tendency is to prostrate all the just powers of government and produce anarchy and civil war.

...that every opposition to the said act, except that of remonstrance and application to constitutional authority is equally censurable and dangerous.

...that the conduct of the President of the United States as well in calling forth the militia to suppress so dangerous a spirit, as also first attempting an amicable termination by negotiation was wise, prudent and constitutional and therefore deserving of the approbation and support of this society.

On September 4, the Democratic Society in the town of Canaan, in the State of New York, declared:

...whatever may be our sentiments relative to the excise law of the United States, we highly disapprove of the riotous opposition to the laws enacted by the constitutional powers of government, which at the present time exists in the western parts of the State of Pennsylvania, as an improper and dangerous mean to obtain redress of grievance.

On September 6, the Democratic Society of Washington, North Carolina, resolved...

...that the conduct of the people of Pittsburg is highly reprehensible and ought to be discountenanced by every friend of the constitution of his country.

On September 11, after learning of the difficulties of the peace party to get a favorable vote in the committee of sixty for acceptance of the liberal terms offered by the government, the mother society at Philadelphia met once again, this time to condemn the citizens of the western counties—not for their riotous conduct but for their refusal to submit to the minimum demands of the government. At this meeting, the Society drew up a series of resolutions on the insurrection. The first of these commended Washington and Governor Mifflin for "pursuing a plan of pacification with the western people."

28 Gazette of the United States, September 1, 1794.
29 Ibid., September 6, 1794; American Daily Advertiser, September 8, 1794.
30 Aurora, September 23, 1794.
31 American Daily Advertiser, October 6, 1794.
The second approved "the sentiment that the strength of the state ought to be exerted should the power of reason prove inadequate with the Western Citizens." The third declared that... the intemperance of the Western citizens, in not accepting the equitable and specific proposals made to them by the government augurs an enmity to genuine principles of freedom, and that such an outrage upon order and democracy, so far from entitling them to the patronage of democrats, will merit the proscription of every friend to equal liberty, as it will exhibit a rank aristocratic feature, at war with every principle of just and rational government.

The first two of these amendments were heard with equanimity by the society, but in the midst of the reading of the third, "an unusual warmth took place among some of the members, and the President [Blair McClenachan] suddenly and unexpectedly left his seat which threw the society into a disorder that occasioned a suspension of Proceedings." He was followed out of the room by twenty-eight others, and the remaining thirty elevated Benjamin Bache to the chair and passed the three resolutions.

This temporary disruption of the Pennsylvania Society marked the termination of all official cognizance that that Society took of the insurrection, and except for the condemnatory resolutions of the Newark Republican Society on September 22, it was the last mention of the affair by any of them until they rushed into print to defend themselves and each other against Washington's denunciation and the calumniations of the Federalists.

The departure of the peace commissioners with their unsatisfactory report and the subsequent approach of the militia under the leader-

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See note 32 above.

Luetscher, op. cit., 54.

Gazette of the United States, September 26, 1794; Aurora, September 27, 1794. In these resolutions, the Republican Society of Newark not only condemned the citizens of Western Pennsylvania for their riotous conduct, but also branded "the late attempts to impress on the minds of the people of the United States a belief that the Republican societies in the Different parts of the Union have been instrumental in promoting the riots in the back parts of Pennsylvania," as "not only an invidious calumny, but calculated to stifle enquiry into the conduct of government, by rendering odious and suspected those who have had virtue and public spirit enough to engage in it. . . ."

These resolutions were passed almost two months before the President's public denunciation of the societies on November 19, 1794, and thus no doubt refer only to the "calumniations" of the Federalist press and not to any public characters. And as such, these resolutions represent the only reply made by any of the societies to the attacks that were so frequently published in the Federalist press.

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ship of Governor Henry Lee of Virginia, worked a change of heart among the insurgents, and on October 2, 1794, those who had met at Parkinson's Ferry on August 14, reassembled and "resolved unanimously" to "submit to the laws of the United States," including the excise law; to guarantee protection to all officers of the Federal government; and to delegate a commission to "detail" to Washington such evidences of contrition "as may enable the President to judge whether an armed force be now necessary to support the civil authority in those counties." 

This mission was executed on October 10, and the commissioners were told by the President that, since the army was already on the march, his "orders would not be countermanded, yet [he] assured the delegates that no violence would be used and that all that was desired was to have the inhabitants come back to their allegiance."

After giving this assurance, Washington left the scene of the uprising on October 11, to return to the capital to prepare his report to Congress. Governor Lee was left in full charge in Western Pennsylvania, and by November 10, normal operations attendant upon the peaceful collection of the excise were restored.

On November 17, general orders were issued for the evacuation of all troops "except a small detachment under General Morgan directed to remain at Pittsburgh 'for winter defense.'"

In the meantime, Judge Peters, who had accompanied Washington and Hamilton to Western Pennsylvania, had concluded his judicial investigations which resulted in the arrest of many, the release of most, and the pardon by the President of the only two who had been convicted of treasonable activities.

These resolutions, and those of another meeting on October 24, may be found in Pennsylvania Archives, 389, and 423-24 respectively, also in Gallatin, Writings, III. 59, 60.

It is worthy of note that among other evidences that the civil authority in the four counties could function without the support of the militia, Gallatin introduced the usually neglected fact that "the courts [were] sitting, as customary, without interruption in the four counties, and transacting every kind of business during the month of September. . . ."

(Gallatin, Writings, III. 31.)


Pennsylvania Archives, 449-50.

Ibid., 455-57.

Ibid., 174; McMaster, op. cit., II. 202. According to William Findley, elected to Congress with Gallatin in October, 1794 (Gallatin, 139), Hamilton made determined efforts to find evidences of treason in the conduct of Gallatin, probably, among other
These events virtually marked the end of the insurrection in Western Pennsylvania, but the report of the uprising to Congress by the President, on November 19, had important repercussions for the societies. For Washington's denunciation of them as fomenters of rebellion had now become official denunciations, destined to arouse a storm in and out of Congress, and eventually to constitute the most powerful cause of the decline and ultimate disappearance of the clubs.

Things, to win "advantages" for "his party" "by overturning Mr. Gallatin's popularity" (ibid., 140). Findley writes: "After both wings of the army had encamped in the vicinity of Youghiogany and Monongahela rivers, two judges of the Court of Westmoreland County, General Jack and Mr. Baird, men of very respectable characters, waited on the secretary [Hamilton] and the judge [Peters], in order to be informed what offenses would be proper for the state magistrates to prosecute agreeably to the Secretary's advise, which I [Findley] communicated to one of them; but instead of consulting about the distribution of the prosecutions, as was expected, they were both strictly examined as witnesses against Mr. Gallatin and myself. They were urged to testify that Mr. Gallatin had expressed himself in a treasonable manner at the first Parkinson's meeting, and when they denied having heard any such expressions, the secretary asserted that he had sufficient proofs of them already; they, however, persisted in asserting that he used no such expressions, that they had been very attentive to his arguments at the meeting, and they stated the substance of them, and mentioned the abilities he had displayed and the unrelenting exertions he had made on all proper occasions to restore order and to convince the citizens of the necessity of submitting to the laws; that his decision, talents perseverance had contributed more to the restoration of order, than that of perhaps any other person as he had been a member of all the meetings for that purpose and acted with decision, when several others thought it prudent in many instances to temporize or were afraid to avow their sentiments." (Findley, op. cit., 239-40.)

Failing to incriminate Gallatin personally, the Federalists made efforts to have his election to Congress declared void on the ground that a state of insurrection existed in his district at the time the elections were held, in October, 1794. This move started in the legislature of Pennsylvania, in which, on January 3, 1795, Gallatin made his famous speech on the insurrection (Gallatin, Writings, III. 1-56)—a speech, the effects of which doomed the Federalists to failure once again. Adams, Gallatin, 139-40; Lynch, op. cit., 45-46, cf., Madison to Jefferson, December 21, 1794 (Writings of James Madison, Gallard Hunt, Ed., 9 Volumes, New York, 1906), VI. 230.

41 Hamilton claimed that they did not, and that a standing army would be required to keep peace. On October 30, 1794, he wrote to Rufus King: "All is essentially well; no appearance of opposition. It is of great consequence that a law should, if possible, be expedited through Congress for raising 500 infantry and 100 horse to be stationed in the disaffected country. Without this the expense incurred will be essentially fruitless..." Charles R. King, Life and Correspondence of Rufus King, (New York, 1894) I. 575. On the whole question of whether there was indeed an insurrection or only local riots played up into an insurrection by the government, see Gallatin's Speech of January 3, 1795: Gallatin, Writings, III, esp. p. 29-36; also, Jefferson to Monroe, May 26, 1795, Writings of Thomas Jefferson, P. L. Ford, ed., VII. 16-17.
In his letter of November 1, to Jay, Washington wrote:42

... I shall be more prolix in my speech in Congress on the commencement and progress of this insurrection, than is usual in such an instrument, or than I should have been on any other occasion; but as numbers at home and abroad will hear of the insurrection, and will read the speech, that may know nothing of the documents to which it might refer, I conceived it would be better to encounter the charge of prolixity by giving a cursory detail of facts, that would show the prominent features of the thing, than to let it go naked into the world, to be dressed up according to the fancy or inclination of the readers, or the policy of our enemies.

When he came to address both houses of Congress, Washington did recount the details of the uprising and in the course of his recital, he declared:43

... The very forbearance to press prosecutions [for infractions of the laws in Western Pennsylvania] was misinterpreted into a fear of urging the execution of the laws; and associations of men began to denounce threats against the officers employed. From a belief that, by a more formal concert, their operations might be defeated, certain self-created societies assumed the tone of condemnation. Hence, while the greater part of Pennsylvania itself were conforming themselves to acts of excise, a few counties were resolved to frustrate them. . . .

Washington, *Writings*, XII. 487-88. On October 11, 1794, Edmund Randolph wrote to Washington: "... As I remarked to you in conversation, I never did see an opportunity of destroying these self-constituted bodies, until the fruits of their operations was disclosed in the insurrection of Pittsburgh. Indeed, I was and am still persuaded that the language, which was understood to be held by the officers of government in opposition to them, contributed to foster them. They may now, I believe, be crushed. The prospect ought not to be lost." Quoted in *Writings*, XII. 474, note 1. To which letter Washington replied on October 16: "My mind is so perfectly convinced, that, if these self-created societies cannot be discountenanced, they will destroy the government of this country, that I have asked myself, whilst I have been revolving on the expense and inconvenience of drawing so many men from their families and occupations as I have seen on their march, where would be the impropriety of glancing at them in my speech. . . ."

Ibid., XII. 475.

Washington, *Writings*, XII. 491-96. This was really not the first official denunciation of the clubs as instigators of the insurrection. After Washington had left the scene of the insurrection on October 11, 1794, the erstwhile insurgents had met again on October 24, to pass new conciliatory resolutions to which, when they were handed over to him, General Lee replied, in part, that he "confidently expected the most active and faithful cooperation" from the citizens of the four counties for establishing peace, and that "in my judgment [this cooperation] cannot be more effectually given than by circulating in the most public manner the truth among the people, and by inducing the various clubs which have so successfully poisoned the minds of the inhabitants, to continue their usual meetings for the pious purpose of contradicting, with their customary formalities, their past-pernicious doctrines. A conduct so candid," he said, "should partially atone for the injuries which, in a great degree, may be attributed to their instrumentality, and must have a propitious influence in administering a radical cure to the existing disorders." *Pennsylvania Archives*, 438.
... And when in the calm moments of reflection, they [the citizens] shall have retraced the origin and progress of the insurrection, let them determine whether it has not been fomented by combinations of men, who, careless of consequence and disregarding the unerring truth that those who rouse cannot always appease a civil convulsion, have disseminated, from an ignorance or perversion of facts, suspicions, jealousies and accusations of the whole government.

This speech was received quietly enough in the Senate, which body in its reply to the President, declared:

... Our anxiety arising from the licentious and open resistance to the laws in the western counties of Pennsylvania, has been increased by the proceedings of certain self-created societies, relative to the laws and administration of the government; proceedings, in our apprehension, founded in political error, calculated, if not intended, to disorganize our government, and which, by inspiring delusive hopes of support, have been influential in misleading our fellow-citizens in the scene of insurrection.

It was in the House, however, that long and sharp debate took place. The original draft of the reply of the House to the President was written in most part by Madison and contained no reference whatever to the President's arraignment of the "self-created" societies. It was left for Thomas Fitzsimons, lame-duck member from Pennsylvania, three days after debate on the reply began, to introduce the following amendment, which set off the fireworks of partisan debate:

As part of this subject [the President's speech] we cannot withhold our repro-

"Annals of Congress, 3rd. Cong., 2d. sess., 794. Aaron Burr, seconded by James Jackson, had moved to have this paragraph expunged from the reply, but they were defeated and the reply accepted without debate as originally read.

"Ibid., 893-94. On December 4, 1794, Madison wrote to Monroe: "The introduction of it [the denunciation of the societies into his address] by the President was perhaps the greatest error of his political life. For his sake, as well as for a variety of obvious reasons, I wished it might be passed over in silence by the House of Representatives. The answer was penned with that view and so reported. This moderate course would not satisfy those who hoped to draw a party advantage out of the P.'s popularity. The game was to connect the Democratic Societies with the odium of the insurrection—to connect republicans in Congress with those societies—to put the P. ostensibly at the head of the other party, in opposition to both, and by these means prolong the illusion in the North and try a new experiment in the South. ..." Madison, Writings, (Hunt, Ed.), VI. 222-23; cf. Madison to Jefferson, November 30, 1794, Madison, Letters, etc. (Congr. Ed.), II. 21-22.

"Fitzsimons, up for reelection in October, 1794, was defeated by John Swanwick, a member of the Democratic Society of Pennsylvania, for the first Republican victory in the history of Philadelphia. See, Luetscher, op. cit., 56.

"Annals of Congress, as cited, 889.
bation of the self-created societies which have risen in some parts of the Union, misrepresenting the conduct of government, and disturbing the operation of the laws, and which, by deceiving and inflaming the ignorant and the weak, may naturally be supposed to have stimulated and urged the insurrection.

There is no need here to go into the details of the debate which was conducted on a strictly party basis. William Smith set the keynote of much of what was said on the Federalist side when he declared:48

... that if the committee withheld an expression of their sentiments in regard to the societies, pointed out by the President, their silence would be an avowed desertion of the executive...

Mr. Tracy added that “he thought that this declaration from the House of Representatives would tend to discourage Democratic societies by uniting all men of sense against them.”49 Fisher Ames concluded the Federalist argument with a long speech on high ground, which he concluded as follows:50

You ought... on every occasion to show the most cordial support to the executive in support of the laws... If it is dangerous to liberty, against right and justice, against truth and decency, to adopt the amendment, as it has been argued, then the President and the Senate have done all this.

In support of his amendment, Fitzsimons had conceded to the opposition that the societies were “institutions not strictly unlawful,” though “not less fatal to good order and true liberty” on that account.51 In their replies to the Federalists, the Republicans in the House concentrated on this point. William Giles declared that52

... if the self-created societies act contrary to law, they are unprotected, and let the law pursue them. That a man is a member of one of these societies will not protect him from an accusation for treason, if the charge is well-founded. If the charge is not well-founded, if the societies, in their proceedings, keep within the verge of the law, Mr. G. would be glad to learn what was to be the sequel? If the House undertake to censure particular classes of men, who can tell where they will stop?...

And after having “entered into an encomium of some length on the public services and personal character of the President,” Giles declared that, nevertheless,

48 Ibid., 902. The continual harping on this point by the Federalists prompted Rutherford to shout: “By the turn which the debate has taken, if any man is in favor of these societies, the President is drawn across his face.”
49 Ibid., 903.
50 Ibid., 932.
51 Ibid., 899.
52 Ibid., 899-901
he trusted that the fiat of no person in America should ever be taken for truth implicitly and without evidence.

Mr. McDonell declared that though the Democratic Societies had reproved "the Assumption business and the system of funding," "the rest of the people as well as Democratic Societies had generally censured the Assumption and funding transactions." And Mr. Tracy quoted McDonell as having said to the House: "Your wanton laws, begotten in darkness, first raised insurrection."

Mr. Venable agreed with McDonell, and reverted to the original argument against the amendment when he declared:

... Should the Government ... come forward and show their imbecility by censuring what we cannot punish? The people have a right to think and a right to speak.

But it was left for Christie of Maryland to voice not only opposition to the proposed amendment, but a stanch defense of the Democratic Societies by name, particularly the Democratic Society of Baltimore. That society, he declared,

was composed of a band of patriots, not the fair-weather patriots of the present day, but the patriots of seventy-five, the men who were not afraid to rally around the American standard when that station was almost concluded to be a forlorn hope. They were men who, with their persons and properties, had assisted to drive from the soil of America the present lawless disturbers of the world. ...

And Christie then anticipated the defenses soon to be published by almost all of the societies, when he declared:

What was the conduct of this society when the first news of the late insurrection reached them? Did they not in the most pointed manner disown any such proceeding? Did they not refuse to correspond with any society that aided, or in any manner abetted the insurrection? They did more. They offered their personal services to go and help crush this commotion in the bud. Mr. C. subjoined that he would venture to say, and at the same time he spoke within bounds, that nine-tenths of this society actually took their muskets and marched into the field, for the above laudable purpose, and that numbers of them still continue there, and are the friends of peace and order, and not the disorganizers that the present amendment would make them.

The debate on Fitzsimon's amendment began in the House on November 24. On the 26th an amendment was introduced to revise the wording of Fitzsimon's amendment to make it "an echo of that part of the speech of the President which mentions self-created

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53 Ibid., 902.
54 Ibid., 910.
55 Ibid., 908-909.
societies."\(^{56}\) Giles then proposed to strike out the world "self-created," and this was agreed to by a vote of 47 to 45. On the next day more amendments were considered and voted upon, with a very close margin either way until the "main question" was put in the form of an amendment, stronger even than Washington's arraignment, denouncing the self-created societies for fomenting the insurrection.\(^{57}\) Only 19 voted in favor of this proposal, and on the 28th, a clause with all mention of the societies deleted, was introduced, and finally adopted as an integral part of the reply of the House to the President's address. This clause stated:\(^{58}\)

... We learn with the greatest concern, that any misrepresentation whatever, of the government and its proceedings, either by individuals or combinations of men, should have been made, and so far credited, as to foment the flagrant outrage which has been committed on the laws.

This closed the discussion in the House.\(^{59}\) The President's speech and the proceedings in both houses in regard to it were widely published in the newspapers, and even before the House debates were concluded, the Democratic Society of Pennsylvania, on November 27, drafted a lengthy address in self-defense.\(^{60}\)

The societies had indeed, almost from the very moment they were proposed, been heartily denounced by the Federalist press, sometimes with vituperation and sometimes with ridicule. Federalist politicians did not lag far behind their papers.\(^{61}\) To all this abuse, how-
ever, the societies themselves had not replied; they had concentrated
their attacks solely upon the distasteful activities of the government.
Now, however, the most distasteful activity of the government had
become the attack upon the societies. These attacks, once strictly
partisan, had now become official, had come indeed, from the most
influential source in the country. If they were to maintain their ex-
istence, the societies felt they must reply. The most influential of
them did reply in long addresses and many resolutions, defending
themselves against the strictures of the President, the Senate and
the Federalist members of the House; commending the Republicans
who had opposed Fitzsimons' amendment (none but Christie had
explicitly defended the societies); and reiterating the constitutional
and peaceful though political purposes of their organizations.

Limitation of space forbids extensive quotations from these publi-
cations of the societies, but their arguments can be summarized readily
in a few words. They denied any complicity in fomenting the in-
surrection; they declared that violent opposition to the excise laws
was aroused "from the earliest promulgation thereof"; they as-
serted that their members had been in the van of those who had
taken up arms to suppress this "outrage on the laws."

To the charge that their resolutions denouncing the insurgents were
insincere, the German Republican Society in Philadelphia, replied:"4

... As well might we say that the pretended friends of law and order, had
secretly fomented the insurrection that they might borrow another argument
against republicanism, and be furnished with a stronger evidence in favour of
a standing army, as that the patriotic societies were instrumental in disseminat-
ing sedition. . . .

Concerning the attempts of Congress to censor the societies, the
same association declared:

... The representatives of the freemen of America designed to give an opinion
which was to have the operation of a law, and by means of it, effect the de-
struction of the freedom of speech. In this view of the subject, fellow-citizens,
who are the conspirators against the liberties of the United States? Say who
meditate the destruction of our constitution and seek to plunge us into all the
horrors of anarchism or of despotism? Say who is the self-created society, the
one composed of citizens, under constitutional sanction, or the one delegated
for the purposes of legislation and usurping censorial authority. ...
The Democratic Society of the City of New York examined the charge of “self-created,” asking:

... by whom, then, ought we to have been constituted? ... Is it for assembling, that we are accused; what law forbids it? for deliberating, for thinking, for exercising the faculties of the mind; what statute deprived us of the right? for the publication of our sentiments; where is the constitution that is prohibitory?

These and similar resolutions and addresses were the longest and most comprehensive the societies had ever published. Though the clubs seem to have refuted the charge that they were the instigators and abettors of the insurrection, nevertheless, as Hazen says, “the official displeasure of the President was a heavy blow ... and whistle as much as they might, their courage was gone and their prestige had been affected.” After these official attacks, contemporary newspapers contain no more resolutions nor any more addresses of the societies, and earlier attacks upon the clubs seem to have become attacks only upon the Democrats and “jacobins” in general. While the declaration of “Deodatus” in the *Columbian Centinel* (Boston) of September 13, 1794, that “the insurgent clubs are in a very low and despised state,” was made perhaps too soon, it seems to have

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66 See resolutions of the Republican Society of Charleston (*Independent Chronicle*, January 29, 1795); Resolutions of December 27, 1794, of the Republican Society of Newark (*Aurora*, January 3, 1795); Address of the Massachusetts Constitutional Society (*Independent Chronicle*, January 5, 1795); Address of the Republican Society of Baltimore (*New York Journal*, December 20, 1794).

67 Hazen, op. cit., 207-208.

68 Even in that great orgy of denunciation that met the revelation of the terms of the Jay Treaty, the societies seem to have had, if any, only an insignificant part, though they had been in the forefront in denouncing the appointment of Jay to carry on the negotiations. McMaster, *op. cit.*, II. 282-83; Frank Monaghan, *John Jay* (New York, Indianapolis, 1935), 388-403; William E. Connelley and E. Merton Coulter, *History of Kentucky* (2 Volumes, Chicago, New York, 1922), I. 357-58.

69 The fervent activity of the clubs in the elections of 1794 (Luetscher, *op. cit.*, 56-60) would seem to belie this assertion of “Deodatus.” The severity of his attacks upon the clubs in his three articles in the *Centinel* (September 13 and 27; October 11, 1794) seems to indicate that his pronouncement was more the product of his wish than his thought. In his very first article, he declared: “... are they not working in darkness and silence, spreading like the spider their little threads in the way of unwary flies. They wait until times favor them and then they come out in force. Engines so useful to faction will not fall into disuse as long as faction exists. To counteract these engines by those vulcanian arms which truth holds in her hands is become a necessary task, a task too long delayed.” (*Columbian Centinel*, September 13, 1794.)
been an accurate anticipation of their real condition a few months later.

On November 27, 1794, Alexander Hamilton wrote to Thomas Fitzsimons, the avid Pennsylvania Federalist in the House: 70

Seeing the debates on the subject of the Democratic societies, I called at your home to state some facts. It is true that the opposition to the excise laws began from causes foreign to Democratic Societies, but it is well ascertained by proof in the course of judicial investigations, that the insurrection immediately is to be essentially attributed to one of those societies sometimes called the Mingo Creek society, sometimes the Democratic Society. An early and active member of it commanded the first attack at Neville's house; another active member of that society, McFarlane, the second attack. Benjamin Parkinson, the President, and several other members of it seem to have directed the second attack as a committee. This may be asserted upon good proof and information recently received, though it would not be consistent with decorum to name me. Make what use you please of this, and communicate it to other friends.

Whatever were Hamilton's ultimate purposes in writing this letter, investigation reveals that his "good proof and information" was at least mistaken if not conveniently twisted to throw the blame upon the Democratic Society of Washington County and by implication upon all other democratic societies. 71 For while it is clear that the Mingo Creek society may have been responsible for the beginning of the actual violence, it is also clear that this society was not "sometimes [called] the Democratic Society," but was a separate and distinct organization.

"A democratic Society was instituted in the town of Washington in the month of April, 1794," writes Hugh Henry Brackenridge, "on the same principles, and in correspondence with societies of the same denomination in New York, Philadelphia and elsewhere. I have traced no resolutions or proceedings of this society of Wash-

Almost at the same time, on September 3, 1794, Fisher Ames wrote to Thomas Dwight from Boston: "They [the clubs] poison every spring; they whisper lies to every gale . . . they wait in silence for occasions and when they occur, out they come and carry their points . . ." (Ames, Works, I. 148.) And on September 11, he wrote to Dwight again: The clubs "are rather waning here. Yet their extinction is more to be wished than expected; and if they exist at all, it will be like a root of an extracted cancer, which will soon eat again and destroy." (Ibid., I. 150.)

70 John Church Hamilton, History of the Republic of the United States (7 Volumes, Philadelphia, 1864), VI. 123.
71 Cf. note 41 and note 45, above. See also, Lynch, op. cit., 45-47; Claude G. Bowers, Jefferson and Hamilton (Boston, New York, 1925), 262.
ington, with regard to the excise laws." And then he continues: "Prior to this, a society, of a nature more democratic, had been instituted in the neighborhood of Mingo Creek. The place of convening was usually the meeting house." Later on, Brackenridge writes: "The Mingo Creek Society was instituted on February 28, 1794. It was to consist of Hamilton's battalion and to be governed by a president and council."

Very little is known of this Mingo Creek society; "this association," writes Findley, "was never announced in the newspapers, and its existence was known to but a few." "A great proportion of the Mingo Creek regiment of militia became members," writes Findley, and "during its existence," its meetings were "frequently attended by three hundred persons." And Hugh Henry Brackenridge writes: "The account [of the society] given me by Mr. McDonald, the secretary," or rather the apology made for instituting the society was

\[\text{Brackenridge, } \text{Incidents, III. 25. Even in the address and resolutions of a public meeting in Pittsburgh, sponsored by the Democratic Society of Washington County, on April 16, 1794, there was no mention whatever of excise, but only of the Mississippi River and the usual detestation of Great Britain. (Independent Chronicle, May 19, 1794.)}\]

The only communications on the excise law that we have been able to connect with the Democratic Society of Washington County, is the letter sent to it by the Philadelphia society on August 14, 1794. On May 8, 1794, Citizen Leib of the Philadelphia society, reported to that society an answer to a communication from the Democratic Society of Washington County. (MSS. Minutes, 88.) There is no record of the contents of this letter from the Washington County society in the Minutes of the Philadelphia society, but Leib's answer is given and it contains no mention of excise. It congratulates the citizens of Washington for creating another society "to protect the rights of freemen in America" and sees no necessity "to expatiate upon the benefits of Democratic Societies," since these "must have been already suggested by your own reflections and observations." With this letter were enclosed the resolutions of April 10, "on the present state of public affairs," and these again, contain no reference to excise. (MSS. Minutes, 88; Woodbury, op. cit., 69-71.

On May 22, Leib reported that he had transmitted this communication to the Washington County Democratic Society.

The letter of August 14, from the Philadelphia to the Washington Society, was acknowledged by the President of the latter on August 27 (MSS. Minutes, 142) but could not have been presented to his society before September 22, when it held its first meeting since June 23. (Aurora, January 31, 1795.) And by that time, as Luetscher writes, "the insurrection had reached its climax, so that no communication passed between the two societies having any reference to the excise in time to aid in fomenting the rebellion." (Luetscher, op. cit., 54-55.)

\[\text{Brackenridge, } \text{Incidents, III. 25.}\]

\[\text{Ibid., III. 148. Cf. Findley, op. cit., 56.}\]

\[\text{Findley, op. cit., 56.}\]

\[\text{See H. M. Brackenridge, op. cit., 70, for McDonald's affidavit in which his account of the society and its purpose is stated.}\]
that the people of the settlement were outrageous to do something on account of the excise law, the costs of suits before justices, court expense and salaries of officers; and were determined to do something and had talked of breaking up General Neville [sic] and burning Pittsburg; and that the instituting of a society was thought of, by the more moderate, as a means of employing the people’s minds, and to keep them deliberating instead of acting. Be this as it may,” concludes Brackenridge, “it does not seem to have had the effect, but rather to have accelerated the commencement of actual violence. It appears that at the June Court, at Washington [Pennsylvania], 1794, there was conversation, and by some of the members of that society, of a nature with that mentioned by McDonald, viz., seizing Neville and breaking up the office in Pittsburg.” Brackenridge asserts that “this society was the cradle of the insurrection.” He adds, “A society of a similar nature was instituted in a part of the county of Allegheny, in April following. We have the first account of it in the [Pittsburgh] gazette of April 26, 1794. The articles of this society are to the same effect with that of Mingo Creek and equally calculated to abstract the public mind from the established order of the laws.

But this society in Allegheny County, and the one in Mingo Creek were not the same as the Democratic Society of Washington County or any other Democratic Society. David Redick, a member with Gallatin of the peace party in the insurgents’ committee of sixty, writing in a Pittsburgh paper on January 17, 1795, declares that the charges against the Democratic Society of Washington County “are malicious and without true foundation,” and then he goes on to add: “If I have not been very ill informed, the government is in possession of sufficient evidence that the dreadful deeds had long before been determined on by people altogether unconnected with the Democratic Society.”

77 One of the rules of this society declared that “no district citizen [was] to sue, or cause to be sued before a single justice of peace or any court of justice, a citizen of the district before applying to the society for redress, unless the business will not admit of delay” (Brackenridge, Incidents, III. 149).

78 This was right after the issuance of the seventy-five writs by the Federal District Court in Philadelphia, on May 13, 1794. (See Note 8, above.)


80 Brackenridge, Incidents, III. 25; Cf. note 77, above.

81 See below.

In his letter to Fitzsimons, Hamilton states, too, that the members of "The Mingo Creek, sometimes called the Democratic Society" were leaders in the two marches upon Neville's house. We do not know the names of any members of the Mingo Creek society and only those of the officers and committeemen of the Democratic Society of Washington County. There is no evidence, however, that John Holcroft, the leader of the first attack upon Neville's house, was a member of the Democratic Society, nor that McFarlane, the leader of the second attack who was killed, was a member either, nor that Benjamin Parkinson, the acknowledged President of the Mingo Creek Society, was a member of the Democratic Society. It is well known, however, that James Marshall and David Bradford, the two most active leaders of the rioters, were very active in the Democratic Society of Washington County. Marshall, indeed, was the president. But here, again, there is nothing to indicate that either of them acted in the insurrection as members of the Democratic Society.

Both Marshall and Bradford had been very active in the Washington County meetings of 1791 and 1792 at which resolutions were passed condemning the excise, and it is most likely that neither had anything to do with the insurgents until the meeting at Mingo Creek on July 23, 1794, after Neville's house had been burned and McFarlane killed. Even then it is probable that they were at that meeting only under duress. Hugh Henry Brackenridge states: "I have understood from others, that after the first attack upon the house of the inspector, when the adjacent country was about to be roused to a second attack, persons went to the town of Washington and called on Marshall and Bradford to come forward, on that occasion. They declined it. The expression of Bradford, reported to me, is, 'I cannot act; you may do as you think proper.' He alluded, as was understood, to his being prosecuting counsel for the commonwealth; and in that case, not at liberty to do what others might. After the destruction of the house, persons went to Marshall and Bradford, demanding of them to come forward and support what was done, or they would burn their houses. They had a claim upon them as having been conspicuous in the deliberative committees, with regard to the excise laws; and alleged that Bradford had encouraged

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83 For accounts of these early meetings and the resolutions passed at them, see, Pennsylvania Archives, as cited, 20-22; 31. Adams, Gallatin, 89-91; McMaster, op. cit., II. 41-43.
them to do what they had done, by his words when urged to take part before the burning. 'I encourage,' said he; 'Good God! I never thought of such a thing.' 'Yes you did encourage,' said they; 'if you do not come forward, now, and support us, you shall be treated in the same manner with the excise officer.' He found himself under the necessity of coming forward and that being the case, he would seem from that time to have adopted the most violent counsels. Marshall was obliged also to come forward and thought it necessary, having come forward, to adopt violent counsels. I am of the opinion that both these men acted in the first instance under a subordination to popular influences."

The Introduction to the Pennsylvania Archives also states that once having "changed their minds [and] attended the [Mingo Creek] meeting, where, hearing the story of what they called the murder of McFarlane, their [Bradford's and Marshall's] sympathies became excited and from that moment they took a warm and active part." 

In a letter to Governor Mifflin, on October 4, 1794, Bradford wrote:

"I must confess I always disliked the excise law, but it was never in my mind to go farther than the committees, who met at Pittsburg, expressed in their resolutions, to wit: a negative opposition. After the first effray at Nevill's, when informed of it and consulted what ought to be done, I disapproved in the strongest terms of the measures. Mr. Redick can explain to you my conduct, for he was present, and I hope it will not be unpleasant to you to hear it."

Wharton perhaps best sums up the situation when he writes: Bradford "was a man of great timidity of character and yet a great demagogue. Before the attack on the inspector's, he had avoided giving open sanction to their proceedings, yet had encouraged the rioters. But, after that time, he was compelled by their threats to declare himself in their favour. He had thus got unexpectedly involved in the insurrection and finding it too late to recede, endeavored to carry out the most violent measures in order to save himself. All the wild proceedings afterwards adopted are attributable to him."
The only other member of the Democratic Society of Washington County, or of any other Democratic Society for that matter, whose name we know of as connected with the insurrection, was David Redick. It was said of him that "at the time of the 'Whiskey Insurrection,' he took a prominent part in the defense of law, order and the constitution, and with Mr. Findley, was appointed October 2, 1794, to wait upon President Washington and Governor Mifflin to explain the state of affairs in the western counties."

Hugh Henry Brackenridge was almost as deeply involved in the insurrection as Marshall and Bradford, but there is no indication that he was a member of the Democratic Society except his own statement that he attended one meeting "as a spectator."

Finally we know that Absalom Baird was a member of the Democratic Society of Washington. But when, a few years later, he was candidate for a justiceship of peace, the worst that could be said against him was that

... he had been uniformly among the strenuous opponents and censurers of our government, and has been and yet is of what is called the French party. He was of a party who at midnight and for some hours after in a noisy manner raised a May pole in the town of Washington and to the American colors annexed red, blue and white ribbons. . . .

There was no mention of any complicity of his with the insurrection.

On January 13, 1795, in a long address defending itself against the strictures of the President and Congress, the Democratic Society of Washington County, declared:

... we admit that a few of them ['our members'] (not more than seven) in their individual capacity were too deeply involved; but suppose there had been twenty; is that any reason that the society should be stigmatized with being fomenters of the rebellion; with the same reason and propriety it might be asserted that if a member of a corporate body should commit murder, that the corporation should be punished. . . .

member of the legislature and of the convention for ratifying the constitution of the United States against which he voted. As his character had been that of a moderate, prudent, industrious man, the part he took in the insurrection surprised everyone." (Wharton, op. cit., 114, note.)

Pennsylvania Archives, as cited, p. 46, note; ibid., 389.

Brackenridge, Incidents, II. 30.

Pennsylvania Archives, as cited, 544. Judge Addison to Judge Hall, July 6, 1798.

Aurora, and American Daily Advertiser, January 31, 1795.
The question whether the disturbances in Western Pennsylvania had really reached the stage of insurrection or not is a moot question that will never be answered. Nor will we know whether, as Jefferson suggested, Hamilton had exaggerated the extent of the riots to the point where it seemed that 15,000 militiamen must be gathered to restore law and order. This much, however, is clear, that whatever the extent of the uprising, Hamilton and the Federalists were determined to gain party advantage from it. The proceedings against Gallatin indicate this. But as Madison pointed out, the attack upon the Democratic Societies showed it even more clearly. For while it is abundantly evident that the societies were really not involved in the insurrection, it is also clear that they had been the spear-head of the Republican victories in the elections of 1794—victories that set the stage for the great struggle of 1796 and the ultimate Republican conquest in 1800. Here at last was an opportunity for the Federalists to indict the societies with the charge of fomenting insurrection and thereby destroy their prestige and influence.

Before the elections of 1794, the Federalists had indeed been keenly aware of the influence of the Democratic Societies against them. But their only mode of retaliation had been harsh denunciations. And, as Randolph remarked, these had only "contributed to foster" the clubs. But "they may now, I believe, be crushed," he

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92 See Note 40, above.
93 See Note 45, above.
95 Cf. note 42, above. On November 19, 1794, Fisher Ames wrote to Thomas Dwight: "... Would the insertion of the debates [in the House, on the condemnation of the societies] into your country papers have any good effect. . . . Everything that will impress public opinion as far as truth and decency allow, ought now to be urged as the issue rests with the public to hold up the clubs or the magistracy." (Ames, Works, I. 154.)
96 See note 69, above. On September 3, 1794, Ames wrote to Dwight that the clubs would "be as busy as Macbeth's witches at the election, and all agree that the event is very doubtful" (ibid., I. 148). On May 8, 1794, Jeremiah Smith wrote from Philadelphia: "The Democratic Societies have undertaken the guardianship of the rights of the people. They are ever and anon blowing the trump of faction, and warning the people of their danger, puffing the members of Congress, who are for sequestering British debts, and widening instead of healing the breach between Great Britain and us. Need I add, that this renders our situation uncomfortable—to me it is hateful. This zealous attachment to the rights of the people, this bellowing against monarchy, aristocracy, national debt, etc., this scorching fire of patriotism would be suspected with us in New Hampshire, but here it answers a good purpose." John H. Morison, Life of Hon. Jeremiah Smith (Boston, 1845), 64.
wrote after the insurrection, "the prospect ought not to be lost." As we have seen, with Washington in harness and Hamilton in the driver’s seat, the prospect was not lost.

But if the Federalists thus crushed their greatest enemy, they still remained enemies to themselves, and by 1800, the political whirlwind that they had, in 1794, begun to reap, had virtually swept them off the political horizon.

*New York University*  
*William Miller*

97 See note 42, above.