The North American:
Advocate of Protection

In Philadelphia the North American was one of the leading journalistic protagonists of Lincoln's administration. It had been first issued on March 26, 1839 by S. C. Brace and T. R. Newbold. Soon passing into the hands of William Welsh, the property was purchased in 1845 by George R. Graham, the magazine publisher, and Alexander Cummings. The latter withdrawing, Graham was sole proprietor until January 1, 1847 when Morton McMichael bought an interest in the paper. In 1854, after a number of changes in the ownership, McMichael became the sole proprietor of the paper.¹

The new partner, a man in the prime of life, had been connected with literary weeklies in Philadelphia for a score of years, being associated successively with the Saturday Evening Post, the Saturday Courier, the Saturday News, and Joseph C. Neal's Saturday Gazette.² Gifted with unusual oratorical powers, McMichael had a penchant for politics; as a Whig from the Whig stronghold of Philadelphia, he had a part in the calling of the Harrisburg convention of 1839, the first national convention of the party.³ When but a young man he was elected an alderman, and from 1843 to 1846 served as high sheriff of Philadelphia County, taking an active part in suppressing the anti-Catholic riots of 1844. He enjoyed the friendship of many prominent Whigs, among them Henry Clay, Daniel Webster, John J. Crittenden, and William H. Seward.⁴

The paper with which McMichael became connected in 1847 was an influential Whig journal. Published after 1848 at 132 South Third

³ Alexander K. McClure, Old Time Notes of Pennsylvania, 73; see also p. 197 for activity of McMichael as a Whig.
⁴ John W. Forney, Anecdotes of Public Men, II. 118.
Street beside the Girard Bank, it was a huge blanket sheet, twenty-four by thirty inches, with ten columns on each of its four pages. Besides the daily there were weekly and tri-weekly editions for distribution to distant readers. Thoroughly Whig in principle and dignified in tone, it catered to the propertied classes, the well-to-do merchants, lawyers, bankers, and iron masters, and, according to the Philadelphia Press, "had always represented the special commercial interests." Indeed, the subscription price of eight dollars a year, higher than that of other Philadelphia papers (it was not sold on the streets), placed it beyond the reach of the working classes. Under McMichael the North American, with the New York Tribune, was a center of protectionist propaganda. Henry C. Carey, the leading advocate of a protective tariff, was a close friend of McMichael, and editorials by him appeared regularly in the North American, as well as in the Tribune. Carey was not only an untiring propagandist, but an active worker in every political movement in Pennsylvania which looked toward protection.

When the Whig party faltered, friends of protection began to seek a new organization to support their favorite doctrine. Thus in 1856 McMichael with a number of like-minded individuals called a union state convention to secure the cooperation of Whigs, Know Nothings, and Republicans in the approaching canvass. As a result of the convention these groups combined on a list of candidates for state office and selected a fusion electoral ticket for the presidential contest. Though not pleased with the nomination of the radical John C. Fremont, McMichael loyally supported him.

In the gubernatorial canvass of 1857, the absence of cooperation resulted in a Democratic victory. After this experience the opposition groups in Philadelphia fused to form the "People's" party in the spring of 1858. The success of the Philadelphia organization in the mayoralty election encouraged the formation of similar groups in the interior of the state, and in July, 1858, the state convention of the

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6 Philadelphia Press, January 3, 1865.
7 Thomas M. Pitkin, "The Tariff and the Early Republican Party" (Unpublished Doctor's dissertation, Western Reserve University, Cleveland, Ohio, 1935), 21-23.
8 McClure, Old Time Notes, I. 251.
opposition, on a motion by McMichael, declared itself to be the People's party. The program of the party was opposition to the measures of the national administration in Kansas and on the tariff. This movement was primarily a protectionist one, and the North American was willing to soften its Republicanism, avoiding as much as possible the issue of slavery in the territories. It urged the election of the People's candidates as a means of securing a protective tariff.

This object was still unattained in 1860. Then McMichael took a distinctly conservative position; he was deeply devoted to the Union, and determined to suppress sectional agitation. Yet, understanding that only a Republican victory could give Pennsylvania a protective tariff, he became a delegate to the Republican national convention at Chicago, and assisted in securing the nomination of Abraham Lincoln. In the campaign that followed the North American made the tariff question practically the sole issue. In September McMichael was canvassing Pennsylvania under the auspices of the state committee of the People's party, speaking daily. The Harrisburg Union, a partisan critic, described his conservative strategy in wooing votes:

Morton McMichael, Esq., the editor of the North American, is now stumping it through the interior counties of the State. His progress is marked by a volley of compliments from the Republican press. He supports Lincoln and ignores the slavery question entirely, like the manager who advertised the play of Hamlet with the part of Hamlet omitted. His speeches are confined principally to that novel and exciting question, the tariff, with occasional allusions to the "corruptions of the Buchanan Administration," by way of life and variety.

Answering this charge of inconsistency the North American explained the reasons for being very quiet on the slavery question:

What better way is there of tranquilizing the public mind, of silencing discord, and invoking moderation, than by ignoring a question which begets strife, does not involve a practical issue at this time, and only estranges friends? Our principles are fixed and immovable, and will be asserted whenever the occasion occurs.

10 Ibid., 77-79, 87-88; McClure, Old Time Notes, I. 342.
12 John W. Forney, Memorial Address upon the Character and Public Services of Morton McMichael (Philadelphia, 1879), 5-6.
14 A list of his engagements was given in the Philadelphia North American, September 7, 1860.
15 Quoted in the Philadelphia North American, September 18, 1860.
16 Philadelphia North American, September 18, 1860.
Until that time arrives, we prefer to consider our neglected interests. . . . Our desire is for peace and quiet, and the return of fraternal feeling between the north and south.

The *North American*'s Republicanism was plainly not of the "irrepressible conflict" variety. Indeed, the paper repeatedly referred to "Mr. Lincoln's Conservatism," and insisted that his party had "no disposition to touch slavery in the States, or to interfere with it where it properly belongs." In a final, election day appeal it asserted: "Every voter of Pennsylvania who desires today to emphasize his vote in favor of protection to American industry and to the best interests of this State, should give it to Abraham Lincoln." The appeal was successful, for Lincoln carried Pennsylvania on the protection issue and thereby won the election.

The Republican victory was at once followed by the secession of the lower South. Northern business interests, threatened with the loss of credits extended to southern planters, bent their efforts to prevent the disintegration of the Union. Identified as it was with the commercial interests in Philadelphia, the *North American* sought to stay the tide of secession. It denied that the election of Lincoln was an anti-slavery victory or "a triumph of the North over the South." The people of South Carolina, argued one editorial, had no cause for secession. Indeed, theirs was "A CASE WITHOUT A LEG TO STAND ON." The *North American* supported all efforts to preserve the Union. When, however, the lower South had at length seceded, the paper did not advocate the use of force to restore it. As the months passed without war the *North American* began to feel relieved. Reviewing the signs of peace, it looked forward optimistically to "BETTER TIMES": "The cottonocracy have done their worst, and having now passed the dead point of danger we begin to recuperate. It is clear to all that there is to be no war between the Gulf States and the Union."

17 Philadelphia *North American*, November 1, 1860; see also the issue for October 30, 1860.
The prophecy proved false, for three weeks later the firing upon Fort Sumter plunged the nation into civil strife. When Lincoln called for seventy-five thousand volunteers, the newspaper appealed "for promptness and unanimity in support of the government." Force alone, cried the erstwhile pacific journal, "can now settle this great trouble. . . . Let the government hurry forward troops to strike at the heart of the great rebellion. . . . A blow as terrible as the nation’s vengeance can make it should fall on Charleston instantly." As the scourge of war was about to descend on the land the *North American* praised Mars for "Military Virtues": "It raises the standard of national character, purifies the moral atmosphere, and dispels the gathering corruption, meanness and want of principle which long peace and prosperity are apt to engender." From the outset the *North American* was indefatigable in supporting President Lincoln, loyally praising his inaugural address and policies. Whenever the President was mentioned, the *North American* broke into applause. He was "a statesman of broad and comprehensive views, of enlightened patriotism," his inauguration quickly restored "the sense of national security," his communication to the special session of Congress was "this admirable message."

The editorial course of the *North American* was undoubtedly influenced by McMichael’s prominence in the Republican party. Active as an adviser, editor, and public speaker, he was well acquainted with Stanton, Lincoln, and Chase, and was a trusted member of the party councils in Pennsylvania. When mentioned for the United States

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25 Philadelphia *North American*, April 15, 16, 1861. On April 16 the Philadelphia Board of Trade passed resolutions declaring their purpose to support the government, and on the following day a meeting of the merchants and manufacturers of the city expressed the same determination. Scharf and Westcott, *History of Philadelphia*, I. 756.


30 Philadelphia *North American*, July 6, 1861.


Senate in the spring of 1861, his position in the party was thus described: “Although firm and consistent in his advocacy of Republican principles and Republican men, he is not regarded as radical.” Though never a senator he was elected mayor of Philadelphia in 1865.

His party connections and the services of his newspaper were recognized by the administration. Thus the *North American* received a generous amount of advertising from the federal government, principally in the form of proposals for the coal, pork, beef, and other supplies needed to carry on the war. For such advertising the *North American* received nearly five thousand dollars from the war department in less than two years. It also published in its columns the laws passed by Congress. For the second session of the Thirty-seventh Congress this brought $482 into McMichael’s pocket, for the third session, $335, and $575 for the first session of the Thirty-eighth Congress. Advertising patronage also came to the *North American* from the city and county of Philadelphia when the offices were in the hands of the People’s party. For example, on the eve of the election of 1861 the *North American* extolled the party candidate for sheriff.

Alderman John Thompson, the People’s nominee for Sheriff, is a man . . . thoroughly respected by everybody for his irreproachable honesty, for the calm, impassioned temper of his mind, for his dignity, impartiality and strict adherence to the exact line of duty.

When honest John took office, he gratefully diverted generous amounts of sheriff’s sale notices to the *North American*.

To such bounty were added the sweets of office. When the distribution of places to the faithful began in March, 1861, the *Pennsylvania* thought it detected an air of discontent about its Republican contemporary:

The spoils harvest has almost past, the summer almost ended, and yet the editor of the *North American*, and “Independent” [James E. Harvey], the Washington correspondent of that journal, are still unprovided for. There is said to be a point at which forbearance ceases to be a virtue. That editor and his correspondent seem to have reached it. . . . Our slighted neighbors begin to

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84 United States Official Register, 1865, pp. 218, 221-25.
85 Ibid., 1865, pp. 15-16; 1865, p. 15.
86 Philadelphia *North American*, October 5, 1861.
complain. They are not appreciated. They see it and are disheartened. The fat offices are fast slipping away, and they begin to experience that heart-sickness which is said to follow “hope deferred.”

Within a week, however, President Lincoln appointed Harvey minister to Portugal, a “fat office” paying $7,500 a year. A South Carolinian educated at Charleston by Bishop John England, he had been put in charge of the Loan Office in the United States Treasury in 1842. Two years later the young government official, then but twenty-four years old, became the Washington correspondent of the *North American*, a post he held until he went to Portugal in 1861. An able commentator, his letters went also to the New York *Tribune* and other papers. Early in 1861 Harvey was apparently intimate with Seward, Scott, and Holt and in the first days of April he was acting as a confidential agent for the administration with the Confederate authorities at Charleston.

Not long after Harvey’s appointment the bonds between the *North American* and the Republican administration were strengthened by favors extended to four of McMichael’s sons. The eldest, Morton McMichael, Jr., listed in the city directory for 1861 as an auctioneer, was in 1862 a lieutenant-colonel and aide-de-camp stationed at the Headquarters of the Army of Pennsylvania, Hagerstown, Maryland. This commission in the state forces was doubtless the gift of Governor Andrew G. Curtin. By June, 1864, young McMichael had retired from military life, and was cashier of the First National

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40 Joseph B. Baker to Buchanan, January 11, 1861, Buchanan MSS., H. S. P.
42 There was another son, Charles B., a young boy at the time of the Civil War. See his foreword to Mordell, *In re Morton McMichael*. The other sons were, in the order named in McMichael’s will and probably according to their ages, Morton, Jr., Walter, Clayton, and William. See McMichael’s will, Register of Wills Office, City Hall, Philadelphia.
45 If Morton, Jr. had been in the volunteer forces of the United States, he would have been listed in Francis B. Heitman, *Register of the United States Army* (Washington, 1903).
Bank in Philadelphia. The second son, Walter McMichael, was, according to the city directory, a publisher, and was in 1861 living in his father's house and working in the office of the *North American*. The same year he was given a clerkship in the office of the House of Representatives with compensation at eighteen hundred dollars a year. Both Walter and his younger brother Clayton acquired a fiftieth interest in the *North American*. Clayton, then but a stripling of seventeen, was living with his father and working in the office of the *North American* as an editor when the war broke out. Having enlisted in the regular army, he was promoted to first lieutenant in the 9th United States Infantry on August 5, 1861, and was placed in command of a military escort to protect emigrants from the Missouri River to the headwaters of the Columbia. Later, however, he was transferred to the Army of the Potomac where from January 1, 1862 to September 1, 1863 he served as regimental quartermaster, rising on March 4, 1864 to the rank of captain. In Virginia while aide on the staff of General Birney and later General Hancock he won by his gallant and meritorious service at the capture of Petersburg the commission of brevet major. Twice wounded in 1864–65 he was assigned to duty on the coast and frontier of Maine. Another son, William, became an assistant adjutant general of volunteers with rank of captain on August 15, 1861, and was stationed at St. Louis. A year later he was promoted to the rank of major, and on March 13, 1865 he was made brevet lieutenant colonel and colonel of volunteers for faithful and meritorious service during the war.

46 C. H. Clark was president. Advertisement in Philadelphia *North American*, June 8, 1864.
49 Will of Morton McMichael, Register of Wills Office, City Hall, Philadelphia.
The places so generously bestowed upon the younger McMichaels seemed to have a tangible influence on the editorial course of the *North American*. The careless distribution of military commissions aroused the Philadelphia *Inquirer* to protest against the appointment as army officers of "presumptuous politicians and raw civilians." Terming the "whole system . . . rotten," it continued, "Although it is broadly said that General Scott has stopped by energetic remonstrances, the further distribution of positions amongst Clan Cameron, we still fear the evil is not yet checked." As criticism of the wasteful and corrupt administration of the war department continued, Cameron was finally in January, 1862 forced out of the cabinet. Upon his resignation the *North American* lauded his career as secretary: "Few public men in this crisis have displayed such unfailing readiness, such bold and sagacious enterprise, such promptitude in the preparation of comprehensive and systematic measures for so unprecedented a struggle, as the retiring Secretary of War." While the eulogy to the retiring cabinet officer was an acknowledgement of the *North American*s obligations, more important were its services at the hustings. Here the tactics generally adopted by the Republican press were to identify the Democratic party with the Confederacy. Applying this strategy the *North American* in 1861 lectured its readers on the treason of the Democracy:

On the one hand we have arrayed the same party in whose bosom the present civil war had its origin, which contains all the traitors we have in the north, and whose continued existence seems strange, in view of its past career, and the events which have rendered it infamous. On the other we have the only living issue which a patriot should now recognize, the perpetuity of the Union intact. To vote for a Democratic candidate at this time is to touch pitch and run the risk of becoming defiled. The purposes of the party are of the dark lantern species. While professing loyalty, the expressions of its members are of the most suspicious character. We will not, therefore, think that the intelligent people of Philadelphia can be deceived by false pretenses. It will not do for our noble city to taint her name now by affiliation with rebel sympathizers. The only course now is to sustain the government by voting the People's Union ticket, of which the candidates are good, and the organization supporting them patriotic.

A year later the *North American* again raised the cry of "Domestic Treason" against the Democratic party. "Any vote, therefore,"

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53 Philadelphia *Inquirer*, July 3, 10, 1861.
56 Philadelphia *North American*, October 8, 1861.
the editorial concluded, “cast at this election for a Democratic candidate for the Legislature ... will practically be a vote for the rebellion against the national government.” In 1863 the North American, striving to secure the re-election of Governor Curtin, rang the changes on the old cry.

The Democratic party of the north, as it now stands, is the rebel party pure and simple. ... It stakes all on the issue of peace, ignominious, bitter, disgraceful peace—the peace of submission to rebel despotism the peace of perpetual slavery.

The following fall when seeking votes for Lincoln the North American prepared a Republican catechism by which the people might learn the true nature of the Democracy. Under the caption “Queries For The Canvass” it asked:

Where are the friends of slavery to be found in this country?
A. In the Democratic party.

Q. Where are the persons to be sought who in all past contests have been rated as northern men with southern principles?
A. In the Democratic party.

Q. Where are all the friends of the rebellion, the peace men, the copperheads, the southern refugees; the spies, conspirators and pimps of the rebels to be found in the north?
A. In the Democratic party.

Q. Where are the advocates of a degrading and ignoble peace at any cost of national humiliation, and at any sacrifice of our dear-bought conquest?
A. In the Democratic party.

With the North American, devotion to the Republican party was coupled with loyalty to the business interests engaged in furnishing the government with war supplies. Thus the Democratic Age liked to refer to it as the “contractors’ organ,” and did so with some justice, for the North American took upon itself to defend the “shoddy” aristocracy. Speaking on “The Contractors And The Public,” the North American informed its readers that to think “a large profit” made a contract fraudulent was “one grand mistake,” and exonerated those accused of war profiteering.

57 Philadelphia North American, October 3, 1862.
58 Philadelphia North American, August 10, 1863.
60 Philadelphia itself was alive with the industrial activity of firms working under government contract. See Scharf and Westcott, History of Philadelphia, I. 773, 777, 780, 782, 786, 787, 790.
61 Philadelphia Age, September 11, 1863.
The great corruption report, which last year astounded the whole nation, has since been shown up in its true colors, as a tissue of the most surprising misrepresentation of facts ever published in an official document. ... As regards the contractors who have supplied the government with materials of war for the army, we are inclined to think that generally they are a much abused class of men ... no army in the world was ever better fed, clothed, armed, equipped, shod, or cared for than ours.

The record, however, told a tale of shameful swindling.63 Bald truth was not always the first object of the Philadelphia North American.

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