

Morton McMichael's *North American*

IN November, 1846, Morton McMichael began a connection with the Philadelphia *North American* which lasted for more than three decades. In the course of time this journal came to be known as "McMichael's *North American*," much in the same fashion as its contemporaries referred to "Greeley's *Tribune*." McMichael's fame as a journalist was never as great as that of Greeley or James Gordon Bennett in New York, Joseph Gales in Washington, Samuel Bowles in Springfield, or even his fellow Philadelphians, George W. Childs, William Swain, and A. K. McClure. Nevertheless, a fellow editor described him as "the Master of Philadelphia journalism," and an authoritative chronicler of Philadelphia history deemed him "one of the ablest and most useful journalists which the city has produced."¹

It was McMichael's fate to become one of what Allan Nevins has called "secondary and tertiary personages . . . whose labors were the main elements of progress." His statue, which adorns a hilltop near the entrance to Philadelphia's Fairmount Park with the inscription, "Morton McMichael, A Beloved Citizen of Philadelphia," has failed to rescue him from the relative historical obscurity to which the passage of time has relegated him. He was one of those individuals who busied himself with behind-the-scenes activity which looked toward furthering the commercial and industrial interests of his adopted city and state,² and as the publisher of an important commercial journal in one of the nation's leading marts, he occupied a vitally strategic post in the innermost councils of those shaping public policies. It has been his lot to be remembered only by anti-

¹ *Philadelphia Day*, Jan. 7, 1879; E. P. Oberholtzer, *A Literary History of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1906), 88.

² McMichael was a native of Burlington, N. J., but his family had moved to Philadelphia during his childhood. See A. C. Baugh, "Morton McMichael," *Dictionary of American Biography*, XII, 142.

quarians, although Oberholtzer classed him with McClure and John W. Forney as "the last representative of that journalism in which the man was more than the paper."³

McMichael was thirty-nine years old when he entered into partnership with George R. Graham in the publication of the *North American*.⁴ He had already established himself as a literary figure and political personage in Philadelphia. After reading law in the office of David Paul Brown, he had gained admittance to the Philadelphia Bar in 1827. He began his political career as a Jacksonian Democrat, but by 1838 he was drifting away from the party and was a member of "an unusually large and respectable meeting of Democrats . . . friendly to the General Government, and opposed to the Independent Treasury bill as introduced into the Senate by Silas Wright."⁵ Increasingly repelled by the low tariff policies pursued by the Democrats, he had an important part in calling the Whig National Convention at Harrisburg in 1839. Beguiled by the Whig "hard cider campaign" of 1840, he was an out-and-out Whig by 1843, at which time he was reported making pro-Clay speeches in the hinterlands.⁶ For some time he had been active in municipal politics and had served a term as alderman and as a police magistrate. In 1843, he was elected Sheriff of Philadelphia County, and in this post confronted the boisterous Native American riots of 1844. This turbulence was eventually quieted through the intervention of the state militia, but when McMichael retired from the office in 1846, the *North American* published a testimonial letter, signed by one hundred thirty-seven leading citizens, praising his conduct in this crisis.⁷

³ *Philadelphia: A History of the City and Its People* (Philadelphia, 1912), IV, 410.

⁴ J. Albert Robbins, "George R. Graham, Philadelphia Publisher," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* (PMHB), LXXV (1951), 287. Robbins gives the date of the Graham-McMichael partnership as Jan. 1, 1847. The *North American* announced on Nov. 12, 1846, that "Morton McMichael, Esq., will from this date be interested and identified with the North American." Another source states that he acquired a half-interest. See *National Encyclopedia of American Biography*, II, 211.

⁵ Baugh, 142; *Philadelphia Times*, Jan. 7, 1879; J. B. Moore, *The Works of James Buchanan* (Philadelphia, 1908-1911), III, 397.

⁶ *North American*, Aug. 1, 1843; *Philadelphia Times*, Jan. 7, 1879; E. B. Robinson, "The North American: Advocate of Protection," PMHB, LXIV (1940), 346.

⁷ *North American*, Oct. 29, 1846. A Catholic historian calls McMichael's conduct "weak-kneed." See H. J. Nolan, *The Most Reverend Francis Patrick Kennedy* (Philadelphia, 1948), 329.

Although he was by 1846 a strong Whig, his value to the *North American* was not entirely due to his agreeable political complexion. He had long been known as a writer of merit, and he was no novice in the editorial world. A brief term as editor of the *Saturday Evening Post* in 1826 and as editor-in-chief of the *Saturday Courier* in 1831, a whirl with Louis Godey and Joseph Neal in the short-lived *Saturday News* in 1836, and a partnership with Neal in the publication of *Neal's Saturday Gazette* in 1844, had all fitted him to undertake editorial duties with Graham, who had recently purchased the *North American* from William Welsh and his associates.⁸ McMichael appears to have been among the first magazine editors in America to recognize the genius of Edgar Allan Poe, an admiration which was reciprocated. On one occasion Poe wrote:

Mr. McMichael is well known to the Philadelphia public by the number and force of his prose compositions. . . . As a poet he has produced some remarkably vigorous things. I have seldom seen a finer composition than a certain celebrated Monody.⁹

McMichael's journalistic venture with the *North American* may have interrupted a promising literary career. "He, more than anyone else," wrote one contemporary, "combined the two elements of editor and publisher—the graceful writer and capable business man." Another recorded an effusive evaluation of his powers of oratory as "models of beautiful diction and exquisite literary merit . . . every word in the right place and conveying the precise meaning intended . . . almost faultless." According to his son Charles, when McMichael had written an address he was to deliver, he never looked at it a second time, but a stenographic report of his speech would correspond verbatim "with the original draft." Some observers compared his oratorical abilities to those of Edmund Burke and Daniel Webster. John W. Forney called him "the best dinner-table orator, the sharpest wit when the cloth is removed, the most genial of public hosts."¹⁰

⁸ Oberholtzer, *A Literary History of Philadelphia*, 227.

⁹ Cited in Albert Mordell, *In Re Morton McMichael* (Philadelphia, 1921), 12, 14.

¹⁰ Edwin M. Benson, *In Memoriam: Henry Armitt Brown, J. Gillingham Fell, Morton McMichael* (Philadelphia, 1879), 12–13; John W. Forney, *Anecdotes of Public Men* (New York, 1873), I, 71; Mordell, 6; J. T. Scharf and T. Westcott, *History of Philadelphia, 1609–1884* (Philadelphia, 1884), III, 1972.

The firm of "Graham & McMichael" soon raised the *North American* to the forefront of Philadelphia journalism. McMichael appears to have been the chief agent in effecting the merger of Joseph R. Chandler's respected *United States Gazette* with the *North American* in July, 1847, and it was probably through his importunity that Robert Montgomery Bird came to serve the journal. The dual acquisition of Chandler's paper and Bird's literary talent made the *North American & United States Gazette* the leading Whig newspaper in the city. After Graham withdrew from the firm in 1848, the reorganized partnership of "McMichael & Bird" carried the newspaper on to commercial and political prominence.

It is exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish between McMichael and Bird in their influence on the *North American*, although the former seems more likely to have concentrated on managerial responsibilities, leaving the editorial functions to Bird. McMichael's forte lay in making the proper contacts among Philadelphia businessmen and the upper-class clientele. Much of his success in this may be attributed to his facility for moving in the "elegant" social circles of the community. No longer were journalists considered little better than hacks, whose services were available to the most liberal purse, but they were not yet generally accounted of the social elite. By the 1850's, however, "men of high attainments engaged more and more frequently in journalism," and though Horace Greeley might sniff at college men, "well educated journalists became more and more common in the prominent positions—especially in the east."¹¹ With a legal and literary background to aid him, McMichael had entree into upper-class Philadelphia society as a member of the Wistar Association, the St. Andrew's Society, and the informal Saturday Night Club.¹² J. S. Rosengarten, a *North American* employee, wrote of his chief:

Mr. McMichael was leader in all the social life of Philadelphia that was so heartily appreciated by all strangers here. . . . at his office in the newspapers and magazines with which he was connected, there was a constant

¹¹ F. L. Mott, *American Journalism* (New York, 1950), 311-312. McMichael is sometimes erroneously listed as an alumnus of the University of Pennsylvania (Baugh, 143). Yet, unquestionably he was an "educated man."

¹² *St. Andrew's Society Catalogue*, 249. John W. Forney recalls McMichael present at the Saturday Night Club "telling Louis A. Godey his last joke. . . ." Forney, II, 192.

succession of visitors representing all sections of this country and many foreigners.¹³

Among the more distinguished figures from abroad was William Makepeace Thackeray, who ate late suppers with McMichael at the "oyster cellars" in the city. "Surely," wrote the British novelist in February, 1853, "I shall get a chance of seeing you all again in Philadelphia ere long . . . dear McMichael."¹⁴ Horace Greeley made the *North American* offices his Philadelphia headquarters during the Whig National Convention of 1848.¹⁵

Upon the death of Bird in January, 1854, McMichael succeeded to the sole managerial and editorial responsibility for the *North American*. A third of the shares of the now moderately prosperous enterprise had been left by Bird to his widow, McMichael controlling the remainder. Until the financial troubles of 1857 beset it, the paper prospered, and in 1856 Mary M. Bird received \$2,823.60 as her share of the yearly profits. In January, 1858, however, McMichael informed her that the financial situation was such that the usual semiannual payment, due on January first, would not be forthcoming. When the same condition prevailed in July and December of that year, Mrs. Bird was constrained to accept an offer from McMichael to sell her shares to him. In the letter in which he stated his offer to relieve her of her shares, McMichael revealed the business instincts which governed him in this matter:

If this offer [\$15,000] shall not be accepted by the 1st of February, it will be positively withdrawn, & after that day and before the 1st of April, I will give \$12,000, payable as above. After the 1st of April and before the 1st of July I will give \$10,000. After the 1st of July I shall leave things to take their inevitable course.

He added that he considered \$10,000 to be far beyond the value of the Bird shares.¹⁶

¹³ Cited in Mordell, 41-42.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 37-38. Thackeray once thanked McMichael for the return of a lost purse:

"McMichael, who sent me my cash and my purse
May count on my friendship, for better or worse."

¹⁵ Henry L. Stoddard, *Horace Greeley: Printer, Editor, Crusader* (New York, 1946), 126. Like Greeley, McMichael possessed an almost undecipherable chirography.

¹⁶ The correspondence between Mary M. Bird, McMichael, and James C. Douglass (one of the executors of the Clayton estate) relative to this transaction may be found in the Robert Montgomery Bird Papers, Library of the University of Pennsylvania.

After some hesitation, the pressure of her financial needs prevailed upon Mrs. Bird to dispose of her shares to McMichael on his terms. On March 16, 1859, McMichael paid to the executors of the John M. Clayton estate, to whom Mrs. Bird was indebted,¹⁷ the sum of \$11,000, and an additional \$5,000 was paid to Mrs. Bird to secure for McMichael full title to the Bird shares.¹⁸ Thus, for \$16,000 McMichael acquired full proprietorship of the *North American*.

McMichael proceeded to make the *North American* a well-paying newspaper of Whig persuasion. Old-timers later remembered it as "the centre of that castellated group of Whig papers which upheld our manufacturing interests . . . in the very front of the Whig papers of national reputation," a journal in Philadelphia "with an editorial staff that compared favorably with the staffs of the best New York journals."¹⁹ Jay Cooke, who regarded the newspaper fraternity as "a needy, half-starved, improvident set, always short, no credit, out at elbows," noted two important exceptions in William Swain of the prosperous *Public Ledger*, and McMichael.²⁰

There is no direct evidence that McMichael embarked upon a newspaper career for purely pecuniary considerations, although Bird testified in 1848 as to his heavy domestic obligations.²¹ McMichael probably recognized the growing political power exercised by the newspaper press, and judging from periodic "leaders" in *North American* columns, he believed the editor to occupy a very significant role. They could and should do the thinking for the masses, "who have neither the leisure nor the capacity to excogitate for themselves an abstruse and complicated problem in morals or civil policy," he wrote.²² This important function, however, did not keep him from earning a generous competence as editor-publisher. William H. Boyd's *Business Directory of Philadelphia for 1858* described McMi-

¹⁷ See Robert L. Bloom, "Robert Montgomery Bird, Editor," *PMHB*, LXXXVI (1952), 124-125.

¹⁸ Mary M. Bird to James C. Douglass, Mar. 25, 1859, Bird Papers.

¹⁹ G. A. Townsend, "Men Who Make Public Opinion," *New York Daily Graphic*, XXII (Mar. 16, 1880); Howard M. Jenkins, ed., *Pennsylvania: Colonial and Federal* (Philadelphia, 1903), III, 195-196.

²⁰ E. P. Oberholtzer, *Jay Cooke; Financier of the Civil War* (Philadelphia, 1907), I, 93.

²¹ Bird to John M. Clayton, Dec. 24, 1848, Bird Papers. Bird thought McMichael might contemplate selling his shares of the *North American* in order to meet his debts.

²² *North American*, Mar. 9, 1854. Other editorials of like sentiments included those of Apr. 8, 1854, May 23 and Dec. 2, 1857, May 17, 1859.

chael and the *North American* as "the recognized exponent of the commercial interests of Philadelphia," with a claimed daily circulation of 6,000 copies distributed extensively "in the States of Pennsylvania, Delaware, New Jersey, Maryland, and the States of the South and West generally."²³ Sufficient financial reserve was accumulated to enable McMichael to continue the *North American* as Philadelphia's only "blanket sheet" during the newsprint famine of Civil War time.²⁴

Some rivals hinted that the *North American* prospered during the era of shortages and high costs only because its owner was intimate with Simon Cameron, a dispenser of patronage in Lincoln's Cabinet until January, 1862. McMichael did receive a large share of government advertising and printing during Cameron's tenure as head of the War Department, but this does not necessarily mean that he "bought" McMichael's editorial support. Their political friendship antedated the war by a decade. The newspaper owner naturally welcomed whatever public patronage fell his way, and the *North American* did very well in this particular under Cameron's successor, Edwin M. Stanton, who had no reason to favor McMichael.²⁵ Nevertheless, antiadministration editors in Philadelphia professed to be scandalized by the patronage awarded the *North American*. "We do not think much of those newspapers which are very loyal indeed," the editor of the *Philadelphia Evening Journal* wrote, "when we discover that they are excellently well paid for their loyalty." McMichael's subsequent defense of Cameron against critics of War Depart-

²³ The postwar *North American* apparently lost ground. *Rowell's American Newspaper Directory for 1870* put its circulation at 5,200, and at 3,000 for 1880. The figure given for 1890, fifteen thousand, is to be questioned. Meanwhile, the *Public Ledger* had reached a circulation of 81,000 by 1872. See A. K. McClure, *Old Time Notes of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia, 1905), II, 348.

²⁴ On July 29, 1865, however, the *North American* announced an increase in "the current bills . . . rendered to subscribers," because of "the enormous rise in the cost of paper . . . all other materials, as well as the labor employed." The "N.A.'s" blanket sheet was described as "almost big enough to sleep under." See George Morgan, *The City of Firsts* (Philadelphia, 1926), 181.

²⁵ From Sept. 30, 1863, to Sept. 30, 1864, the *North American* received \$4,184.74; the *Inquirer*, \$4,520.56; the *Press*, \$4,046.70; and the independent *Public Ledger* but \$36.00 in government patronage. See E. B. Robinson, *The Public Press of Philadelphia During the Civil War* (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Western Reserve University, 1936), 225.

ment corruption and favoritism earned for the *North American* the Philadelphia *Age's* sneer, "the contractor's organ."²⁶

That McMichael considered himself in Cameron's good graces in 1861, is seen in his hope for the latter's support for the Senatorship which Cameron was vacating to enter Lincoln's Cabinet. He considered himself as well qualified for the post as the other aspirants, who included Edgar Cowan and David Wilmot, and wrote to Cameron asking his aid.

I have just had an interview with Scott—He thinks neither Cowan nor Wilmot would suit you or him. He appears anxious that I should make it and says it can be accomplished if they can now get a postponement of the question until Feb. when both can be elected at the same time. He says if you will cooperate that I can be elected for the long term & a man satisfactory to Curtin & McClure for the short term, & thus reconcile all difficulty and stop all opposition to your appointment. This would be a big thing and worth working for—with you in the Cabinet & I in the Senate it would not be in the power of *any fellow* to cheat us badly.

McMichael thought that A. K. McClure was the Curtin-man to approach, and added, "I will pledge myself, if I win, to join you heartily in anything . . . and what is there that we could not control?"

Think well of this [McMichael wrote]. You and Scott can I know carry it out. You have the power; will you use it? At the same time, in justice to myself, I must add—Don't be embarrassed by my pressure of the case. I think it important to you, as well as other interests, & of course I would like it, but I am *for you* & will stand by you if you think it better policy to aid somebody else, and give me the cold shoulder. It will not detach me from you.²⁶

It is difficult, perhaps impossible, to summarize McMichaelian editorial views without recognizing that he was many times incon-

²⁶ *Philadelphia Evening Journal*, Feb. 18, 1862; *Philadelphia Age*, Oct. 10, 1863. Perhaps the Lincoln administration indicated its appreciation in other ways. Morton McMichael, Jr., and William McMichael received direct commissions in the army, and another son, Walter, was made clerk in the House of Representatives at Washington at a salary of \$1,800 a year. See *National Encyclopedia of American Biography*, II, 211-212; F. H. Taylor, *Philadelphia in the Civil War, 1861-1865* (Philadelphia, 1913), 17; Robinson, *The Public Press of Philadelphia During the Civil War*, 92-93. McMichael to Cameron, Jan. 4, 1861, Simon Cameron Papers, Library of Congress. (The italics are McMichael's.)

sistent, biased, and partisan in his interpretation of the events of his day. His contemporaries, and some later commentators, insist that he refused to tolerate personal abuse in his columns and that "he did much to improve the tone of the newspaper press."²⁷ No doubt it is unjust to criticize the tone, the approach, and the lack of historical prescience, which so many of the *North American* editorials displayed, in the light of latter day standards of newspaper propriety. Furthermore, the *North American* discussed an enormous variety of topics during McMichael's thirty-year tenure at its helm, and he constantly confronted new issues and unprecedented problems in the turbulent mid-nineteenth-century decades. Finally, he remained loyal throughout to a set of fundamental tenets which he cherished: tariff protection, antipathy toward slavery, the general welfare dependent upon whatever catered to the interests of the commercial and industrial world, and, perhaps as a result of the attitudes named, unrelenting hostility to the Democratic Party. The journal's editorial columns reflected the climate of opinion which prevailed in the upper-class circles of Philadelphia, which in his time were frequently narrowly conservative and characterized by a certain class interest. Such a clientele found it easy to accept the *North American's* often stodgy, unexciting, and partisan presentation of news and views.

McMichael could not stomach "independent journalism." Newspaper editors who refused to stand up and be counted were, in his words, "the jolly bachelors of politics who refuse to wed, but . . . are by no means above flirtation with doubtful characters."²⁸ "The editors of the *North American* are Whigs," proudly proclaimed the journal in 1848,²⁹ and Whigs they remained until, following a temporary flirtation with the Know Nothings in 1854, they adopted the mantle of Republicanism by 1857. They genuflected in the direction of independency, professing to be conducting "a metropolitan journal with a weakness for news only," but they added that even if the first duty of a newspaper "is to tell the news," it has an equally compelling obligation to support the party whose principles it endorses.³⁰ In practice, this meant *North American* denunciation of the Democrats

²⁷ Baugh, 143; Scharf and Westcott, III, 1972.

²⁸ *North American*, Sept. 22, 1874.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, Dec. 5, 1848.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, Feb. 21, 1877, and Sept. 1, 1880.

and eulogies for the Republicans after 1857.³¹ Although attracted by the ideal of impartiality, the McMichaels, father and sons, continued to conduct what McClure's *Philadelphia Times* called, "the respected organ of business in Philadelphia."³²

Beyond question, it was the Republican Party's strong high tariff stand that won over McMichael. This position was in line with Whig tradition, but the early Republican organization's equally strong antislavery stand gave him cause for pause. Although the *North American* supported John C. Frémont against James Buchanan in the Presidential canvass of 1856, its proprietor was not wholly happy in the campaign. Philadelphia commercial interests looked askance at "ultra" views against slavery, and the *North American* considered the work of John Brown at Harper's Ferry in October, 1859, as the folly of a "wretched fanatic."³³ Whatever qualms McMichael entertained, however, were overcome by his eagerness to see protection legislated in Congress, and the *North American* earned for itself the sobriquet, "Philadelphia's Bible of Protectionism." Henry C. Carey, the high priest of the protectionist faith, deserves much of the credit for the tariff campaigns of McMichael's newspaper. The personal friendship between the two men enabled the indefatigable essayist, pamphleteer, and lecturer to become virtually the "protectionist editor" of the *North American*.³⁴ In the 1860 Presidential contest the Democratic Harrisburg *Patriot and Union* complained:

In the midst of this fearful agitation, shaking the foundations of society, arraying section against section, tearing asunder old organizations—political, religious, and social—an oily antediluvian like Mr. McMichael calmly implores the people of Pennsylvania to vote for Lincoln, the representative of interminable agitation, because he is said to be favorable to a tariff.³⁵

³¹ Like other Republican papers, the *North American* used the term "National Union Party" during the Civil War to refer to its ticket.

³² *Philadelphia Times*, Oct. 20, 1880.

³³ *North American*, Oct. 19, 1859. Republicanism was yet too strong a dish for Editor McMichael. In 1855, "a number of conservative merchants of that city [Philadelphia] met privately with Morton McMichael . . . to contrive a movement more inclusive and less radical than the current one promised to be." McMichael favored John McLean, of Ohio, for the 1856 Republican nomination. See A. W. Crandall, *Early History of the Republican Party* (Boston, 1930), 161.

³⁴ R. H. Luthin, "Abraham Lincoln and the Tariff," *American Historical Review*, XLIX (1944), 618; W. C. Elder, *Memoir of Henry C. Carey* (Philadelphia, 1880), 23, 39.

³⁵ Sept. 14, 1860.

The Morrill Tariff, enacted in February, 1861, climaxed a long campaign for protectionism to which the *North American* had made a significant contribution, not only through its editorial columns, but in its support of a lecturer to instruct Philadelphia "mechanics and operatives" as to the rewards of a high tariff.³⁶

Meanwhile, McMichael, as journalistic spokesman for the city's mercantile group, soft-pedaled the growing antislavery feeling in Philadelphia. As "the great emporium of Southern commerce" in 1860, Quaker City merchants had no wish "to disturb the Southern people in the possession and management of their slaves." It was "not a question of sentiment with the businessmen of Philadelphia [but] a question of bankruptcy."³⁷ Moreover, *North American* circulation in Delaware and Maryland might be endangered by radical pronouncements on the subject. Yet, even staid Philadelphia found it difficult to swallow Buchanan's continuing deference to southern views, and the most loyal Democratic organ in the city was able to continue publication only through the patronage afforded it by the Buchanan administration.³⁸ When the test of war came in April, 1861, however, the *North American* stressed its devotion to the Union rather than any hostility to the South's "peculiar institution."

The futility characterizing the first two years of northern effort during the war proved an effective antidote for conservatism. By the middle of 1862, even the *North American* was indicating its editor's dawning awareness that slavery was of prime importance in the war and the reconstruction to follow. "There is nothing so certain that . . . as the Union cannot be overthrown," he declared, "slavery must be—they being incompatible." The paper hailed the Emancipation Proclamation as "one of the most important documents ever issued by a President," calculated to produce "a revolution in some parts of the rebel states."³⁹ Two years later McMichael's journal was

³⁶ W. B. Hesseltine, *Lincoln and the War Governors* (New York, 1948), 12. The *Philadelphia Times* (Jan. 7, 1879) said that others wrote more enduring essays in defense of Clay's "American System," but that McMichael's editorials were of more practical effect among Pennsylvanians.

³⁷ Oberholtzer, *Philadelphia: A History*, II, 354; McClure, I, 467-468.

³⁸ E. B. Robinson, "The *Pennsylvanian*, Organ of Democracy," *PMHB*, LXII (1938), 360.

³⁹ *North American*, July 8 and Sept. 23, 1862.

willing to see the war last long enough "to burn out the sore places" in the body politic, "and not stop until it has done so."⁴⁰

This gradual approach to the emotional and moral issue of the war was but one aspect of the *North American's* close support of the Lincoln administration. Other Republican editors, like Horace Greeley, might blow hot and cold, alternately praise and condemn, display both forbearance and impatience, but McMichael's newspaper remained almost a "Lincoln organ." It accepted the long-range evolving objectives of the administration as well as its immediate methods. McMichael was ready to submit to the wartime restrictions on press freedom without complaint. "Scarcely a citizen but admits the necessity of maintaining the laws and supporting the government against its enemies." Prosouthern and antiadministration papers, like Charles Towne's *Palmetto Flag* and Albert Boileau's *Philadelphia Evening Journal*, aroused his suspicions. After all, he wrote, freedom of the press "has no warrant in preaching treason."⁴¹ The government's action in arresting Boileau in January, 1863, and incarcerating him for a few days at Fort McHenry, earned the *North American's* approval.⁴²

At the end of the war, the *North American* was a thoroughgoing and vehement Republican partisan. McMichael embraced "radical reconstruction," defended the Grant administration against all criticism, and decried all of the various "reform" movements launched against the Cameron-dominated state Republican organization. He began as a "Lincoln liberal" on the reconstruction issue, but the assassination of Lincoln embittered him toward the South.⁴³ He became increasingly suspicious of Andrew Johnson, and by June, 1867, declared that the American people had had enough of this "stiff-necked, straight-laced, pro-slavery, anti-negro, abolition hating, old fashioned southern State rights Democrat." He deplored the failure to convict Johnson and referred to his supporters as "sore-

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, Oct. 21, 1864. "Slavery has committed the unpardonable sin against the Republic," declared the *North American* on Feb. 2, 1864. "It has been tried and found guilty and sentenced. Its punishment is death."

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, Apr. 16 and 17, 1861; Jan. 26 and May 19, 1863.

⁴² Boileau's *Philadelphia Evening Journal* had contrasted Lincoln unfavorably with Jefferson Davis. See S. L. Davis, *Pennsylvania Politics, 1860-1863* (Cleveland, Ohio, 1936), 278-279.

⁴³ For example, see the contrasting editorials on this issue in the *North American*, Apr. 12 and 21, 1865.

headed malcontents.”⁴⁴ In the entire thirty years of his editorship, McMichael never more greatly imperiled his reputation as an objective or impartial observer. He made his own distinct contribution to the postwar “age of hate.”

His defense of “Grantism” was worthy of a better cause. He regarded criticism of Grant as actuated by partisanship, envy, and cynical ambition. He participated in the assault on Horace Greeley and the Liberal Republicans in 1872, an assault which Greeley later said made him wonder if he had been running for the penitentiary rather than the Presidency. And since the various reform crusades raised during the “gilded age” were initiated by combinations of irregular Republicans and regular Democrats, McMichael’s *North American* enlisted against them. When reform proved too popular, the paper turned to attempts to persuade the electorate that reform was “a name always captivating and plausible in public affairs,” but of no real substance. When the people still demanded reform, the journal insisted that “true reform” was to be found only in the Republican Party.⁴⁵

One theme the *North American* under McMichael never wearied in sounding—the glowing prospects of Philadelphia as a commercial and industrial center and as an attractive metropolis. McMichael’s proverbial admiration for his adopted city led him to declare that:

No city in the country possesses the same uniform general healthfulness, or exhibits in proportion to its census, so small a bill of mortality from year to year. No other is more orderly, quiet, planned, and built with equal regularity of squares and streets, or with more architectural beauty—nowhere are the walks and carriage ways so well lighted or cleaner; the air purer; the stores and shops more elegant, better stocked, or better attended . . . a larger supply of best water . . . a provision market more sumptuously provided; a lovelier surrounding country . . . a society more hospitable and cultivated.⁴⁶

His paper called constantly for greater enterprise, vision, and energy in meeting the problems of municipal expansion. McMichael was

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, June 18, 1867, Apr. 3 and 7, May 1, 4, 8 and 13, 1868.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, Feb. 10 and 16, 1874, Oct. 22, 1874.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, Jan. 14, 1852. Although this paragraph was written while Bird was “chief editor,” it more accurately reflects McMichael’s views. More than once Bird expressed his dislike for Philadelphia, and he was always eager to travel down to his home in New Castle, Del., whenever possible. See Bird to Mary M. Bird, Aug. 23, 1848, Bird Papers.

largely instrumental through his newspaper in securing passage of the "Consolidation Act of 1854," which brought the various satellite communities within the boundaries of the city. Eli K. Price, known as the "Father of Consolidation," testified that "without the aid of Mr. McMichael and his paper, consolidation could not have taken place at that time."⁴⁷ He labored diligently on the Fairmount Park Commission, only one of a number of civic improvements which he supported, and his journal could declare with some truth when he became a mayoralty candidate in 1865 that "for a long series of years the columns of this journal have spoken his sentiments for Philadelphia's progress."⁴⁸

His contemporaries have left posterity a picture of McMichael as an editor and publisher which is almost uniformly laudatory. John W. Forney credited him with elevating the tone as well as energizing the enterprise of Philadelphia journalism.⁴⁹ His relations with his employees were, on their testimony, amiable and cordial. J. S. Rosen-garten recalled "the welcome given by young contributors," and George S. Pierie wrote a half-century later:

I met him before I was employed under him on the North American, in 1866, and can testify to the fact that during the thirteen years I acted as Financial and Commercial Editor under him I found him one of the most genial and delightful employers. . . . He was, in my opinion, one of the greatest Editors America ever had. He colored the Paper with his personality, which was a gentle and kindly one. He was what I would call a high class politician, utterly free from any suspicion of moral taint whatsoever. . . . He was a leader of men, had hosts of friends and no enemies.⁵⁰

He appears to have been a competent judge of men, bringing to Philadelphia a contingent of talent hardly surpassed by any other newspaper of the city in his time, and by few journals elsewhere. Among his earlier importations from New York was G. G. "Gaslight"

⁴⁷ Cited in *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, Jan. 8, 1879.

⁴⁸ *North American*, July 25, 1865. McMichael was elected mayor in 1865 and served until 1869. His administration was neither conspicuously successful nor below standard.

⁴⁹ *Memorial Address Upon the Character and Public Services of Morton McMichael* (Philadelphia, 1879). McMichael was president of the Pennsylvania Editorial Union in 1860. The Democratic editor of the *Lancaster Intelligencer* observed on Sept. 24, 1861: "As a speaker and writer Mr. McMichael is without a superior in the state." Cited in J. C. Andrews, "The Pennsylvania Press During the Civil War," *Pennsylvania History*, IX (1942), 25.

⁵⁰ Cited in Mordell, 41-43.

Foster, who came to the city in July, 1847, with a reputation for pungent and pithy paragraphing in the New York press. Sidney George Fisher followed Henry C. Carey in penning featured articles on finance. Writing over the nom de plume of "Cecil," Fisher's contributions created "an excitement rarely induced by any other anonymous communications." Henry D. Cooke, brother of the redoubtable Jay Cooke, was another financial writer. James E. Harvey served as Washington correspondent for both the *North American* and Horace Greeley's *New York Tribune*. James S. Wallace wrote an interesting account of the first train journey from Philadelphia to Atlantic City in 1854.⁵¹

The lengthy tenures of the editorial, compositorial, and business staffs of the *North American* attest to the stability of employment on the journal. For many years, George S. Pierie and his son, William S. Pierie, together with John M. "Jack" Perry, William C. Shryock, John Davis Watson, George Knorr and William F. Stone, were integral parts of the journal. In October, 1879, the *Philadelphia Times* listed a number of quondam contributors to the *North American*, including Stephen Colwell, John Eagen, William C. Elder, Lorin Blodgett, Horace Binney, Jr., John Sergeant, John M. Clayton, Charles Chauncey, John Bell, William B. Reed, Bayard Taylor, F. O. Packard, George T. Boker, W. S. Ruschenberger, David Paul Brown and H. Hastings Wild.⁵² Not the least influential on the *North American* after 1865, under McMichael, were his two sons, Walter and Clayton. Unlike Morton, Jr., and William, they preferred to follow the elder McMichael into journalism. "We always contemplate with pleasure a business sign that tells of somebody's sons affectionately clinging to the father's name," declared the *North American* of November 19, 1870. In December, 1876, Morton McMichael retired from active direction of the paper, and Walter and Clayton assumed the business and editorial obligations respectively.⁵³

⁵¹ A. W. Smyth, *The Philadelphia Magazines and their Contributors, 1741-1850* (Philadelphia, 1892), 234; Oberholtzer, *Jay Cooke*, I, 92; *North American*, July 2 and 26, 1871.

⁵² *Ibid.*, Apr. 2, 1866, and Jan. 30, 1875; William Perrine, "Of Men and Things," *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, June 22, 1893; *Philadelphia Times*, Oct. 26, 1879.

⁵³ The McMichael brothers published the paper as partners until Walter's withdrawal in 1890. Clayton continued to conduct the journal until February, 1899, when he sold it to Thomas B. Wanamaker.

McMichael played a large part in local, state, and national affairs. Illustrative of his place is the fact that he was one of the few Philadelphians consulted by Allan Pinkerton regarding the safety of President-elect Abraham Lincoln, who was passing through the city en route to Washington for his inaugural in February, 1861.⁵⁴ McMichael's prominent role in Whig Party circles⁵⁵ carried over into the Republican era after the Civil War. He served as temporary chairman of the Republican National Convention in 1872, at which he was considered for the Vice-Presidential nomination. He refused appointment as ambassador to Great Britain in the fear that his income was insufficient to enable him to meet the obligations of that post, and in 1876 he declined the post of permanent chairman of the national convention on the grounds of ill-health. Grant, James G. Blaine, and several members of the Grant Cabinet dined frequently at his home in Philadelphia.⁵⁶ Daniel Dougherty asserted that had McMichael lived in Boston he would have gone to the Senate, or in New York he would have achieved the governorship and eventually the Presidency.⁵⁷ In his last years he was a delegate to the Pennsylvania State Constitutional Convention of 1873, a recipient of an honorary degree from the University of Pennsylvania, and on three occasions a trans-Atlantic voyager. His last important public appearance came in December, 1878, when he delivered an address at a testimonial dinner for Matthew S. Quay at the Continental Hotel.

McMichael died on January 6, 1879, and Philadelphia journalism united in paying tribute to his influence. One editor predicted that it was as "a liberal, earnest, patriotic Republican that he will be best remembered by the tens of thousands who now mourn his departure." Another saw in his career "a commanding influence in the ranks of contemporary journalism." The city's "fourth estate" gathered on January 9 to hear eulogistic words spoken by Francis Wells, John W. Forney, W. W. Nevin, E. Morwitz, Joel Cook, A. K. McClure and

⁵⁴ Norma B. Cuthbert, ed., *Lincoln and the Baltimore Plot* (San Marino, Calif., 1949), 53-55.

⁵⁵ Henry Clay wrote McMichael on political questions and was a close political friend. See Mordell, 31-32, and Bloom, 133-134.

⁵⁶ James G. Blaine, *Twenty Years of Congress* (Norwich, Conn., 1884-1886), II, 526; Mordell, 6-7.

⁵⁷ Cited in *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, Jan. 8, 1879.

William B. McKean. The brief obituary in the *North American*, signed by "J[ohn] W. F[orney]," declared that "the North American owes almost entirely its honorable name among men to its subordination to one who never permitted the columns under his control to be used for an ignoble or selfish purpose."⁵⁸

Gettysburg College

ROBERT L. BLOOM

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, Jan. 7 and 8, 1879; *Philadelphia Times*, Jan. 7, 1879; *Philadelphia Graphic*, Jan. 7, 1879; *North American*, Jan. 7 and 8, 1879.