In December 1839 the first working national nominating convention of a major American political party—the emerging Whigs, successors to the National Republicans—convened in Harrisburg’s “beautiful and spacious” newly rebuilt Old Zion Lutheran Church. In a bruising contest lasting four days, the convention’s leaders (with what Richard P. McCormick calls “amazing technical ingenuity”) selected Ohio’s General William Henry Harrison over the country’s leading Whig, Kentucky senator Henry Clay. The outcome was due in part to the efforts of determined and persistent Pennsylvania Antimasons to regain control of their state. Previous nominating conventions had been ceremonial, called to approve choices already agreed upon. In 1839, however, the Pennsylvania Antimasons helped to change this, thereby making a major, albeit then unrecognized, contribution to the workings of American politics.¹

Antimasonry began in the so-called “infected” or “burned-over district” of western New York during the second quarter of the nineteenth century in reaction to the kidnapping and alleged murder of one William Morgan, an ex-Freemason who planned to publish the secrets of that fraternal order. The movement soon spread to New England, northern Ohio, and

¹ Harrisburg Chronicle, cited by The North American (Phila.), Nov. 27, 1839. The changing role of the national nominating convention is thoughtfully presented in Roy F. Nichols, The Invention of the American Political Parties (New York, 1967), see especially 333-41. Nichols uses the important designation “working” to apply to the Whig national convention in 1839. Richard P. McCormick, The Second American Party System (Chapel Hill, 1966), is indispensable for the study of political parties during this period, for quotation, see 341.
Pennsylvania (where it filled "a particular kind of political void") and entered politics as the country's first third party, participating in the nation's first presidential nominating convention in 1831 when it won Vermont's seven electoral votes. The party's last political stand, which came about because of the exigencies of that state's politics, was in Pennsylvania in the late 1830s.

There is no consensus today among historians as to how the Antimasonic experience should be evaluated and how certain fundamental questions should be answered. Why did this phenomenon arise when and where it did? Why did it persist longer in some areas than in others? How did it relate to the broad currents of the time, such as Jacksonian democracy? There has been no lack of effort to deal with these questions. Charles McCarthy's 1902 study is still useful. More recently, good general accounts have been written by William Vaughn, Michael Holt, and Edward Pessen. The roots of Antimasonry in evangelical Christianity have been explored by Whitney Cross, while Lee Benson has emphasized its egalitarian nature, and Richard Hofstadter has tried to relate it to what he called "the paranoid style of American politics." There are good state studies of Vermont and Connecticut that deal with Antimasonry as well as regional studies of New England by Ronald Formisano and Paul Goodman. Of major importance is the work of Kathleen Smith Kutalowski who, beginning with a thorough study of Antimasonry's roots in Genessee County, New York, the birthplace of Morgan's activities, has caused many older assumptions about Antimasonry to be challenged.  

2 McCormick, Second American Party System, 337.

This essay attempts to supplement the work of these and other authors by showing how Harrison's victory over Clay at Harrisburg in December 1839 arose in large part from the efforts of determined and persistent Pennsylvania Antimasons (aided by sympathetic New York allies) to regain control of their state government. As noted, these efforts helped to change the nature of the national nominating convention, making it quite different from earlier ones, thus contributing significantly to the evolution of American politics. How and why this came about when it did is the subject of this essay which presents Pennsylvania Antimasons in a new light, not as crusaders, zealots, ideologues, or fanatics but as pragmatic politicians doing what all politicians must do: fight for office.

Responding in 1830 to a request for his views on the then fledgling Antimasonic party, Clay wrote, "The leaders of Anti-Masonry are in the pursuit of power: the great body of their party are endeavoring to remove what they honestly believed to be a great evil. The former would desire power, without regard to the means of acquiring it; the latter seek it only as an instrument of effecting their paramount object. . . ."

This quotation might well be taken as the text for this essay which, through a review of pivotal events of the 1830s, examines the quest for and the use of power by the Pennsylvania Antimasons who took advantage of the first national convention of the Whigs to attain their goal: the election of a candidate (Harrison) who could return them to power. The political situation in the Keystone State thus proved fertile soil for institutional innovation. The fact that the success of the Pennsylvania Antimasons proved ephemeral in the 1790s-1840s (New York, 1983); and Paul Goodman, Toward a Christian Republic: Antimasonry and the Great Transition in New England, 1826–1836 (New York, 1988). Of special interest is Kathleen Smith Kutalowski's "The Social Composition of Political Leadership: Genessee County, New York, 1821–1860," Ph.D. diss., University of Rochester, 1973, a detailed social and economic study of the county that gave birth to Antimasonic enthusiasm. The socioeconomic nature of Antimasonry in Pennsylvania remains to be studied. It needs to be undertaken along the lines suggested by Kutalowski, i.e., on a county-by-county basis.

face of the emerging Whigs does not diminish the historical importance of their activity in the 1830s.\(^5\)

The presidential nominating convention was a very young institution in the 1830s. For almost a quarter of a century nominations had been made by congressional caucus, a procedure that fell into disuse following the four-way election of 1824. There was some talk in the Jackson camp of having a national convention prior to the election of 1828, but the first national nominating convention was that of the Antimasons who met in Baltimore in September 1831. More than one hundred delegates attended—most chosen by state conventions or caucuses from thirteen of the twenty-four states. The larger delegations—from New York, Massachusetts, and Pennsylvania—dominated the proceedings. The convention rules required a three-quarters vote for presidential and vice presidential nominations, with secret ballots deposited individually. A number of candidates, including Pennsylvania's Richard Rush and former president John Quincy Adams, had been considered, but well before the convention met the party leaders had settled on John McLean, associate justice of the United States Supreme Court. McLean accepted, presumably making the task of the convention simply one of ratification, but at the last minute he withdrew. An informal meeting of the convention, called a "caucus," decided after four ballots to nominate William Wirt, former attorney general and a Mason. Wirt assured the delegates that he was not an active Mason and was in sympathy with Antimasonic principles. He was vigorously opposed by Thaddeus Stevens of Pennsylvania who, correctly, considered him an opportunist, but after a long night's discussion with New York's William Seward, Stevens was converted to Wirt's side. When the convention reconvened, Wirt was nominated almost unanimously. Probably to assuage the feelings of the Pennsylvanians, the convention then nominated for the vice presidency Amos Ellmaker, a leading Antimason, by an overwhelming vote. The convention closed by adopting an "address," an early form of platform which later became the standard practice of party conventions. Unlike other early conventions this one resolved to meet again four years later. Although the

\(^5\) Daniel Walker Howe, "The Evangelical Movement and Political Culture in the North during the Second Party System," *Journal of American History* 77 (1991), 1231, calls Antimasonry "an evangelical reform movement" Benson, *Concept of Jacksonian Democracy*, 20, states that "it was the Antimasonic Party that gave full expression to the egalitarian impulse"
Antimasonic convention is often referred to as the first national nominating convention, the Antimasons were, despite their ambitions, not a major national party and had undertaken their initial deliberations before the convention met. Theirs became a "working" convention out of necessity because of McLean's change of mind.

The first national nominating convention of a major political party occurred the following December when the National Republicans convened, also in Baltimore. It was the climax of a grass roots movement belatedly joined that summer by the party's chief organ, the *National Intelligencer*. The party met to ratify the nomination for the presidency of Henry Clay, the newly elected senator from Kentucky and champion of the American System, and to nominate a vice presidential candidate. The number of official delegates was determined by the same electoral count used by the Antimasons. Some 155 delegates, chosen by a variety of means, represented seventeen states. (Five southern states, along with Missouri and Illinois, were not represented.) Except for one delegate who seems not to have made up his mind, Clay was nominated viva voce on the first and only ballot. The next day John Sergeant of Pennsylvania received the same support for the vice presidency. Like the Antimasons, the National Republicans issued an "Address to the American People," in effect the party's platform, extolling Clay and his program of economic nationalism and attacking Andrew Jackson and his policies. Representing the prevailing concept of the 1830s, this convention was not a deliberative body or a working convention so much as a rally designed to promote the party's candidates and to generate enthusiasm for its cause.

The Democrats (the party of Jackson) held their first nominating convention in Baltimore also, in May 1832. Initiated by leaders from New Hampshire, this meeting was in fact a political rally. Over six hundred delegates from twenty-three of the twenty-four states (there were no delegates from Missouri) met to roar their approval of Old Hickory and his policies and to promote party unity. The size of the gathering required adjournment from the Atheneum, where the previous conventions had met, to the nearby Universalist Church. As early as 1831 Jackson had let it be known that he would serve a second term "if called," and had broken with his vice president and presumed successor, John C. Calhoun. The meeting in Baltimore was actually held to confirm Martin Van Buren's nomination for the vice presidency, thereby anointing him Jackson's successor. Jackson's own nomination was assumed; there was no formal vote. A notable decision for the future was the convention's adoption of a two-thirds voting requirement for presidential and vice
presidential nominations, as well as a unit rule. Van Buren, with only minor opposition from the South, was easily nominated on the first ballot.

Unlike the two earlier ones, this convention adopted no address. The delegates were simply advised to report to their constituents as they saw fit. Hardly a convention in the modern sense, this meeting served its purpose of rallying behind the president and putting its seal of approval on his successor. As Remini says: “Compared to the Anti-Masonic and National Republican conventions, the Democratic meeting was virtually cut-and-dried.” There were no contests. It was truly a ratifying, not a deliberating, body.6

By the presidential election of 1836, the Whig party, successor to the National Republicans, was emerging as a congeries of state parties; it was still so divided that a national convention as then conceived was not feasible and would probably have been disruptive. In 1836 there were four regional candidates, each nominated by state legislatures or state or local party meetings: Daniel Webster, of Massachusetts; General William Henry Harrison, of Ohio; Hugh Lawson White, of Tennessee; and Willie P. Mangum, of North Carolina. As for the Antimasons, although they claimed to exist as a national party, they retained little strength, except—significantly—in Pennsylvania. (Although they used the term “national” in their state convention, they never did hold the national convention called for in 1831.)

With the Democrats it was a different story. Still the strongest and best organized party in the nation, they prepared to continue their control of the presidency by holding their second national nominating convention at Baltimore in May 1835. Again, several hundred exuberant delegates attended, with this time all but four states—Alabama, South Carolina, Illinois, and Tennessee—represented. (A Tennessean who happened to be in Baltimore at convention time was drafted to cast his state’s fifteen votes.) As in 1832, each state was assigned the number of delegate votes equal to its electoral vote. The

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two-thirds and the unit rules were again adopted. Like the previous convention, this one was a political rally designed to cheer for Jackson and his policies and to approve the nomination of Vice President Martin Van Buren for the presidency. The only contest was over the vice presidency, with delegates torn between war hero Richard M. Johnson of Kentucky who was popular in the West, and William C. Rives of Virginia, who was supported by the South. Johnson won by a bare two-thirds vote. The convention chose a committee to draft an address (essentially a platform) which, when issued in July, praised Jackson and the party’s principles and policies. Except for the contest over the vice presidency, this convention was not a “working” body. The presidential nominee had, in effect, been chosen three years earlier. In 1835 that choice was rubber-stamped.7

All four of these conventions were in fact rallies where the faithful could gather to cheer for their cause, eat, drink, and socialize. With the exception of the Antimasons, who at the last moment were forced to select a candidate to replace McLean, there were no contests for the presidential nomination. For three parties the candidate had already been chosen: Clay for the National Republicans (1831), Jackson for the Democrats (1832), and Van Buren for the Democrats (1835). The Democrats experienced a convention contest in 1835, but this was over the vice presidency. In 1831 the National Republicans considered several names before choosing John Sergeant for that position. Thus the accepted pattern by the mid-1830s seemed to be one in which presidential candidates were nominated by local and state bodies prior to the national convention, with the the latter serving as a party rally. With the exception of the Democratic convention in 1832, each convention issued an address without dissent. There were no real convention issues and—except, perhaps, over the vice presidency—no recognizable factions.8

Ironically, it was the Antimasons, sponsors of the first national nominating convention in 1831, who later had an important impact on the nature of the

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American political convention. And it was the Pennsylvania political situation that brought about the change.

The political situation in Pennsylvania reflected the continued domination of the state by the Democratic party, the appearance and rapid growth of Antimasonry, the slow emergence of the Whig party as successor to the National Republicans, and the aspirations of certain political leaders, state and national. The story is readily understood by following the course of political Antimasonry in the state, as the party struggled to gain (1829–1835) and regain (1836–1838) political power, then turned to the presidential question (1839) to achieve its goals. The result was the rejection of the traditional view of the function of the national nominating convention held by most politicians (including Clay and Harrison), and the adoption of a view congenial to the hopes of would-be challengers (such as Daniel Webster).

Antimasonic sentiment had existed in western Pennsylvania since the early 1820s. After news of Morgan’s murder drifted down from western New York, the movement grew rapidly in popularity. Antimasonic newspapers and local organizations appeared and, aided by the political weakness of the near-defunct Adams party, political meetings multiplied. In 1829 the Antimasonic-dominated opposition ran Joseph Ritner for governor; he gained 39.8 percent of the vote and carried seventeen counties. The year was notable, too, for the conversion of Adams county lawyer Thaddeus Stevens to political Antimasonry, and for the election of Harmar Denny of Pittsburgh to the national House of Representatives. While it is virtually impossible to determine the precise portion of the anti-Democratic vote that was Antimasonic, it is almost certain that Antimasons had the greater numbers and that they provided the chief leadership of the opposition. From the beginning the Antimasons tended to divide into Exclusives and Coalitionists. The former were interested primarily in avenging Morgan and exterminating Freemasonry; the latter were willing, in addition, to cooperate with the National Republican/Whig faction to achieve banking legislation and internal improvements. The Antimasons again nominated Ritner for governor in 1832. This time he garnered 49.1 percent of the vote and took nineteen counties; he came within three thousand votes of beating Governor George Wolf. That year, as noted above, Pennsylvanians participated extensively in the Antimasonic national convention and campaign, with one of their number running as the party’s vice-presidential candidate. For the presidency, Jackson
carried the state with almost 58 percent of the vote.

The next gubernatorial election proved crucial in the history of Antimasonry in Pennsylvania. In 1835 long-simmering factionalism came to a boil in the dominant Democratic party, enabling the Antimasons to elect twice-defeated Joseph Ritner over the factions of incumbent George Wolf (the "Wolves") and preacher-politician Henry A. Muhlenberg (the "Muhls"), thereby gaining control of the state assembly. In the legislative session of 1835–36 the Antimasons conducted their long-sought investigation of Freemasonry. Thanks largely to the overly aggressive bullying tactics of investigative committee chairman Stevens, however, the inquiry proved inconclusive. With their Whig allies, however, the Antimasons passed major taxation, banking, and transportation legislation.

The election of 1835 inspired the Antimasons for the remainder of the decade. Basic to their survival were their democratic and quasi-religious appeal (their so-called "blessed spirit"), and the fact that they were the chief challengers to the Democrats. (The Whigs—whose strength cannot be determined empirically—remained little more than a faction). Throughout the 1830s the Antimasons and the weaker National Republicans/Whigs, while maintaining their separate organizations and leaders, worked together, with the more aggressive and more numerous Antimasons generally providing the leadership. In Pennsylvania, as the decade wore on, it was becoming apparent that state issues (banking, internal improvements, constitutional reform, education, and Freemasonry) were more divisive than unifying and could not be exploited by the coalition to gain control of the state. Aided by the depression which broke out in 1837, by hostility to Van Buren's banking policy, and by "Van Burenism," Antimasons increasingly turned to the presidential question. By common consent, Pennsylvania was considered a critical state in the winnowing process through which presidential candidates must pass every four years. The outcome was that Pennsylvania state and national electorates, long separate, tended to converge.

Nationally the winnowing of presidential nominations continued to rest at the state and local level, with the results affirmed by a national convention, if one were held. The national convention, according to tradition and normal expectations, was expected to ratify decisions made in the states, not to choose among competing candidates. The president and the vice president were the only national officers for which presidential electors voted. Since those electors were chosen by the voters in the states, that vote provided a useful measure of a party's strength at the state level.

Clay recognized Pennsylvania's importance. He called it the "keystone state" and was told that it "holds the election [of 1836] in her hands." Reflecting the general view of the role of the national nominating convention, he made it clear that he would not run "unless [he] was satisfied that it was the wish of a probable majority . . . of the People to turn their attention towards me," but he ruefully noted, in July 1835, that "it has not occurred." He advised that nothing be done with reference to the candidates until after the October elections in Pennsylvania and that the candidate to be supported "ought to be that person whom Pennsylvania shall clearly manifest a purpose of maintaining . . . ."

Prominent and popular as he was, Clay in 1836 remained vulnerable on many scores. Not only was he a Mason; he was known to be a gambler and a slaveholder. Neither was he a church member. Furthermore, he was a two-time loser (the elections of 1824 and 1832) and was tarred by the "bargain and corruption charge" that followed his appointment to John Quincy Adams's cabinet after the 1824-25 election was decided in the House of Representatives. All candidates, Clay included, were handicapped by the failure of the opposition to take steps to concentrate their power in a national nominating convention, largely because the underdeveloped Whig party was evolving piecemeal under a variety of local conditions. As Clay wrote two years later: "No mode was devised, and none seemed practicable..."
to present a single candidate in opposition to [Van Buren].”

McLean remained a presidential hopeful (until the Civil War!) but his last minute refusal to run on the Antimasonic ticket in 1831 had damaged his chances in Pennsylvania. Other potential candidates were General William Henry Harrison from the critical state of Ohio and a hero of the War of 1812 who had recently been removed from a diplomatic post by President Jackson, and Senator Daniel Webster, “the Godlike Daniel” and orator par excellence. Both men sought support from Pennsylvania Antimasons and Whigs.

In the Keystone State Harrison’s name had been mentioned for the presidency as early as 1834. By the fall of 1835 his chances had so improved that Clay, after meeting with the general in Cincinnati, could write to another Ohioan: “I adhere to the opinion expressed in my former letter, that, if Pennsylvania will give satisfactory demonstrations of an intention to support him [Harrison], it will be expedient, under all circumstances, to run him as the most available candidate against Mr. Van Buren . . . .”

In addition, the powerful Whig United States Gazette (Philadelphia) had come out for Harrison. This paper preferred Webster but did not think he would be elected. Many Pennsylvania Whigs, including Nicholas Biddle (whose Bank of the United States was soon to gain a recharter in Pennsylvania) felt that the strongest candidate should be supported even if this meant accepting Harrison.

Webster was nominated by the Antimasons of the Massachusetts legislature in 1833 and by the Whigs of that body in January 1835, but he

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11 Henry Clay to John M. Bailhache, Sept. 13, 1835, summary and quotation in Clay Papers, 8:800; Nicholas Biddle to Herman Cope, Aug. 11, 1835, Philadelphia, Reginald C. McGrane, ed., The Correspondence of Nicholas Biddle Dealing with National Affairs, 1807–1844 (Boston and New York, 1919), 255–56. The relations between Webster, Stevens, and Biddle and the Bank of the United States are relevant to this discussion. For a concise, suggestive statement see Dorothy Burne Goebel, William Henry Harrison: A Political Biography (Indianapolis, 1926), 311–13; United States Gazette as quoted in National Intelligencer, Oct. 28, 1835.
had little support elsewhere although he was told that the nomination had been well received in Pennsylvania and that "everything is ripe for action." The Exclusive (and dominant) wing of the Pennsylvania Antimasons, headed by leading Pittsburgh Antimason Harmar Denny and Thaddeus Stevens, sought to promote Webster by seeking his and Harrison's replies to questions about Antimasonry. Webster clearly (albeit a bit circumspectly) supported the Antimasonic position on Freemasonry whereas Harrison equivocated.\textsuperscript{12}

The presidential election of 1836 was crucial for the future of the Antimasons as well as for their allies. The right choice of candidate could strengthen their position generally as well as help their attack on Freemasonry, currently under siege in the legislature; a poor choice of candidate would, of course, have the opposite effect. The situation was complicated by the fact that there were two wings of the Antimasons along with the Whigs. Thus while the Coalition-controlled legislature met nearby in Harrisburg, December 1835, the Antimasons held a state presidential nominating convention, Harmar Denny presiding. To the dismay of the Exclusives (who favored Webster) the convention nominated Harrison and voted against holding a national convention as Stevens and other veterans of 1831 had proposed. The nomination was meekly seconded by a Whig convention. As a member of the latter correctly moaned, it was dictated by "our masters the Antimasons." The nomination also produced the secession of nine Antimasons, led by Denny and Stevens, who believed that the main purpose of the nomination should be to keep the Antimasonic party unified so as to effect the "destruction of Masonry." After this rupture, the seceders issued an address which concluded: "Permit us therefore to exhort you to buckle on anew your armor, as we have already done, to meet and again overthrow the evil monster whose slightest touch is pollution."

Led by the seceders and dominated by Pennsylvanians, some thirty Antimasons met in May 1836, in Philadelphia, to hold what they called a

“national” convention. The gathering favored Webster (considered stronger on the Antimasonic issue) but made no nomination, devoting its energies instead to denouncing the action of the December convention which they inaccurately claimed had been dictated by the Whigs. They asserted that their goal was to “attempt to survive and sustain pure unmixed Anti-Masonry” and to eschew “alike the insidious Masonic Van Buren and the unblushing Masonic Harrison.” Nevertheless, measured by enthusiastic Harrison meetings held throughout the state, most Antimasons and Whigs probably supported Old Tip.

Before the November voting for presidential electors, the state elections in October produced a shocking defeat for the Whig/Antimasonic coalition. The majority Democrats, now reunited, recaptured control of the state legislature and increased their majority in the national Congress. Ner Middleswarth (Speaker of the assembly and called by the Whig National Intelligencer “the strongest Antimason in the State”) and Stevens, both from strong Antimasonic counties (Union, Adams), were defeated. The unpopularity in some quarters of the newly chartered Bank of the United States and the disgust generated by Stevens’s investigation of Freemasonry help to explain the returns. Basic to the situation, however, was the fact that the Democrats had reaffirmed their status as the majority party in the state; the tactics and policies of the coalition had not succeeded in changing that fact.13

The impact of this October disaster was significantly mitigated by the returns in the presidential vote in November. Probably to the surprise of many Antimasons, Harrison, with Antimasonic and Whig support, received 48.8 percent of Pennsylvania’s vote. He lost by only 4,364 votes out of almost 180,000 cast (2.4 percent of the total). The Democrats gave Van Buren the nine counties that Ritner had carried in 1835, although Van Buren’s total vote declined from the combined Wolf and Muhlenberg total more than did Harrison’s from Ritner’s. (The total vote fell 11 percent from 1835; Van Buren’s fell by 14.2 percent but Harrison’s by only 7.3 percent.) Compared to the

presidential election of 1832, when Jackson defeated Clay, the total Pennsylvania vote in 1836 rose 13.2 percent. Van Buren's vote exceeded Jackson's by a mere 0.5 percent, but Harrison's exceeded Clay's by a stunning 30.6 percent. In 1832 the opposition to Jackson carried only ten Pennsylvania counties; to these Harrison added thirteen more. Furthermore, Harrison's national performance was noteworthy. He carried seven states: Vermont, New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, Kentucky, Ohio, and Indiana. He received 75 percent of the divided four-way vote opposing Van Buren and seventy-three electoral votes. The returns exposed the tactical weakness of the country's anti-Democratic forces.\textsuperscript{14}

For Pennsylvania Antimasons the election of 1836 was a turning point. Thomas H. Burrowes, prominent Antimason and secretary of the commonwealth, reflecting the view of the seceders of the previous December, wrote that "we are now clear of Harrison" and "Harrison is to be, must be dropped now and forever as a Presidential Candidate." Harrison's strong showing, however, dictated otherwise. Turned pragmatist, Burrowes soon changed his tune and stated that "more mature reflection and consultation with many sound friends have caused me wholly to change my ground as to Harrison." Shrewdly and prophetically he noted: "Now, I see that we can make such use of him as will in a measure compensate us for the harm he did us." To preserve and strengthen Antimasonry, he added: "If Harrison be nominated in Philadelphia next September [1837], all can support him." In sum, the returns showed Pennsylvanians that perhaps the presidential question "offered an opportunity to maintain the existence of the party in Pennsylvania." Indeed, as Burrowes exclaimed in March: "If we get a nat[ional] convention nomination of Harrison, the A. M. Party will be stronger than ever." And he exhorted: "For God's sake, don't flinch now." There had been some erosion of Democratic strength, Harrison had come close to a popular majority in the state, and the Antimasons had kept the national convention idea alive. In brief, the election returns had identified a candidate who could help the Antimasons in their quest for control of the state. In 1837 an Antimasonic state convention

issued a call for a national convention in Washington in September.\textsuperscript{15}

Contrasting views as to what a national nominating convention should be are revealed in the interpretations of three major anti-Democratic candidates, Harrison, Webster, and Clay. Two of them adhered to the traditional view that a convention existed to put the stamp of approval on a decision already made, the other believed that the convention should deliberate and then choose. For example, after being endorsed by a state convention of Ohio Whigs (which also indicated its willingness to abide by the decision of a national convention), Harrison reacted to activity for other candidates by complaining: "I must confess however that I do not think I have been very fairly treated. During the whole winter (up indeed to the period of the adjournment of Congress) information was received from various sources that it was agreed upon by the leading men of the nation assembled in Washington that I was to be the only candidate . . . ."

"The only candidate." Far from being a sign of vanity, this lament probably expressed the view most politicians of the time held about the function of the national convention. They believed that a national convention, a relatively new political instrument, should be a \textit{ratifying} rather than a \textit{selecting} body with agreement on a nominee reached before the convention met. The newer view had not yet ripened. In 1837 it was still in the process of evolving thanks to situations in certain states, especially in Pennsylvania where sheer political necessity was driving the Antimasons to develop a new role for the convention.\textsuperscript{16}

Unlike Harrison and Clay, Webster represented the wave of the future. In 1836 he had received only the fourteen electoral votes of his home state, but in 1837 his eye was still on the White House. His views were those of a challenger, not those of a front-runner who wanted a convention like those of 1831–35 simply to ratify his nomination. Early in the year, writing about his immediate plans, including his intention soon to resign his seat in the Senate and to travel, he vaguely hinted at his own wishes: "If there be . . . a body of 

\textsuperscript{15} Thomas H. Burrowes to Jacob Alter, Nov. 10, 1836; to William B. Reed, Nov. 13, Dec. 10, 1836; to H.P. Middleton, Feb. 6, 1837; to Jno[?] Smith, Mar. 10, 1837, all in Burrowes Letterbook. Burrowes became chairman of the Antimasonic State Committee of Correspondence in the summer of 1837 and later state chairman. His efforts to keep the "blessed spirit" alive and to use presidential politics to this end are shown in his numerous, lengthy, and interesting letters. They show the role played by the nominating convention as a political device. See also Rupp, "Social Tension," 275.

friends, determined, at all events, to maintain some other candidate [Harrison? Clay?], they ought in my judgment undoubtedly to make that purpose early known.” He said he would “act in conformity to [the] wishes” of his friends but stated that his “only request would be, that whatever is agreed on, should be adhered to.” He also noted that “New York and Pa. are key stones. Whatever candidate is agreed on, in those States, will receive the support of the party, thro. the U.S.” New York, he added, was the more important because “Pa., as we know, is liable to impulses, and to strange and sudden changes.” (An oblique reference to Antimasonry?) Diplomatically, he continued, “yet there is a great deal of true principle, and true worth in Pa.” Later, alarmed by activity for Clay and anticipating a national convention, Webster wrote: “If we do not look out, and move immediately, the Convention will be no deliberating assembly, but a mere meeting to ratify previous nominations.” Webster was ambivalent. His hopes, however, pointed toward a new convention role. As for Massachusetts, “under present circumstances, [it] ought to express a dignified rebuke of these previous commitments, the effect of which, if continued and carried further will be to make the Convention no deliberative body at all.” And, of course, destroy Webster’s chances.17

In 1831 Clay had been the beneficiary of a powerful groundswell of support that determined his nomination even before the National Republican convention met. Now, six years later with an eye on both Webster and Harrison, his behavior, too, was ambivalent. In the summer of 1837 he opposed both “recommendations” and “nominations,” as they were being discussed in New York City. They would, he wrote, have the “effect of diminishing that prospect of harmony and concert, without which future, like past, efforts of the Whigs must be attended with disaster and defeat.” Action now, he wrote, was premature and, given the current (1837) “paroxism of the sufferings of the Country” might “expose our patriotism to a charge of selfishness and insincerity.” Interestingly, he deplored Webster’s “shocking proof of ambition but stated that “we ought to unite on some one Candidate” to avoid the earlier “error of delay and postponement.” Somewhat ambiguously, he said that “prior to the presentation of the name of any Candidate . . . that a strenuous exertion should be made at Washington to bring about union and concert in behalf of some particular

person." For this purpose he felt that "none better appears to me . . . [than] that of a National Convention"—"the only remaining alternative." He would reluctantly accept a nomination, and demurely urged activity by his partisans. "[P]erhaps some occasional notice of me . . . may serve to counteract the efforts to put me aside or to put me down by the zealous partizans of other Candidates." By March 1838 Clay could write that "there is everywhere an irresistible [sic] current setting in towards me." His basic position, like that of the other front-runner, Harrison, but in contrast to Webster's, was that there ought to be a general agreement before he became his party's candidate. He noted: "I have no wish . . . to be run without a high degree of probability of success." 18

The Antimasonic/Whig coalition in Pennsylvania continued to function, quite apart from the wishes and maneuvers of presidential aspirants. With the outbreak of a major depression in May 1837 (the "paroxism" referred to by Clay), the coalition was handed an issue that it promptly used against the entrenched Democrats. In September, President Van Buren proposed to a special session of Congress his so-called Independent Treasury, aimed at divorcing the federal government from all banking operations and thus helping to create a pro-bank faction in his party known as Conservatives. In Pennsylvania this proposal tended "to cut new lines," superseding earlier damaging Democratic divisions. In the comparatively unexciting elections in October, the Democrats retained control of the lower house, although the coalition controlled the senate. Notably, after a year's absence, the fiery Thaddeus Stevens was returned to the assembly.

Comparing the Pennsylvania returns with the Whig victory in New York a month later where the Whigs "swept" and "virtually revolutionized" the state, Clay waxed optimistic. Somewhat enigmatically, he told his long-time friend and correspondent Peter B. Porter: "The event in N. York will have two effects on the next Presidency. 1st. It will moderate the tone of the Anti Masons of Penns. And 2dly. it will strengthen [sic] the hopes of Mr. Webster, until he

becomes sensible that the preference of the Empire State is for another."

In the meantime, inspired no doubt by thoughts of its national convention six years earlier, the Antimasonic party met September 11 and 12, 1837, in the nation's capital in what the party again called a national convention. The chairman was the Pennsylvanian, Ner Middleswarth. Five states with fifty-three delegates were represented. As Thomas Burrowes, reflecting the continued independence and determination of many of his colleagues, had earlier suggested, "the nomination is not the first object of the party." Hence the gathering would "not be a nominating political convention but a mere moral preparatory one." Fearing a party split, he noted: "The proceedings put forth will be the chief matter and they will be sound because Pennsylvania will be satisfied with no other [proceedings?] and she must be satisfied because she is now more than ever the presidential battleground." (Italics inserted.)

Pennsylvania was indeed the "presidential battleground." Like the action at the convention of May 1836 (but in contrast to that of 1831), this gathering made no presidential nominations. (The occasion was probably considered premature.) Instead it voted to meet the following year in Philadelphia for that purpose. Curiously, it adopted a resolution not to choose any candidate whose state was not then represented. In a "ringing" declaration the convention again resolved to end all oath-bound societies "throughout the Union." Clearly, Antimasonic leaders, especially Pennsylvania's, were not to be driven from their course. The convention chose a new "national" committee of ten, four members of which (Amos Ellmaker, Burrowes, Stevens, and James Todd) were Pennsylvania Antimasons.

Presidential politics continued in the states. Late in the winter of 1837-38, the Whigs of the Massachusetts legislature again nominated

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19 Snyder, Jacksonian Heritage, 115, 121-22, quotation, 122; Mueller, Whig Party in Pa., 43; Rupp, "Social Tension," 180. Senator James Buchanan told ex-president Jackson: "As we had neither a Governor, nor members of Congress to elect, there was not much excitement." He noted that the "aggregate majority throughout the State exceeds by several thousands that of our Electoral ticket last fall." James Buchanan to Andrew Jackson, Oct. 26, 1837, John Bassett Moore, ed., The Works of James Buchanan Comprising His Speeches, State Papers, and Private Correspondence (12 vols., Philadelphia and London, 1908-11), 3:324-25. See also Glyndon G. Van Deusen, Henry Clay, 505; Henry Clay to Peter B. Porter, Nov. 24, 1837; to Willie P. Mangum, May 31, 1838, Clay Papers, 9:94, 194.

Webster; at the same time they promised to abide by the decision of a national convention. In Pennsylvania, Clay's name was much talked of. In January the Franklin (Pa.) Repository took notice of a dinner given for him in New York City and approvingly noted that while there had been toasts for Webster and Harrison, the last toast was: "The man demanded by the crisis and the people—Henry Clay, of Kentucky, the next president of the United States." Later, in the spring, "a large and enthusiastic" Clay meeting was held in Philadelphia. Harrison, however, was generally conceded to be the front-runner in Pennsylvania. He was backed by a Whig meeting in Cincinnati in January and in the spring an effort was made to get "a partial convention in Pittsburgh." In May another state convention of Ohio Whigs again endorsed Harrison as well as the idea of a national convention.

These events paralleled those of the Pennsylvania Antimasons. In March their state convention nominated Ritner for reelection and unanimously resolved to support Harrison for president. The choice of Ritner was soon backed by the Whigs of Philadelphia city and county, and by Whig conventions in other counties. These actions accorded with Burrowes's partisan view that "all we have to do [in Pennsylvania] is to make use of them [the Whigs] while they are available but in such a way as neither to compromise our principles or jeopardize our distinct party existence." No doubt thinking wistfully of his front-runner status in 1831, Clay felt that action in support of Harrison without an agreement to abide by the decision of a national convention would not spread and he told former senator Willie P. Mangum of North Carolina that "if Ritner should be elected, we now believe that it [Pennsylvania] will agree to the nomination [w]hich shall be made at the N[ational] Convention." All of these moves were important. As Massachusetts's Edward Everett mused: "this is certain [:] Ohio will never abandon Harrison for Clay nor Pennsylvania vote for Clay—Convention or no convention."21

For the coalition in Pennsylvania 1838 would be a critical year. The

Antimasonic leadership would be discredited, the Whigs become restive, and the presidential question emerge as the only effective weapon to use against the Democrats. State and national elections would become increasingly coordinated as the presidential question became linked to political activity in the states.

As for the Whigs nationally, if they were to gain the White House, they must overcome glaring party divisions, as expressed extravagantly but appropriately by New York congressman Millard Fillmore who asked: "Into what crucible can we throw this heterogeneous mass of old national republicans, and revolting Jackson men; Masons and anti-Masons; Abolitionists, and pro-Slavery men; Bank men & anti-Bank men with all the lesser fragments that have been, from time to time, thrown off from the great political wheel in its violent revolutions, so as to melt them down into one mass of pure Whigs of undoubted good mettle?" The Whigs were vulnerable. They lacked the unity and organization that Jackson and the Democrats had achieved. And they lacked the means, as Fillmore also noted, "to cement the fragments of many parties," to which Clay had alluded in his post mortem on the 1836 election.22

The solution to the Whig dilemma eventually appeared. After much discussion, and following "several consultations" in the fall of 1837 when they urged the state parties to support the national convention idea, the Whig members of Congress called in May 1838 for a national nominating convention to be held in December of the following year (1839) in Harrisburg, giving clear testimony to Pennsylvania's political importance. All previous national conventions, save for those of the Antimasons, had been held either in Washington or Baltimore.

This call raises numerous questions. Was it a move on Clay's part to counter activity by the partisans of Webster and, more especially, Harrison in key states such as Ohio and Pennsylvania? Harrison was "convinced that this said convention was proposed for the purpose of procuring the nomination of Mr. Clay with or without the consent of the body of the people and that my friends uncautiously consented to the measure." The date chosen—fateful for Clay's prospects, according to Michael Holt—seems to have been selected, as many correspondents observed, to avoid an unfavorable impact on state elections.

22 Fillmore to G.W. Patterson, Feb. 6, 1839, "Millard Fillmore's Miscellaneous Correspondence Prior to the Civil War," Publications of the Buffalo Historical Society 11 (1907), 185; see again Henry Clay to High L. White, Aug. 27, 1838, Clay Papers, 9:220-21.
Clay, very likely aware of the deliberations of the Whig caucus, told Senator Mangum that the date had been set because of "the urgent desire of members from N. York, Vermont, Pennsa. and Ohio." For Pennsylvania, wrote the Harrisburg Chronicle, the main task in 1838 was the election of Ritner. The choice of Harrisburg (called by this paper the "convention city") may simply have been due to its geographical location and general accessibility or, perhaps, because of tariff interests. Certainly, there was a relationship between the calling of the convention and the desire of national and state leaders to neutralize divisive elements, especially Antimasonry, and thus to arrest what Fillmore deplored as the centrifugal tendencies of all groups opposed to the Democrats.23

The Antimasons, led by the Pennsylvanians, continued their independent course. Whether an "Exclusive," like Burrowes, or a pragmatist, like the enigmatic Stevens, they remained a power in both Pennsylvania and national politics. As Massachusetts congressman Caleb Cushing learned from Harrisburg: "Remember always it is only by virtue of Anti Masonry that we have been able to elect a Governor and that a poll here, under any other political banner . . . would be hazardous." Three months earlier an overly optimistic Burrowes had observed: "I wish we could only realize the strength of our position. Party never occupied stronger [sic]. Mr. R[itner] can[’]t be kept from being Governor for three years more." Some Antimasons, including Burrowes, were playing for higher—presidential—stakes in 1838. Burrowes continued: "the nat[ional] [Antimasonic] convention . . . will of necessity settle the nat[ional] politics of the Union." A year later he stated that he wanted "to impress as much free Anti-Masonry as we wish on the Presidential contest." This is what

23 See also Sydney Nathans, Daniel Webster and Jacksonian Democracy (Baltimore, 1973), 117-18, Daniel Webster to Richard Haughton, Feb 23, 1838, Webster Correspondence, 4 275-76, Henry Clay to Francis Brooke, Apr 14, 1838, to Peter B Porter, Apr 15, 1838, to Harrison G Ots, June 16, 1838, to Nathan Sargent, Aug 11, 1838, to Willie P Mangum, May 31, 1838, Clay Papers, 9 172, 173-74, 208-9, 217, 194 Clay had earlier observed "Mr Webster's friends wish a late, Genl Harrison's an early meeting of the Convention Mine are indifferent as to time or place I am inclined to think that it ought not to be earlier than next November " To Peter B Porter, Jan 5, 1838, Clay Papers, 9 119-20 See National Intelligencer, May 15, 1838, William H Harrison to William Ayres, Oct 1, 1838, W H Harrison MSS, Library of Congress, Harrisburg Chronicle, May 2, 9, 16, 1838 The idea of the tariff as an influence was suggested by the late Sylvester K Stevens "Convention city" in Harrisburg Chronicle, May 2, 1838 Relating the time chosen for the convention to economic factors, Holt concludes that the date favored Harrison and thus denied the nomination and the presidency to Clay See Michael F Holt, "The Election of 1840 " in Political Parties and American Political Development from the Age of Jackson to the Age of Lincoln (Baton Rouge, La , 1992), 151-91, esp 187-88
Clay feared when he prophetically wrote: “The danger ahead is that if both Pennsa. and N. York should elect Anti Masonic Governors (as seems probable, and as perhaps is desirable) it may render the Antimasons presumptuous and they may underta[k]e to dictate in regard to the Presidency.”

In November 1838 the national nominating convention, called for in 1837 by the Antimasons, met in Philadelphia. The comparatively neutral *Niles’ National Register* reported, among other things, that six states were represented (one more than at the September 1837 gathering) with about twice the number of delegates. Harmar Denny, who with Thaddeus Stevens had led the seceders from the Pennsylvania state nominating convention in Harrisburg in December 1835, was again elected chairman. Stevens, a member of the committee to draft an “address,” spoke to the gathering, and—in contrast to his position three years earlier—nominated Harrison for president. Old Tip was unanimously chosen (“viva voce by states”), with about 25 percent of the votes coming from Pennsylvania delegates. Webster was nominated for the vice presidency. The convention also created a “national” committee of correspondence. Harrison, eyeing Whig as well as Antimasonic support, did not mention Antimasonry in his long and wordy acceptance letter. He called the convention a “patriotic Association.”

Clay suspected with good reason that the Antimasons and the friends of Harrison and Webster were seeking to block his nomination; he foresaw a plot “the foundation of which was laid here [Washington] during the last Session of Congress.” He added: “The Anti Masonic nomination at Phila[delphi]a exposed still more unequivocally the plan of operations.” He further noted that, “the Convention did not contain one member who had been elected at any primary meeting of Anti Masons; and, except from Penn[sylvani]a, one member who held his seat in virtue of any election whatever.” A week later he observed: “The mock nomination of the Anti Masons has fallen still born,” a characterization he later repeated, calling the Philadelphia convention “a mere mockery.” However, by suggesting “action at Richmond,” to be “seconded at Albany” (i.e., by Whig leaders in those centers of Whig power), Clay

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recognized that a real contest was underway.\textsuperscript{25}

While pursuing their own presidential course, the Antimasons were jolted by two events in 1838. First, the month before their national convention they suffered a stunning defeat in Pennsylvania's triennial gubernatorial election. In one of the bitterest campaigns in Pennsylvania history, David Porter, candidate of the now united and still majority Democrats, defeated Governor Ritner. Although Ritner failed in his bid for reelection, his supporters retained substantial strength in a disputed election for house seats. In a portent for the future, the Democrats had attempted to pin the abolitionist label on Ritner and thereby forced him to take extraordinary measures including appointing Stevens to the politically powerful Canal Board, announcing the early resumption of specie payments by Pennsylvania banks, and appointing prominent Philadelphia Whig William B. Reed (a Mason) as the state’s attorney general. Both New York and Pennsylvania were considered critical in the fall elections. Clay thought his fate hinged on those two states and General Jackson’s former aide went so far as to say: “Upon the result of the approaching elections in Penn[sylvania] and New York depends the presidential question.” The total vote increased markedly over that of 1835 (24.8 percent) with most of the increase going to Ritner who exceeded his 1835 total by 30.1 percent. Some may have wondered whether the next state-wide ballot (the presidency in 1840) might enable the Antimasons under Harrison to recoup their losses. As a Harrisburg correspondent told ex-president John Quincy Adams, “I think Harrison will be the man. We could not carry 7 counties for Clay in the whole state.”\textsuperscript{26}


\textsuperscript{26} McCarthy, “Antimasonic Pary,” 492–94, Snyder, Jacksonian Heritage, 123–32, 223, Mueller, Whig Party in Pa, 48–50, Current, Old Thad Stevens, 56–60, Vaughan, Antimasonic Party in the U S, 109–19, Rupp, “Social Tension,” 181–83, Thomas Burrowes to [mos] Ellmaker, Nov 19, 1837, Burrowes Letterbook The state vote was 127, 321 (51.1%) for Porter, 122, 325 (48.9%) for Ritner The total vote increased by about 25%. Porter's gain over the combined Wolf and Muhlenberg vote of 1835 was 20% For the tone of the campaign, see Washington Globe, Oct 12, 1838, Richard Smith Elliott, Notes Taken in Sixty Years (St Louis, 1883), 107 (Elliott was the editor of the Harrisburg Intelligencer) See also T W Lytle to John Quincy Adams, Oct 25, 1838, Adams Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society; Henry Clay to Nathan Sargent, Aug 11, 1838, Clay Papers, 9 217, W B Lewis to W C Rives, Sept 18, 183[8], Rives Papers, Library of Congress
Then came the second jolt. Soon after the election debacle the coalition became involved in the so-called “Buckshot War,” which produced a major crisis in its ranks and raised the presidential question to a new level of importance in the state. Briefly stated, the “Buckshot War” occurred when two conflicting sets of returns, one Democratic and one Whig, were forwarded to Harrisburg from the Northern Liberties section of Philadelphia. Both parties charged fraud. The conflicting returns resulted in two rival lower houses, the legitimate one to be determined by the senate. Spectators crowded into Harrisburg and excitement ran high. Lame duck governor Ritner, fearing that the situation might get out of hand, mobilized the militia from Philadelphia (he had failed to obtain federal forces from Carlisle) who were to be armed with “thirteen rounds of buckshot cartridges and seventeen rounds of ball cartridges.” Eventually the Democrats were supported by enough senate members of the anti-Democratic forces to enable them to win the battle. Burrowes and Stevens, present in the senate to observe the proceedings, and Charles Penrose, Speaker of the senate, ignominiously fled through a window behind the Speaker’s desk. Rather than join the Democrat-controlled house, Stevens returned to his home in Gettysburg.

If not a turning point, this bloodless “war” was at the least a public relations disaster for both Antimasons and Whigs. As Senator Buchanan noted: “The Whigs and Antimasons, by attempting to force into the Legislature, their defeated candidates & thus usurp the powers of the majority, have greatly injured themselves in public opinion.” In practical terms, as Snyder wrote with some exaggeration, the “Coalition could no longer keep its members in line . . . [and] Antimasonry never recovered from its loss of face.”27

Long before the election of 1838 and the Buckshot War, the Whigs, with no place to go, had chafed under the Antimasonic yoke. Their dilemma was succinctly put by George Chambers, an unhappy Whig in Chambersburg who wrote: “The Whigs of the county are so much dissatisfied with some of the measures, acts & councils of Govr. Ritner, that were it not for the influence of the election of governor, or the next

Presidential election & the measures of the National Government, they would not interfere in it.

Speaking of his "dictation & rule," Chambers singled out Stevens for attack. A similar distrust of Ritner was hinted at in a report to New York Whig editor and political boss Thurlow Weed about a Whig meeting in Philadelphia held in the spring, the proceedings of which failed to mention Ritner. Weed felt that the omission was a deliberate attempt "to intimidate—to coerce the friends of Ritner to their view! What insanity!" He added: "There can be no motive but by defeating Ritner, to show that Harrison cannot carry Pa. and therefore must not carry." Ever the practical politician he continued: "I am sick of such folly. Men who want missions and collectorships and post-offices, seem determined to ruin all."28 As to the presidency, Pennsylvania Whigs scoffed at Antimasonic independence. The November convention was labeled divisive by one Whig newspaper and certain to ensure Van Buren's reelection. The paper called the Antimasonic course "suicidal," one that would be stopped had "the Anti-Masonic Party . . . a tithe of the patriotism" of the Whigs. However, another paper defiantly noted that the nominations of Harrison and Webster would have no effect on the Whigs: "The Whigs . . . will not again cease to regard themselves as a substantive party, and throw away their influence upon national principles, for the sake of mustering in [sic] a majority in a single state [Pennsylvania]." It called the Antimasonic convention "a feeble and uncalled-for attempt to forestall and control the decision of the Whig Convention" and indicated that the Whigs had reached a breaking point: "Whigs will no longer consent to be mere hewers of wood and drawers of water for a party that turns all victories to its own advantage, and dictates with arrogance to those who number twenty in its ranks to one which the other can muster." A Clay partisan pointed out that Harrison was now supported by Antimasons who had "denounced" him earlier [December 1835] for "not being a pure Antimason." The Harrison and Webster nominations suggested to another the desirability of advancing the date of the national Whig convention. In addition, the Whigs of Philadelphia City

28 George Chambers to W.M. Meredith, July 30, 1838, William Meredith Papers, HSP; Thurlow Weed to William H. Seward, May 11, 1838, Seward Papers, Rush Rhees Library (hereafter RRL-UR), University of Rochester; see also the Albany Evening Journal, May 11, 1838.
and county called for a state-wide organization and a state convention.\textsuperscript{29}

As for Clay himself, he continued "to despair of Pennsylvani.a." He agreed that the Whigs should complete their organization in order "to effect a definitive but not unfriendly separation between that party & the Antimasons." For the latter, he said, if they so choose, "let them . . . pursue their own course." He had earlier observed that "Anti Masonry does not exist in organization in any State in the Union but Pennsylvani.a. & perhaps Vermont." He was sure that the Antimasons "can never become the basis of the politics of this whole Union."

Clay might well have been thinking wishfully of his nomination by the National Republican convention of December 1831 when he wrote to Harrison Gray Otis in 1838: "In my opinion the best way to ensure success to our cause is by such a manifestation of the public choice as to leave no other duty to the Convention than to ratify & promulgate it.\textsuperscript{30}\textsuperscript{30} The Convention ought to express not to make public sentiment; but to express it, it must know it; and it cannot know it unless the public demonstrate it." In the paragraph immediately preceding, he observed prophetically:

If matters remain just as they are, the public giving no expression of its wishes or preferences, there is reason to apprehend the defeat of the Candidates nominated by the National Convention, whoever they may be. \textit{There will be collisions as to the delegates to be sent to it; divisions in it; and disappointment and dissatisfaction afterwards.} (Italics inserted.) These will be followed by unfavorable predictions; and the prophet does not strive hard to defeat the fulfillment of his prophesy.\textsuperscript{30}\textsuperscript{30}

Unlike state issues, which tended to be divisive, the presidential question had the potential of being a unifying point for Pennsylvania's Antimasons and Whigs. Such unity, if achieved, might carry over into state matters, thus restoring the halcyon days of 1835–36. Stevens's aide, William McPherson, recognized the need when he observed, before the settlement of the

\textsuperscript{29} \textit{Franklin (Pa) Repository, Oct 30, Nov 20, 1838, the latter quoting United States Gazette, (n d ), Mueller, \textit{Whig Party in Pa.}, 57–58, quotation from United States Gazette, Nov 30, 1838, 57, United States Gazette, n d , quoted in Goebel, \textit{William Henry Harrison}, 329, R.T Leech to Jonathan Roberts, Dec. 18, 1838, J Roberts Papers, HSP

\textsuperscript{30} \textit{Henry Clay to Harrison G Otis, Dec 13, 1838, fromWills Hall, Dec 14, 1838 (summary), Clay to Samuel Mclean, Apr 16, 1839, to Josiah Randall, Feb 8, 1839, to Josiah R Ingersoll, June 24, 1839, Clay Papers, 9 251–52, 254–56, 305–6, 283–89, 327–28
Buckshot War, "the necessity . . . of a united effort in the Presidential contest." But a month later, reverting to his Antimasonic intransigence, and anticipating the year's events, he wrote: "Harrison is the rallying cry now." In March the Antimasons issued a call for a state convention to choose Harrison-Webster electors. Burrowes felt that this would provide an opportunity for the Antimasons "to express their opinion of the late shameful occurrences here [presumably the Buckshot War] and to show to the public that tho' betrayed we are not destroyed as a party." Indeed, a new Antimasonic newspaper appeared that spring in Lancaster.31

For all their restiveness, the Whigs in Pennsylvania remained a junior partner in the coalition opposing the Democrats, although the normally astute president Van Buren overstated the case when he wrote Andrew Jackson that "in Penn. the Whigs have no longer a particle of hope." Senator James Buchanan thought the coalition could not last: "Present appearances indicated that the Whigs & Antimasons will separate; but the former have so often made bold speeches & afterwards skulked into the ranks of Antimasonry, that I place but little reliance upon their late demonstration of independence." The Pennsylvania Whigs were limited in the areas of their strength, they lacked influence, tended to dance to the tunes of the more aggressive Antimasonic pipers, and their efforts at independence were halting and inconclusive. Nevertheless, they were to play an important role at the state and then the national level in presidential politics.32

The year 1839, destined to be one of decision, opened with four—soon to be reduced to three—presidential candidates in the field in Pennsylvania. Webster, Antimasonic favorite in the Keystone State, was reelected to the Senate by Massachusetts early in the year, but by then his presidential hopes had stalled. Gloomy about the future, having failed to win a diplomatic post, and


12 Martin Van Buren to Andrew Jackson, Feb 17, 1839, Van Buren MSS, Library of Congress, James Buchanan to Joel R Ponsett, June 20, 1839, Ponsett Papers, HSP Before Rutner became governor, George M Dallas told Wolf "The Whigs are political prostitutes, and to attain or keep power will just as readily submit to the soft persuasions of the Antimasons as to any other inducements" Dallas to Wolf, Nov 8, 1835, Wolf Papers, HSP
perennially in debt, he sailed for England in May and withdrew from the contest the next month. He remained the vice-presidential nominee of the Antimasons.33

Harrison, still strong in the north and west and in Pennsylvania where he had lost in 1836 by fewer than 5,000 out of almost 180,000 votes, remained the front-runner. Buchanan correctly noted that there was "not the least idea that the Harrison Antimasons of this State can ever be induced to abandon him." After polling the "anti-Van Buren" members of the legislature (excepting the Philadelphia delegation), Charles Penrose reported that Clay would lose Pennsylvania to Van Buren by 24,000 votes, whereas Harrison would beat Van Buren by 9,650.34

Clay remained strong nationally, but his appeal in Pennsylvania outside the Philadelphia area was limited, not only because of the factors mentioned earlier but because of his retreat from the economic nationalism of his American System. The fact that he was a slaveholder was a serious handicap in Pennsylvania which, under Quaker influence, had seen the founding of the country's first antislavery society (in 1833), and been the first state to abolish slavery and to pass a personal liberty law to protect fugitive slaves. Antislavery agitation and Antimasonry were powerful factors in Pennsylvania that worked against his candidacy. By 1839 the antislavery movement forced Clay to deliver a major address in the Senate, "a most dangerous experiment [wrote congressman Millard Fillmore] for a candidate for the Presidency, who has got to succeed, if at all, by northern votes." Clay's dilemma persisted for, as he wrote, "the Abolitionists [still] are denouncing me as a slaveholder and slaveholders as an Abolitionist." His major weaknesses were summed up by Penrose who told Governor William H. Seward of New York that Clay's candidacy would lead to Whig defeat because of strong abolition and Antimasonic sentiment against him.35

A fourth presidential hopeful appeared on the horizon in 1839 when the

11 Daniel Webster to Samuel Jaudon, Mar 29, 1839, To the People of Massachusetts, June 12, 1839, *Webster Correspondence*, 4 354–55, 370


publicity given to another hero of the War of 1812, General Winfield Scott, for his role in policing the agitated northern frontier brought him national attention. Hitherto Scott's career had been exclusively military, but in the late 1830s he became receptive to a presidential nomination. Despite frequent mention of his name and his well-reported travels, there was little serious talk of supporting him in Pennsylvania. His boom was largely among New York Whigs, chiefly from the old Antimasonic stronghold in western New York. Clay's Philadelphia correspondent, Nathaniel Sargent, accurately labeled Scott's possible candidacy a "half-way house" designed, as Weed told Webster, "to keep New York away from Mr. Clay." Scott would get involved in Pennsylvania politics in December, but not earlier.  

In 1839, there was no Whig (formerly National Republican) consensus on a candidate to oppose the Democrats, a situation fostered by Pennsylvania's Antimasons whose intransigence was typified by Burrowes's statement to Denny: "We must let it be known that we are neither to be driven from our candidates nor out of the field as a party." The situation changed Clay's thinking. Thus, he wrote (no doubt with 1836 again in mind): "I see no other chance of reconciling them [the Whig divisions] than through the agency of the Harrisburg Convention." Plaintively he concluded: "God knows with what alacrity I would consent to have my name withheld from the Convention, if it would have the effect of increasing our prospects of success." 

Clay, reluctantly, had arrived at the answer. In previous national nominating conventions (with the possible exception of the Antimasons in 1831) the nominees, including Clay, had been acclaimed without a contest. But now the Whig Harrisburg convention must go beyond those of 1831, 1832, and 1835, and move from ratification to deliberation, from approving to choosing. As for Pennsylvania the December convention would provide an opportunity for the Whigs to throw off the Antimasonic yoke and to assume the leadership of the anti-Democratic opposition in the state. Whigs were now a threat to the Antimasons whose game they could play by using the presidential question to gain control of the state. That question


17 Thomas Burrowes to Harmar Denny, Jan 7, 1839, Burrowes Letterbook, Henry Clay to Nathan Sargent, Oct 25, 1839, *Clay Papers*, 9 352-53
had helped to hold the anti-Democrats together, but now it was tearing them apart.

With control of the state a major (if not the major) consideration, between May and September presidential politics produced in Pennsylvania an undisguised tug-of-war between Antimasons and Whigs. Having already made their presidential nominations in their so-called "national" convention the previous November, in May 1839 the Antimasons held a state convention of the friends of Harrison, in Harrisburg, to choose electors to support their nominees. The temporary secretary was one William Ayres, Harrison's representative in Pennsylvania. Dissension surfaced early when Stevens, the temporary chairman, in still another manifestation of Antimasonic determination, fought ("in a tirade of very coarse language") a move to have the choice of electors postponed until after the Whig national convention in December. The gathering appointed a seven-man Antimasonic state committee and chose a full slate of electors, headed by former governors John Andrew Shulze and Joseph Ritner as senatorial electors. It passed the usual resolutions denouncing Freemasonry.38

The battle for the state intensified the next month when the Pennsylvania Whigs held a convention to promote Clay's candidacy, the idea for which probably originated in Philadelphia. They met in Chambersburg on June 13–14. With most of the delegates coming from the eastern counties, it may be assumed that "the Philadelphia group was in control." A controversy arose over the seats from Adams county, the strongly Antimasonic home base of Stevens.

The Clay forces dominated the proceedings, supported Clay's candidacy, and resolved to abide by the decision of the Whig national convention. The pro-Harrison minority, lead by Charles B. Penrose, maneuvered doggedly. Through a series of motions it sought either to have the convention adjourned so as to create a broad anti–Van Buren front, or to substitute Harrison's name for Clay's. These attempts failed and ended with the defeat of a "Protest by the friends of William Henry Harrison" after which Penrose and sixteen others walked out. The convention chose two senatorial delegates: Joseph Lawrence, an early Antimason and state treasurer under Ritner, and Shulze. It recommended that citizens of the congressional

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38 Harrisburg Chronicle, Mar. 6, 1839; Goebel, William Henry Harrison, 333–34; Pennsylvania Reporter, May 24, 1839; Niles' National Register, June 1, 1839; Mueller, Whig Party in Pa., 66 n. 4.
districts elect delegates to the national Whig convention if they had not already done so. The state Whig central committee was authorized to fill vacancies for senatorial delegates. As a parting shot at the Harrison seceders, the convention passed a resolution that “strenuously recommended” to the national Whig convention that no name be considered for nomination without a pledge of withdrawal if another was nominated. Another resolution required an agreement by all national convention delegates to accept the candidate to be named in December.

Whig assertiveness at Chambersburg stands in dramatic contrast to the subservient role played at their state convention in 1835 where they had meekly accepted the decision of the Antimasons (an action consistent with the nature of the coalition at the time). But by 1839 the presidential question—while an indispensable “rallying cry” for both Antimasons and Whigs—now threatened the coalition’s very existence. Not surprisingly, Clay applauded the Pennsylvania Whigs, but said that because of the Antimasons he still had “no hopes of any thing being effected, in Pennsylvania for the good of the Whig Cause, in the approaching struggle.” More positively he observed: “[Y]ou have laid the foundations for future success by the separate organization of the Whigs on which you have resolved.” For the moment the Pennsylvania Whigs had stolen a march on the stubborn Antimasons.39

Within a week an effort to repair the damage done at Chambersburg produced a meeting of the “democratic members of the Legislature opposed to Martin Van Buren.” The meeting was undoubtedly an Antimasonic move, with Thaddeus Stevens—who had been returned to the assembly by a special election—most probably the prime mover, aided by Penrose, the leading seceder from Chambersburg. The caucus seized upon a plan Penrose had proposed at the Whig convention in June and passed resolutions calling for the election of delegates to meet in Harrisburg on September fourth “to adopt measures to unite the Anti-Van Buren party, and secure its success in our own State, and in the next Presidential election.” In a gesture of amity to the recently adjourned Whigs, the caucus

somewhat disingenuously disavowed any intention "to interfere in any way with the distinct or independent organization of either of the great divisions" of the opposition. Under the banner of "Anti-Van-Burenism," an effort was made in Pennsylvania to produce a united front—most emphatically under Antimasonic direction. This was a decisive maneuver in advancing Harrison’s nomination.

Before the caucus, events outside Pennsylvania continued to affect the presidential contest: Webster’s withdrawal in June, and Clay’s extended and futile trip north during the summer to seek the support of the New York Whig organization which under Seward and Weed was already beginning to lean toward Scott. The September convention at Harrisburg was designed to block the Whig move of the previous spring and to unite “the two branches of the anti-Van Buren or Democratic Whig party,” in the hope of carrying the state. Appropriately, “Union and Harmony,” was both its motto and a statement of its goals. The third anti-Democratic state convention to be held in Pennsylvania in four months, the convention met in Harrisburg, September 4–5. A Democratic newspaper gleefully claimed that the meeting took place in a “think... perhaps the immediate result of this vain attempt at mixing oil [Antimasons?] and water [Whigs?]” and was, it chimed, “certainly emblematical of the gloomy prospects of our visitors.” In contrast to the June meeting, the September proceedings were, as stated by a Cincinnati Whig newspaper, “entirely harmonious,” a fact attributable both to the obvious political needs of Pennsylvania’s Antimasons and to the fact that they had seized the initiative. With delegates from forty-one of the fifty-six Pennsylvania counties, this convention reflected a broader geographical base, and except for five of the June seceders, the delegates were essentially new. Events showed that a majority of the delegates were pro-Harrison and anti-Clay and very likely Antimasons. The term “Antimason” was used officially only once: in the opening statement of the convention’s president, John Parker of Chester County, a Clay Whig who stated that he was “surrounded by Whigs, Anti-masons and Conservatives” (this last, a reference to those Democrats who had broken with Van Buren over banking policy). Parker called on the convention “to merge all minor differences of opinion in the one grand and patriotic object of redeeming our beloved

country from the grasp of the spoilers [i.e., the Democrats].” The convention’s address, issued some weeks later, enigmatically praised the Antimasons for not insisting “on a candidate who had adopted their peculiar views on the subject of masonry.” It expressed high praise for Clay, noted that the time had not arrived to support his candidacy, and stated flatly that only Harrison could “unite the Anti-Van Buren party and by the union rescue the country from misrule.” It expressed unanimous support for Old Tip (the address called him a “distinguished whig”) and noted, perceptively, that he elicited feelings akin to those evoked by “the Hero of New Orleans [i.e., Jackson].”

The Whig meeting in June had selected the two senatorial delegates for the national Whig convention in December, with others to be chosen in congressional districts. The “Union and Harmony” meeting, however, named a full slate of delegates (including Whig delegates Shulze and Lawrence as the senatorial delegates) thus ensuring a contest for convention seats. Interest understandably attaches to the role of Stevens. Without published evidence, A.K. McClure wrote that the “union and harmony” convention “was largely planned and carried out by Thaddeus Stevens, whose violent anti-Masonic convictions made him the opponent of Clay.” Stevens was not a delegate and the press did not report either his presence or evidence of his influence in Harrisburg at the time of the “Union and Harmony” convention. Amazingly, biographers Fawn Brodie and Richard Current do not mention the September convention or other crucial events of 1839. It is true that the state concentration on Harrison and the sidetracking of support for Clay comported well with the desire of the Antimasonic opposition. The Antimasons sought to maintain their identity by using the presidential question as a focal point to overturn the Democratic rascals’ state control and to create a new working majority. In 1835-36 Stevens had opposed Harrison and favored Webster. Now, like others, he no doubt recognized that Old Tip was the proper rallying point. By the eve of the national convention of the Whigs, state and national politics were converging.

The “Union and Harmony” convention constituted a real coup—truly a decisive event—although the success of this maneuver did not mark the end of the task before the Antimasons. In the forthcoming Whig convention

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41 Niles' National Register, Nov 16, 1839, The (Harrisburg) Keystone, Sept 4, 1839, Cincinnati Daily Gazette, Sept 18, 1839 For the details of the convention, see Harrisburg Chronicle, Sept 11, 1839
they needed first to gain control of the Pennsylvania delegation. This would assure them of approximately thirty delegate votes. Then they needed to build a majority for Harrison, requiring over 130 votes. Without such a majority their efforts to use the presidential question to regain control of the state would come to naught. That they succeeded remains a tribute to the skill and determination of Pennsylvania's Antimasonic leaders. In the process they helped to change the nature of the nominating convention.42

Unlike the earlier national nominating conventions (1831–35), the Whig convention at Harrisburg in December 1839 faced a real problem. Only one from several hopefuls would have to be chosen to represent the party in the coming presidential election. The “result was not pre-ordained,” writes William Chambers; the more than two hundred delegates, representing twenty-two of the twenty-six states in the nation (none appeared from South Carolina, Tennessee, Georgia, and Arkansas), must indeed work to reach their critical decision.

At noon on the fourth of December the delegates met in the newly-rebuilt Old Zion Lutheran Church, south of the capitol. On the motion of Pennsylvania's John Williamson (a delegate chosen by the September “Union and Harmony” convention), Isaac Bates of Massachusetts was elected chairman pro tempore. Two Pennsylvanians, also chosen in September, Charles B. Penrose and John Swift, were named acting secretaries. The roll call went smoothly until, predictably, it reached the Pennsylvania delegation where rival delegates, chosen in June and September, appeared from three congressional districts. Wisely the convention voted to have the state's delegates themselves deal with the problem. They seated both sets of delegates. Control remained with the Antimasons. Second only to New York in votes, Pennsylvania constituted a major anti-Clay bloc from the beginning. James Barbour, former governor of Virginia and John Quincy Adams's secretary of war, was chosen to preside. He had also presided over the National Republican convention of December 1831 which had nominated Clay. Former Pennsylvania governor John Andrew Shulze became one of the vice presidents, and Penrose one of

42 Proceedings of the Democratic Whig Convention, 13, 16, A K McClure, Our Presidents and How We Make Them (New York, 1900), 66–67, Brodie, Thaddeus Stevens, 81–85, Current, Old Thad Stevens, 70–72 See also Snyder, Jacksonian Heritage, 141–42, Mueller, Whig Party in Pa, 59–60 For the November meeting of the state committee chosen in September, see Harrisburg Telegraph and Intelligencer, Nov 7, 1939
the secretaries. Nondelegate Thurlow Weed wrote Governor Seward on this opening day: "Penn[sylvania?] [has] created a Harrison atmosphere here."

On the second day, George Chambers, Pennsylvania delegate and president of the Whig state meeting in June, presented the resolutions from that meeting. These were promptly tabled, whereupon the anti-Clay tacticians struck. Former Maine senator Peleg Sprague, a Massachusetts friend of Webster, moved to create a system of three-person state committees to consult and report to each other until a majority of the 254 had decided on a candidate.

At this point Penrose—one of the seceders from the Whig state convention in June and active in the "Union and Harmony" meeting—proposed a bombshell: "That the vote of a majority of each delegation shall be reported as the vote of that State; and each State represented here shall vote its full electoral vote by such delegation in the committee." This critical amendment, proposing a "unit rule" for balloting, was adopted and thus amended, the Sprague motion passed. Authorship of this procedure is not certain. Clay's friend Sargent, a Pennsylvania delegate, called Penrose "the chief engineer." Harrison's biographer says of the Sprague-Penrose action, "it is highly probable that the honor . . . belongs to Weed." On the other hand, Gunderson says that Penrose's action was undertaken "no doubt at the instigation of Stevens," who ten days later wrote that "the nomination [of Harrison] takes beautifully." Governor Shulze, a delegate named at both the Whig and the "Union and Harmony" conventions, may have been party to this scheme, a role suggested the following May when candidate Harrison wrote to thank Shulze "for the great services you rendered me at Harrisburgh last December." Had all the southern states been represented, writes Holt, "there would have been no unit rule . . . [and] Clay

would have won the nomination on the first ballot."

Weed and Stevens, neither one a delegate, met with delegates in lobbies, bars, and other smoke-filled hotel rooms with either Stevens's room or Horace Greeley's (Whig editor and Weed associate) serving as Antimasonic headquarters. Critical to the situation was the fact that Clay, although strong in the early balloting, was considered by both Pennsylvania and New York delegates a political risk as a Mason, slaveholder, and two-time loser. The first tally (called "an informal ballot") gave Clay 103 votes in twelve states. Harrison had 91 votes in six states; Scott had 57 votes in three states. A second "informal canvass" reduced the Clay vote to 95, raised Scott's to 68, while Harrison's remained at 91. The Penrose amendment required each state to cast its votes as a unit for or against a candidate. This nullified Clay's significant minority in Pennsylvania, New York, Ohio, and other states. Webster's influence may have been at work here. Clay learned a year later that Edward Curtis, Webster's New York friend, had opposed Clay because he felt Clay could not be elected. Three New England states subject to Webster's influence (Maine, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts, with a total of thirty-one convention votes) went for Harrison on the first ballot. This "created and sustained," writes Sydney Nathans, "the deadlock which the Ohioan's nomination finally resolved." Massachusetts, New York, and Pennsylvania, the three states that controlled the first Antimasonic convention in September 1831, seem to have also controlled this first Whig national convention in December 1839.

The Pennsylvania Antimasons were not finished. At this juncture Stevens proceeded to undertake what has been called "the decisive maneuver of the convention." According to the only surviving account, Stevens "dropped a Scott letter on the floor" of "the headquarters of the Virginia delegation." This was a private letter that Scott had earlier written to Francis Granger of New York seeking "to conciliate the antislavery sentiment of that State." The result was a shift of Virginia's second choice

44 Sargent, Public Men, 2:75; Goebel, William Henry Harrison, 341; Gunderson, Log Cabin Campaign, 58; Thaddeus Stevens to C.B. Penrose, Dec. 14, 1839, photostat provided by Professor Harry Stevens, Ohio University, copy of original owned by William Olpp; W.H. Harrison to J. Andrew Shultz [sic], May 22, 1840, Society Collection (Harrison), HSP; Holt, "Election of 1840," 16-17.
from Scott to Harrison. By this maneuver Stevens helped to block Weed's presumed plan to have Scott nominated, thus making New York support for Harrison more likely. There were desperate efforts by Clay followers to have the convention revert to an open ballot, but the swing toward Harrison had begun. Late in the evening of the convention's third day, the committee reported the final vote: Harrison 148, Clay 90, and Scott 16. Following a common practice, the convention voted to make the vote unanimous. Stevens had "not only turned Pennsylvania around" in September but had "turned the entire [Whig] convention around" in December. As ex-Antimason and ex-president John Quincy Adams recorded, based on information received from Whig publisher Joseph Gales, Harrison's nomination was "the triumph of Anti-Masonry."46

There followed endless eulogies for Clay and several ballots before John Tyler of Virginia was chosen as the vice-presidential candidate acceptable to Clay. No attention was given to assigning the vice presidency to an Antimason, as Clay's political confidant Peter B. Porter had previously suggested. In addition, while all previous national conventions (except the Democratic convention of 1832) had, without incident, adopted addresses, the Whig convention of 1839 made no attempt to do so. Such an effort might well have divided the party into the many fragments to which Fillmore had earlier referred. Finally, the Antimasons would have to decide what to do with Daniel Webster, nominated with Harrison in 1838; the task was given to Harmar Denny.

Even with Tyler, the convention had given the Antimasonic leaders in Pennsylvania what they needed: a presidential candidate who might help them to regain control of the state and thus pave the way for future state successes. The presidential question as both a national and a state issue had truly become "the rallying cry." And, goaded by the Antimasons, the Whig party had found a "mode" (Clay's term) "to present a single candidate in opposition to" Van Buren but with Harrison, not Clay, as the beneficiary. Harrison had defeated Clay because of the political situation in Pennsylvania and the ambitions and political shrewdness of its Antimasonic

46 Gunderson, Log Cabin Campaign, 61; Chambers, "Election of 1840," 663–64; Remini, Henry Clay, 550–53, quotation, 553. The source of the Granger letter is A K McClure, Our Presidents, 67–68, who says: "My authority for this is Mr. Stevens himself." Adams, Memoirs, 10, 152 Thurlow Weed reminisced: "Although General Harrison's nomination was finally made unanimous, that unanimity was anything but cordial." Harriet A Weed, ed, Autobiography of Thurlow Weed (Boston, 1883), 482.
leaders.47

In the ensuing campaign, featuring log cabins, hard cider, marching, singing, an unprecedented national voter turnout, and separate campaign organizations—General Harrison carried Pennsylvania (twenty-three of whose thirty electors had been chosen by the Antimasonic Convention in May 1839) by the narrowest of margins—350 votes out of 297,693 cast.

Ironically, this “log cabin and hard cider” campaign of 1840 was the Antimasonic party’s last hurrah and its victory a Pyrrhic one. Aided by the Democratic schism in 1835, ably lead and inspired by their “blessed spirit,” as the state’s chief minority party, the Pennsylvania Antimasons had existed as a party for twelve years, longer than in any other state. Although they had made Harrison president, they found little favor in his administration and in Pennsylvania were soon absorbed and superseded by the rapidly expanding Whigs. They had superb tacticians but lacked the roots to support their aggressive leaders—and they soon faded.

By using the presidential question as a means of regaining power at the state level, Stevens and his colleagues, determined and pragmatic politicians that they were, became the main force that helped to change the national nominating convention from a rubber stamp to an institution that could choose a candidate from several aspirants. Pennsylvania was fertile ground for giving birth to this institutional innovation because of the unique internal political situation created by the peculiar political void that existed in Pennsylvania early in the decade and the determination of able opposition leaders to fill that void by taking advantage of Democratic divisions. The Antimasons’ goal was to regain control of the state; clever use of the presidential question and the Whig convention was their means.

One has only to look back at the national nominating conventions of the first half of the 1830s and the prevailing traditional view of their function to comprehend the significance of what resulted from the efforts of the Antimasons. Previous national nominating conventions—1831, 1832, and

47 Peter B. Porter to Henry Clay, Dec. 30, 1837, Clay Papers, 9:115–17. Porter had noted that: “The Anti Masons will doubtless expect & perhaps ought to have the Vice Presidency.” Harmar Denny to Daniel Webster, Jan. 3, 1840, Webster Correspondence, 5:8–9. Denny explained the dilemma of the Antimasons and pointed out that steps were underway to choose electors and of the need to have but one anti-Van Buren ticket. He asked for Webster’s views and whether his candidacy should be adhered to. The editors of Webster’s correspondence note Webster’s “response has not been found.” Webster Correspondence, 5:9. See again Henry Clay to Hugh L. White, Aug. 27, 1838, Clay Papers, 9:220–21 and Nichols, American Political Parties, 333–41.
1835—did not have to work to choose their candidates; that had already been done by the states and public opinion or party leaders. Their convention proceedings were essentially cut and dried. The one exception, that of the Antimasons in 1831, occurred only because the already designated nominee (McLean) withdrew just before the convention began, forcing the leaders to scramble to find a new candidate to present to the convention. The debate over what a convention should be continued through the decade, as the views of Harrison, Clay, and Webster illustrate. But, driven by the Antimasons, the Whig Harrisburg "convention began a new chapter in the history of American political behavior."  

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48 The returns are available in Walter Dean Burnham, *Presidential Ballots 1836–1892* (Baltimore, 1955), 704, and in Snyder, *Jacksonian Heritage*, 223. See Vaughn, *Antimasonic Party in the U.S.*, 112, 182–83, Rupp, "Social Tension," 199–202, 263–75, Mueller, *Whig Party in Pa.*, 64–66, 94–95, especially the long and valuable footnote, Current, *Old Thad Stevens*, 73ff. Robert H. Wiebe in *The Opening of American Society* (New York, 1984), 250, notes that "For the first time a presidential election outpolled the contests for state offices." Stevens, denied the coveted postmaster generalship, moved to Lancaster and for a decade failed to play an important role in either state or national politics. President-elect Harrison told Webster, to whom he offered the State Department "I tell you however in confidence, that I have positively determined against [Thaddeus] Stevens There is no consideration which would induce me to bring him into the Cabinet We should have no peace with his intriguing, restless disposition." William Henry Harrison to Daniel Webster, Dec 27, 1840, Wiltse, et al., *The Papers of Daniel Webster, Diplomatic Papers 1841–1843*, 1 5–6. A month later this sentiment was expressed more generally by Horace Greeley who told his mentor, Thurlow Weed "I know some of the Pennsylvania Politicians too well They are more rapacious and unprincipled, if possible, than politicians in general." Horace Greeley to Thurlow Weed Jan 27, 1841, Barnes, *Memor*, 92. McClure suggests that before the Harrisburg Convention Harrison wrote to Stevens "voluntarily proposing that if Harrison should be nominated and elected President, Stevens would be a member of his Cabinet." A K McClure, *Abraham Lincoln and Men of War-Times* (2d ed., Philadelphia, 1892), 261. For a review of the final days of the Antimasonic party in Pennsylvania, see Rupp, "Social Tension," 202–5.

For a longer perspective on the nominating convention see Arthur [M.] Schlesinger Jr., "Faded Glory," *New York Times Magazine*, July 12, 1992, 14–15, 23–25, 52. Schlesinger points out that "the convention in recent times has dwindled into a ceremony of ratification Not since 1952 has a nominee required more than one ballot." He adds "The gatherings in 1952 represented the last hurrah of the old-style convention—the convention that itself made the decision." Thus, he writes "The convention's original function—choosing the Presidential candidate—has ebbed away [and] the convention's function is now to certify results achieved [by presidential primaries] well before the delegates gather in the convention hall." Final quotation in text, Nichols, *American Political Parties*, 333.