When we get a vivid picture of Western Pennsylvania at the beginning of the nineteenth century with her little towns, her few infant industries, her agricultural pursuits, her comparative isolation from busier centers of the east due to her geographical position, we realize that here was a fertile soil for democracy. The economic interests connected with manufactures which now make western Pennsylvania a firm adherent to the Republican party, had not then extended beyond the mountains. The people recognized these interests only as the interests came in conflict with their own welfare and economic development. From the very birth of the nation, the people west of the mountains had been anti-federal. The tax put upon whiskey and the consequent insurrection in 1794, followed by the troubles in Adams administration, only made this opposition more bitter and made the country ripe for the support of Jefferson in 1800.

In organization and principles the development of the Democratic Party here from 1800 to 1816 had a certain unity and continuity. During that time the party organization became fairly strong in local centers and in counties. There seems to have been but little organization in the state as a whole. That remained to be worked out in the next period with a change from caucus to convention nominations. (1)

The election of 1800 was a bitter one to the very end. For at least two years harsh attacks had been made on the administration of Adams. In 1799 both the administration and the opposition party had made a desperate attempt to win the election of their candidate, for everyone knew that whichever party carried the state that year, would again carry it in 1800. The Democrats were successful. (2)

When Thomas Jefferson was put up then by the Democratic Party as a candidate for president, he was received most enthusiastically in Western Pennsylvania. The principles which he advanced were given in a letter to Gideon

*Paper read before the Historical Society, May 29, 1917.
Granger dated Aug. 13, 1800. (3) They were—1st the preservation of rights remaining unquestionably to the state; 2nd freedom of religion and of the press; 3rd trial by jury; 4th economical administration of the government; 5th opposition to war, to standing armies, to paper money system, and to all conjunction, except commercial, with other nations.

The Alien Act was regarded as an invasion of States Rights. (4) In newspaper articles many attacks were made also upon the extravagance of the Federals in their administration. (5) The Democrats were stimulated and encouraged in this campaign by their own press, *The Tree of Liberty*, a weekly paper published in Pittsburgh.

Albert Gallatin, Democratic-Republican candidate for the United States Congress in this western district, received a majority in all but two of the seventeen townships of Allegheny County. (6) *The Tree of Liberty* also notes that "the Republicans have carried all candidates in the five western counties by large majorities." (7) The party was strongest possibly in Washington County, the Democratic vote there being about five times as large as the Federal vote.

In 1802 McKean, the Democratic candidate for governor, was again successful over the Federal candidate, Ross. (8) Both men were strong, but Ross's party was weak. The defeat of the Federalists was so complete that in 1803 they did not even try to nominate candidates for all the offices. There was a rising spirit of dissatisfaction with the state judiciary, not always well founded, yet with a real basis of discontent. One evil was the delay of trials, often for as long as six or seven years. (9) The discontent continued to grow until 1805, when it brought on a bitter struggle.

In 1804 Jefferson was nominated for reelection. The Republican members of the legislature met to recommend certain citizens to the people for electors. (10) In May the Democrats of Allegheny County met in Pittsburgh and appointed a committee of correspondence to make arrangements for the election. (11) This committee recommended that the citizens of each township of the county meet at their usual places on June 23rd to elect two delegates for a nominating assembly of the county to meet June 26th. This was the first time for such a nominating delegation, but
the plan continued to be carried out and elaborated. The other counties had similar meetings. Each county nominating assembly was to appoint two of their body to meet at Mercer in August to nominate a candidate to Congress from the western district, which was made up of eight counties.

After the nomination of the congressional candidate, the delegates from Allegheny, Beaver and Butler were to fix the ticket for their representatives, as these three counties formed one representative district. The Democrats had an overwhelming majority in the fall, (12) but this big majority was not to continue. There were causes at work which were to divide the Democratic party and give heart to the Federal party.

We should hardly expect the election of 1805 to be very important or interesting, ordinarily, but the course of events in Pennsylvania politics brought about a conflict which was both interesting and important. To be sure, the county judges were often “the worst kind of laymen and small politicians, though the state judges were well read in the law”; (13) but the judges were Federalists and when the Democrats had the other offices in the state—governor, senator, representative—they could not bear to have the Federalists in the judiciary. Complaints came from all parts of the state. An attack was made against Addison who was a president judge from Allegheny and an ardent Federalist. He was impeached and removed from office. (14) Then the state Representatives were asked to impeach three justices of the Supreme Court. This was too radical. Danger was scented. The whole country was roused against the Democrats. The legislature did pass a bill reforming the entire judiciary system of the state, but Governor McKean, although a Democrat, refused to sanction it. He was immediately criticised most severely by those favoring the bill, because he had defied the will of the people as set forth by their representatives. (15)

The Democrats were aroused by their failure. They were also sincere in their desire to have these conditions improved. To do this it seemed to them necessary to have the constitution of the state amended. Just here came in the two questions upon which the election of 1805 turned—shall
the constitution of the state be amended? and—how shall it be amended? Unfortunately, while the constitution provided that amendments might be made, it made no provision for the way in which they should be made. (16) The Federalists were of course opposed to any amendment. Every one agreed that there were defects in the constitution, but the Federalists maintained that the constitution—indeed, not any constitution—could be made perfect and that the citizens were not competent to revise it. (17) In regard to the second question, the radical Democrats, called loudly for a convention. (18) Some of the less radical Democrats, standing by Governor McKean, were opposed to the call of a convention just then to make amendments. They preferred to leave the matter in the hands of the legislature. (19) The legislature had received petitions in favor of a convention and against it. They referred the matter to the people in the coming election for governor. (20)

The Tree of Liberty took the side of McKean. So July 24, 1805 the first issue of the Commonwealth appeared. It was edited in Pittsburgh also. Its object was "to meet the need of a press to speak the will of the people against the ambitious and intriguing spirit fostered by the state executive."

As in the previous year, delegates were elected to nominate tickets and committees were appointed to unite the activity and energy of the different parts of the counties and districts. A new point in organization was brought out in a meeting in Washington County held August 28th. Besides appointing a standing committee to address the citizens of the county, they advised committees of vigilance in each township. (21) Part of their duty was to receive and distribute tickets on election day.

Beaver County held a meeting August 26th according to public notice, to investigate the proceeding of the nominating committee of the county. (22) They claimed that the delegates had been improperly chosen, because the committee which had issued the circular letters calling for township meetings, had not been appointed for that purpose. The assumption of power by them was contrary to the principle.
of democracy. They called for new township elections of delegates, which were held in September.

By September the Democrats who were friendly to McKean and who were called “Quids” by other Democrats, had joined with the Federalists in making a ticket. (23) In Allegheny County they had McKean, a “Quid”, for governor; James O’Hara, a Federalist, for Congress; and Dr. Andrew Richardson, a “Quid”, for State Senator.

Although McKean was defeated in most of the districts of Western Pennsylvania, his large majorities in the eastern part of the state gave him the election. With his success the call for a convention was given up. (24) The party which elected him had, however, no real, permanent bond of union and fell apart almost at once after this victory. (25)

There was little of special interest in political affairs again until 1808, except that in 1807 the committees of vigilance were chosen by ballot instead of being appointed as always before. (26)

Our grievances against England were looming up larger and larger. The question of our attitude toward England and of action to be taken for our protection occasioned differences of opinion upon which turned the presidential election of 1808. Jefferson had been president for two terms, all through which he had been warmly supported by the Democrats. In carrying out the policy of peace, of opposition to a navy and of encouragement to home industries rather than to foreign commerce Congress had passed the Embargo Act. Great indeed was the opposition of the commercial centers and of the Federals. The Democrats found all sorts of excuses and good reasons for it. Western Pennsylvania, which was largely an agricultural country, so separated from the coast as to receive little benefit from exports and imports, or from commerce in any way, had no sympathy with the coast towns. She was necessarily dependent on herself for almost everything. Her people could find much good in the Embargo Act. Their pockets were not touched.
They recognized that the Act could not be a permanent measure as it stood then, but declared that even if it were removed soon, Congress would have to pass such laws and restrictions as would enable our nation to be less dependent on foreigners. Sudden interruptions to commerce were unavoidable. (27) The effects of the embargo were really good. It was already leading to the extension of domestic manufacturers. Manufacturing societies had been started in Philadelphia, Baltimore, and New York with large capital. (28) It was either a question of Embargo or war and the Embargo was the lesser of the two evils. (29)

The western counties were all holding meetings, arranging for the election of delegates and nomination of candidates. They appointed their committees of correspondence and vigilance to carry on the campaign and agreed to support Snyder for governor. (30) Snyder was a German and the Democrats hoped through him to gain the German vote of eastern Pennsylvania. They were not disappointed. Snyder not only received large majorities in all the western counties but carried the whole state. (31)

Every county west of the mountain had elected Democratic representatives to the next legislature. (32) The Democrats, however, did not feel that their work was done, but set themselves to assure the success of their electoral ticket. (33)

From this time on until after the War of 1812, foreign affairs were uppermost in the minds of the people. Our foreign affairs were at a crisis. There was less place for the consideration of local affairs in the great national issue.

In 1811, however, much dissatisfaction arose about the nomination of State Senator from the district composed of Beaver, Butler, and Allegheny counties. Beaver and Allegheny had each recommended a man from their own county. The senator whose term continued was from Allegheny County. Beaver County thought it was unjust to take both senators from Allegheny County when there were three in the district. Her committee of correspondence protested that it was contrary to the principle of representative democracy. (34) They cited the example of Washington and Greene Counties which formed one district. Al-
though Washington had a larger population than Allegheny, and Greene a smaller population than Beaver, yet there was no thought of not allowing Greene one candidate. Some of the Democrats of Allegheny County were dissatisfied with the nominations made and a new ticket was agreed upon. (35) In spite of the unhappy divisions in the party, the Democrats were generally successful. (36)

The party was destined to be divided again the next year. On public notice, a meeting of the citizens of Plumb Township was held at Turtle Creek Sept. 5, 1818. (37) They decided that the crisis in affairs called for a change of men and measures. They suggested the further meeting of citizens in the townships of Allegheny and Butler counties to send delegates to make up a ticket on September 19th.

The change desired was in the presidency. (38) Madison had been nominated in the usual way by congressional caucus. The New York state legislature had, however, nominated DeWitt Clinton of that state. Clinton’s claim came not in the way of political principles, for he held the same as Madison, but rather in the mode of nomination. Every one agreed that there were some objections to congressional nominations but the adherents of Madison asserted it to be less objectionable than nomination by the legislature of a particular state.

Meetings were called in Pittsburgh of those who favored Madison and other meetings of those who favored Clinton. (39) Each faction made its own ticket. (40) The Federals had gained strength, yet were not able to defeat the divided Democratic party. (41) The Madison ticket ran almost unanimously in Butler county, and was generally successful in the western country.

In 1816 the question of caucus nominations came up again. The Democratic congressional caucus had on March 19th nominated James Monroe for President and Daniel Tompkins for vice president. (42) The Pennsylvania legislature had nominated twenty-six electors for the electoral choice of president and vice-president. In many of the meetings held relative to the election, resolutions were passed against caucus nominations. The objections of one element of the party were so strong that they were led to
hold a convention at Carlisle, which was not very largely attended. Here they nominated an independent and unpledged set of electors. (43)

The Democratic party in Allegheny again suffered a division. Each township had always been granted two delegates to the county nominating assembly. (44) This year a meeting in Pittsburgh disapproved of the delegate ticket because:—a. the towns were not represented at the delegate meetings according to population, taxable inhabitants, or taxes actually paid; b. the persons nominated were from portions of the county with a small population, in violation of the first principles of our forefathers that taxation and representation went together; c. the city of Pittsburgh with population and taxes nearly equal to that of eleven of the townships of the county had no representation whatever. To justify their proceedings they published a schedule of taxables in Allegheny County in 1814 and the amount of taxes paid in 1816. (45)

At the request of a number of delegates and citizens, the two committees of correspondence of Allegheny and Butler counties met September 5th in order to effect a union of republican interest at the election if possible. (46) As it was too late for township elections and as there was difficulty as well as to the apportionment of delegates the committees made out a conciliatory ticket, which was partially successful. (47)

There was a post-election meeting of Democrats in Pittsburgh at which a plan was made for a later meeting to reform the method of calling and conducting Democratic meetings, so that contentions and divisions might be prevented. (48) In 1817 two questions came up, one in regard to local meetings for nominations, the other in regard to state meetings for nominations. Sooner or later the questions would have to be answered in a way to change the party organization. A separate convention which had been proposed did meet in Carlisle March 4, 1817 to nominate a candidate for governor. (49)

So far as the organization of the party was concerned, there was very little in 1800. Nominations for president and for governor were made by congressional and legislative
Political Activities in Western Pennsylvania, 1800-1816

233

caucus. Then each town, village or township held a meeting of all the citizens, made its own nominations, and spent its energies in its own little territory. General opinion expressed in various ways, gave what concerted action there was. In 1804 the party had county committees of correspondence. These arranged for county nominations by delegates elected from each township and also for nominations from congressional and legislative districts by delegates from the several counties composing them. These delegate meetings together with the committees of correspondence and the committees of vigilance which appeared in 1805 in the townships, formed the center of the whole organization for the period. The duties and activities were extended; the different townships and counties gradually got into closer connection. In 1807 they had committees of vigilance for the counties as well as for townships. In 1812 the entire arrangement for the township election of delegates was given to the township committee of vigilance.

The party suffered several times from division in its ranks. Notwithstanding these divisions, the Democratic party was usually triumphantly successful, due in a measure to the lack of organization on the part of their rivals. They won all the presidential elections from 1800 to 1816 and all the elections for governor except in 1805 when part of the Democrats joined with the Federalists. In the election of members to congress and the state legislature the Democrats were usually successful in the west. Beaver, Butler and Washington Counties could be counted on almost certainly as having a Democratic majority. Allegheny County was doubtful, sometimes giving the Federalists a small majority as she did in 1814. The greatest strength of the Federalist party then was naturally in Pittsburgh, the one center of manufacturing and manufacturing interests in the western part of the state. Evidences of increased strength of the Federalist party and of changes to be made in the organization of the Democratic party brought about a new period of development after 1816.

Graduate student, University of Pittsburgh. Elizabeth McWilliams.

REFERENCES
Articles on “Pennsylvania Politics Early in this Century.”

1. The Mercury (Pittsburgh) August 17, Sept. 7 and Oct. 26, 1816.
5. Ibid., August 30, Sept. 13, Sept. 27, 1800.
8. The Gazette, Sept. 17, 1802.
9. Ibid., Sept. 17, 1802.
10. Tree of Liberty, Apr. 4, 1804.
11. Ibid., May 19, 1804.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid., III, 158.
17. The Commonwealth (Pittsburgh), July 24, 1805.
18. Ibid., July 24, 1805
20. In favor of convention 74 petitions from 11 counties, 4944 names. Against convention 80 petitions from 9 counties, 5590 names.
22. Ibid., Sept. 14, 1805.
23. Ibid., Sept. 14, 1805.
27. Ibid., Feb. 17, 1808.
28. Ibid., Apr. 27, 1808.
29. Ibid., June 22, 1808.
31. Ibid., Oct. 19, 1808.
32. Ibid., Oct. 19, 1808.
33. Ibid., Oct. 26, 1808.
34. Ibid., Sept. 30, 1811.
35. Ibid. Sept. 23, 1811.
37. Ibid., Sept. 10, 1812.
38. Ibid., Sept. 17, 1812.
39. Ibid., Sept. 17, 1812.
40. Ibid., Oct. 8, 1812.
41. Ibid., Oct. 22, 1812.
42. Ibid., May 18, 1815.
44. Mercury, Aug. 17, 1816.
45. Ibid., Aug. 31, 1816.
46. Ibid., Sept. 14, 1816.
47. Ibid., Sept. 14, 1816.