THE ELECTION OF 1864 IN WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA*

By Norman C. Brillhart

From 1829 when Andrew Jackson became President to the inauguration of Lincoln in 1861 the Democrats had control of the government with the exception of the two short terms of the Whig Presidents, Harrison and Taylor. In 1860 Lincoln received only forty percent of the popular vote. He probably would have been defeated had there not been a split in the Democratic party. The Democrats therefore regarded Lincoln as a usurper and determined if it were possible to oust him in 1864. When that year came they had many faults to find with him. The war which he and most men thought would be of short duration had lasted three years and the end was not yet in sight. The Democrats found fault invariably with the way Lincoln dealt with the perplexing problems which the war brought.

However the majority of the people of the North supported Lincoln. Pennsylvania had given him a large popular vote in the election of 1860. Yet the State contained almost as many Democrats as Republicans as was shown in the election of A. G. Curtin in the fall of 1863; in the fact that the Democrats and the Republicans each had twelve Congressmen at Washington from 1863 to 1865; and in the further fact that the Republicans had a majority of only seven members in the Pennsylvania Legislature in 1864. The Senate of the State Legislature when it convened in Harrisburg in January was supposed to have seventeen Republicans and sixteen Democrats but one of the Republicans, Senator Harry White from Indiana, Pennsylvania, was a prisoner in Libby Prison, Richmond. He tried to obtain his freedom but the Rebels, probably because they realized that the Pennsylvania Legislature could not do any business without him, would not release him for any of their men whom the Union forces had as prisoners. (1) After a while he resigned and Dr. Thomas St. Clair, a Republican, was elected to fill the vacancy. Thus the Senate was unable to organize and legislation was held up by Democratic tactics for eight weeks until the deadlock was broken by Dr. St. Clair taking his seat.

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The Pennsylvania Legislature in the middle of January opened the campaign of 1864 by endorsing Lincoln. Every Republican member of the Senate except Senator White who was a prisoner in Richmond and every Republican member of the Lower House signed a Petition endorsing Lincoln’s administration and urging him to run for the presidency in the coming campaign. (3)

While the Republicans of Pennsylvania thus put themselves behind Lincoln in 1864, the Democrats accused him of frauds and failures. (4) They accused Mrs. Lincoln of sympathizing with the South, (5) they opposed his call for men as autocratic, (6) they called him “a buffon story teller whose jokes are too coarse even for the jibes of Ethiopian minstrelsy”. (7) Their choice for the presidency, as expressed thru the Democratic State Convention, was George B. McClellan. (8) He, they said, was admired and loved by the army and inspired hope in it as no other general could. (9) He had been removed from the army, the Democrats said, because the administration feared he was becoming too popular and would endanger its existence. (10)

The Allegheny County Republican Convention was held the last week in April. Honorable James K. Moorehead was unanimously re-nominated for Congress and the conferees were told to cast their votes for Honorable Thomas Williams. All the delegates to the State and the National Conventions were instructed to vote for the re-nomination of Lincoln. (11) Immediately after the County Convention closed the State Convention assembled. It elected Geo. V. Lawrence permanent chairman, and Simon Cameron, Governor Curtin, M. B. Lowry, and W. W. Ketchum Senatorial delegates to the Baltimore Convention. A resolution was adopted instructing them to stand by Abraham Lincoln “first and last.” (12)

The Fremont campaign was launched in Pennsylvania in January when the Pittsburgh Post characterized him as a better man than “the present incumbent of the White House.” (13) Every few days thereafter the Democratic press would sound the praises of Fremont and at the same time bitterly criticise Lincoln. (14) The Cleveland Con-
vention met the last week in May at the call of William F. Johnston, ex-governor of Pennsylvania, N. P. Sawyer of Pennsylvania, and Republicans from other States who were displeased with the administration. (15) In spite of the aid given by the Democratic press the Fremont Movement did not make much headway in Pittsburgh and Western Pennsylvania. (16)

On June 8 Lincoln, who was proposed by Simon Cameron of Pennsylvania, was re-nominated by acclamation as the Republican candidate for the presidency, and Andrew Johnson by an overwhelming majority on the first ballot was nominated for vice president. (17) This Republican Convention at Baltimore endorsed Lincoln's policy. It favored fighting until the rebellion was crushed, endorsed the Emancipation Proclamation, and an amendment to the Constitution to abolish slavery forever from all of United States and territory under its jurisdiction. (18)

A large and enthusiastic meeting of the friends of Lincoln and Johnson assembled at Wilkins Hall, Fourth Street, Pittsburgh, on Saturday evening, June 18, to ratify the nomination and to endorse the Baltimore platform. The meeting was called together by Major A. M. Brown. Major James Lowry was made president and in an excellent speech commended Lincoln. The crowd becoming too large for the hall, adjourned to Second Street Square where it was addressed by Major Brown. Speeches of other prominent men were heard. Resolutions were reported and adopted to support Lincoln and Johnson and the Baltimore platform and pledges were made to secure a larger majority for the Republican candidates than any other county in the Union. (19)

One thing that had to be decided in Pennsylvania before the October and November elections was whether the Pennsylvania soldiers in the field had the right to vote. The Supreme Court under Democratic control had declared the law allowing them to vote unconstitutional. The Democrats in the State Legislature had tried to block the proposal of an amendment giving the soldiers the right to vote. The Democratic press made no comment on the amendment because it realized that most of the soldiers were for the administration. (20) The Republican press, of course,
urged the people to give the soldiers the right of suffrage at the August election for they knew that they greatly needed the soldiers’ vote in the coming elections. (21) The election in Western Pennsylvania on the proposed amendment shows the following: Every county in Western Pennsylvania with the exceptions of Cambria, Clearfield and Elk voted in favor of giving the soldiers the right to vote. The majority for the amendment in Western Pennsylvania was 34,478. The vote for the amendment in the entire State was 199,959, against the amendment 105,352. The total vote cast in the election was 305,311; while the majority for the amendment was 94,607. (22) From these figures it is evident that Western Pennsylvania did its share in giving the soldiers in the field the right to vote. The vote was light throughout the State, being about half that of the following November, and it was not strictly partisan, for the parties were much more evenly matched.

During the last few days of August the Democratic National Convention was in session in Chicago. It chose General George B. McClellan on the first ballot as Democratic candidate for the presidency and Geo. H. Pendleton for the vice-presidency. Governor Seymour of New York was its permanent chairman but in its proceedings Vallandigham of Ohio seemed equally influential. Seymour and his following dictated the candidate but Vallandigham drew up and put thru the important resolution, viz., “After four years of failure to restore the Union by the experiment of war . . . justice, humanity, liberty, and the public welfare demand that immediate efforts be made for a cessation of hostilities . . . to the end that the earliest practicable moment peace may be restored on the basis of the Federal Union of the States”. (23)

A great mass meeting of the Democracy of Allegheny County was held on Saturday evening, September 3, at the St. Charles in Pittsburgh to ratify the nominations of McClellan and Pendleton and to endorse the Chicago Platform. Though the weather was inclement very many people came to the meeting. First the band played the Star Spangled Banner, Yankee Doodle and other patriotic airs. Then Honorable Chas. Shaler, chairman of the County Committee, stated in a few words the object of the
meeting. Honorable Walter H. Lowrie was elected president. The Chicago Platform was read and heartily endorsed and cheers were given for the Democratic nominees. Resolutions which were entirely in harmony with the Democratic Platform were received with applause. Several locally prominent men then addressed the audience. However the speeches were short and the meeting after adopting the resolutions with three hearty cheers adjourned because of a heavy downpour of rain. (24)

With the nominations of McClellan and Pendleton and the adoption of the Democratic Platform the presidential campaign began in earnest. The main issue was the conduct and the duration of the war. That "slavery must be crushed if it takes the last dollar and the last man" is Lincoln’s position, said the Democratic press. If he is elected, war, conscription, subjugation and emancipation will be continued, it claimed, until the bloody purposes of abolitionism are finally accomplished. (25) If Lincoln is re-elected, the war will last at least four years longer. He is waging it, sacrificing the white population of the North, to free the degraded negro slaves of the South. He will carry it on until the European powers step in and declare terms of peace. If McClellan is elected, on the other hand, he will soon restore the nation to peace and general prosperity. (26)

The Republicans gladly accepted this challenge. The Pittsburgh Gazette said, "the plank is rotten that declares the war a failure." When Lincoln became President he had neither money nor men. "Now," the Gazette said, "Look at the shrunken Confederacy and its exhausted armies." Nearly one-half of the land which the Rebels held at the beginning of 1862 is now in our hands. We have not lost an acre, nor a city, nor a fort. Their armies are exhausted, ours are stronger than ever before. When victory is within our grasp, shall we offer base terms of peace? (27)

In the latter part of September the Republican side, which during August had been disheartened by lack of military success and by party disaffection became more confident because the fresh victories of Sheridan added to those of Farragut and Sherman, "knocked the bottom out
of the Chicago Platform." (28) Then, too, Chase came out for Lincoln, (29) Greeley began to support him wholeheartedly, (30) Wade and Davis got into line for him, (31) and Fremont withdrew from the race. (32) The Democrats, on the other hand, were disconcerted by McClellan’s letter of acceptance of the Democratic nomination. In this letter he showed himself to be for the prosecution of the war and the overthrow of the Confederacy while the Democratic Platform was for peace. (33)

The first objective which each side hoped to attain was the victory in the October election. This was the important election. Never had its results been reversed in November. Pennsylvania was the pivotal State and each side put forth its best efforts to win in October. (34) There were mass meetings everywhere. (35) A typical one was held by the Democrats the evening preceding the election, October 10, at the old Battery. An exceedingly large assembly with tremendous enthusiasm was addressed by prominent speakers. There were banners, transparencies, pictures of the Democratic candidates, satirical devices and caricatures of Lincoln, Stanton and other prominent Republicans. (36)

On October 11th the people went to the polls with the issue clearly in mind. The Democrats insisted that if the administration were supported, we would have four years more of war, conscription, and taxation in order to secure negro emancipation. (37) The Republicans maintained that the war was a success and would soon terminate satisfactorily if the administration were endorsed at the polls. (38)

The results of the election in Western Pennsylvania were as follows: In the seven Congressional districts six Republicans and one Democrat were elected. The average Republican majority in the six districts they carried was 2,229 while the Democrats had a majority of only 125 votes in the district they carried. Here in Allegheny County, the twenty-second district, Honorable J. K. Moorhead was re-elected by a vote of 11,233 to 7,013. In Eastern and Central Pennsylvania taking the vote as a whole the Democrats polled more votes than the Republicans, for although the Republicans carried Western Pennsylvania by a majority
of 15,475, their majority in the entire State was only 13,859. (39) However, by the election in the entire State the Republicans received a representation of sixteen in the Lower House of Congress while the Democrats received only eight. This was a decided gain for the Republicans, for at the time of the election they had only as many representatives as the Democrats, each party having twelve. The Republicans increased their majority in the State Senate from one to seven and their majority in the State House of Representatives from 6 to 28. (40)

Although the Republicans gained many seats in Congress and in the State Legislature, these gains were made almost entirely by the soldiers' vote. As nearly as could be calculated, excluding the soldiers' vote, there was not a Republican majority of as many as 400 votes in the entire State. (41) The Democrats thought that McClellan's name would cause as many as 30,000 more votes for them in November than they polled in October. (42) So the campaign continued with increasing bitterness.

The Republicans accused McClellan of being on a gun-boat far removed from danger at the Battle of Malvern Hill while the Democrats retaliated by saying that Lincoln ran away from Washington when it was in danger of being captured. (43) Each party accused the other of election frauds and each asked its members to be on guard against the frauds of the other. (44) The Democrats said that Grant and the administration had wasted 100,000 men in an attempt to reach Richmond and that the Confederate army was by no means on its last legs, (45) while the Republicans said that the Rebels were putting forth their best and last efforts in a desperate attempt to have the peace men of the North elected. (46) But the main issues of the campaign were stated thus by the Democratic press; if Lincoln is elected, the present office-holders will grow richer; lazy negroes will infest our streets; more widows and orphans will be made; gold and silver coin will entirely disappear; and a merciless draft will soon be called. On the other hand, if McClellan is elected, you will see the war honorably ended; a hard currency; reduced taxation; and general prosperity. (47) The Republican press said that the great election would decide whether the war was a suc-
cess or a failure; whether the Union would be preserved or broken up; whether loyal men or traitors would hereafter rule this nation; whether slavery would exist or perish; whether our soldiers would have died in vain or paid the great price for the salvation of our nation. (48)

The Republican Party of Allegheny County on November 3rd held a huge torch light procession as a final demonstration before the election. For days the committees of wards and townships were in continuous council of preparation for the demonstration. The local committees were engaged in getting up devices and in arranging their trimmings generally. Flags and lanterns were in demand beyond the ability of dealers to supply up to the last moment. Special trains were run on the Pennsylvania Railroad. Friends from the country flocked to the city and when they failed to find accommodations with friends filled up the hotels. It was estimated that approximately 50,000 people thronged the streets during the time of the procession. Public buildings were tastefully decorated and illuminated. George McCook, M.D., was chief marshall of the procession. There were three divisions: Delegations from all the wards of Pittsburgh and from Lawrenceville and East Liberty comprised the first; delegations from all the wards of Allegheny and from surrounding townships comprised the second; and delegations from Birmingham and numerous surrounding townships comprised the third. There could not have been less than six thousand persons in the line of procession, nearly 2,000 of whom were on horse back. In addition to these were about 180 carriages and wagons, all well loaded, the former with enthusiastic, loyal ladies and the latter with men, women, boys and girls who appeared intensely delighted with the honor they shared in being in the Republican procession. Besides these there were hundreds of ecstatic boys who insisted in taking part in the display, inasmuch as they would not be able to vote. They were determined to carry a flag, a lantern, a torch, or a roman candle, or anything so they could have a "hand in" at the death of "Little Mac" and his Seymour "friends". "Little Mac" was "done up" in every style, but nowhere in the whole line of procession could he be seen on the platform. Both he and the platform were rep-
resented in various shapes, but never together, except when he was endeavoring to stand on the broken pieces of the peace concern. A few of the choice designs were: Phil Sheridan stumping the Shenandoah Valley; S. S.; Sherman and Sheridan, good for a million votes; McClellan and Pendleton on the Chicago platform, pulling a rope to opposite directions, McClellan in the war corner, Pendleton in the peace corner; Mac saying, "My voice is still for war," Pendleton saying, "I contend for peace." The tens of thousands of men, women and children who lined the sidewalks, and who filled the windows of private dwellings, stores and public buildings along the line of parade, with their thrilled and beating hearts, gave token of the fact that throughout Allegheny County there was nothing to fear from the disloyalty of the people. (49)

The Democracy of Pittsburgh, Allegheny, and the adjoining neighborhood on Saturday night, November 5th, held a last rally at the old Battery, on Grant Street, Pittsburgh. Democrats moved in large numbers toward the place at an early hour, rendering the meeting one of the largest and most imposing of the campaign. The meeting elected Chas. B. Kenny president. After delivering a short speech he introduced the Seventh Ward Glee Club which entertained the audience with a beautiful song prepared expressly for the occasion, entitled "McClellan and the Union." The song was enthusiastically received by the entire assemblage, which gave three unanimous cheers for McClellan and made the old Battery, famous as being the scene of so many political contests, ring with the name of General McClellan. Addresses were then delivered by Hugh Duffey, A. Stevenson, J. H. Baily, T. F. Backus, W. H. Witte and G. W. Hewett. All the speakers scathingly denounced the Lincoln administration and highly praised McClellan. The meeting adjourned at about half past eleven o'clock with unanimous cheers for McClellan and Pendleton. (50)

Thus the campaign was waged to the very eve of the election. However, the fact that had most weight in the minds of the majority of the voters on election day was Sheridan's fresh victory in the Shenandoah Valley, added to those that had but recently preceded it. The voters
realized that the quickest way to bring peace and prosperity to a restored Union was to crush the Rebellion.

Therefore the voters of Western Pennsylvania cast their ballots as follows: For Lincoln, 89,193; for McClellan, 72,701. The vote in Allegheny County was 21,519 for Lincoln, 12,414 for McClellan.

The vote cast for Lincoln in the entire State was 296,389
The vote cast for McClellan in the entire State was 276,308
The majority for Lincoln in the entire State was 20,081
The majority for Lincoln in Western Pennsylvania was 16,492
The majority for Lincoln in Allegheny County was 9,105

These figures show that of the 20,081 votes by which Lincoln carried the State, nearly half of them, 9,105, came from Allegheny County and that nearly five-sixths of them, 16,492, came from Western Pennsylvania. This large majority for the administration indicated that the people of Western Pennsylvania thoroughly endorsed its policies: namely, the abolition of slavery by constitutional amendment, the Emancipation Proclamation, the Confiscation Act, the war taxes and every other measure deemed necessary by the administration for the entire suppression of the Rebellion. (52)

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4. The Daily Post, January 8, 1864.
5. Ibid., February 6, 1864.
6. Ibid., February 8, 1864.
7. Ibid., April 6, 1864.
8. Ibid., March 28, 1864.
9. Ibid., February 3, 1864.
10. Ibid., February 12, 1864.
11. The Daily Pittsburgh Gazette, April 27, 1864.
12. Ibid., April 29, 1864.
14. The Daily Post, April 21, 1864. 
   Ibid., April 27, 1864.
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15. Ibid., May 11, 1864.
17. The Daily Pittsburgh Gazette, August 23, 1864.
18. Ibid., June 9, 1864.
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20. Ibid., July 22, 1864.
   The Daily Post, July 27, 1864.
   Ibid., July 22, 1864.
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   The Daily Pittsburgh Gazette, September 1, 1864.
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25. Ibid., August 31, 1864.
26. Ibid., September 9, 1864.
27. The Daily Pittsburgh Gazette, September 8, 1864.
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30. Ibid., September 9, 1864.
31. Ibid., September 26, 1864.
32. Ibid., September 23, 1864.
33. Ibid., September 7, 1864.
34. Ibid., September 19, 1864.
35. The Daily Post and The Daily Pittsburgh Gazette, September and October.
36. The Daily Post, October 11, 1864.
37. Ibid., September 28, 1864.
38. The Daily Pittsburgh Gazette, October 10, 1864.
39. Ibid., October 20, 1864.
   Ibid., November 22, 1864. (These are the official returns.)
40. The Tribune Almanac for 1865, pp. 54, 55.
   The Daily Pittsburgh Gazette, November 7, 1864.
41. Ibid., October 20, 1864.
   Ibid., October 21, 1864.
42. The Daily Post, October 14, 1864.
43. Ibid., October 28, 1864.
44. Ibid., November 3, 1864.
   The Daily Pittsburgh Gazette, October 31, 1864.
45. The Daily Post, October 31, 1864.
46. The Daily Pittsburgh Gazette, October 28, 1864.
47. The Daily Post, November 7, 1864.
49. The Pittsburgh Commercial, November 4, 1864.
50. The Daily Post, November 7, 1864.
51. The Daily Pittsburgh Gazette, December 8, 1864.
   (These are the official returns for the November elections.)
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