THE
WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA
HISTORICAL MAGAZINE

Volume 44 March 1961 Number 1

PENNSYLVANIA NEWSPAPERS AND
PUBLIC OPINION, 1861-1862

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The mold of public sentiment was shaped early in the Civil War by the newspapers of Pennsylvania. Many public journals, irrespective of party, took up the plea for unity of purpose, and party animosity was at first submerged beneath a common objective. A common theme found its way into public print: "There can be no neutrals in this war; only patriots or traitors." Only the passing months revealed the political dissensions that lay behind this appearance of unity. As the war progressed there developed a strong partisan press that supported the President of the United States and heaped charges of condemnation upon the critics of the Republican administration.

With the defeat of the Buchanan administration, and the loss of patronage, the emaciated Democratic press of Philadelphia virtually collapsed. On April 2, 1861, the Pennsylvania met its end in ignominy, unmourned by the fifty thousand Democrats in Philadelphia. Commenting on the obituary of this organ of Democracy, a newspaper said: "The Democratic Party of the North being dead, or having sunk into an insignificant Secession party, it is not surprising that its organs are expiring . . . Now we have to announce the decease of the Old Democratic organ of Philadelphia, the Pennsylvania . . . It has labored with great zeal even in the last months

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of its existence to promote the cause of secession, and to exasperate the South against the North.”¹ Not until 1863 with the coming of the Age into publication was Philadelphia Democracy to raise its voice in a newspaper.

Thus throughout the Civil War the press of Philadelphia shaped public sentiment along the lines of pro-Republican politics; it was committed wholeheartedly, except for a few minor exceptions, to the cause of Lincoln’s leadership. Yet the strain of conservatism remained, for there was a reluctance to approve of an abolition crusade against the South.² To hold the faith of these newspapers to the Republican cause, the party liberally subsidized friendly journals through appointments and by government advertising. For example, although John W. Forney’s Philadelphia Press came to be known as the local organ of Lincoln, Forney was dexterous enough to keep himself in good standing with the Radicals and Simon Cameron. For defending a friend of Cameron in the July 31 issue of the Press on the subject of a beef contract, Forney’s sons received commissions as lieutenants, one in the Army and the other in the Marines. Also, there was reason for the statement: “Forney by his devotion to Lincoln has made money.”³ It is not unnatural that Forney was responsive to the wishes of Lincoln and the Cameron régime, for in the years from 1861 to 1865 he received $10,000 for advertising from the war department.⁴ Clayton McMichael, editor of the North American and United States Gazette, received a generous amount of advertising from the federal government; for such advertising the North American received nearly five thousand dollars from the war department. James Chambers, publisher of the Evening Bulletin, secured the position of Navy Agent. It is little wonder that such papers, liberally subsidized by the Republican ad-

² Only the Philadelphia Press and Evening Bulletin supported abolition as a consistent policy.
⁴ United States Official Register, 1863, 197-198; 1865, 218-225; see also Forney, Anecdotes of Public Men, I, 66-67, 76; John Hickman to Forney, May 2, 1861, Cameron to Forney, May 14, 1861, Forney to Fessenden, April 29, 1863, Forney to Fessenden, October 21, 1864, Forney Papers (in Library of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia); Forney to Chase, September 24, 1863, Chase Papers (in Library of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia). Other examples of patronage are George Bergner’s appointment to postmaster in Harrisburg while editor of the Telegraph and Russell Errett’s rise to paymaster in the Army while editor of the Pittsburgh Gazette.
ministration, defended the "shoddy" aristocracy of Pennsylvania—the war profiteers tied to the strings of party politics. At the same time the newspapers of Philadelphia leveled the charge of treason against political rivals. Only two papers in Philadelphia did not conform to the pattern of unswerving partisanship: the Inquirer, a Republican organ, and the Public Ledger, an independent paper. Both these papers generally upheld Lincoln's administration, but both papers also criticised Republican charlatans and unscrupulous government patronage and contracts.

In Philadelphia, the city which had been committed to conciliation tactics previous to the war, there developed a Republican press committed to the defense of this nation and an earnest prosecution of the war. Besides the North American (organ of the propertied classes, the well-to-do merchants, lawyers, bankers, and iron masters), the Press, and the Inquirer, the following newspapers supported the Republican party: Banner of the Covenant, Daily News, Dollar Newspaper, Episcopal Recorder, Commercial List and Price Current, Philadelphia Herald, Sunday Transcript, Sunday Mercury, Sunday Herald, Philadelphia Evening Bulletin, National Guard, Home Weekly and Household Newspaper. Yet of all these newspapers possibly the one most closely linked with Lincoln and patronage, and with the Republican party, was John Forney and his Press. This editor developed public opinion into an unswerving devotion to the Union. His technique of propaganda took the following pattern: (1) paint a romantic picture of war, (2) rouse the people to the appeal of the recruiting officer by chauvinistic bombast, (3) depict Southern distress and demoralization, the lack of food, shelter, and clothing in frequent editorials, (4) inflame the passions of hate by dwelling on alleged atrocities, (5) play up the
victories and play down defeats.\footnote{See "The Romance of War," Philadelphia Press, October 17, 1861; for appeals for recruits see Press, October 18, 1861; July 22, 31, August 5, 6, 12, 29, 1862; March 18, April 3, 1863; December 24, 29, 1864; January 27, February 27, April 10, 1865; for charges for atrocities see Press, May 16, August 9, 1862; June 6, 22, 1862; May 8, 1865; for editorials against the South see Press, October 1, November 11, 1861; March 19, 25, 1862; January 27, May 27, 1864; January 27, February 1, 3, 21, March 28, 1865. When the Union forces were demoralized at the battle of Fredericksburg, Forney telegraphed John Russell Young in charge of the Press: "Don't treat the affair at Fredericksburg as a disaster." The next day the headlines of the Press gave no hint of the truth. Forney to Young, December 16, 1862; Young Papers (Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.).} So successful was the Press in its league with Republicanism that Forney soon published a weekly summary of the Press which he named Forney's War Press. This paper found its way deep into the rural counties of Pennsylvania and into the camps of the Union armies. Therefore, one cannot accurately measure the broad scope of this paper in molding Pennsylvania sentiment or even army sentiment. The Press and the Evening Bulletin were the only two Philadelphia newspapers to champion the cause of anti-slavery; the other metropolitan newspapers, in keeping with their pre-war conservatism, opposed an abolition crusade.

Harrisburg had two newspapers with strongly divergent views based totally on political affiliations: The Pennsylvania Daily Telegraph, the official organ of Curtin Republicanism, and the Patriot and Union, outspoken organ of Democracy. It should be especially noted that in the beginning the Patriot and Union was a firm supporter of the prosecution of the war against the South; it consistently expressed this view: "The leaders of the Southern rebellion are guilty not only of actual treason against the United States Government, but also of moral treason against the Democratic party of the North . . ."\footnote{Harrisburg Patriot and Union, May 9, 1861.} Nevertheless, the Pennsylvania Daily Telegraph persistently attacked the Patriot and Union as the organ of traitors. The Telegraph harped on the fact that the Democratic paper on April 8, 1861, had advocated letting the South secede from the Union if it so desired. The Telegraph never took cognizance of the fact that the Patriot and Union advocated firm prosecution of the war once it had begun. Thus, the aim of the Telegraph was to contaminate the Patriot and Union with treason for being an organ of the Democratic party.

In Pittsburgh the journals were preponderantly of a pro-Republican nature. The Pittsburgh Gazette, Saturday Dollar Chronicle, Pittsburgh Evening Chronicle, the Daily Dispatch, Saturday Morning.
ing Commercial, and the Daily Commercial Journal had strong Republican leanings.\textsuperscript{9} The only Democratic paper in Allegheny County was the Pittsburgh Post, and this paper at the beginning of the war had strong pro-Union leanings, even if it did criticize the Republican administration. As the war progressed the Post became the target of the Republican journals.

There evolved a pattern of condemnation that was used as a weapon in the hands of the Republican party to cast discredit upon the Democratic party in Pennsylvania; this weapon was a fabrication of lies and half-truths. The process was one of amazing simplicity. There is irrefutable proof that the ante bellum South had been evenly divided between the Whigs and the Democrats, but the Republican politicians of Pittsburgh and other areas of Pennsylvania skillfully made it appear that the Democratic doctrine was the doctrine of secession; thus, by such logic, the Democratic party became culpable for the secession of the South. The fact that Grant, McClellan, Hancock, Franklin, Meade, and other notable generals summoned to the defense of the Union had been Democrats at the outbreak of the war, was forgotten. By 1864 pro-Republican papers were stating that “every soldier killed in defending the Union, was shot by a Democrat.”\textsuperscript{10}

By such underhanded measures the stigma of traitor was placed upon Democratic newspapers that loyally supported the Union.\textsuperscript{11} The unity that had prevailed early in the war was at an end by the end of the summer of 1861. As one Democratic paper said: “Certainly, no Democrat could have intended the disruption of the

\textsuperscript{9} Pittsburgh Daily Dispatch, April 17, 20, May 22, July 23, 1861; Pittsburgh Evening Chronicle, July 24, December 11, 1861; Saturday Dollar Chronicle, April 27, May 4, 18, 25, June 8, 1861; Saturday Morning Commercial, April 20, 27, June 8, 22, 24, July 27, August 17, 1861; Pittsburgh Gazette, April 5, 30, 1861; Pittsburgh Daily Dispatch, April 17, 1861.

\textsuperscript{10} Philadelphia Press, September 25, 1864; October 4, 1864; Pittsburgh Gazette, November 2, 1864; Harrisburg, Pennsylvania Daily Telegraph, October 26, 28, November 2, 1864.

\textsuperscript{11} For the accounts of verbal attacks on Democratic newspapers, see the following accounts in the Democratic newspapers themselves: Warren Ledger, April 19, 1861; Erie Weekly Gazette, May 16, 1861; Meadville Crawford Democrat, June 25, 1861; Uniontown Genius of Liberty, May 16, 1861; Franklin Venango Spectator, May 1, July 24, 1861; Ebensburg Democrat and Sentinel, May 1, 15, 29, 1861; Blairsville Record, June 5, July 24, 1861; Greensburg Pennsylvania Argus, May 24, 1861; Wilkes-Barre Luzerne Union, May 1, June 19, 1861; Bellefonte Democratic Watchman, May 30, October 10, 17, 1861; Chambersburg Valley Spirit, April 24, August 7, 14, 28, October 9, 1861; Lewistown True Democrat, May 2, August 1, 22, September 12, October 3, 1861; Ellis Irwin to the Hon. Joseph J. Hale, December 10, 1861; Bigler Papers (Library of Pennsylvania Historical Society, Philadelphia).
party or a fusion with the enemy [Republican]. Republicanism and Democracy are as distinct and wide apart today as they were one year ago.” 12 Yet another newspaper summed up the situation in the following manner: . . . “let a Democrat, even though denying the right of secession, but express a desire for peace, and he is called a ‘secessionist’ and is threatened by mobs. It is time the people should know the truth. Democrats have ever denied the right of secession, nevertheless, have been endeavoring to bring about an amicable adjustment . . . They want peace, but if peace cannot be had, they will fight as ever they have done, gallantly and willingly for the Union. Whole regiments of Democrats are in the field. Over one half of the troops now in the field are said to be Democrats, nevertheless they are termed ‘traitors’.” 13

In the early phases of the war mob violence was immediately used to suppress so-called undesirable newspapers. On April 15, 1861, in Philadelphia, mobs visited and attacked the Palmetto Flag, the Argus, the Southern Monitor. 14 This episode gave off repercussions all the way across the state. On Tuesday, April 16, 1861, word of the attack on Philadelphia newspaper offices reached Uniontown, and a mob threatened to attack the offices of the Genius of Liberty unless a flag was run out. The editor refused to be threatened; that afternoon warnings were made of destruction, and townspeople cancelled their subscription to the Genius of Liberty, a movement that was led by Andrew Stewart. Finally the following letter was received:

Uniontown, Pa., April 16, 1861

E. G. Roddy:
The Stars and Stripes of the Union must be displayed by the office of the Genius of Liberty before 12 o'clock midnight, April 17, or the office will be gutted.

Many Citizens 15

Fortunately these threats were never carried out. But this incident touched off long and windy vilifications between H. W. Beeson, Democrat and friend of Roddy, and Andrew Stewart, Republican

12 Meadville Crawford Democrat, June 25, 1861.
13 Somerset Democrat, June 21, 1861.
14 Philadelphia Press, April 15, 16, 1861; Philadelphia Inquirer, April 15, 1861; New York Daily Tribune, April 16, 1861; Sypher, op. cit., 48; Philadelphia Public Ledger, April 16, 1861.
15 Uniontown Genius of Liberty, April 25, 1861.
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and politician. This resulted merely in ill feelings and party dis-
sensions. As the war progressed the Genius declined in prosperity; in April, 1861, this paper was a flourishing journal of four large
sheets, but by the beginning of 1863 it had declined to a small two
sheet affair.

On April 17, 1861, the office of the Luzerne-Union in WilkesBarre was threatened by mob violence; destruction of property was
averted by E. B. Chase who held the mob in check with a revolver. In May the Doylestown Democratic Standard was forced out of
business because of its alleged affiliations with secessionists. On
June 30, 1861, the office of the Beaver Western Star was entered
by a mob, the presses taken apart, and the parts, with several cases
of type, were dumped into the Ohio River. This act of violence was
because the Western Star was a Democratic newspaper.

The greatest number of attacks on Democratic newspapers oc-
curred in the month of August, 1861. In Philadelphia the United
States District Attorney J. Coffee, on August 22, 1861, gave direc-
tions to the United States Marshal to seize all the copies of the
Observer office was visited and the types seized. A force of officers stationed at Walnut Street wharf examined the bundles of news-
papers from New York, seizing all copies of the proscribed newspa-
pers. Also at this time the sheriff in Allentown had to call out a
guard to protect two Democratic newspapers. In Easton the
office of the Sentinel was destroyed by a crowd of Unionists on
August 19, 1861. On August 31, 1861, the offices of the Carbon
Democrat at Mauch Chunk were completely gutted. Furthermore
other scenes of violence took place at Bloomsburg and Pittston against
the Democratic newspapers. This wrecking spree in the month of August was not an isolated case in Pennsylvania alone, for in
New York City during that month the streets were placarded by

16 Uniontown Genius of Liberty, April 25, May 2, 9, 16, 23, 30, June 6, 13, 1861.
17 Wilkes-Barre Luzerne Union, April 24, May 1, 1861; New York Daily Tribune, April 18, 1861.
18 Doylestown Bucks County Intelligencer, May 7, 1861.
21 Philadelphia Press, August 20, 1861.
22 New York World, September 2, 1861.
23 Pittston Gazette, September 5, 1861; Bloomsburg Columbia Democrat, September 7, 1861.
warnings which read: “The freedom of the press is subordinate to the interests of a nation. Let the three southern organs in this city beware!”

Of all the instances of mob violence against Democratic newspapers, perhaps the most colorful were the attacks on the West Chester Jeffersonian, published by John Hodgson. This newspaper had all the earmarks of a southern press; its unique quality lay not only in its caustic criticisms of Lincoln and its rabid defiance of the North but in its quality of fire and brimstone slavocracy. If this newspaper had been printed in Charleston, Savannah, or Richmond it would have achieved popular approval; being issued in the North it was one of the strongest of the “copperhead” newspapers. All the speeches of Jefferson Davis appeared in this paper; not one speech of Lincoln made its appearance. The speeches of Clement L. Vallandigham covered whole pages, and the credo of the Jeffersonian was that the Civil War was a “nigger war to liberate the nigger.” As time went on not one Northern military victory found especial mention in the pages of the Jeffersonian; also in his lack of tact Hodgson castigated the clergy of the North in general and of West Chester in particular as being the “Bloodhounds of Zion.”

The town of West Chester evinced no surprise when a mob forced its way into the offices of the Jeffersonian on August 19 and wrecked the property. The pro-Republican Village Record gave ample space to the incident: “The office of the Jeffersonian in West Chester was entered on Monday night last, and the newspaper press broken, the hand press pitched out the window and the type knocked into pi and thrown into an adjoining sink. On Tuesday morning the office presented a desolate looking spectacle. Nothing but a few bundles of paper were seen either in the first or second stories of the office. Who the perpetrators of this act were we have no knowledge. It is believed they came from the country. The night was moonlight.” The one public protest to this act of violence came from the Democrats who at the next county political meeting in September condemned this mob violence.

The troubles of the Jeffersonian were not over, for on August 23, 1861, United States Marshal William Millward closed down
the newspaper and took possession of the office. The case came up for hearing before the United States Circuit Court in Philadelphia. The court saw no definite charge in the indictment that the Jeffersonian had been used "to aid and abet the insurrection." An order for restitution of property was granted on October 14, 1861. For a small measure of time this case was the cause celebre among the Democrats of Pennsylvania. The Republican press had nothing but condemnation for John Hodgson. As one newspaper described the case: "No attorney should be permitted to appear before any court as the advocate of a known, published traitor to his country—particularly when that attorney is himself believed to be in sympathy with the enemies of his country." 27 The Democratic press was jubilant over the victory of John Hodgson and his Jeffersonian. The Northumberland County Democrat made the following observation: "Thus ends the only attempt of the government to suppress Democratic papers in Pennsylvania. We hope to see The Jeffersonian in full blast again." 28

John Hodgson was not content with the mere restoration of his property, for he instituted suit against Marshal Millward and his deputies for trespassing vi et armis. Nevertheless, the problem of the publication of the Jeffersonian was taken up by the United States government when it resumed operations on October 26, 1861; on that date Postmaster-General Montgomery Blair deprived the Jeffersonian of the use of the mails and did not restore the privilege until January 18, 1862.

The suppression of the antagonistic press in Pennsylvania, especially in August, 1861, aptly defines the two methods used in controlling anti-administration journals: suppression by mob violence and by action of civil or military authorities. If one were to accept the figures compiled by a Democratic newspaper, the following newspaper fatalities occurred in the North up through October, 1861: seventeen journals suspended, ten destroyed by mobs, five died naturally, five denied the use of the mails, seven changed to the support of the Union, six editors imprisoned.29 In all fairness to the Democratic journals of the war period one must concede that,

28 Sunbury Northumberland County Democrat, November 6, 1861; see also Wilkes-Barre Luzerne Union, November 20, 27, December 11, 1861; Lancaster Intelligencer, November 6, 1861; Reading Gazette, January 22, 1862; Easton Sentinel, October 23, 1861; West Chester Jeffersonian, October (27) 26, November 9, 1861; January 25, 1862.
29 Washington Examiner, October 24, 1861.
except for a few cases, the Pennsylvania newspapers of Democracy supported the prosecution of the war at its beginning. Only when the plea for unity of parties was dropped and the issue of war became a political football did charges of treason become leveled at the Democrats as a whole. Therefore, the rancor that arose in Pennsylvania between Republican and Democrat as the war continued came from the desire to associate the Democrats with the Confederacy; true, in Pennsylvania there was a small percentage of pure "copperhead" journals that opposed the war, the administration, conscription, volunteering and everything else that concerned the Union, but their number was indeed small.

The stigma of treason was placed on the Democrats by editorials such as this: "On the one hand we have arrayed the same party [Democrats] in whose bosom the present civil war had its origin, which contains all the traitors we have in the north, and whose continued existence seems strange, in view of its past career, and the events which have rendered it infamous . . . To vote for a Democratic candidate at this time is to touch pitch and run the risk of becoming defiled." 30 And when the Democratic party refused to vanish at the demand of their opponents, the adherents to the Republican party began a vicious attack upon Francis W. Hughes, chairman of the Central Democratic committee for the state, as a traitor. The basis of the charge was a resolution for the secession of Pennsylvania from the Union; this resolution Hughes had prepared for the Democratic convention early in 1861. Two weeks before the election of 1862 Forney's Press lashed this resolution to its masthead under the caption: "The Platform of Treason, as Prepared by the Leaders of the Breckinridge Party in Pennsylvania." 31 The measures created by the Republican party to gather votes had their foundation in "downright falsehood." 32 It was at this time that

30 Philadelphia North American and United States Gazette, October 8, 1861.
31 Philadelphia Press, October 3 to 14, 1862. For the reaction to this accusation see Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, October 21, 1861; Washington Examiner, October 23, 1862; West Chester County Times, October 4, 11, 1862; Towanda Bradford Reporter, October 9, 1862; Doylestown Bucks County Intelligencer, October 7, 1862; Bellefonte Central Press, October 10, 17, 1862; Carlisle Herald, October 3, 1862; Lebanon Advertiser, October 3, 1862; Clearfield Raftman's Journal, October 8, 1862; Easton Daily Evening Express, October 6, 13, 1862; Altoona Tribune, October 9, 1862; Greensburg Westmoreland Republican and Farmer's Chronicle, October 8, 1862; New Brighton Times, October 9, 1862; New Castle Lawrence Journal, October 10, 1862.
one of William Bigler's constituents wrote: "I look forward hopefully to the time when we can once more discuss the merits and demerits of men... without danger of Ft. Lafayette or being denounced as traitor." 33 The pattern of falsehoods to gain votes was supported by the Philadelphia *North American and United States Gazette*. On October 3, 1862, that paper blasted the Democrats with the cry of "Domestic Treason": "Any vote therefore cast at this election for a Democrat candidate for Legislature... will practically be a vote for the rebellion against the national government." 34 Thus by such procedures the Republican party, through the voice of the press, was able to hold political dominance in Pennsylvania, and the name Democrat became unjustly an anathema associated with treason and the South.

It is evident that a definite pattern of war sentiment evolved in Pennsylvania in the period 1860-1861. In 1860 Pennsylvania had looked upon southern threats of secession as mere bluster. A national convention of workingmen at Philadelphia in February, 1861, inscribed the following sentiments: "We are... utterly opposed to any measures that will evoke civil war." The bombardment of Fort Sumter ended the period of irresolution and conciliation, giving way to a temporary unanimity of feeling. The crystallization of war sentiment found expression on a state, county, and local level, so that a chain of command was formed. In April, 1861, the state under the leadership of Andrew Gregg Curtin efficiently prepared itself for war, and the measures and needs of the state were adequately carried down to the county and local levels, securing action through mass meetings and committees. Finally, binding this feeling for the Union into a cohesive unit were the clergy and newspapers. One can understand why Pennsylvania, with such a pattern for achieving a common front, was important to the Union at the outbreak of the war.

34 Philadelphia *North American and United States Gazette*, October 3, 1862.