CONTRABAND AND REBEL SYMPATHIZERS IN PENNSYLVANIA IN 1861

Edward G. Everett

In Pennsylvania the problem of contraband arose at the very outbreak of the Civil War. Two things made this state the point of logical contact for rebel agents seeking the purchase of illegal goods: (1) its industrial development and (2) its proximity to the South. Thus the word "contraband" early became part of the daily vocabulary of the border towns of the Keystone State; furthermore Pennsylvania's proximity to the Confederacy created a fear of spies and invasion. Implementing these fears was the great mass of negroes that pushed out of the South, spreading invasion rumors. So it was that York, Adams, Franklin, Fulton, Bedford, Fayette, and Cumberland counties became centers of rabid military feeling, momentarily expecting the impact of battle.

The beginning of the Civil War saw southern agents in the commercial centers of Pennsylvania seeking needed supplies for rebellion. In Philadelphia pressure methods were used to deter manufacturers from carrying on illegal trade with the South:

Under the supposition that manufacturers have been furnishing arms to the secessionists, manufacturers have been visited by organized bodies of persons, and the workmen compelled to leave.¹

The journals of the day gave credence to the story that Governor Letcher of Virginia offered $30,000 to the patentee of the bullet mold for the purchase of that military item to be used in Virginia; the offer was rejected.² Thus public sentiment in Philadelphia and other areas of the state raised virulent cries against trading with the enemy. So active did the seeking of illegal shipments become

¹ Philadelphia Public Ledger, April 17, 1861; Philadelphia North American and United States Gazette, April 17, 18, 1861; Scharf and Westcott, History of Philadelphia. (Philadelphia, 1884), I, 756.
² New York Evening Post, April 20, 1861; Philadelphia Inquirer, April 22, 23, 1861; Frank Moore, The Rebellion Record (New York, 1862), I, 36.

*Dr. Everett, a member of the faculty of the State Teachers College at West Chester, Pennsylvania, is the author of three other articles published in the Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine: Jeffersonian Democracy and the Tree of Liberty, John Smilie, Forgotten Champion of Early Western Pennsylvania, and Pennsylvania Raises an Army, 1861.—Ed.

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that, from time to time, manufacturers inserted statements in the newspapers denouncing rumors that they were engaged in contraband running. Such a notice appeared on April 17, 1861:

Having heard it rumored that we were accused of making friction cannon primers for the Southern traitors we hasten to deny it.

Bowen Brothers

From April through May seizures of illegal goods intended for the South were made by municipal officers and extra-legal committees. It was remarkable that now that war had broken out there still remained trade relations between Philadelphia and the South, even though these relations seem to have been of a tenuous nature. Although the content of the boxes and barrels intended for the South were camouflaged, the addresses upon them were definitely of a southern destination, bearing such routes as Savannah, Georgia; Jackson, Mississippi via Memphis; Kentucky; Richmond, Virginia; Arkansas; Maryland. In a short period of time shipments of rifles disguised as cases of whips, tons of sheet-lead, gunstocks, locks, knapsacks, barrels of flour, kegs of powder, percussion caps, primers, and other such implements of war were confiscated.

By the latter part of May newspapers held such articles as the following on the restriction of illegal trade:

The embargo on all things wanted from this city [Philadelphia] by Southern buyers is very rigid. They cannot get even medicines for the sick. They have ordered quantities of shoes for their troops but not a case can be got off.

Thus the call for Northern food and notions embraces the whole catalogue of Southern dependencies.

At various times seizures of ships suspected of being in the pay of the South were made by customs officials or municipal officers. May 17, 1861, saw a flurry of excitement spread through the city of Philadelphia; on that day a submarine, suspected of being intended

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3 Philadelphia North American and United States Gazette, April 17, 1861.
4 Scharf and Westcott, op.cit., I, 759, 760, 763, 781; R. Patterson to Mayor Henry, April 21, 1861, Craig Biddle to Alex Henry, April 22, 1861, Henry Papers (in Library of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia); Philadelphia Evening Bulletin, April 25, 1861; Philadelphia Public Ledger, April 19, 1861; Philadelphia Sunday Transcript, April 21, 28, May 5, 1861; Philadelphia Press, April 19, 24, 25, 30, May 9, 17, 1861; Philadelphia Inquirer, April 20, 22, 23, 1861.
for Confederate service, was seized with its crew of two men and placed under government custody at the Noble Street Wharf. Furthermore, ships owned in part by "rebels" were seized by local officials; on such seizures the loyal owners were afterward permitted the use of the vessels on payments of the amounts held by southern parties. Much of this work of confiscation was done through the office of Marshal William Millward in conjunction with the United States attorney for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania. One finds that in the latter part of August and early September confiscation of property increased; reason for this is possibly found in the confiscation act passed by Congress on August 6, 1861. This act provided for the seizure of all property used for "insurrectionary purposes."

In the year 1861 there was one outstanding case of confiscation. James Murray Mason of Virginia had married one of the Chew girls of Germantown who held much valuable property near Philadelphia. In May a bill was presented to the state legislature to confiscate Mason's Pennsylvania property. This did not end the problem, for on August 5, 1861, Mr. Chew of Germantown applied to Judge Ludlow for an injunction to prevent James Murray Mason from taking money out of the estate in Philadelphia County.

The confiscation of supplies intended for the South went on at a slower rate in other parts of Pennsylvania, except for the activity of Pittsburgh and Harrisburg. Pittsburgh proved a logical point of egress into the South and a point for collecting materials of war. When war broke out, Pittsburgh once more resorted to committees of public safety, similar to the pattern established in the American Revolution and during the War of 1812. On April 15, 1861, an immense mass meeting was held in city hall. Here evolved a concept of organization and controls that were to last throughout the war. A committee of one hundred, hereafter usually called the committee of public safety, was created. To expedite matters, on April

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8 Congressional Globe, 37 Cong., I Sess., p. 415.
18, 1861, at a meeting in the board of trade rooms, the committee of one hundred developed a pattern of controls through the following sub-committees: executive committee, committee of transit of munitions of war, committee on home defense, finance committee, committee for the aid of families of volunteers. The powers of the executive committee were of dictatorial nature, since all sub-committees had to make daily reports to it; also the executive committee determined the mode of action of the other committees. In matter of fact the Pittsburgh committee of public safety had powers almost identical with the committee of public safety set up in Philadelphia on June 30, 1774. It too kept stern control of the thoughts and actions of the people; controlled the manufacture and sale of the necessities of war, especially salt petre; inspected and secured food, clothing, and other supplies; controlled militia companies; and was responsible for acquiring sufficient arms, munitions, and men for carrying on the war. There were two vital differences between the Revolutionary War and the Civil War vintage of committees of public safety: (1) in the Revolution the hub of control was Philadelphia with a strong chain of command projecting outward to local committees of safety throughout the state, producing a homogeneity of effect; (2) the committees of public safety of the Civil War were local matters, lacking a cohesive state-wide plan and producing independence and individuality of action in each community.

The committees of public safety in other parts of the state functioned with the same aims in view as the organization established in Pittsburgh. Yet there was a degree of vital difference,

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Committees of safety were organized in the following communities: Beaver, Brownsville, Uniontown, Blairsville, Washington, Harrisburg, Philadelphia. It is a guess that the reason for the predominance of committees of public safety being organized in western Pennsylvania possibly comes from two factors: the strong Union sentiment in Western Pennsylvania and the pattern of organization established by Pittsburgh. See Beaver Western Star, April 26, 1861; Brownsville Times, April 22, 1861; Uniontown Genius of Liberty, April 25, 1861; Blairsville Record, May 8, 15, 22, June 5, 19, 1861; Washington Reporter and Tribune, April 25, 1861; Harrisburg Pennsylvania Daily Telegraph, April 26, 1861; Harrisburg Patriot and Union, April 25, 26, 1861; Philadelphia Committee of Public Safety, Minutes 1861, I Vol. (in Library of Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia) I-109. For some reason the Philadelphia committee was rarely mentioned in the local newspapers. Philadelphia Inquirer, May 1, 1861; Philadelphia Press, May 1, 2, 1861; Philadelphia North American and United States Gazette, May 1, 3, 1861; Journal of the Common Council, Nov. 15, 1860-June 27, 1861, p. 139. Alfred J. Pleasanton, Military Reconnaissance of the Susquehanna River, 1861 (in Library of the Pennsylvania Historical Society, Philadelphia).
for none of the other committees operated with the same superb organization of controls. Only one came close to equalling the record of the Pittsburgh committee, and that one was in Philadelphia. It should also be pointed out that the first committee of public safety throughout the state was organized in Pittsburgh, April 15, 1861.

In the early months of the war the committee of safety sitting in Pittsburgh was in session day and night. From April 18 through September 16, 1861, the major part of its work was the seizure of contraband goods that were sent south through Pittsburgh. Working hand in glove with the executive committee was the committee of transit of ammunitions of war headed by Joseph Dilworth. The efficiency of this organization is easily attested by facts; on April 18 it was instrumental in stopping the shipment of three thousand kegs of Dupont gun powder down the Ohio River, chastising Messrs. Shriver and Dilworth for taking part in this shipment.11 On April 20, 1861, the committee on transit of munitions of war refused to let Captain Campbell ship powder and guns to St. Louis.12

The sincerity of the munitions committee is demonstrated in its published notices to shippers to report all goods supposed to be contraband to the committee sitting in permanent session. The effectiveness of this committee was augmented with the formulation of the following resolutions:

Resolved, that all goods arriving at Pittsburgh, and destined for Southern States, be stopped for the present, stored and insured.

Resolved, that no packages whatever shall be allowed to go forward to Southern States till they have been opened and examined by the committee.13

It is significant that the committee of public safety was not making idle threats, for notices were inserted in Philadelphia, New York, and local newspapers along the following lines:

Shippers of goods in New York are hereby notified that the packages found to contain guns, pistols, powder, and other articles contraband of

11 Pittsburgh Gazette, April 19, 20, 1861; Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, April 23, 1861.
12 Pittsburgh Gazette, April 20, 1861.
13 Pittsburgh Gazette, April 29, 30, May 3, 1861; Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, April 30, May 7, 14, 1861; Pittsburgh Post, April 30, May 1, 1861.
war destined for the Southern states will not be permitted to pass the city of Pittsburgh.

By order of the committee
E. D. Gazzam

The work of this committee was mainly kept secret. Proof that the munitions committee worked diligently through the summer of 1861 is illustrated by the fact that some of the members were injured when an express car loaded with contraband materials of war exploded. Nevertheless it seems evident that Pittsburgh, rather than Harrisburg, was the main exit of illegal shipping. Despite the sharp restrictions placed upon goods going South a brisk trade arose between Pittsburgh and the rebel states in salt, powder, arms, lead, quinine, and morphia; from the South cotton was smuggled into Pittsburgh. Here at Pittsburgh river traffic gave exit into the South. Thus from time to time seizures of military blankets, gloves, guns, ammunition, and other items of war took place. Sometimes a steamboat suspected of being in Confederate service would be taken into custody by Marshal Murdock of the Western District of Pennsylvania. The procedures of stopping contraband shipments, although carried out by the United States marshal's office, fell mainly to the extra-legal committee on transit of munitions. Since the work of controlling shipments of illegal materials of war fell into the category of secret work, there is no definitive measure of how much contraband goods was seized and how much found its way South; at best such study is incomplete and superficial.

Pennsylvania at the outbreak of war saw a flurry of fear over the possibilities of having spies within its borders. This fear was augmented in the case of Lieutenant Sennifer stationed at Carlisle Barracks who had been sending messages South, giving details of the exact condition of things at Carlisle Barracks and of Pennsyl-

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15 Pittsburgh Gazette, August 29, 1861.
16 War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies (Washington, 1880-1901), Ser. 3, XVII, part 2, p. 151, 178. Sherman described this practice to Grant from Memphis, August 17, 1862: "What use in carrying on war while our people are supplying arms and the sinews of war?" Ibid., 178; Ser. 3, II, 350.
17 Pittsburgh Gazette, April 22, 1861; Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, April 30, September 17, 1861; Pittsburgh Post, April 24, 26, 1861; Pittsburgh Saturday Dollar Chronicle, April 27, May 4, 1861; Pittsburgh Evening Chronicle, April 20, 25, 27, 1861; Pittsburgh Daily Dispatch, May 16, July 25, 1861.
Vania's measures for defense. On April 22, 1861, Curtin secured the arrest of Sennifer at Hanover, in York County, as he was trying to make his way south into the Confederacy. Furthermore fear of spies was especially emphasized when secession flags were run up Pennsylvania flagpoles late at night.

In the early phases of the war secret groups warned suspected spies and undesirable people out of Philadelphia. In the Henry Papers are a number of letters concerning suspected spies. One in particular demonstrates the manner in which undesirable were advised to leave town:

You are hereby notified that your presence in Philadelphia is obnoxious to the "Knights of the Blue Gauntlet," and that at a general convocation held this night beneath the folds of the starry Banner it was determined to notify you of the fact, and to give you ten days from date to place yourself without the pale of our jurisdiction.

From time to time arrests were made of suspected people. William Johnston, nephew of Joseph E. Johnston, was picked up as he was trying to board a train at the Pennsylvania Railroad Station. Samuel W. Eakin was imprisoned at Fort Lafayette for spying. William H. Winder of Philadelphia, brother of John H. Winder, was arrested on the charge of treason and sent to Fort Lafayette. In most instances the seizure of people suspected of being spies or of possessing southern sympathies was the work of legal authorities, but some of the time the activity of getting rid of an undesirable or suspected spy was of a cursory nature, almost invariably carried out by a vigilance committee. One of the favorite methods of dis-

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19 *New Castle Lawrence Journal*, July 13, 1861; *Easton Daily Evening Express*, July 6, 1861; *Philadelphia Inquirer*, July 7, 1861; *Lewistown True Democrat*, July 25, 1861; *Franklin Venango Spectator*, July 31, 1861; *Bellefonte Democratic Watchman*, June 27, July 18, 1861; *Wilkes-Barre Luzerne Union*, July 17, 1861; *Chambersburg Valley Spirit*, August 21, 1861.


posing of rebel sympathizers was to smear the victim with molasses and raw cotton.\(^2\)

The fear of southern spies was strongly expressed in Pittsburgh. If one is to believe the journals of the day, there was a devout belief that Pittsburgh would make a choice prize for the Confederacy, a prize well within the scope of rebel strategy. It is little wonder that Pittsburgh took up virulent procedures to cope with spies and sympathizers; indeed to the populace the term spy was synonymous with sympathizer, and on Wednesday evening, April 17, ropes were suspended from lamp posts as a warning to all traitors. That very day suspected southern sympathizers were attacked and encouraged to leave the environs of Pittsburgh.\(^3\)

The inability to present a clear and accurate study of rebel sympathizers, suspected spies, and spies in Pennsylvania is due to the inherent weakness of such a study; one cannot secure the incidence on this subject since the public sentiment was apt to class all people who opposed the war as spies. Those accused of such "crimes" were apt to get short treatment from the people. Thus legal procedures, with their accompanying documents and records, were replaced many times by mob violence that left little record of justice or evaluation, except in the almost inconsequential traces of historical evidence in the journals of the day. Yet this much is true: the people of Pennsylvania had a profound fear of spies operating within the state, and the reaction to that fear was apt to be found mainly in the cities, birth place of mob organization, rather than in the rural counties.

It is difficult to sift the shreds of truth from the intense emotionalism that constituted the times; statistics are inadequate, practically negligible. Nevertheless by plumbing the intense feelings of the day one can sense the strong emotions that can be summed up in the sentiment, "If you're not for us, you're against us."

These sentiments were adequately aroused by such announcements as the following, printed in the city journals and then reprinted in newspapers in the inland areas of Pennsylvania:

\(^2\) *Philadelphia Inquirer*, April 30, May 1, 1861; *Philadelphia Press*, April 17, 20, May 3, 1861.

\(^3\) *Pittsburgh Gazette*, April 18, 1861; *Pittsburgh Post*, April 17, 20, 1861; *Pittsburgh Saturday Dollar Chronicle*, April 20, 27, June 8, 1861; *Pittsburgh Evening Chronicle*, April 17, 18, 23, May 16, July 19, 23, September 20, 1861.
A thoroughly organized plot is now in progress of execution to burn New York, Philadelphia, and Boston... the men entrusted with execution of the plot belong to the Knights of the Golden Circle.

If one is to believe General L. C. Baker, Philadelphia was indeed a hotbed for secession sympathy; one letter in particular written by a southern agent in Philadelphia makes this particular picture:

Philadelphia, Dec. 26, 1861

... Nebo says that in less than three months we will have Philadelphia and Baltimore. He says that as soon as the advance is made upon the lines at Washington, a party here, now numbering over five thousand in this city together with thrice that number in the adjoining counties will seize the Navy Yard arsenal. His experience tallies with mine, that is, that New Jersey is sound to the backbone for us: yes, so far more so than Delaware, although a Southern State.

Thomas, The D. D.

Just how true was it that Philadelphia had a strong pro-southern element? Was it true that war sentiment in western Pennsylvania was stronger than in any other part of the state?

January, February, March, April, and May, 1861 delineated the tragedy of political dissensions and economic uncertainties in Philadelphia. A sharp recession had set in because of the decline in the rich southern trade. Shipowners, dry goods merchants, textile manufacturers saw the handwriting on the wall. During the secession winter and early spring bankruptcies began to break out in Pennsylvania with the predominance of cases in Philadelphia. Philadelphia newspapers were looking for a curtailment of southern trade, “fully one-half.”

In Philadelphia alone rich capitalists had

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24 Easton Daily Evening Express, May 7, 1861; see also Lancaster Daily Evening Express, April 17 to 20, 1861; Philadelphia Press, May 6, 1861; Philadelphia Sunday Dispatch, April 21, May 5, 12, 1861; Philadelphia North American and United States Gazette, April 15, 16, 1861; Philadelphia Forney's War Press, July 27, 1861; Philadelphia Evening Bulletin, April 17, 1861.


26 Frederic Bancroft, “The Final Efforts at Compromise, 1860-1861,” Political Science Quarterly, VI (1891), 401-423; Philadelphia Public Ledger, December 7, 1860; January 10, 1861; Emerson D. Fite, Social and Industrial Conditions in the North during the Civil War (New York, 1910) 105-110; Clinton E. Knox, “The Possibilities of Compromise in the Senate Committee of thirteen and the Responsibility for Failure,” Journal of Negro History, XVII, (1932), 437-465. The estimated trade of the North with the South was from $150,000,000 to $300,000,000.

27 Philadelphia Public Ledger, December 18, 23, 1860, and February 8, April 13, 1861; Pittsburgh Post, April 15, 1861; Uniontown Genius of Liberty, April 4, 11, 18, 1861.
brought up a thriving trade with the South that spelled prosperity: Baldwin locomotives were in use on every southern railroad; Philadelphia wagons and carriages were a byword in the South; printer's type, textbooks, and Bibles had afforded a lucrative source of trade. Now before the end of November, Philadelphia banks had suspended specie payments. Old credit accounts of the South had been left without settlement, and the money of the cotton crops had gone to purchase war materials, food, and clothing—but purchases were made from entirely new business houses. Thus in Pennsylvania unemployment and suffering spread, so that by December, 1860, there were nearly 20,000 unemployed in Philadelphia.

Out of this bleakness of economic decay came a move for compromise. In Philadelphia a riot was prevented on December 13, 1860 by forbidding a lecture by George William Curtis, radical; on that same day a mass meeting gathered at Independence Square and sent conciliatory resolutions to South Carolina. Committees of merchants from Philadelphia and Pittsburgh poured into Washington to put pressure where it was needed, while others buttonholed state politicians. The panacea for Philadelphia after December, 1860, was compromise.

In a way the compromise sentiment in Philadelphia after December, 1860, had a degree of similarity to the attitudes of James and Andrew Allen, Edwin Shippen, Jr., and Edward Tilghman who in 1775 saw economic salvation for Pennsylvania only under the protection of the British empire. So also a number of Philadelphia merchants in 1861 saw prosperity only within the framework of a trade alliance between Penn's city and the cotton South. Perhaps this is the most cogent reason for the compromise sentiment that.

28 Frank H. Taylor, Philadelphia in the Civil War 1861-1865 (Philadelphia, 1913), 11; William B. Weeden, War Government, Federal and State in Massachusetts, New York, Pennsylvania, and Indiana 1861-1865 (New York, 1906), 87-88. That many southerners had moved to Philadelphia is demonstrated by an article in The Sunday Dispatch, April 14, 1861; it stated that in a single square of Walnut Street, “occupying palatial residences,” were twenty-two southern families. The commander of the First Division of the Pennsylvania Militia owned one of the largest plantations in Louisiana, and the commander of Fort Delaware was a southerner.

29 Philadelphia Morning Pennsylvanian, December 11, 1860; Philadelphia Press, December 18, 1860.

30 Taylor, op. cit., 11-12; Davis, op. cit., 144; Kenneth M. Stampp, And the War Came: The North and the Secession Crisis 1860-1861 (Louisiana, 1950), 126-127.
flourished in this city. Nevertheless, if we are to accept the evaluation of Philadelphia newspapers, such statements as the following were made:

In the State Legislature, in the city councils, upon the bench, in the departments, we find everywhere men of Southern education, feeling and family. Many merchants of this city from motives of interest, perhaps of sentiment, are devoted to the interests of the South. In our shipping houses, our wholesale and manufacturing establishments, our newspapers, there are individuals who owe their all to Southern patronage, who have married into Southern families and who have extensive properties in the South.11

Then if this evaluation is true there must be validity to the reasons for the split in the Old School Presbyterian General Assembly that met in Philadelphia in May, 1861. When a segment in the meeting forced the conference to take a stand for the Union, a minority of forty members, mainly from south-eastern Pennsylvania, called the assembly's stand for the Union "a great calamity, as well as the most disastrous to the interests of the church which has marked its history." Out of this meeting the delegates returned to their homes divided by the measures raised in this convention, so that in Philadelphia this denomination was pro-southern and for compromise and in western Pennsylvania opposed to secession and slavery. Could there be truth in the statement that a minority of Old School Presbyterians in the southern half of Pennsylvania turned toward Copperheadism partly as an outgrowth of the General Assembly of 1861 held in Philadelphia?12

Finally there must be a major degree of truth to the conclusions of one letter writer when he says:

Those who are familiar only with the public sentiment at Harrisburg, Philadelphia, New York, and Washington can have no idea of the fierceness of the sentiment here [in Pittsburgh] in opposition to anything that looks like compromise. It amounts to a fury.13

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11 Philadelphia Sunday Transcript, April 14, 1861; see also Chas. Thomas to Alexander Henry, April 20, 1861 in Henry Papers; S. M. Felton to Alexander Henry, April 24, 1861; ibid; Philadelphia Public Ledger, April 15, 16, 1861; Philadelphia North American . . ., April 15, 16, 1861; "A Southern Rebel" to Mayor Henry, April 17, 1861, Henry Papers.


13 Russell Grett to Cameron, January 23, 1861; also John Blodgett to Cameron, February 1, 1861; Samuel Snyder to Simon Cameron, February 18, 1861, Cameron Papers (in Library of Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia).
Could it possibly be true that only in the large industrial cities of the eastern seaboard did the business men still call for conciliation and compromise with the South from December, 1860 through April, 1861?\footnote{Frederic Bancroft, ed., \textit{Speeches, Correspondence and Political Papers of Carl Schurz} (New York, 1913) 1, 168-170; \textit{New York Daily Tribune}, February 16, 1861.}