



THOMAS & KATHERINE DETRE
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LA& Treasures by Matthew Strauss,
Chief Archivist

A.M. Brown's Union letter book, 1864

Though it seems unimaginable today, Abraham Lincoln faced considerable challenges on his path to winning a second term in the White House. In the months preceding the 1864 election, the Union Army suffered major defeats at the Battle of the Crater and Battle of Cold Harbor, bolstering calls from the Copperhead wing of the Democratic Party for a peace settlement with the South. From within his own party, Lincoln received criticism from radical Republicans who believed he had not done enough to end slavery. Lincoln was also trying to buck the trend of single-term presidencies that had followed in the wake of Andrew Jackson. In August 1864, preparing for the possibility of defeat, Lincoln wrote a pledge, signed by the members of his cabinet, that stated, "This morning, as for some days past, it seems exceedingly probable that this administration will not be re-elected. Then it will be my duty to so co-operate with the President elect as to save the Union between the election and inauguration; as he will have secured his election on such ground that he cannot possibly save it afterwards."¹ Undaunted by these odds, Lincoln's supporters swung into action on behalf of their candidate.

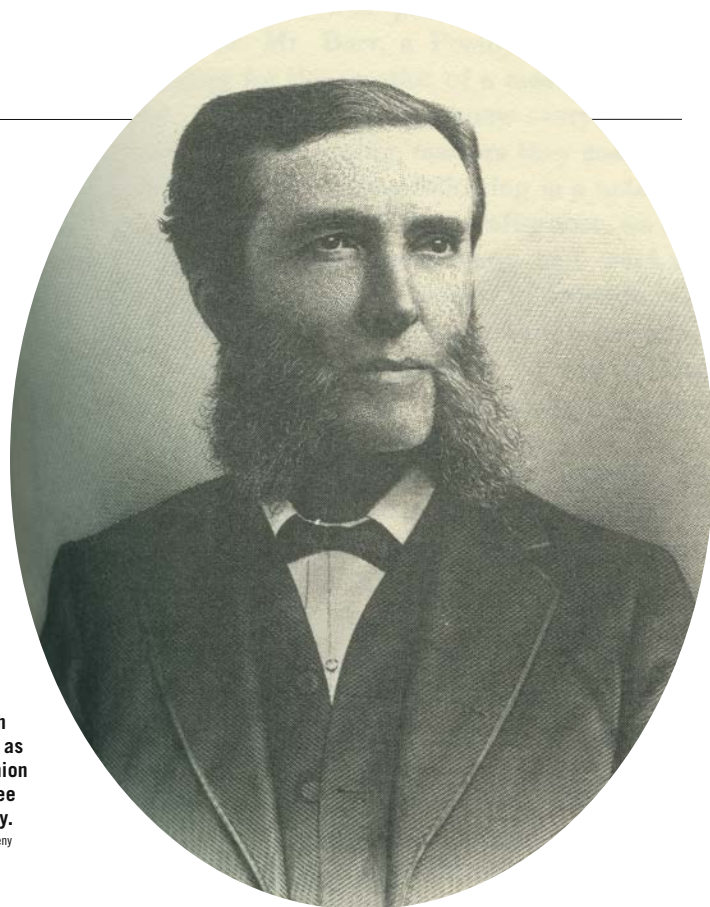
The urgency of the 1864 election can be sensed from looking through the pages of a letter book from the Union Executive

Committee of Allegheny County, a branch of a nationwide organization that worked to re-elect Lincoln and pro-Union legislators to Congress. Recently cataloged as part of the History Center's National Historical Publications & Records Commission Basic Processing grant, the book belonged to A.M. Brown, a Pittsburgh lawyer who served as committee chairman. Within its pages is a circular that reveals what the organization believed was at stake in the elections to be held later that year. "Pennsylvania and the Union must be saved from the vortex into which northern traitors and copperheads (acting in concert with Southern rebels) are endeavoring to precipitate them," the circular reads. "Abraham Lincoln and Andrew Johnson can and must be elected!"

Just like campaign strategists today, Lincoln's supporters realized that their cause would be advanced through grassroots mobilization. Within the letter book is a circular written by Simon Cameron, formerly Lincoln's secretary of war and governor of Pennsylvania, who was serving as chairman

of the Pennsylvania Union State Central Committee. Addressing the county-level Union Executive Committee chairmen throughout the state, Cameron writes that, "instead of the campaign being conducted as others of a like character have been, by the assembling of the people in mass meetings, by the appeals of enthusiastic and eloquent orators, it must be fought hand-to-hand, by those who have charge of our organization meeting the people individually face to face, and urging on each man the performance of such loyal duty as is essential to the maintenance of the Government and the preservation of the union."

Lincoln's Democratic opponent that year was Major General George B. McClellan, a Pennsylvania native who had served as general-in-chief of the Union Army. Union military victories in Atlanta and the Shenandoah Valley in September seemed to bring the end of the war within sight, but Lincoln still anticipated a close race with McClellan, fearing he might lose both Pennsylvania and New York to his challenger.²



Portrait of A.M. Brown, a Pittsburgh lawyer who served as chairman of the Union Executive Committee of Allegheny County.

HHC Detre L&A, History of Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, 1889.

Lincoln knew that winning the soldier vote would be the key to carrying the closely contested state.³ Lincoln was indeed popular among enlisted men, and the election of 1864 marked the first time that many states allowed soldiers to vote without returning to their home district. In Pennsylvania, those in military service could vote by proxy providing that their taxes had been assessed and paid within the last two years. The correspondence in the letter book reveals that Brown, in the

weeks preceding the election, worked to ensure that Allegheny County soldiers had their taxes paid and ballots to record their vote. The efforts of Brown and the Union Executive Committee of Allegheny County, along with those of similar organizations throughout the state, helped Lincoln carry Pennsylvania on Election Day, on the way to a resounding defeat of McClellan.

¹ Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2005), 648.

² Ibid., 662.

³ Alexander Kelly McClure, *Old Time Notes of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: The John C. Winston Company, 1905), 153-154.

The form sent to Allegheny County soldiers who were voting by proxy.

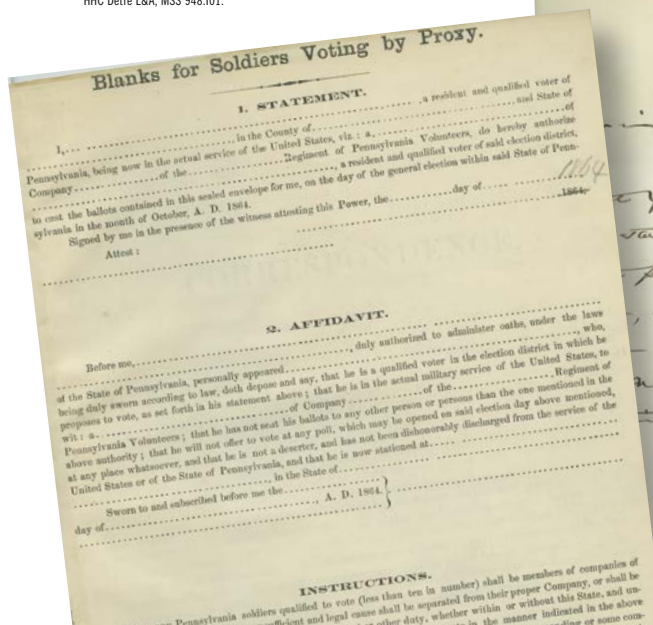
HHC Detre L&A, MSS 948.101.

A letter from Thaddeus Stevens declining an invitation.

HHC Detre L&A, MSS 948.104.

A letter to A.M. Brown requesting that taxes be paid for five Allegheny County soldiers recuperating in the Alexandria Hospital.

HHC Detre L&A, MSS 948.105.



Lancaster, Pa. 17. 11. 64

I should be glad to be able to be your invitation unambiguously put state of my health for the last two weeks, day permit that - I hope you will allow, however, if able to drop in among on the 24th had much with the men the some place with depe

Thaddeus Stevens

Washington D.C. Oct 22nd 1864

M. Brown Esq

Dear Sir,

Please pay the tax on

Richy. McCandless's Sonship

Henry Mifflet " "

Dr. Elwell Richmond " "

W. Mackey Pitt " "

Stuart Allegany City all in good

negro Hospital in Washington D.C.

the Receipt to me

Yours Truly,

Joseph M. Wilson

Sic. Exp. Comm. Legat. Penns.

These persons are in the Alexandria Hospital

state this fact on the receipt you send



Smithsonian Connection

Lowe Press, portable printing press, patented 1856

Multiple companies developed small portable printing presses in the 1850s, which the military used during the Civil War. Philadelphian Samuel W. Lowe patented this version in 1856 and offered five sizes of it (through a Boston firm) ranging from 12 to 120 pounds. Federal regiments such as the 100th Roundheads and the 13th Pennsylvania used such presses to print military orders, receipts, and camp newsletters. As the war escalated, many companies left such equipment behind as they marched to battle.



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