

OLD-TIME POLITICKING

With the Fall election approaching, a look at old-style politics—before internet, TV or radio—is timely. Berwick newspaperman Ted Fenstermacher in 1940 noted the change in politicking at that date compared to the era before World War I (and before use of outdoor amplifiers). In response to Fenstermacher’s column, Bloomsburg miller and historian H. V. White recalled an even earlier era, around 1870, when a grand political parade in the county seat featured a contest of one-upmanship with horse-drawn wagons.

(Thanks to previous Newsletter editor George Turner for providing these old newspaper items.)

Activities of Political Parties

“The Passing Throng,” *Morning Press*, October 29, 1940

The Remark most frequently heard during the last week had to do with the change in pre-election activities.

“If this had been a quarter of a century ago,” remarked one observer Saturday, “practically every member of the bar would be unable to speak much above a whisper by this time. Their services would have been enlisted for weeks in speaking in this schoolhouse and that throughout the county. In those days, every campaign manager—of both parties—thought it necessary to completely cover the county with their spellbinders.”

There is no question but that times have changed in election campaigning, with the transition gradual since the turn of the century.

Back in the eighties and nineties, politics was an intimate, personal affair. Every youngster used the expression “Up Salt River.” There was never a political parade that didn’t include the “Salt River” boat. [*On the obsolete term Salt River see WHAT IS IT? p. 9.*]

The parties went in much those days for ox roasts. Our first recollection of such a roast was one held by the Democrats on a field off Mill street in Catawissa—near the present location of Alphonso Baker’s rock garden.

Marching clubs ruled in those days and in Bloomsburg both the Democrats and Republicans went in strongly for that sort of thing. Real money was spent on the uniforms and no marcher was completely outfitted unless he carried over his shoulder a torch, for which kerosene furnished the illumination. High hats were often a part of each marcher’s uniform. The last of those we saw was one William Chrisman cherished and brought out on special occasions—a grey topper.

The Republicans had their headquarters for years on the third floor of what is now the Moose building. The Democrats usually used the old opera house [on the site of the present BTE theater, Center Street] to receive the election returns, but we can’t recall where their marching club maintained its headquarters.

On election night the returns came in by Western Union and duplicate “flimsies” were delivered by messenger boys to the respective headquarters. Then, as now, these returns were pilfered from The Associated Press, the only press organization that does the complete job of gathering the election returns throughout the nation on election night.

Our first recollection of a political parade in Bloomsburg was that held by Democrats to celebrate the election of Grover Cleveland, as president [in 1892]. The up-creek contingent came down on a special B. & S. train. The parade formed on Market street between Fifth and Sixth. There were plenty of high hats that night. An outstanding recollection in connection with that parade is of a huge rooster, built around a marcher. Torches furnished all the illumination except for the red fire liberally used along the sidewalks. Parades have lost something since the public has ceased burning red fire.

One of Bloomsburg’s biggest political parades—coming to a later date—was that staged by the Republicans when Dr. E. W. Samuels, of Mount Carmel, was elected congressman [in 1904]. With the exception of the year [1894] Monroe H. Kulp, of Shamokin, broke through the old solid Democratic Sixteenth District to defeat Senator Charles R. Buckalew, running that year on the Democratic ticket for Congress, that was the first the Democrats had gone down to defeat in the Sixteenth District.

Few who saw it will forget the premature parade Clyde Yetter and a few others staged on Main street early the morning following election [in 1912] when they thought William Howard Taft had been re-elected as president. But their parade was staged too early. Woodrow Wilson went in as the first Democratic president since Grover Cleveland’s last term. The three-cornered fight among Taft, Roosevelt and Wilson made that possible.

Clyde was adorned that night in high hat and Prince Albert coat, and thus garbed had every right to lead any parade. It was a long time before he lived down his premature activity.

The last really big political parade Bloomsburg ever witnessed—unless memory fails us—is the night William Krickbaum’s cohorts celebrated when the Supreme Court decided he had been elected associate judge by 23 votes. All his remaining days “Krickie” wore a gold button in his coat lapel, bearing the numerals “23.”

In a knock-down and drag-out fight Krickie” won that year over George M. Hughes, with the Mifflin township vote included.

In that township some of the regularly constituted election officials failed to appear and new officials were quickly placed on the job. There was no question of any irregularity in the voting. The only irregularity had to do with the officials presiding.

The same Clyde Yetter had promoted the Hughes campaign. He was in the Republican saddle at the time.

He instituted court proceedings and Judge Evans threw out the Mifflin township vote. That gave the office to Hughes.

Krickbaum acted quickly. He employed [Bloomsburg attorney] Fred Ikeler as counsel and Hughes was prevented from taking his seat pending the appeal to the [Pennsylvania] Supreme Court. That body decided in Krickbaum's favor.

"Billie" Allen, one of "Krickie's" cohorts, thereupon started setting the stage for the parade. It was a real parade, no question of that. And "Krickie" sat on the porch of his East street residence, carnation in buttonhole, having the time of his life.

The aftermath was the presentation by Ikeler to Krickbaum of a bill for \$1,000 for his services. "Krickie" paid the bill, but from that day until his death he grasped every occasion to berate his counsel.

As a matter of fact, during the heat of the fight, Krickbaum would have given almost his last cent to have won that fight.

Since then we haven't heard much about political parties.

The Town's Political Parades

"The Passing Throng," *Morning Press*, November 1, 1940

The Passing Throng man's story on the town's political parades called to mind an earlier political parade in Bloomsburg.

It was in the campaign of 1870 when the Columbia county Democrats were cocksure of winning the election of their candidate for governor.

A booster meeting and parade were scheduled to take place in Bloomsburg and the farmers, especially those up Fishing Creek, vied to see who could bring the most men. Farm wagons, with two, four, six and eight horses, loaded with men as thick as they could stand in the wagon body, came from all directions.

John White at Light Street took the tongue from one wagon, coupled it behind another, hooked on six horses, loaded a full cargo of enthusiastic Democrats, and drove off prepared to lead the parade.

Cyrus McHenry, of Stillwater, started with the same outfit and same ambitions and when he reached Orangeville and was told that John White was ahead with the same equipment, he persuaded Wesley Bowman to hook his pair of greys on the lead and he drove into Bloom the King Bee of the day.

The parade formed at the Forks Hotel and was led by Dr. Gardner as marshal, down Main to West, to Fifth, to East to Main. And it was some parade!

Flags, bunting, banners, high hats, fireworks and stentorian voices—nothing like it these days.

The aftermath was not so jubilant. John Traub, who lived at the first canal bridge on the Berwick road, started down East street with his fine team of spirited horses when some one threw a fire cracker in his wagon box, set fire to the straw and the team took fright and ran at full speed. The running team and the burning straw proved the greatest excitement of the day. With his clothes on fire Traub held on to the reins and landed home with but slight damage.

To a boy of twelve this proved an exciting event.

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