

Politics, Politics, What Fun!

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Continuing with the theme of local politics, here is a reprint from the October 1980 issue of the Quarterly, Volume 18, Number 4.

One of the most hotly contested elections in Chester County was back in 1832 when Andrew Jackson ran against John Quincy Adams, or the "Anti's" against the "Aristocrats."

What were the "Anti's"? They began as organizations against the Society of Free Masons, "Anti-Masons", but before long the "Anti's" were running wild. There were all kinds: Anti-Republicans, Anti-Taxationists, Anti-Canal, Anti-Slavery — you name it and there was an "Anti" against it. And they really had things hot and heavy in the County all that summer.



Joseph Ritner, the eighth governor of Pennsylvania, was elected on the Anti-Masonic ticket in 1835. *Image from the State Museum of Pennsylvania.*

Two "Anti" newspapers started publishing in the County. One was in West Chester, published by Joseph Painter, "The Anti-Mason Register"; the other was in Coatesville, published by Dr. John Perkins and called "The Anti-Mason Examiner." In a short time they united under Painter as "The Anti-Mason Register and Chester County Examiner", published weekly, with a circulation of over two thousand. By the next election, in 1836, it was credited as being the main instrument in getting Joseph Ritner, an Anti-Masonic Whig, into the gubernatorial chair. After Ritner's administration, however, the "Anti's" began to fade and the party became known as the "Whigs."

During the campaign in 1832 "The Old Hickory Club" organized at "The Ship" in West Whiteland township. They were Democrats, pushing for Jackson's re-election. (They had no Anti-Whiskey members, even though the temperance movement was picking up momentum at this time. All the members proclaimed the Widow Evans at "The Ship" served good food and the best whiskey in the County for toasting Jackson, Wolf, and Wilkins.)

Politics had gone into high gear by October, and the Democratic Congressman Joshua Evans and his brother set up a big rally at their tavern, "The General Paoli." They called it the "Great Rally of the Democracy against the Aristocracy."

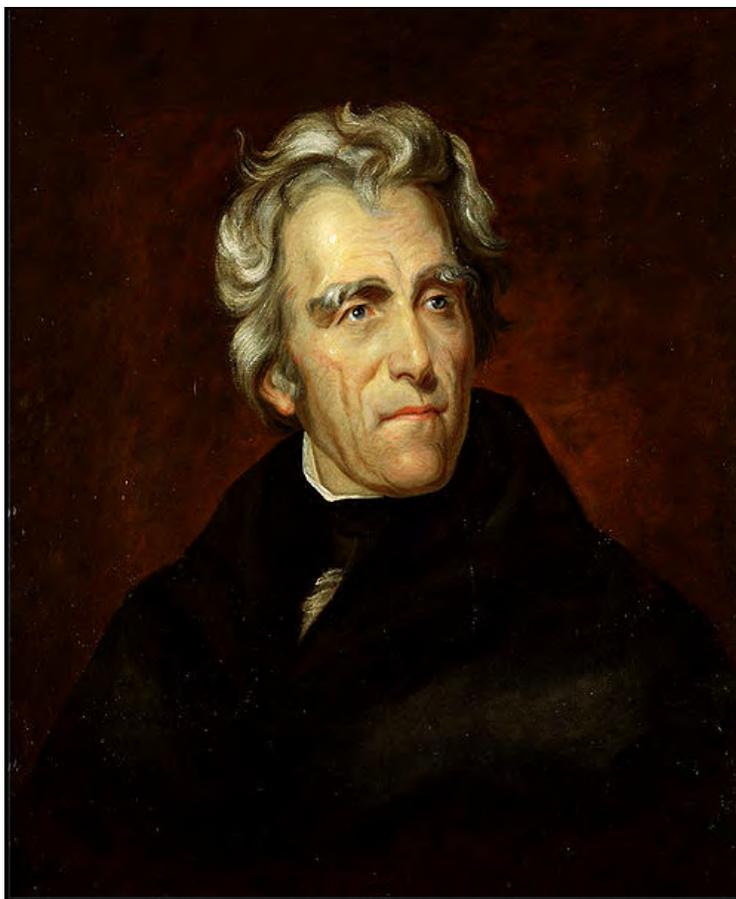
"The General Paoli" was also the polling place for the five townships surrounding it and one of the big political headquarters in the County. On the day of the Rally all roads leading to "The Paoli" were crowded with men and boys heading for the festivities.

"The Old Hickory Club" did itself proud, that day! It came down the Lancaster Pike from "The Ship" in marching order, four abreast, led by two Marshals, Nimrod Strickland and Wilmer Worthington. Then came the buglers, and a horseman carrying a brand new American flag with twenty stars on it. Behind them, men followed on horseback, in ranks according to the color of their horses, and following them, men in haywagons and dearborns, decorated with cedar and shellbark boughs, all cheering for "Old Hickory" as they passed each tavern along the road.

General Evans fired off "Old Diana", a big brass cannon belonging to The Republican Artillerists of Chester County, when the parade came within sight of the inn. As the parade entered the inn yard a band struck up with "Yankee Doodle" and "Independence Day Has Come."

There were plenty of speeches and barrels of whiskey, with spigots, for toasting all day. "Here's to Old Hickory" and "Down with the Aristocrats" could be heard far into the night. Quite a few of the "Anti's" showed up and pitched into the Jackson whiskey, and "Old Hickory" was re-elected.

According to the Chester County website (www.chesco.org), eight Anti-Masons held the position of County Commissioner between 1829-1838, including John Malin of East Whiteland Township. The Anti-Masonic party eventually merged with the National Republicans to form the Whig Party. Whigs served as County Commissioners from 1840-1853. None of the Anti-Masons or Whigs were from Tredyffrin or Easttown. In the mid-1850s, many Whigs, including Abraham Lincoln, joined the newly formed Republican Party. While partisan politics continues to play an important role in our area today, perhaps we can be grateful that the campaigning is somewhat more subdued than in the days of Andrew Jackson.



"Old Hickory", Andrew Jackson, seventh President of the United States (1829-1837). Painting by Thomas Sully. www.senate.gov