

THE WHISKEY REBELLION

Good day everyone...it's a beautiful day in Pennsylvania.

When Abraham Lincoln called from them, Pennsylvania sent into battle some 350,000 fighting men--to preserve the American Union. Thus, it is hard to believe that in three periods in its history, prior to the Civil War, Pennsylvania was the scene of rebellion against the authority of the Federal Government. Loyal as Pennsylvanians were, they were the first ever to defy the government and test its power. The first heavy tax levied by Congress upon any important home-made product was an excise on whiskey--today eighty percent of its cost is tax. The tax in that day would appear trifling in comparison, yet in 1794, the price of whiskey was trifling also, which made the tax proportionately greater. There were then in the state hundreds of small distilleries, where today there are only three. They were not as a rule owned by companies but by individual farmers. In our economy, whiskey was a by-product of good rye production and it was better to convert it to the barrel than to the bushel--economically. Of course, politics enters into the thing--Jefferson's party then strongly opposing the Federalists who supported Washington. In Western Pennsylvania, men were as they still are free thinkers, these on the outer fringes of the Union--independent talkers around a mountain country stove; rough men compared to the effete influences of the national capitol at Philadelphia. In the Monongahela country they shouted: "We fought against a tyrannous tax laid down by England on tea and paper, why should we submit to a greater tax on American whiskey?" And they answered their own

question with shot guns when Federal agents demanded that they pay the excise. Abler Gallatin, later our Secretary of the Treasury, (and a Western Pennsylvanian) roared against the iniquity of a whiskey tax. Guns barked down the hills and riots occurred when the Federals would employ force. But the Federal government said---"If Pennsylvania won't pay a whiskey tax, will the rest of the nation pay any tax?" The answer was obvious. George Washington met the crisis with calm courage as he always did. He ordered an army to march into Western Pennsylvania--along the Braddock trail. He donned his old uniform for the last time at his mansion in Philadelphia, and rode one of his superb horses to Carlisle. He intended to act as Commander-in-Chief--the right of the President. The musketeers beyond the Alleghenies then suddenly sobered. They didn't wait for Washington; they simply paid their taxes and the Whiskey Rebellion was at an end. Jefferson, when he ran for President, got a lot of his votes from the strongholds of Western Pennsylvania--and they held to his party for half-a-century thereafter. One must admire Washington's raw courage in the face of rebellion among his own people--as usual he faced the issue squarely, despite the fact that as a distiller himself in Virginia, he probably thought the tax obnoxious--but necessary.

This is Pete Wambach. It's a beautiful day in Pennsylvania.