

THE OLD TIME ELECTIONS

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

In old political Pennsylvania there are election stories and political stories. The fights in Philadelphia over both the Declaration and the Constitution are in that category, but are preserved as hallmarks of Americana, not tainted in gory, time-hallowed rust of politics. Pennsylvanians have always taken their politics seriously, as when the Pennsylvania delegation swung for Abraham Lincoln in 1860, or when they swung with Arthur James for Wilkie in 1940 and for Dewey in 1948 with Edward Martin. These were affairs of a national nature, and as I had pointed out in a story before, Pennsylvania swung many of the nation's national conventions. The old time local campaigns however, with their torch-light parades with Boss Tweed type politicians exhorting paid hirelings to "vote today and vote often"--those are the historical political happenings that make the past interesting. William Rimmel, Pittsburgh newsman sometime ago reminisced of such pasts in a column, stating that Alleghenians took their politics seriously years ago. As did other countians in the Commonwealth, and still do. Speakers were treated with catcalls, and found themselves targets for a barrage of mud and missiles. Shame it doesn't happen anymore! After the Harrisburg Whig convention in 1839, when John Tyler spoke in West Park Commons in Pittsburgh it turned into a riotous

affair. The famed Pittsburgher General William Robinson was hit by a brick in front of his home. A howling mob chased the son of a Whig editor after the young man had belted one of the speakers at a rally. After a close riotous campaign in Pittsburgh, the folks were so jubilant they shot off a cannon in front of the home of the mayor-elect there, breaking windows and nearly killing the political hero of the hour. Ah, and those political rallies were something! I've seen them in the past quarter-century at the North Side Armory and they were noisy, but not like the marching clubs, attired in colorful uniforms and lighted torches marching through the streets. On election day, ward leaders everywhere set up their barrels of beer. And Jimmy McKay, a tavern owner conducted his mayoralty campaigns in a more direct way--like the Great McGinty. He gave McGinty and even Skeffington of the "Last Hurrah" a few lessons. He'd take the army of thieves sheltered in his tavern and others, on the rounds of polling places where they voted again and again. Jimmy's boys voted as many as a dozen times during the day. Elections were colorful--and they were crooked! One remembers fifty years ago, an Allegheny County event--in which votes were allegedly dumped into the river--to swing a state primary party. Ah, those were the days the old timers said--"Vote early and often"--Well sir, this is election day in Pennsylvania. Vote today--'nuff said.

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