

WILL BE INDUCTED INTO PENNA. HALL OF FAME

Thaddeus Stevens to Be Honored

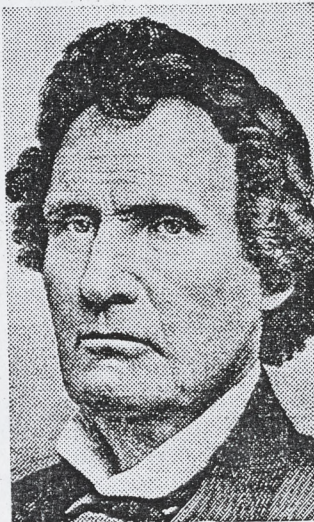
A famous Lancastrian will be inducted into the Pennsylvania Hall of Fame, 106 years after his death.

Thaddeus Stevens, a local attorney who led the Republican forces in Congress during the immediate Reconstruction period of the Civil War, will be the honoree.

Jack W.W. Loose, 3311 Columbia Ave., president of the Lancaster County Historical Society, will deliver the installation speech for Stevens at the third annual meeting of the Pennsylvania Hall of Fame, scheduled for Girard College in Philadelphia on Saturday, Nov. 16.

3RD YEAR

This is the third year that the society has named a list of six Pennsylvania residents for inclusion in the Hall of Fame. The group was organized in 1972 by



THADDEUS STEVENS

Ralph L. Coleman Jr., a Bucks County historian.

S.R. Slaymaker II, Gap, is a member of the board of jurors making selections for the honor.



JACK W.W. LOOSE

Slaymaker said today that the selection of membership in the Hall of Fame is made from outstanding Pennsylvanians making contributions of value to the state

and nation who lived a significant part of their lives in Pennsylvania.

PAST RECIPIENTS

Named to the honor in prior years have been:

William Penn; Benjamin Franklin; Charles Wilson Peale, the painter; Stephen Girard, the financier; Andrew Gregg Curtin, Civil War governor of the commonwealth; Andrew Carnegie, steel king and philanthropist; James Wilson, philosopher; Dr. Benjamin Rush, early physician; James Buchanan, 15th President of the United States; Stephen Foster, composer; John Wanamaker, merchant; and Gifford Pinchot, former governor.

CAME HERE IN 1841

Stevens, known as one of the architects of the plot to impeach President Andrew

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Thaddeus Stevens to Join Pa. Hall of Fame

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Johnson and a firebrand Republican whose influence delayed justice in the formulation of reconstruction to the defeated South, came to Lancaster in 1841 from Gettysburg. He was a resident here and representative in Congress until his death in 1868, just two months after the passing of his most hated rival, James Buchanan.

Club-footed, and weighted with age, he was carried to the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives on a litter to register his vote for Johnson's impeachment.

Following his death in Washington, D.C., he became one of the few members of the House to be honored by lying in state in the Rotunda of the Capitol.

Loose said today that during the funeral cortege which bore him to Shreiner's Cemetery here at Chestnut and Mulberry streets, a violent thunderstorm broke, prompting many of the mourners and townspeople to compare the "great commoner" and his life with the thunder and lightning which accompanied his burial.

REMARKS BY JOHN WARD WILLSON LOOSE ON THE
INSTALLATION OF THE HON. THADDEUS STEVENS
IN THE PENNSYLVANIA HALL OF FAME

16 November 1974 A.D.

Ladies and gentlemen, officers, judges, and guests of the Pennsylvania Hall of Fame's Third Annual Banquet: I am pleased to extend to you the compliments of the Lancaster County Historical Society this evening as we gather to honor those Pennsylvanians who have left their indelible mark upon our commonwealth and nation.

Announcement in the local press that Congressman Thaddeus Stevens was to be inducted into the Pennsylvania Hall of Fame evoked a small storm of protest. Numerous telephone calls and letters--many anonymous--to this speaker is sufficient evidence to demonstrate the effect Stevens had on the history of our nation. Though dead for 106 years, the "Old Commoner" continues to inflame men and create controversy. Perhaps some members present this evening will go away with unsettled feelings.

The Hall of Fame in its third year of existence has chosen to pursue a courageous course in selecting Thaddeus Stevens for inclusion among Pennsylvania's most worthy past citizens. I say "courageous" because even an institution as young as the Pennsylvania Hall of Fame will not be excused for juvenile impetuosity. No, the Hall of Fame has acted with uncommon courage in the face of what most assuredly has been a controversial choice. I commend the judges and directors for exhibiting precisely that virtue possessed in abundance by Thaddeus Stevens.

Who, then, is this man you have elected to stand among our historic figures? A man characterized as a saint by some, as a madman by others; an apostle of hate by his enemies, and a being "darkly wise and rudely great" by sympathetic historians. To some critics he was a murderer, an adulterer, and a beast of no morals.

Carl Sandburg described him thus: "Scholar, wit, zealot of liberty, part fanatic, part gambler, at his worst a clubfooted wrangler possessed of endless javelins, at his best a majestic and isolated figure wandering in an ancient wilderness, thick with thorns, seeking to bring

justice between man and man---who could read the heart of limping, poker-faced old Thaddeus Stevens?

An editor from Alabama painted this picture of our hero: "I have no wish to wrong even this wicked man, whose terribly wretchedness gapes frighteningly at him from the hopeless grave upon whose brink he stands--this patricide and murderer--this demon who will soon leave an immortality of hate and infamy for an eternity of unutterable woe...this malicious, pitiless, pauseless enemy of an entire nation--this misanthrope, whose curses of mankind shall be written upon his loathed tomb an awful epitaph--this viperous, heartless, adulterous beast, whose horrid life has converted an "image of God" into plagiarism of devils--this living sepulcher of all hideous things, upon whose body in his mother's womb was fixed hades' seal of deformity." [George M. Drake, editor, Union Springs Times]

Little Thaddeus was born in 1792 in Vermont to a mother possessed of tremendous ambition and a near-fanatical Calvinist piety. His father could not cope with life when sober; he deserted his family after a few years. Like his brother before him, Thaddeus was born with a deformed foot. In that day such deformities were interpreted as punishment visited upon sinners; indeed, the ugly and misshapen part was considered tangible evidence of the devil's presence. Stevens was stung by his schoolmates' jeers and laughter as he limped among them. Later, he was to be rebuffed by the requirement of the Masonic Order that its members have physical integrity. Although he was ^{not} attached to the doctrines of Calvinism--or any other religious system--Stevens would say on occasion--perhaps cynically--"I am one of the devil's children, and this club foot of mine is proof of my parentage."

Ugly rumors seemed to follow Thaddeus Stevens throughout his life, from the ridiculous claim that he was the illegitimate son of Count Tallyrand to the more plausible accounts of his relationship to his mulatto housekeeper, Lydia Smith. After his graduation from Dartmouth in 1814, Stevens moved to Pennsylvania where he taught school and taught himself law at York. When he thought himself ready to take the bar examination, the York County Bar hastily passed a resolution which disqualified Stevens. Undaunted, Stevens went to Bel Air, Maryland, about 40 miles south of York, where he passed the examination by answering a few questions on Coke and Blackstone. He also expressed his appreciation to the examining

judge by presenting him with several bottles of Madeira.

Having thus thwarted the York County lawyers, he opened an office in Gettysburg. Before his first year of practice was ended, Stevens had earned himself fame by his brilliant defense of a feeble-minded farmer who killed a constable with a scythe. He handled more than fifty murder cases, winning all but one---and frequently using the plea of insanity as the defense. Ironically, Stevens' first victory before the Pennsylvania Supreme Court was in behalf of a slaveholder who was trying to regain possession of his slave who claimed freedom in Pennsylvania. Thirty years later he would attract national attention by his successful defense of the defendants in the Christiana Riot treason trial wherein the roles were reversed.

Stevens came close to marrying a girl, but when she suggested he buy her a ring she admired, he discontinued his courtship, and never married anyone.

His law practice grew, and Stevens invested in property, including the Caledonia Iron Works which the Confederate invaders eventually destroyed. With his entrance into politics the absentee ownership of his properties nearly drove him into bankruptcy. Stevens was a poor businessman and he detested the details of finance.

In 1833 Stevens was elected to the Pennsylvania House of Representatives on the Anti-masonic ticket. His hatred of Freemasonry knew no limits. But if he hated the Masonic Order, he loved with equal vigor the idea of free public education, a cause he supported throughout his life. His speech for an appropriation for Gettysburg College in 1834 was regarded as a masterpiece, second only to his stirring oration to the Pennsylvania General Assembly in 1835 when that body was set to repeal the public education law. He succeeded in turning a certain defeat into a stunning victory. Rarely did legislative speeches change votes; Stevens' speech reversed entire voting blocs. Hence his reputation as "Father of the Pennsylvania Free Public Schools." Towards the end of his life Stevens considered this act the most important one of his life, and even his hordes of critics could hardly disagree.

He served in the legislature during the terms 1833-1835, 1837, and 1841, and was a member of the Pennsylvania Constitutional Convention of 1838. During that year he also served as canal commissioner.

Stevens moved to Lancaster in 1842 where the skilled lawyer could earn more money. Immediately he became active in Lancaster politics, first as an Anti-mason, and later as a Whig. The transition was stormy because Lancaster Whigs tended to be rather conservative on the slavery problem. Stevens insisted the local Whigs strike out hard against slavery, a position that divided the Whigs many years. He was elected as a Whig to the 31st and 32nd Congresses (1849-1853), and as a Republican to the 36th, 37th, 38th, 39th, and 40th Congresses (1859-1868). He was elected to the 41st Congress after his death as a mark of respect by Lancastrians.

During his congressional career, Stevens was a bitter foe of slavery and those who owned slaves. His invective was hurled not only at those who supported slavery, but also at those who failed to stand up against it as strongly as Stevens did.

His cynicism and bitterness made him a man dangerous to oppose and nearly impossible to love as a person. His sarcasm and waspish wit probably are unparalleled in American political history.

He opposed the moderate measures President Andrew Johnson proposed for reconstruction after the Civil War, and insisted the South must be crushed. No mercy was to be shown to those who owned slaves and who led the Confederacy. When the articles of impeachment against President Johnson were adopted, the House turned to Stevens for leadership. He managed the impeachment process with his customary vigor despite approaching death. The failure of the Senate to convict the President capped the bitterness of the aged congressman. He died in Washington, 11 August 1868.

Back home in Lancaster, he was laid to rest in Shreiner's Cemetery in a plot Stevens had purchased because the graveyard did not have any restrictions on color. His mulatto housekeeper was not buried in the same cemetery as many persist in believing, but in St. Mary's Catholic Cemetery inasmuch as she was of that faith. Throughout his life Stevens fought, often against great odds, to gain the civil rights of oppressed minorities, whether they were black or yellow, Gentile or Jew, rich or poor, or society's outcasts.

Too often we regard our political leaders not as human beings with their moments of weakness but as supermen, possessed of inflexible integrity. Even the heroes of Greek tragedy had their fatal flaws. What is most important, I think, is that we recognize these men were human beings, and that they rose to great heights on occasion, heights that have become landmarks of our humanity and our civilization. Thaddeus Stevens was such a man, and it is entirely proper that we honor him tonight.

John Ward Willson Loose
President
Lancaster County Historical
Society