

## THESIS.

Subject, The Whiskey Insurrection

Name, Charles L. Snow



1.  
When, after the close of the Revolution, the three branches of the government were firmly established and their functions plainly delineated, the question arose as to how the current expenses of the government and the tremendous war debt which had accumulated should be met in such a way as neither to injure the already fast increasing commerce of the states nor enhance the liberties of the commonwealth at large.

In looking over the statute books, a bill was discovered which had been adopted by the Provincial Assembly in 1772, entitled a "Bill of Aid and Assistance of the Government" wherein a tax had levied on all domestic and foreign distilled spirits.



This bill which had been very unpopular at its formation, was resurrected in 1791 and instantly became even more unpopular, especially in the western counties of Pennsylvania where whiskey was universally distilled and used; there being an average of one distillery to every six farmers.

Here it was not only used as a beverage but it took the place of money which was especially scarce in these back woods districts, and as the principal occupation of the people here was farming and as there were no markets except east of the Alleghenies, they were compelled to transport all their grain and other produce over the rough and rocky mountain paths by



means of mules to eastern settlements to find a market for them and bring back such commodities as sugar, salt, iron etc.

On these trips a mule could carry but five or six bushels of grain in its natural state thus making the cost of transportation nearly equal to the amount received for it; while in the distilled form a mule could carry the substance of twenty five bushels.

Thus the isolated position of these counties prohibited them from importing and consuming foreign liquors like their eastern brethren, and if this bill was enforced, while the eastern settlements were living in ease and luxury, the western counties would be paying a heavy



bounty for their most important product.

These settlers were of Scotch-Irish descent and had fostered the same hearty contempt for excise officers here as they had beyond the ocean, and remembering the resistance with which the Stamp Act and Boston Port Bill were met, they determined to meet this infringement on their rights in the same way.

Another 'bone of contention' was the clause compelling the violators of the excise laws to be transported to Philadelphia for trial. This was resisted on the same grounds as the colonies had resisted it years before when imposed by England.

With these considerations for



opposition the first excise officer, who happened to be a broken down Philadelphia saloon keeper, sent out by the government was given such a warm reception in Greensburg that he immediately retired to Washington Co. where half his head was shaved, the cockade cut from his hat, and he himself marched out of the county with instructions not to return.

Twelve arrests were made for this offense but all were cleared. Next Mr. Craig was sent out but he too failed and was followed by Mr. Hunter, who made seventy charges in Pittsburg against distillers, but they were set aside as irregular by the Pittsburg court.

A petition was now presented



6.  
to Congress praying for a repeal,  
stating that "Laborers were scarce  
and wages high and whiskey was  
an absolute necessity in keeping  
them, and, why not as proper  
to tax a man for eating his grain  
as for drinking it?"

This, however, was of no avail and  
Gen. John Neill, a Revolutionary  
officer, was appointed collector.  
He attempted to fill his office but  
signally failed; his house being burn-  
ed and he himself forced to leave  
the country.

On July 17, 1791, delegates from  
Westmoreland, Fayette, Allegheny,<sup>and</sup>  
Washington Counties headed by  
Albert Gallatin assembled at  
Old Fort Redstone, near Brownsville  
to discuss the mode of procedure.



They adopted resolutions stating that they would have nothing at all to do with, and would consider a public enemy any citizen accepting the office of collector of excise duties in either of the four counties.

Then followed a succession of lawless acts in which Robt. Johnson was tarred and feathered, his hair cut off, and he forced to resign his office. A deputy sheriff sent from Philadelphia with warrants returned without serving them for fear of his life.

The home of Mr. Kille at Uniontown was burned and a demented school master was tarred, feathered, and branded with a hot iron at Greenfield, now Coal Centre  
1792 and '93 were filled with like



outrages chief of which were the attack upon United States Marshal Knox and the shooting of Maj. M. C. Parlant at Bower Hill.

On July 23, 1794, an immense mass meeting was held at Mingo Creek Church in Wash. Co. led by Bradford, Breckinridge, Findley, and Gallatin.

Shortly after this the militia of the four counties was ordered to assemble at Braddock's Fields and soon over seven thousand were present not knowing for what they had been assembled. After rebellious speeches by the principal agitators and actions similar to the French Jacobins, the troops paraded through the principal street of Pittsburg and on Aug. 2. disbanded.

In the next mass meeting



called at Brownsville, Albert Gallatin, in a speech three hours long saved the counties from open rebellion and succeeded in having a committee appointed to confer with the U. S. Commissioners then at Pittsburg.

No satisfaction resulted from this however, and on Sept. 25. Pres. Washington called out the Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Virginia militia to quell the insurrection; and they were soon on full march towards the Monongahela Valley.

The Pa. troops under Gov. Mifflin massed at Carlisle where they were reviewed by Pres. Washington and Sec. Hamilton and then advanced via Bedford, across Somerset Co. to Mt. Pleasant.

The left wing under Gov. Lee of



Virginia advanced from Fort Cumberland over Braddock's route through Great Meadows to Uniontown where they were met by Washington and Hamilton, who, after going as far as Williamsport, near Fayette City, returned east.

Meeting with no resistance, the army now descended on the eastern bank of the river and went into camp at Budds Ferry near McEwensport and sent out parties to bring in offenders. In two days two hundred ragged men and boys were brought in and immediately sent east, guarded by a corps of wealthy Philadelphia-ns known as the "Gentlemen Corps". This virtually ended the trouble and on Nov. 17 all the soldiers, with the exception of twenty five hundred,



were ordered home.

On May 12, 1795, twenty true bills were found by the Grand Jury for treason. Two Germans from West<sup>md</sup><sub>cc</sub> Co. were sentenced to be shot but were afterwards pardoned.

This trouble known in history as "The Whiskey Insurrection" cost the government eight hundred thousand dollars and was the first real test of the stability of the American Republic. Had the insurrection been successful, the American Republic would have gone the way of all previous republics, and soon been a thing of the past, instead of the leader of nations which it now is.



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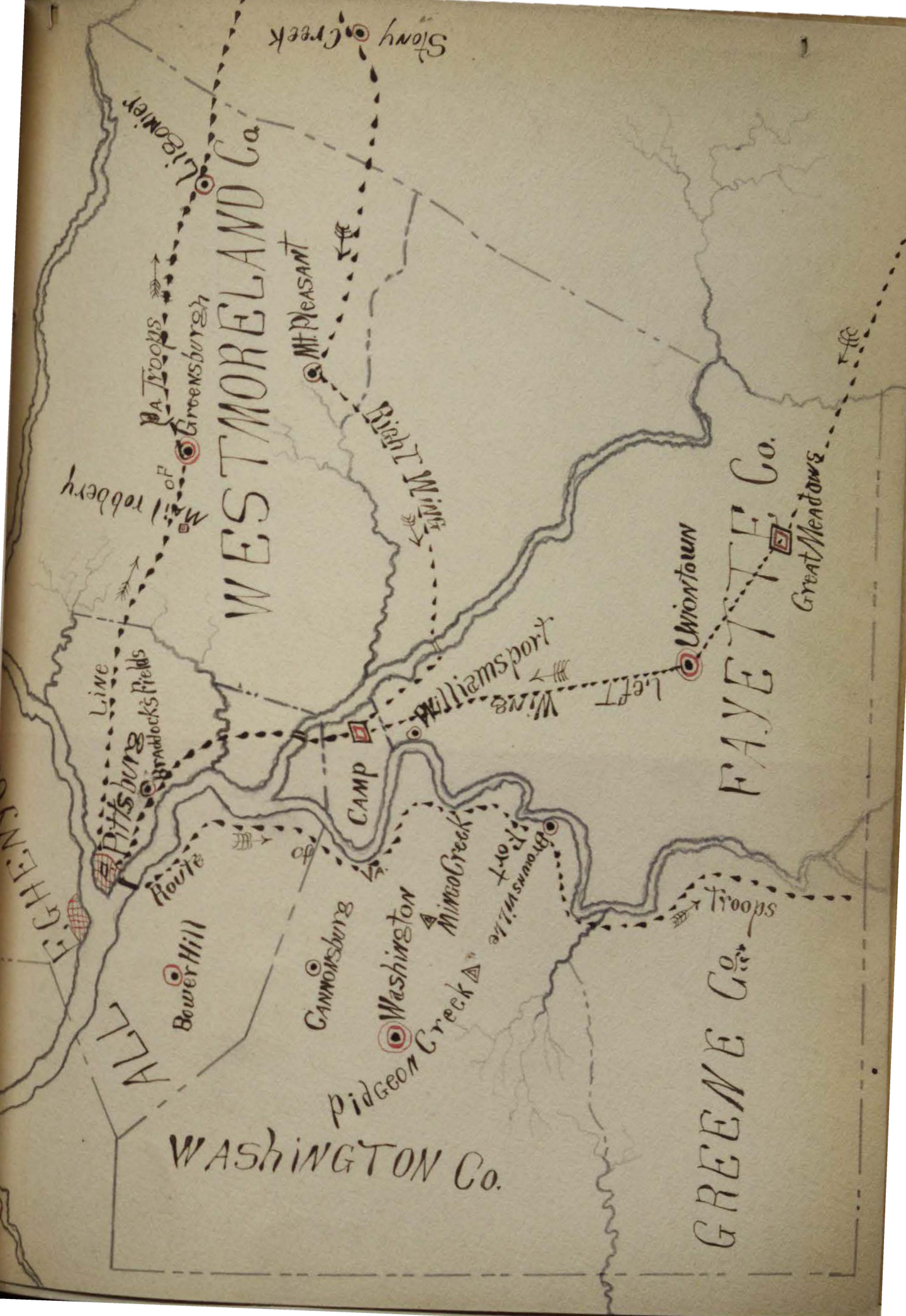
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WESTMORELAND Co.

FAYETTE Co.

GREENE Co.

WASHINGTON Co.

ALL

ECHEN

OLIVER

GREENSBURGH

MT. PLEASANT

RIGHT WING

UNIONTOWN

GREAT MEADOWS

STONY CREEK

MAIL ROBBERY

LINE

PITTSBURGH

ROUTE

BOWER HILL

CANNONSBURG

WASHINGTON

MINGO CREEK

PIDGEON CREEK

WINGSWEEPER

LEFT WING

TROOPS