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How Swanswick Won the Congressional Election of 1794

The 1794 congressional election in Philadelphia between Federalist Thomas Fitzsimmons and Democratic-Republican John Swanwick had many variables which affected the outcome of the election. In 1793, prior to the election, Philadelphia had been affected by the worst outbreak of yellow fever, a disease caused by the yellow fever virus spread by mosquitoes. This disease killed thousands and as a result, affected certain voters in the election of the following year. The excise tax was an ongoing tax on whiskey in which both candidates had a different stance on, which also affected the votes. Besides that, the two candidates had different classes, which led some voters to favor a candidate based on their own, similar class. Ultimately, the 1794 congressional election turned out in favor of Swanwick over Fitzsimmons mainly due to the yellow fever, the excise tax, and the difference in class.

After the devastating yellow fever outbreak, Swanwick was the candidate who was credited for its suppression. This was because while many Philadelphians fled to avoid infection, Benjamin Rush stayed to care for his patients. Rush was a Democratic-Republican doctor who was one of the few of his kind to actually stay and help the infected patients. He became very prominent from this which increased the support for the Democratic-Republicans, and in turn increased promotion for Swanwick, who was Democratic-Republican as opposed to Fitzsimmons. Rush is important because he revealed a trend in which areas which were hit the hardest by the yellow fever were the ones to vote for Swanwick. This can be proved by referring

to both sources 17 and 18, which display the wards and their respective death rates, along with the numbers of who voted for which candidate. By looking at the heavy death rates in a ward such as North Mulberry, one can then conclude that the voting ratio, 177 to fifty-nine, which in favor of Swanwick, directly correlated to the death rates. This shows how the yellow fever outbreak of 1793 influenced voters to vote Swanwick over Fitzsimmons in the congressional election of 1794.

The excise tax was another factor that contributed to the victory of Swanwick during the congressional election. The excise tax is a legislative tax on whiskey that was used in order to help pay off colonial debt. This tax was more detrimental to the lower class or small producers rather than the rich. This would cause more of the affected lower-middle class people to rally indirectly against Fitzsimmons, since he was a federalist, or someone who supported the excise tax. This can be supported by the wards where artisans were most prevalent, or the more lower class wards, who were more inclined to vote Swanwick rather than Fitzsimmons. An example of this can be seen in sources 9 and 18, where it shows the occupations of every male in each ward, along with the votes of the entire ward. In this case, South Mulberry, consisting mainly of artisans, voted an overwhelming majority of 217 to eighty for Swanwick. This trend is shared across the other wards in the northwest of Philadelphia. This data shows that since artisans made up most of the population and were most affected by the excise tax, they were the majority that voted for Swanwick, which in turn contributed to the upset victory of Swanwick against Fitzsimmons in the 1794 congressional election.

The different classes between the two candidates also affected the outcome of the election in Swanwick's favor. Fitzsimmons had always been a wealthy man, unlike Swanwick, who was more on the poorer side. This difference would sway the majority of Philadelphians who were

also in a similar class as Swanwick. These people would mainly consist of artisans who were plentiful and were the majority in select wards. An example of this would be a ward on the northern side towards the outskirts of the city, because the wards towards the middle were higher class neighborhoods and consisted of higher paid workers. A ward in particular would be North Mulberry, having a total of 353 out of 667 artisans of the population. In the election results by ward, North Mulberry had a vote of 177 in favor of Swanwick to fifty-nine in favor of Fitzsimmons. This proves how the majority of people, being lower class, tended to vote for Swanwick, who was in a similar class with them. It would also be important to note that areas that voted for Fitzsimmons had a considerable amount of merchants. This would reveal that being a merchant or any type of job relating to the sea was usually wealthier than being an artisan. An area in which clearly displays this is the dock, which had a total of 101 merchants and in which 125 people had voted for Fitzsimmons and only seventy-six for Swanwick. This means that there is also a trend where the wealthy people voted for Fitzsimmons, which further supports the case in which class affected the result of the congressional election. In this case the more wealthy voters preferred Fitzsimmons. This can be justified by source nine, which displayed the number of males with jobs in each ward and source eighteen, which displayed the voting result of each ward.

The congressional election of 1794 ended in the upset victory of challenger John Swanwick. This victory had many variables which convinced voters to vote for or against a specific candidate. The main variables being the yellow fever outbreak, where there was a deadly outbreak of yellow fever, a mosquito-borne infection, which garnered attention for Swanwick after the outbreak had concluded. Another one being the enforced excise tax, which angered some colonists to despise federalists, and in turn vote in favor of Swanwick, the candidate who

desired to get rid of the tax. The final one being the difference in class between the two candidates, to which the majority of lower-middle class voters voted in favor of Swanwick, who was less wealthy than his competitor Fitzsimmons.