

## Reflections of the Class of 1957

By JW Smith

What world or national event caught the most attention of the Class of '57 during our four years? A perusal of every issue of the Student Weekly in that span produced an inarguable answer – the presidential election of 1956, when Dwight Eisenhower won a second term over Adlai Stevenson.

There were other events that rated some mention, notably the threat of Soviet Russia, including the Hungarian revolt, but the paper was remarkably insular in those days. I could find nothing about Joe McCarthy, Brown v. Board of Education, Rosa Parks. The election was the biggie – articles in two issues in the spring of '56, and then in six straight in the fall.

It was not a watershed election. Every four years, somebody with no sense of history proclaims that “this is the most important election in our lifetime.” Nobody did that year, and nobody wrote a book about it. But it was important to us, because it was the first time we seniors could vote.

Nobody in the other classes could, unless they were Korean vets or fudged their age.

The stage was set in the spring, when the question arose about whether Eisenhower should run again after having suffered a September heart attack.

The SW reported that an Associated Collegiate Press poll found that 71 per cent of college students believed he should not. Two months later, an SW poll found 81 per cent of F&M students thought he should. Quick recovery.

The same poll saw Tenn. Sen. Estes Kefauver nosing out Stevenson as the Democratic choice, by nine votes.

On Oct. 10, the SW reported that the Young GOP Club (35 students) and the F&M Students for Stevenson and Kefauver (40) were formed the same night, the GOP in the Student Union and the Democrats in Diagnothian Hall. (The SW wondered if there was any significance in that the one met in a recreation hall and the other in a literary building.) It was observed that three students took the Democratic sound car to New Holland for a rally; the needle kept sticking.

The next week, Louis Gawthrop '58, the Dems' chairman, and John Dubbs, '57, the GOP president, authored articles touting their choice. Gawthrop said Eisenhower's goals were utopian because he had failed to lay the foundation for those goals, while the Democrats offered a leadership “geared to the coming age.” Dubbs said the GOP's slogan of “Peace, Prosperity and Progress” showed to the people “a better and sounder way of life,” emphasizing that the prosperity was based on peace rather than war.

The SW noted the only thing rarer than a Democrat millionaire is a Republican government professor, and suggested that the difference between an egg and an egghead is you can beat

an egg only once. The SW also wondered if the fact that a Democratic rally conflicted with an ROTC drill was carrying Adlai's peace program too far. Sid Wise posed looking bewildered at his car with an Eisenhower sticker on it.

Attorney General Herb Brownell came to Hensel Hall, and said Stevenson "thinks longer than any man I know of to come to the wrong conclusions," calling his views on the draft and H-bomb tests "fuzzy." The Democrats participated in a mailing of 15,000 letters to Republican and independents in the county.

Dick Schier, government, and Bill Toth, history, wrote articles supporting Stevenson and Eisenhower, respectively. Schier praised the youthfulness of Democratic leaders and the party's intellectual vitality.

Toth lauded the GOP's sound record and its generating hope among the oppressed.

The state senators from Lancaster (Republican) and York (Democrat) counties came to the campus on consecutive nights. Edward Kessler of Lancaster promised greater effort to get the government out of business. Harry Seyler of York cited Stevenson's concern for individual rights. Al Reider, '57, researched past campaigns for the SW. Among his findings: a plea was made in 1908 for classes to be canceled on Election Day; R.L. Herbst, father of Rene, '57, was chairman of the Democrats in 1916; Republican debaters defeated the Progressives (no Democrats?), 14-13, in 1924; professors endorsed Al Smith and students backed Herbert Hoover in 1928; Hoover topped Roosevelt in a 1932 straw vote, 279-196 (54 for Socialist Norman Thomas); Wilkie beat Roosevelt in 1940, 247-137.

The SW did not editorially endorse either candidate, but hinted strongly it liked Ike. It found flaws in both parties, but preferred the GOP platform on power, farm supports, Taft-Hartley and fewer costly promises. (People took platforms more seriously in those days.) The SW had strongly backed Adlai in '52.

An SW mock election four days before the voting gave 403 votes to Eisenhower and 163 for Stevenson, Ike capturing every class but Wise's political theory. Noel Laird's economic of distribution went 21-0 for Ike. Still, Adlai did better than he did in the national electoral vote, which went to Eisenhower by 457-73.

At F&M in the Pennsylvania Senate race, Democrat Joseph Clark tied Republican incumbent Jim Duff, 273-273, presaging the ballot splitting that cost Duff his seat.

Historians debate the effectiveness of the Eisenhower administration, but as we gaze back on the '50s with great nostalgia, he looks pretty good. Peace, though uneasy, was enjoyed. The Interstate Highway System remains a legacy. We can agree he was a remarkable man – a so-so West Pointer who became a great general; one with without academic credentials who became president of a prestigious university; one with no political background who became a popular two-term president. Stevenson's leadership ability remained untested.

Dick Tobin, New York political writer, speaking at F&M just after the election, claimed the landslide was a personal one and the GOP was in trouble. He speculated it might soon be as

dead as the Whigs. Eight years later, after the Goldwater debacle, he could have been hailed as a prophet.

But 48 years after that, we know he wasn't. There have been 13 presidential elections since 1956: Democrats have won six and Republicans seven.