

Locofocos

by Lynne Belluscio

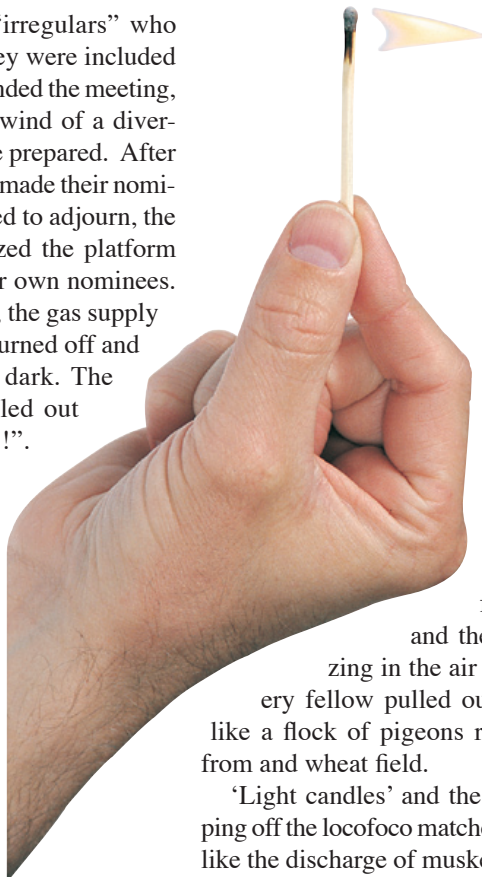
With the recent antics of the New York Senate where senators hid the gavel so the meeting could not be called and closed all the internet connections and turned off the lights and air conditioning in the Senate Chamber, I couldn't help but think of the Locofocos.

The word loco foco was the name for a friction match that was introduced in the early 1800s. The term came from the Spanish word for matches or "crazy lights." But in New York politics, it became a term for the Working Men's Party and the Equal Rights Party who were advocates for free trade, greater circulation of specie, and legal protection for labor unions. They supported Martin Van Buren and Andrew Jackson who opposed the Second Bank of the United States.

In 1835, the New York State Democratic Party was divided into two factions. On October 29, 1835, the Democrats gathered at Tammany Hall to make legislative nominations. Backed by Tammany Hall, the "regulators" pushed through their nominations. In the

meantime the "irregulars" who believed that they were included in the party, attended the meeting, and had gotten wind of a diversion. They came prepared. After the "regulators" made their nominations and voted to adjourn, the "irregulars" seized the platform to put forth their own nominees. At that moment, the gas supply to the hall was turned off and the room went dark. The "irregulars" called out "Draw candles!"

At that point, according to one newspaper account: "All obeyed the word and hundreds of dippers and moulds (candles) in the air like the sabers of Napoleon's cuirassiers ... the drill officer continued 'Handle pocket?' and the slapping and clapping was like a hailstorm. 'Pull out loco -



State of New York which the irregulars had met to adjust, the nominations were made, the essence of the party dispersed in as good order as could be expected." From that day on, the "irregulars" were called "loco focos."

The Equal Rights Party - the Locofocos as they were to be called - failed in the November elections, but in 1836 they elected two members to the State Assembly. They were never able to gain more support. They supported Van Buren's unsuccessful bid for the Democratic Presidential Nomination in 1844.

Although the party had disbanded, Whig opponents continued to call the Democrats "Locofocos" and described them as dangerous radicals. *The LeRoy Gazette* followed the antics of the Equal Rights Party and the Locofocos until they disappeared from the political scene.

It is said that history repeats itself. Let's just hope that the locofocos who are in Albany right now, won't require years to settle their issues.

foco!' and the wizzing in the air as every fellow pulled out was like a flock of pigeons raising from and wheat field.

'Light candles' and the snapping off the locofoco matches was like the discharge of musketry in a sham fight and the sudden illumination was like a flash of mock lighting in a theatre. Light being thrown upon the business of the



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