PITTSBURGH'S COMMERCIAL AND INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT DURING THE OPENING YEARS OF THE 19TH CENTURY

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PITTSBURGH, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, was an established town of about 2,000 inhabitants. By 1800 Pittsburgh's actual physical struggle against the frontier was over; the right to possess the land had been accepted; Indian troubles had been virtually non-existent in Western Pennsylvania since 1794; and the status of political relationship with the federal government had been defined. Pittsburgh was here to stay and grow!

Pittsburgh's commercial and industrial development was the result of a group of factors which worked intermittently. Pittsburgh was, and is, the product of many fortuitous circumstances, namely: a strategic location, easily accessible natural resources, an increasing population, and a people with a ready aptitude for manufacturing.

Of these factors none is more important than Pittsburgh's locale. The town's location, at the most strategic point at the headwaters of the Ohio, gave a great impetus to the growth, not only of the town's population, but also to its commerce and industry. Especially was this significant in the days when travel and transportation were limited to the packtrain, the wagon, and the river boat.

Pittsburgh's geographic importance was further emphasized because the Allegheny Mountains separated eastern and western Pennsylvania and seriously retarded transportation and communication between the two sections. Because of the high freight rates, people on the western side of the mountains looked to Pittsburgh for economic leadership and this dependency persisted even after the completion of the Pennsylvania State Works.

1 John Taylor, The Honest Man's Almanac for 1813 (Pittsburgh, 1813).
2 A. L. Kohlmeier, The Old Northwest as the Keystone of the Arch of American Federal Union (Indiana, 1938), 9.
Early Pittsburgh took the shape of the hub of a giant wheel whose spokes extended in all directions. The strength of the wheel depended substantially upon a strong hub, and upon the contributing support of each of the individual spokes that jointed the hub and the rim. Like spokes and hub uniting to form a good wheel, so did Pittsburgh and her rivers, roads and canals unite to produce an industrial center with a rapidly expanding trade area. Regardless of whether the channels brought commerce towards Pittsburgh, or carried it from Pittsburgh toward the periphery, they cooperated in strengthening the economic structure of Pittsburgh. The rivers, roads and canals, in addition to serving as conduits of economic goods, themselves stimulated settlement and economic development along their courses. Since they pointed toward Pittsburgh, their economic increment added materially to the commercial increment of the city at the forks of the Ohio.

Second, Pittsburgh was aided in her economic development because she was situated in the heart of a rich agricultural area. The soil of Western Pennsylvania was fertile, and the settlers were soon able to produce a surplus crop for sale. The port of Pittsburgh was the most convenient place for exchange or shipment, and for that reason, Pittsburgh became the middleman for the farmers of Western Pennsylvania. The abundance of conveniently located natural resources also furthered Pittsburgh’s commercial and industrial development. The land was covered by timber which furnished cheap building material. Coal was also plentiful and cheap, and although it was discovered and in use there for many years, it was not mined in large amounts until the industrial boom during the War of 1812. Iron ore, too, was readily available. The ore was not located in Pittsburgh proper, but the source of supply was not too remote. The neighboring counties of Fayette, Westmoreland, and Somerset, having abundant quantities of iron ore, early developed furnaces from which the iron was sent to Pittsburgh to be made into articles needed for household and industrial use. Pittsburgh was fortunate in having access to the ore region, because the weight of the iron was too great to allow its transportation from the East. The fabrication of this bar-iron marked the beginning of Pittsburgh’s industrial growth.

* Neville B. Craig, *History of Pittsburgh* (Pittsburgh, 1851), 95.
growth, and Pittsburgh grew in proportion as the demand for iron increased.

Third, Pittsburgh's commerce, likewise, was stimulated immeasurably by the demands of the emigrants who passed through Pittsburgh on their way to the "West." The increasing commercial activity resulting from the demands of these transients gave stimulus also to industrial development. Demands for farm implements and building tools produced an expansion of the iron industry, while textile manufacturing and boat building found a ready market. The emigrants also aided Pittsburgh by paying cash for their supplies, and the merchants had money once again in their strong boxes even though the amounts were small. Merchants anticipating future sales were not slow to realize that a potential market was being created if they could only continue to supply the settlers with manufactured goods.

Finally, not all the emigrants who came to Pittsburgh were transients; many stopped at the forks of the Ohio. Its natural resources and economic possibilities attracted skilled laborers in ever increasing numbers. As early as 1802 Zadok Cramer, one of the earliest advocates of home industries in Pittsburgh, estimated that there were 46 classes of master tradesmen, or a total of 163 master craftsmen. These men came to Pittsburgh because there was a demand for them. Blacksmiths, iron workers, brick makers, coopers, cloth weavers, tanners, masons—even "two hair dressers and perfumers" were included in this list. Thus, with the arrival of a skilled labor supply, Pittsburgh possessed the necessary prerequisites for manufacturing. The foundation for almost unlimited growth was laid.

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, Pittsburgh with its nascent manufacturing was eager, if not quite ready, to play the role as a provided for the west. Zadok Cramer, in his Almanac for 1802, produced the following report of Pittsburgh's manufactures:

In the town of Pittsburgh there is one extensive brewery; in its vicinity, there are two glass works, the

5 Zadok Cramer, Pittsburgh Almanack for the Year 1802, (Pittsburgh, 1802).
6 Ibid., 1802.
third for the finer kind of glass is erecting; one extensive paper mill, several oil mills, fulling mills, powder works, iron works, salt works, saw and grist mills, boat yards.

Such fellow citizens, is your spirit of enterprise. Your manufactures are going up around you as the weeds growth in a rich garden. Your exertions cannot be too much applauded. And, though Europeans may be jealous of your covering the seas with your Allegheny and Monongahela ships of war, they will do you the justice to admire your adventurous dispositions exhibited in so new a country.

By 1800 Pittsburgh, past her hand-to-mouth stage of existence, was beginning to have a surplus to send to market. Had the eastern markets been accessible, probably Pittsburgh's history would have been another epoch in the expansion of the Philadelphia market. Instead, Pittsburgh had a development of her own, and for some time afterward, she considered Philadelphia as a rival. The isolation that had been a disadvantage during the period of settlement proved to be a valuable incentive to economic development.

The earliest surviving estimated summary of manufacturing in Pittsburgh was made by Zadok Cramer in his *Almanack for the Year 1804*. The total value of Pittsburgh's manufactures was estimated by Cramer "to be upwards of $350,000." In the breakdown Cramer lists and partially prices 55 classes of goods which were manufactured in Pittsburgh. These manufactures were estimated by Cramer to total $266,403; this estimate included 12 items of country manufactures which were brought to Pittsburgh for the "bartering trade." The total value of these articles was estimated to be $92,505, thus making the total of Pittsburgh's manufactures $358,908.

An analysis of this summary shows that the iron industry takes first place even in 1803, with the grand total $56,548. Fifty tons of bar iron were produced in Pittsburgh proper; included were such specialized work as axes, hoes, nails, plough iron, ship-work, et cetera. Cramer quoted the selling price of bar iron at 17c per pound. He pointed out also that in the surrounding area bar iron was produced in the amount of 80 tons at a selling price of $160

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7 *Pittsburgh Commonwealth*, November 5, 1806.
per ton. Cut and hammered nails were produced in the amount of 40 tons in Pittsburgh borough and they sold at 18c per pound.

Textiles with a total value of $46,825 were second in importance in 1803. Linen was the best seller in the textile field with an output of 41,500 yards selling at 40c per yard both in Pittsburgh and in the country. Cotton, the new fabric of the nineteenth century, was second in the field with a total of 8,500 yards. Linsey-woolsey was still in demand with 7,500 yards being produced in 1803. Cotton was sold for $1.00 per yard in Pittsburgh and $.80 in the country; linsey-woolsey brought 50 to 60 cents per yard. Other textiles listed include tow linen, twilled bags, rag carpet, stockings, coverlid and diaper weave.

Boat building was third in value of products manufactured; the total given by Cramer at $40,000. Leather manufactured in Pittsburgh in 1803 amounted to $34,165 and placed fourth in value. Cramer estimated that $10,000 worth of leather was tanned in that year, and that 5,180 pairs of shoes were manufactured to sell at 75 cents per pair. Boots were sold at $6.00 per pair and 550 pairs were manufactured. Saddles and bridles were also important items produced in 1803. Cramer listed 450 saddles manufactured that sold for $15.00 apiece while 1,500 bridles were produced that sold at 50 cents each. And last of all, buckskin breeches and dressed skins were produced to the amount of $2,300.

Pittsburgh carpenters and furniture makers produced $33,900 worth of wood products in 1803, according to Zadok Cramer, while the liquor trade crowded into sixth place. Total liquor production amounted to $32,100, with 3,200 barrels of whiskey being distilled in the surrounding area of Pittsburgh, and selling, incidentally, at $12 per barrel. Beer and ports sold at $5 per barrel, and 900 barrels were brewed in Pittsburgh in 1803.

The brick and stone industry fell into seventh place in the business line-up of 1803, but the drop was drastic—$17,500 in amount. Brass and tin totaled $15,600 in amount produced; the hat and cap business amounted to $14,675. The glass industry placed tenth according to Cramer. Here production amounted to a total of $13,000 with window glass, bottles, jars, decanters, tumblers and blue glass being produced in the amount of $12,500, while glass cutting was valued at $500. Cramer added a postscript noting that the cutting was "equal to any cut in the states of Europe."
Cramer listed numerous other products of Pittsburgh, produced in small amounts, but showing, nevertheless, that manufacturing had begun on a firm foundation. Howard C. Douds has estimated that by 1800 Pittsburgh had 63 shops (23 of which were general stores) 6 shoe shops, 4 bakeries and 4 hat shops.\textsuperscript{10} Zadok Cramer listed in his \textit{Almanac of 1802} a slightly varied estimate. He reported that there were 30 mercantile stores, 27 taverns, 1 book and stationery store and 2 printing offices. Probably Douds, in 1936, confused the taverns with shops, while Zadok Cramer who was on the spot knew the exact character of each enterprise! Thus, by the opening of the nineteenth century, Pittsburgh was ready to become the provider of the West; and, as soon as she realized that she could produce items needed by the people of Western Pennsylvania and surrounding areas, her commercial life began to expand. Pittsburgh, as the hub of the wheel, was being strengthened so as to support the increasing spokes.

The longest, most significant of these spokes or conduits was the Ohio River, the link with the ever-growing West. Not only was the Ohio River Pittsburgh's leading artery to the West but also her principal outlet to the world market at New Orleans.\textsuperscript{11} Pittsburghers would have preferred to trade directly with the East, but since water connections were not existent and the roads were almost impassable, Pittsburghers were forced to accept reluctantly the alternate route. At New Orleans the exporter sold his cargo and usually his boat. After seeing the sights of the metropolis, the boatman with his cash either took passage on a sailing vessel for Philadelphia or Baltimore, or walked home by way of Lake Pontchartrain, northward to Nashville and then to Pittsburgh. A return cargo was rarely taken up-stream because navigation against the current was slow, tedious and expensive. As a result, upstream trade was barely 10 per cent of the down-stream trade. Pittsburghers purchased those articles which they could not manufacture in Philadelphia instead of New Orleans and transported

\textsuperscript{10} Howard C. Douds, \textit{Merchants and Merchandising in Pittsburgh, 1759-1800}, Master's Thesis (Pittsburgh, 1936), 29.

\textsuperscript{11} "If the Mississippi Valley would have been forced to depend upon its over mountain route for contact with its markets, there would never have been any great commercial development, at least not until railroads became more numerous than they are at the present time." Rowland Dunbar, "The Mississippi Valley in American History," in Mississippi Valley Historical Association, \textit{Proceedings} (1915-1916), IX, 65.
them overland to Pittsburgh, thus forming a triangular trade which continued even after the introduction of the steam boat on the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers.

Pittsburghers, usually ready to sail with the spring floods, hoping thereby to reach New Orleans before the market was overcrowded, were shipping flour, whiskey, bar iron and castings, glass, salted pork and beef, copper and tin wares, cordage, apples, cider, peach and apple brandy to New Orleans. These commodities increased annually in volume and variety. In 1801 the total of exports by the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers was $3,649,322, of which Pennsylvania and the territory northwest of Ohio sent $485,000. In 1802 the total value of produce reached $4,475,364, of which Pennsylvania exported $700,000. The total amount of freight received at New Orleans by way of the river in 1801 was 38,325 tons, and in 1802 the amount rose to 45,906 tons. Year by year the river traffic increased in size and value, but it is questionable if the importance of the river was ever greater than it was at the beginning of the nineteenth century when there was so little competition from other routes to East and West.

The Monongahela and Allegheny Rivers also had a steady and increasing influence on Pittsburgh's industrial and commercial development. Along the banks of the Monongahela increasingly large amounts of goods collected for shipment down the Ohio Valley. On the north side of the town products of the Allegheny Valley were received. Heavily laden wagons from the East and from the West converged on Liberty Street and made that district famous for the wagon trade. Despite poor roads and high freight rates, overland trade with Philadelphia was necessary, and this trade increased in spite of handicaps and the editorial scoldings of Chamber of Commerce-minded editors. The spokes of this giant economic wheel were developing just as rapidly as the hub.

Cramer, Navigator (1821), 31.

3 U. S. House Ex. Docs. 50 Congress, 1 Session, XX, No. 6, Pt. 2, 183.

The value of receipts received at New Orleans for 1801 and 1802 is as follows:

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<tr>
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<th>1801</th>
<th>1802</th>
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<tr>
<td>American territories</td>
<td>2,111,672</td>
<td>2,634,564</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pennsylvania and territories northwest of Ohio</td>
<td>485,000</td>
<td>700,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kentucky, Tennessee, and Mississippi</td>
<td>1,626,672</td>
<td>1,522,064</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mississippi territory</td>
<td></td>
<td>412,500</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spanish possessions</td>
<td>1,537,650</td>
<td>1,840,000</td>
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Commercial procedure in 1800 was a decidedly different process from that of today. Business was small, restricted, intimate, hampered, and encumbered by numerous disadvantages, but these handicaps were accepted as ordinary routine. Moreover, one of the cardinal principles of merchandising was to buy only the necessities of life. Both merchants and individuals were governed by this philosophy, because money and products alike were relatively scarce.

The business methods reflected the tempo of the times, and the period was highly personalized and local in outlook. Friendship, or at least acquaintance, was an important element in business, because merchants were primarily citizens of a community, and customers were individuals, not mere sales slips. Manufacturers as yet could not offer the modern facilities of traveling salesmen, samples, and mail orders, because business was not standardized nor had mass production or mass consumption, for that matter, made buying possible on a large scale. Furthermore, the character and integrity of the merchant were considered of prime importance because trademarks were unknown. In the absence of standards, goods had to be personally examined, or at least vouched for by a "friend." Every grade of products was marketed, and the quality varied from one extreme to the other. Flour was branded fine, super, extra, and then it was still a gamble which grade one would get. Pork was also branded bulk, mess, prime, and cargo, while the quality of salt depended on its origin as well as three different grades. Both pork and salt were usually inspected, as well as whiskey, tobacco, and molasses. No one was completely successful in raising standards because the inspection was optional. For the most part, a buyer had to rely on his eyes and nose and a sound judgment. Weights and measures were as varied as the grades and the shops. Every conceivable container was utilized, and the size and weight depended on the fancy of the producer.

Business, too, for the most part, was restricted to a small area. Although there was a certain amount of eastern or foreign goods imported into Pittsburgh, these imports travelled slowly. Haste

14 Douds, Merchants and Merchandising in Pittsburgh, 29.
16 Pittsburgh Commonwealth, October 19, 1805.
17 Pittsburgh Gazette, November 2, 1793.
was physically impossible; nothing faster than the speed of a horse was known at the beginning of the century and even the horse was hampered by the bad roads. Business was tuned to meet the needs of a slow-moving world, and its methods, as compared with those of the present, were dilatory and wasteful. Efficiency experts and time-saving devices were unnecessary where time was plentiful and clock punching was unknown. Eight-hour working days and five-day weeks were impossible, for time meant nothing; business was a twenty-four hour job with time-out for numerous short naps. Keyed to a lower tempo, business hours meant long hours, and one's work was never done.

The entire process of buying and selling was not only extremely personal in those days before the telephone and the telegraph, but also was closely interwoven with production so that the two operations were inseparable. A large part of Pittsburgh's independent retailing originated in the small "manufacturies" where the producer manufactured and also sold the article directly to the consumer. Pittsburgh in 1802 boasted of 46 different classes of master tradesmen, and these master craftsmen offered to their customers a variety of products, such as shoes, boats, trunks, brushes, cabinets, chairs, candles, clocks and watches, cloth, guns, hats, pottery, glass, nails, pumps, saddles, wagons, coaches, scythes, sickles, and other tools. In addition to these small factories and shops, Pittsburgh had 30 mercantile stores. No information is given as to what else "mercantile stores" sold, but the newspaper advertisements give the impression that these stores handled primarily the products of eastern manufacturers. James McDowell announced to the public that he had just received a "fresh assortment of Dry Goods, Groceries, Queensware, Glass and Hardware" which he would sell for cash or country produce; John A. Tarascon advertised "Woollens [sic] Linnens [sic] and Cotten Goods [sic]". Joseph McClurg offered his store goods from Baltimore and Philadelphia either "wholesale or retail for cash or approved produce." Other retail establishments were also frequently described as selling "general merchandise" and, although the proprietors were local merchants, they did not sell local products exclusively. In short, Pittsburgh merchants might be divided into two distinct

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54 Cramer, Almanack (1802).
59 Pittsburgh Commonwealth, December 11, 1805.
60 Pittsburgh Commonwealth, November 29, 1805.
55 Ibid., September 18, 1805.
Pittsburgh's early development classes: first, those who were retailers, or shop keepers, dealing primarily in eastern merchandise; second, the small merchant-manufacturer who made a certain type of product and sold it directly. Both classes were important factors in Pittsburgh commercial history; both contributed to make Pittsburgh the great commercial center, but the merchant-manufacturer was the basic foundation for Pittsburgh commercial progress.

In addition to the little merchant-manufacturers and stores, Pittsburghers did a vast local business at the public market houses. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Pittsburgh had three market houses: one located at the Diamond opposite the Court house; another at the corner of Market and Second Streets; and the third at the end of Market Street on the bank of the Monongahela River. Here the farmers of the surrounding county brought their products to sell in order that they might get cash to buy Pittsburgh store goods. An example of the prices and the types of articles sold in 1801 can be seen from the prices current found in the *Pittsburgh Gazette* for January 9, 1801.\(^2\) Beef, pork and venison sold for 3c per pound; veal and mutton at 4c per pound; flour $1.25 per bbl; potatoes 25c a bushel; butter 10c per pound; eggs 7c per dozen; turkeys 40c apiece; geese 25c; ducks 12c and fowls 7c.

The farmers, however, were not limited to these markets, and the majority of the Pittsburgh merchants would take produce in exchange for their manufactured articles. Bartering was a common practice because money was scarce. Lacking an adequate medium of exchange, local merchants took products in place of cash. Denny and Foster's advertisement illustrates the common practice; they advertised that they had "Prime Soal [sic] leather, of clean, well-trimmed, Spanish Hides which they will exchange at the rate of 2s. per pound for Flax linen at 3s. per yard, tow linen at 2s. per yard and good twilled bags at 7s6p."\(^2\) Not all trade was barter, however, and merchants even advertised for certain products, offering cash for them.

Pittsburgh was a busy mart even in 1800. Despite handicaps and limitations, its commerce was healthy and active. Pittsburgh faced the new century with confidence and hope. Pittsburgh was apparently here to stay!

\(^2\) *Pittsburgh Gazette*, January 9, 1801.
\(^2\) *Pittsburgh Commonwealth*, November 30, 1808.