PHILADELPHIA IN THE 1850'S
As Described by British Travelers

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During the 1850's, Philadelphia, like most American cities, grew considerably in population. On the eve of the Civil War the Quaker City could boast of having well over half a million inhabitants, making it second only to New York among the cities of the United States.1 But what kind of city was Philadelphia, and what could it offer to its residents and its visitors? Some of the answers may be found in the accounts written by British visitors to the city during this decade.

Travelers, then as now, were concerned about their accommodations at the various stops in their tours. When visiting a large American city Englishmen usually took up residence at one of the spacious and magnificent hotels which they found there. These havens for weary travelers were more than just resting places; they were actually among the most interesting sights on the tour. American hotels, in their size and lavishness, and in the many services they offered to their guests, were completely unlike the type of hostelries that Englishmen had encountered in their own country.

In Philadelphia the Girard House, a good-looking sandstone building, located on fashionable Chestnut Street, was the preferred hotel among British visitors. It was here that William Makepeace Thackeray chose to reside while in Philadelphia in 1853.2 Most travelers thought highly of the Girard House. B. W. A. Sleigh, in 1852, called it "one of the most elegant establishments in the States," and the next year William Chambers referred to it as being "of the first class."3 Similar comments were

*Dr. Steen is assistant professor of history at the State University of New York, Albany.
2 Eyre Crowe, With Thackeray in America (London, 1893), p. 100.
3 B. W. A. Sleigh, Pine Forest and Hacnatack Clearings; or, Travel, Life, and Adventure in the British North American Provinces (London,
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recorded by other visitors.4 Jane and Marion Turnbull spent several months at this hotel in 1856. They were pleased to find that their rooms opened out onto a balcony from which they could "enjoy the cool [evening] air, and look at the Philadelphians taking their promenade [along Chestnut Street]." The interior of the Girard was "very handsomely furnished, even to plated spittoons in the parlours." The Turnbolls also enjoyed the food and service at this hostelry.5 The Reverend Frederick Jobson stayed at the Girard in the same year. He found his rooms to be "clean and airy," and noted that not a word was spoken at the dinner table. "If it had not been for the crying of an infant, who would not take its food," he wrote, "we should have been as silent in that large dining-room as if we had been eating with some severe fraternity of monks."6

Not every traveler, however, regarded the Girard House as an excellent hotel, although they all considered it an attractive building. In 1853, Clara Bromley could only say that it was "a most magnificent looking hotel at all events."7 Six years later, John Henry Vessey noted that the Girard had been recommended to him as "the best" hotel in the city, but he added, "if it is so I am sorry Philadelphia does not supply a better inn." Although he did not argue about the merits of the exterior of the building, he thought that the hotel was "sadly wanting in cleanliness and light, very important considerations in the selection of a comfortable hotel."8 But Vessey and Mrs. Bromley, it seems, were the only travelers to offer adverse criticism. In 1859 the Girard served as the headquarters for the English cricket team that visited the city in October. Fred Lillywhite, who accompanied

6Jobson, American Methodism, pp. 43-48.
7Clara F. Bromley, A Woman's Wanderings in the Western World (London, 1861), p. 36.
the athletes as a sort of press agent, recommended this hotel to
"any one desirous of paying a visit to the liberal citizens of
Philadelphia." A few months later, in February 1860, Mrs. Emilie
M. E. Cowell, the wife of the noted British comic-singer, Sam
Cowell, was "astonished" by the "magnificence" of the Girard
House Hotel.

English tourists also might have been found at some other
hotels in Philadelphia. One of these was the United States Hotel,
which an anonymous traveler of 1849-1850, writing under the
pen-name of "A. Rughean," considered to be "the best in the
town." His only complaint was that it was "pervaded by an
undeniable smell of grease." A few months later, Alexander
Marjoribanks took up residence at the small Indian Queen Hotel,
but had little to say about this establishment. Marianne Finch
spent a short time in 1851 at Jones's Hotel, which she found "very
comfortable." Another Englishwoman, Clara Bromley, was at
Barnum's Hotel in August, 1853, where she was offended by the
lack of courtesy on the part of one of the servants. A fairly
large hotel, the International, was visited by Robert A. Slaney
in 1860. He considered it "one of the finest in the United States."

In the same year, the Continental Hotel was honored by the
presence of the Prince of Wales and his entourage.

Philadelphia's streets were often commented upon by British
visitors to the city. The careful regularity with which the streets
were laid out led Englishmen to compare the city to a gridiron
or a checkerboard. They made note of the system for naming the

9 Fred Lillywhite, *The English Cricketers' Trip to Canada and the United
10 Emilie M. E. Cowell, *The Cowells in America: Being the Diary of
Mrs. Sam Cowell during her Husband's Concert Tour in the Years 1860-
11 A. Rughean [pseud.], *Transatlantic Rambles: or a Record of Twelve
Months Travel in the United States, Cuba, & the Brazils* (London, 1851),
p. 44-45.
12 Alexander Marjoribanks, *Travels in South and North America* (Lon-
don, 1853), p. 437.
13 Marianne Finch, *An Englishwoman's Experience in America* (Lon-
don, 1853), p. 254.
15 Robert A. Slaney, *Short Journal of a Visit to Canada and the States of
the Prince of Wales through British North America; and His Visit to the
United States, 10th July to 15th November, 1860* ([London, 1860?]), p. 85.
streets, most of the main streets being named for trees, while those that crossed them at right angles were simply numbered consecutively. Most travelers yearned for just one crooked street to break the monotony. Yet it hardly could be denied that the plan of Philadelphia made it easier for strangers to find their way. Indeed, it was even suggested that it would be practically impossible for a person to become lost in the Quaker City. William Chambers, an 1853 visitor, provided an answer for those who criticized the layout of Philadelphia. He agreed that "the scheme of long and straight rows of brick buildings, with scarcely any variation," was "not very tasteful"; but, he added, "a severe regularity in this respect is better than no plan at all with the consequent confusion of streets, lanes, and mysterious back-courts with which such cities as London are afflicted."

In spite of the monotony of the streets, it was admitted that they were not unattractive. They were particularly beautified by the rows of handsome trees that were planted on either side. Thomas Wilson, who was in Philadelphia in 1859, regretted that this practice of lining the streets with trees was not more widespread in England. One of the most pleasing streets to travelers was Chestnut. Here were located some of the handsomest buildings in the city, as well as the best shops. Another fashionable thoroughfare was Walnut Street, while the two main business streets were Market and Broad.

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18 Chambers, *Things as They Are*, pp. 305-306.


During the 1850's, American cities were sadly deficient in the amount of space allocated to park facilities. Philadelphia, however, was an exception. Captain John W. Oldmixon alone complained, in 1854, that Philadelphia had "no park, no gardens, [and] no walks." He stated that "two or three squares full of trees" were "the only lungs left." Other travelers noticed that the Quaker City did have a park. This was Fairmount Park, which, although not in the heart of the city, was close enough to be easily accessible. This park served two purposes: it provided Philadelphians with a scenic outdoor recreational area, and it provided a site for the city's waterworks. Charles Weld, an 1854 visitor, noted that Fairmount Park was "adorned by statues and fountains," and was "a favourite resort of the citizens in the summer evenings." But the squares of Philadelphia were the most convenient open areas. These were tastefully laid out with trees, shrubs, grass, and gravel walks; and birds, squirrels, and even deer could be seen in them. Alfred Pairpont claimed, in 1854, that he knew of "no more pleasant treat, after a long walk through the hot and dusty streets, than to rest oneself in the shade of one of these prettily planted gardens, cooled by the plashing of water from numerous fountains, and gazed on the deer quietly grazing, perfectly tame and unconscious of the bustle around." Citizens of Philadelphia could also find trees and grass at Laurel Hill Cemetery, on the banks of the Schuylkill River. In 1860, Walter Thornbury thought that this was "one of the most beautiful burial-places in the world."
For the most part, English visitors to America during the 1850s were not especially impressed by the beauty of the public buildings in American cities. Rarely would a traveler consider a city noteworthy for its good architecture. Yet those Englishmen who stopped at Philadelphia usually were pleased to find many attractive buildings. Indeed, they often ranked the structures of the Quaker City among the finest in the United States. White marble was described as the most common material used in the erection of public buildings, most of which found their prototypes in ancient Greece. Englishmen generally agreed that Girard College was the outstanding building in the city, but they also found several others that were worth describing.

One of the prime attractions in Philadelphia was Independence Hall. Visitors discovered that within this venerable, red-brick building was the room in which the Declaration of Independence had been signed. This room was carefully preserved so as to look very much as it had on that historic occasion. The clock-tower of Independence Hall provided an excellent vantage point from which to look out over Philadelphia and the surrounding area.

A trip to Philadelphia was hardly complete without a visit to the United States Mint on Chestnut Street. At the door of this...
white marble edifice, which resembled a Greek temple, travelers were greeted by a guide who conducted them through the building. Travelers also considered some of the banks noble in appearance, and the Merchants’ Exchange handsome. The latter was thought by the Turnbull sisters to be “one of the most beautiful” public buildings they had seen in the United States.

As in most other American cities, Englishmen found few monuments to interest them in Philadelphia. In 1851, Marianne Finch went to see Penn’s Monument, which, she noted, was “in a timber-yard, in the dirtiest suburb of the town.” This monument, “a plain stone obelisk, about five or six feet high, with an inscription on it,” looked to her very much like a “gate-post.” Thomas Wilson found the tomb of Benjamin Franklin to be an “object of the deepest interest,” in 1859. He mentioned that it was “situated in the Christ Church yard,” and he believed that “the simple inscription” on the tombstone could not “but be pregnant with meaning to the hearts of all Americans.”

Although Philadelphia contained many churches in the 1850’s, among which some travelers found good specimens of ecclesiastical architecture, they were not among the principal features of the city. In 1856, Frederick Jobson pointed out that the churches of Philadelphia were “fitted up with great convenience and comfort for the worshippers.” He also discovered that several of them had “large week-night lecture and service-rooms underneath,” which were “admirably arranged and furnished.” Thomas Wilson singled out two of Philadelphia’s churches for particular comment in 1859. One was the Roman Catholic Church of St. Peter and St. Paul on Logan Square, a domed building of red sandstone. The other was the Protestant Episcopal Church of St.

—Finch, _Englishwoman’s Experience_, pp. 255-256; Sleigh, _Pine Forest_, p. 315; James Robertson, _A Few Months in America: containing Remarks on Some of its Industrial and Commercial Interests_ (London [1855]), p. 23; Ferguson, _America by River and Rail_, p. 97; Turnbull, _American Photographs_, II, 157; Wilson, _Transatlantic Sketches_, p. 146.


—Wilson, _Transatlantic Sketches_, pp. 145-146.

—Jobson, _American Methodism_, p. 56.
Mark's, a "handsome building," which Wilson admired for its "beautifully ornamented" tower and spire.\textsuperscript{55}

Uniformity and respectability were keynotes of Philadelphia houses, which Englishmen usually found to be handsome, clean, and comfortable looking structures. The typical Philadelphia house was constructed of red brick with white marble steps and window-sills. The basement story of most of the houses was faced with white marble, while the doors were painted white and were decorated with highly polished silver hardware. Green, and occasionally white, shutters were also prominent features.\textsuperscript{36} Captain Oldmixon noticed that in front of each house was a slanting cellar door that protruded onto the pavement.\textsuperscript{37} Unlike most of his countrymen, Charles Mackay, an 1857 visitor, did not admire these houses, but considered them "third-rate." Their uniform appearance, he wrote, rendered them all "equally prim, dull, and respectable."\textsuperscript{38} Because the houses on each street were so similar, John Vessey, in 1859, stated that Philadelphia reminded him "of a woman's twin babies."\textsuperscript{39}

Few travelers reported having been inside any of these homes. One of those who did examine the interiors of several residences was Captain Oldmixon, who noted that many of them were heated by hot air.\textsuperscript{40} The houses that Marianne Finch visited were also warmed in this manner. She stated that the "temperature of these rooms was delightful, being pleasantly warm, but neither hot nor close." Marianne Finch considered one house on Spruce Street to be "beautifully furnished," and she was pleased to find that it contained "some good paintings by native artists."\textsuperscript{41}

In 1853, William Baxter discovered that in Philadelphia, un-
like the practice he had deplored in New York, people did not "live in their basements, and keep their good rooms for show." Moreover, the custom of living in boarding houses, which was so common in New York, Baxter noticed, did not prevail "to such an extent in Philadelphia." Three years later, Frederick Jobson saw "some small low-class houses here and there," but he believed that they were "fewer in proportion . . . than in any other town" that he had visited.

The shops of Philadelphia were frequently praised by English visitors to the Quaker City. The best of these retail establishments were located on Chestnut Street. Some of them were very large, and were equal in splendor to those of London, Paris, or New York. Many were solidly constructed of white marble, and exhibited attractive displays in their windows. Inside, these stores were tastefully decorated, and were well stocked with many costly articles. Merchandise of both French and British origin could be seen on the shelves, although the French items were slightly more numerous. Captain Oldmixon was pleased in general with the shops in Philadelphia, but he noted that "the poorest show and worst taste" were to be seen at stores belonging to the jewelers and silversmiths, where "very showy" silver plate "of the most preposterous shapes" was displayed.

Among the sights of Philadelphia were its extensive markets, the largest of which was located on Market Street. Here, under a covered arcade, travelers noticed stalls on either side of the street, in which were displayed various kinds of meat, fruit, vegetables, and flowers. Englishmen were amazed at the large quantities of a great variety of provisions to be seen in this market. They were pleased to report that everything was nicely arranged and appeared very clean. The best time to visit Phila-

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Philadelphia's markets, it was stated, was early in the morning, when they presented a scene of great activity.46

Philadelphia offered its citizens a wide variety of entertainment and cultural facilities during the fifties. Beer saloons provided diversion for many Philadelphians, who frequented these establishments to smoke, drink, and be entertained by the comic singers who performed there. Alfred Pairpont visited one of these saloons in 1856, but the “great heat, . . . and the dense smoke” made his visit “anything but agreeable,” and he was “speedily compelled . . . to beat a retreat.”47 At Barnum’s Museum wax figures, stuffed animals, and all sorts of “curiosities” could be examined, or the visitor could attend a dramatic performance at the theater that was on the premises.48 Exhibits of greater scientific value could be found at the Academy of Natural Science, which was praised by Englishmen for its fine collection of stuffed birds.49

Captain Oldmixon, who was probably in Philadelphia in 1854, noted that the city contained three or four theaters, including the one in Barnum’s Museum, which were “generally well filled.”50 Two years later, Alfred Pairpont claimed that Philadelphia had four or five theaters. He attended the Walnut Street Theatre, which, he observed, was “a prettily decorated place of amusement,” although it was “not so spacious as some in New York and Boston.” At this theater he saw a good production of King Lear that featured Edwin Forrest in the title role.51 When the Prince of Wales visited Philadelphia in October 1866, he attended a performance of the opera Martha at the Academy of Music, a theater which, “for size and magnificence,” according to Nicholas Woods, was “equal to the best in Europe.”52

47 Pairpont, Uncle Sam, p. 302.
48 Finch, Englishwoman’s Experience, p. 256; Oldmixon, Transatlantic Wanderings, p. 54.
49 Finch, Englishwoman’s Experience, p. 261; Weld, Vacation Tour, p. 350; Ferguson, America by River and Rail, p. 216.
50 Oldmixon, Transatlantic Wanderings, p. 42.
51 Pairpont, Uncle Sam, pp. 300-301. See also: Turnbull, American Photographs, II, 162.
Public lectures in Philadelphia were "numerously attended," and the rooms in which they were held were "often crammed," Captain Oldmixon commented. During his stay in the city he heard a lecture on socialism and some readings of Shakespeare.53 "Like Boston and New York, Philadelphia abounds in public libraries," William Chambers wrote in 1853. He reported that he "was taken from library to library through a long and bewildering series, each addressed to a different class of readers—apprentices, merchants, and men of scientific and literary acquirements."54 In 1852, B. W. A. Sleigh visited the Library Company of Philadelphia, which he considered to be "an admirable library of reference," containing 50,000 volumes.55 William Ferguson looked over Philadelphia's Athenæum in 1855. He noted that it was "a fine stone building," the first floor of which was "occupied as a reading-room, chess-room, and library," while the other floors were "rented for different purposes." The reading-room, he claimed, was "large and comfortable," and the library was "a fine well-proportioned hall, with a good collection of books."56

The various educational, charitable, and penal institutions of Philadelphia were one of the principal attractions of the city to British travelers. "Few towns in America," Thomas Wilson wrote in 1859, "are better supplied with Charitable or Educational Institutions than this city of Loving-brotherhood." He believed that "much time might be spent" in Philadelphia, "in a profitable manner as regards the information to be derived and conclusions to be drawn from the management of many of the admirable public institutions there."57

The schools of Philadelphia were among the "most remarkable and admirable objects" in the city, Captain L. B. Mackinnon stated in 1851, and he noted that they were "deservedly considered among the best in the world."58 In 1850, Robert Slaney

53 Oldmixon, Transatlantic Wanderings, p. 51.
54 Chambers, Things as They Are, p. 314. See also: Oldmixon, Transatlantic Wanderings, p. 42.
55 Sleigh, Pine Forest, p. 322.
56 Ferguson, America by River and Rail, p. 183.
57 Wilson, Transatlantic Sketches, pp. 139, 148. See also: Finch, Englishwoman's Experience, p. 254; Sleigh, Pine Forest, p. 322; Everest, Journey through the United States, p. 70; Ashworth, Tour in the United States, pp. 17, 18; Tallack, Friendly Sketches, p. 87.
visited a Philadelphia public school, which, he claimed, was “open to all,” and “well managed.” But he did not see any children that he regarded as being very poor. Most of them were “so well dressed” that he assumed they were “tradesmen’s children.” Slaney complained that the boys’ division of this school was “not enough ventilated.” Both the boys and the girls spent the hours from nine to twelve and from two to five in the classrooms. This, he thought, was “too long . . . for attention to health.”

A high school in Philadelphia was “thoroughly” examined by Captain Mackinnon during his 1851 visit. After observing several classes, he commented that he could not “sufficiently express” his “admiration of the proficiency of the pupils, particularly in the classes of anatomy and physiology,” in which “every student . . . appeared to be thoroughly conversant with the structure of the human frame.”

H. A. Murray was also impressed by the anatomy classes in this high school, which he visited sometime between 1852 and 1853. He reported that the classes in this subject, as well as those in the other natural sciences, were conducted “entirely by lecture,” and were enhanced by the use of “beautifully executed transparencies.” He maintained that the “readiness” with which he “heard the pupils in this class answer the questions propounded to them showed the interest they took in the subject, and was a conclusive proof of the efficiency of the system of instruction pursued.” Murray also pointed out that a plan he had never seen in operation before was adopted at this school. It consisted in ringing a bell at the end of every forty-five minutes, at which point all the students simultaneously left the classrooms in which they had been studying, and moved to the rooms in which the next subject was to be taught. Murray stated that he “spent three interesting hours in this admirable institution.”

While he was in Philadelphia Murray also visited a school that was “appropriated to four hundred free negroes,” and in which he found Negroes “of all ages, from five to fifty.”

Girard College, a home and school for orphaned boys, was one of the lions of Philadelphia. It was situated in the outskirts of

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62 Ibid., I, 308.
the city, and consisted of several buildings surrounded by spacious and attractively landscaped grounds. The central building of the group was used for classrooms, while the others housed the teachers and approximately 300 boys. The classroom building, with its Grecian architecture and white marble construction, attracted the attention of most visitors. Although some Englishmen considered it to be unsuited for the use to which it was appropriated, many observers claimed that it was the handsomest building in the United States. Even the roof, from which an excellent view of Philadelphia could be obtained, was fabricated out of white marble. Members of the clergy were not permitted to enter the grounds of Girard College, according to the provisions of the will of Stephen Girard, its founder. Others, though, were guided politely through this institution, which they regarded as being admirably conducted. 

In 1853 George Ranken visited asylums for the deaf and dumb and for the blind. At both of these institutions he was “treated with marked courtesy and kindness,” and he noted with interest the methods of instruction that were employed. H. A. Murray inspected an insane asylum in either 1852 or 1853. He reported that the grounds were “pleasantly laid out in walks, gardens, [and] hot-houses,” and that “a comfortable reading-room and ten-pin alley” were located on either side of the building, “one for the males, the other for the females.” This asylum also contained

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64 Ranken, *Canada and Crimea*, pp. 53-55.
“rooms and dormitories” which were “large and airy.” Murray
maintained that the “comfort of the inmates appeared fully equal
to that of any similar establishment” that he had visited.65 Will-
liam Ferguson, who examined this institution in 1855, claimed
that the “quiet, and order, and comfort prevailing everywhere
were admirable.”66

The Institution for Aged Women was visited by Marianne
Finch during 1851. She considered the rooms here to be “large,
warm, and very pleasant.” In them, she saw “several active old
women of eighty,” as well as others, “imbecile and blind,” who
were “sitting by the stoves, warming themselves, and chatting
of things that happened when they were young.” Those women
who were able were permitted to leave the building whenever they
desired, while the others could “receive their friends there.”
Marianne Finch also inspected “a Female Industrial Establish-
ment.” Here, she “found about forty poor women sewing in a
large pleasant room, under the superintendence of two young
ladies.” She reported that the “children of these women were
playing in another room, with a woman to take care of them.”67

Thomas Wilson, an 1859 commentator, considered the Blockly
Alms House well worth a visit. He claimed that the building was
“capable of accommodating 4,000 paupers,” and he noted that
it was “conducted on the self-supporting principle,” that is, “all
inmates” were “obliged to work.” Wilson regarded this poor-
house as “a model of cleanliness,” and, he wrote, “the provision
made for the wants and accommodation of its numerous inmates
cannot but testify in the strongest manner to the attention paid
by the Americans to this sort of institutions.”68

Several travelers visited the House of Refuge for Juvenile
Offenders in Philadelphia, in which about 200 boys and 100 girls
were lodged. The boys were taught various trades, while the girls
performed household duties. The young female delinquents were
provided with small, but neat and clean, bedrooms, which they
were allowed to decorate themselves. Most of those travelers who

66 Ferguson, *America by River and Rail*, p. 213.
68 Wilson, *Transatlantic Sketches*, p. 140. See also: Everest, *Journey
through the United States*, p. 70; Turnbull, *American Photographs*, II,
157-158.
examined this institution were pleased with the manner in which these children were supervised. Philadelphia had a separate house of refuge for Negro juvenile offenders, according to William Chambers, an 1853 observer.

British travelers frequently visited the famous Pennsylvania State Penitentiary when they were in Philadelphia. They reported that a turreted wall, thirty feet in height, enclosed an area of approximately ten acres, in the center of which was the prison. This building was designed with corridors radiating from a central point, like the spokes of a wheel. Surveillance was easy, for the only entrances to the cells were along these corridors. Travelers noted the "solitary system" that was employed at this institution. Each prisoner was kept in his individual cell during the entire internment, and never was placed in contact with any other prisoner. The inmate performed the work that was required of him in this room; and he took his outdoor exercise in his own private yard which was attached to it. Travelers pointed out that proponents of the solitary system maintained that it prevented prisoners from becoming involved with other criminals during their stay at the penitentiary, and thus made it easier for them to lead a law-abiding life upon release. Most foreign commentators considered this system to be a satisfactory one, although some visitors, while recognizing it to be a product of good intentions, believed that the solitary system was unusually severe, in view of the natural human desire for companionship.

During his stay in Philadelphia, Alfred Pairpont visited the county prison. This institution, he noted, was "conducted on the social, not the silent system." It was a "large, massive stone building," which was "entered by strongly barred gates." The cells

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60 Mary G. Duncan, America as I found It (New York, 1852), pp. 301-303; Finch, Englishwoman's Experience, pp. 259-260; Ferguson, America by River and Rail, pp. 204-206; Slaney, Short Journal, pp. 51-52.

61 Chambers, Things as They Are, pp. 311-312.

71 Rugbean, Transatlantic Rambles, p. 48; Johnston, Notes on North America, II, 304; Cumynghame, Glimpse at the Great Western Republic, pp. 296-299; Duncan, America as I Found It, pp. 288, 291-293; H. A. Murray, Lands of the Slave and the Free, I, 372-373; Everest, Journey through the United States, p. 70; Chambers, Things as They Are, pp. 309-311; Weld, Vacation Tour, p. 345; Ferguson, America by River and Rail, pp. 206-208; Pairpont, Uncle Sam, pp. 292-294; C. United States and Canada, p. 29; Trotter, First Impressions, pp. 106-107; Engleheart, Journal of the Progress of H.R.H. the Prince of Wales, p. 85; Slaney, Short Journal, p. 51.
were arranged in “three galleries,” that were placed “one above another.” Pairpont commented that “the busy hum of trades, hammering and other factory sounds, appeared far more suitable than the death-like silence” that prevailed at the State Penitentiary.  

Unlike most American cities of the 1850’s, Philadelphia had well-paved streets. The sidewalks, travelers remarked, were made up of diagonally-laid red brick, a material that was seldom used for this purpose in England. William Chambers, an 1853 observer, discovered “broad granite pavements” in Philadelphia. But one visitor, Captain Oldmixon, dissented from the opinion of most of his countrymen. Commenting on his 1854 visit to the Quaker City, he wrote: “The street pavements are wretched, as in all their towns—much as ours were fifty years ago—the same round, smooth stones set on end, assisted by great mud holes, enough to dislocate one’s limbs.”

Travelers also reported that Philadelphia differed from most other American cities in its clean and neat appearance. It was no wonder that Englishmen were struck by the cleanliness of Philadelphia’s streets, for the pavements frequently were washed—and scrubbed. This process was facilitated by the presence of hydrants placed at convenient locations along the edge of the sidewalks. Homeowners in the city sent their servants out early in the morning to water the sidewalks in front of their houses. Hugh S. Tremenheere, an 1851 visitor, noticed a man watering the streets in a similar manner. He claimed that this man was paid to perform this job, but he did not indicate whether the employer was the city government or whether the man was hired by individual citizens. Charles Mackay pointed out in 1857 that the constant washing of the streets caused them continually to

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\[75\] Chambers, *Things as They Are*, p. 306.
\[76\] Oldmixon, *Transatlantic Wanderings*, p. 42.
“run with water.” The roadways, consequently, were never allowed to dry,” and they often appeared dirty and muddy to Mackay.\textsuperscript{79} James Robertson, who was pleased with the general cleanliness of the streets of Philadelphia, complained of the “many open sewers” in 1853, and noted that a “very decided improvement” would be effected by covering them.\textsuperscript{80}

The streets of Philadelphia could be cleaned so often because the city was well supplied with water. The manner in which this was accomplished was of considerable interest to English visitors. They reported that at the Fairmount Waterworks, approximately three miles from the city, water was pumped from the Schuylkill River into large basins on the top of a hill. From these basins, the water flowed through pipes into Philadelphia. The pumps that raised the water were powered by waterwheels, which were turned by the force obtained by damming the river. Englishmen were interested in the functioning of this mechanism; and they praised it for its simplicity. Another pleasing feature of the waterworks was the grounds in which it was located. These were laid out as a park, with gravel walks, benches, and fountains, and were a popular resort among Philadelphians.\textsuperscript{81}

In no American city was police protection especially well organized in the 1850’s. English visitors to Philadelphia during this decade made no mention at all of either the presence or the absence of this urban service. Clearly, though, the need for it must have existed in 1850, when Alexander Marjoribanks claimed that the Quaker City had “become perhaps the most disorderly city on the continent of America.”\textsuperscript{82}

Fire-fighting in Philadelphia, as in most American cities, was

\textsuperscript{79} Mackay, \textit{Life and Liberty}, I, 114.
\textsuperscript{80} Robertson, \textit{Few Months in America}, p. 22.
\textsuperscript{82} Marjoribanks, \textit{Travels}, p. 431.
in the hands of volunteer fire companies. The members of these organizations (usually young men in search of excitement), took great pride in their highly polished and elaborately decorated engines. Great rivalry existed between the various companies in Philadelphia, where the competition seems to have been more acute than in other cities. Unfortunately, one result of this competition was that the firemen frequently devoted as much attention to fighting other companies as to fighting fires.85 Alfred Fairpoint, an 1856 visitor, appalled by this violence, suggested that the volunteer fire companies “should be put down at once,” and that “regularly paid fire-brigades be substituted for these clans of lawless ruffians, who set all law and civil order at defiance.” Yet he claimed that it was “only fair” to point out that these young men would undergo any amount of “labour, fatigue, and danger, ... in their particular vocation,” and that, though they fought among themselves, they were “very courteous to strangers.”86 Captain Oldmixon reported that the firemen were informed of the location of a fire by the number of tolls of the State House bell.85

English visitors to America in the fifties discovered that it was inexpensive and relatively simple to travel within the major cities. Several Englishmen who spent some time in Philadelphia in 1859 and 1860 reported that many of the streets of the Quaker City were lined with iron rails, indicating that the city had an extensive street railway system consisting of horse-drawn cars. One feature of this system was that passengers on one line were able to obtain free transfers to lines that crossed it at right angles. The tracks in the city streets also served another purpose. Railroad trains were not allowed to proceed through Philadelphia with their locomotives; instead, their cars were detached and driven by horses over these rails. At the other end of the city, the cars were reassembled and attached to a different locomotive.86

84 Fairpoint, *Uncle Sam*, p. 291.
Comments were also made about the people of Philadelphia. H. Hussey was probably not the only English visitor who considered the inhabitants of Philadelphia as living "in a more rational way than [the people] in New York, and other go-a-head cities."87 But the traveler usually had personal contact with only the more prosperous elements of the population, and he generally enjoyed his association with these people. Members of Philadelphia's elite were a rather proud group. John Lewis, an 1850 observer, noted that Philadelphians boasted that they had "the best society in the Union," but he pointed out that citizens of other cities made the same claim. Still, the members of society that he met in the Quaker City were "highly intellectual and polished people."88 William Baxter considered the "aristocracy" of Philadelphia to be "more refined" than those of New York.89 Other travelers were pleased by the hospitable manner in which they were received by Philadelphians.90

Some Englishmen commented on the treatment of the Negro in Philadelphia. Ill feeling between the Irish and the Negroes occasionally led to riots which marred the generally peaceful atmosphere of the city, visitors reported.91 "Nowhere is the prejudice against race stronger than in Philadelphia, the city of brotherly love," Alexander Marjoribanks wrote in 1850.92 According to Captain Oldmixon, the Negro population lived in its own quarter on Cedar Street. The residents of this area looked "poor and ill-dressed" to him.93 Henry Murray visited a school that was " appropriated to four hundred free negroes, . . . of all ages, from five to fifty,"94 and William Chambers noted that a separate juvenile prison was maintained for Negro children in Philadelphia.95

In the 1850's, Philadelphia, the nation's second largest city, stood in marked contrast to its more populous northern neighbor, New York. The Empire City was characterized by its English

87 Hussey, *Australian Colonies*, p. 171.
88 [John Delaware Lewis], *Across the Atlantic* (London, 1851), p. 53.
89 Baxter, *America and the Americans*, p. 91.
95 Chambers, *Things as They Are*, p. 311.
visitors as a growing, busy, bustling, “go-ahead” city; the Quaker City was considered a far more subdued place. One traveler noted that he had heard Philadelphia referred to as the “Village-city.” He thought this appellation “most appropriate,” since the city united “the quiet air of a village with the size of a large city.” Travelers apparently were not impressed by the growth rate of Philadelphia, and they rarely predicted a grand future for the city. William Chambers was the only commentator who anticipated the possibility of Philadelphia becoming “the first of American cities.” He claimed that railroad communications gave Philadelphia the advantage of being “on the speediest route from the Atlantic to the Ohio and Mississippi.” But Captain Oldmixon pointed out that the docks of Philadelphia, although crowded with shipping, did not play host to “the immense Atlantic commerce seen at new [sic] York.”

Yet the quiet aspect of the city pleased most of its English visitors. Visitors from the British Isles stared in wonder at New York and they marveled at the amazing growth of Western cities, but they felt more at home in Philadelphia.

16 Lewis, Across the Atlantic, p. 49.
19 Chambers, Things as They Are, p. 305.
19 Oldmixon, Transatlantic Wanderings, p. 50.