

# THE POLITICS OF PITTSBURGH FLOOD CONTROL, 1936-1960

BY ROLAND M. SMITH\*

## I. INTRODUCTION

AN ANALYSIS of the Pittsburgh flood control movement from its inception in 1908 until 1960 provides insight into the changing dynamics of two sets of historic and antithetical forces at work within the American political system. The first set of forces, operating through the system of checks and balances and the fragmentation of authority inherent in our governmental structure, tends to diffuse the decision-making process throughout the system. On the other hand, another set of forces, often operating outside the formally established governmental structure through voluntary organizations such as political parties, political machines, and pressure groups, works to centralize the decision-making process. At the community level, this process of centralized decision-making often occurs when the elite decision-makers of the community decide to act together to accomplish various goals they have agreed upon for the community.

During the first phase of the Pittsburgh flood control movement<sup>1</sup> (1908 to 1936) an elite group of local business and professional men organized an aggressive, unified coalition of civic forces to fight for flood control and other environmental reforms. Cosmopolitan in outlook, this group represented the aspirations of the larger industrial and commercial interests of the city and acted through a host of voluntary organizations to accomplish reforms it had agreed upon for the community. At the national level this elite identified with

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1. A more detailed examination of the first phase of the Pittsburgh flood control movement can be found in Roland M. Smith, "The Politics of Pittsburgh Flood Control, 1908-1936," *Pennsylvania History*, 42 (January 1975): 5-24.

Progressive era reformers favoring scientific, centralized management of inland waterways development under a single independent agency of the federal government. Since Congress and the Corps of Engineers rejected this concept of centralization until the late 1920s, the Pittsburgh flood control movement had to wage an uphill battle for acceptance of its rational approach to flood control.<sup>2</sup> Not until after a series of floods struck the Mississippi Valley in the late 1920s and the Corps' levee system failed, after drought conditions dried up many navigable streams in the northeast, and after economic depression created a demand for work relief projects, did Congress accept the comprehensive and coordinated approach to flood control advocated by Pittsburgh's local elite for almost three decades.

This study investigates the second phase of the campaign to bring the flood waters of Pittsburgh's three rivers under control—placing particular emphasis on the changing structure of power and the system of decision-making operating in Pittsburgh in the quarter century after 1936. The paper examines three major aspects of the attempt to deal with environmental reform in a mature industrial metropolis: (1) the changing patterns of behavior exhibited by community leaders in response to historic pressures being exerted upon their community; (2) the changing role of local institutions in the decision-making process of the community; and (3) the centrality of flood control to the overall effort to halt the physical deterioration of Pittsburgh's central business district.

## II. CHANGING STRUCTURE OF POWER AND LEADERSHIP

The remarkable thing about the Pittsburgh flood control movement from 1936 to the beginning of the Post World War II "Pittsburgh Renaissance" is that the movement proceeded amid a general breakdown of the elite power structure in Pittsburgh. The coalition of civic forces characteristic of the early decades of this century—exemplified by an interlocking network of upper-class individuals acting in concert through voluntary associations and advocating

2. The Commission's plan called for a comprehensive and coordinated approach to flood control including reforestation of denuded forest lands, conservation of forests, and construction of seventeen storage reservoirs at the headwaters of the Allegheny and Monongahela rivers. For details see Flood Commission of Pittsburgh, *Report* (Pittsburgh, 1912).

the orderly, scientific management of the Pittsburgh environment—disintegrated in the 1930s. The collapse of the city-county Republican machine, controlled by William Larimer Mellon and an upper-class elite, epitomized this process of fragmentation in the political realm.<sup>3</sup> Between 1929 and 1934, as a result of economic depression, internal dissension, and scandal involving the awarding of city contracts, the local Republican party “crumbled to dust.”<sup>4</sup> In its place arose a Democratic party machine under the leadership of David L. Lawrence. Drawing its strength from a patronage system built around committeemen on the public payroll, the “New Deal” Democratic machine operated relatively free of the controls the upper-class had exercised over the defunct Republican machine.

Likewise, the plight of the Chamber of Commerce of Greater Pittsburgh in the depression decade illuminates the splintering process at work among the economic and social notables of the city. In the preceding two decades, the Chamber, the initiator and chief sponsor of flood control, had represented cosmopolitan and national aspirations of the larger industrial, financial, and commercial interests, and had functioned as a stabilizing institution used by the business-professional elite to forge consensus on issues confronting the metropolitan area.<sup>5</sup> The extent to which the Chamber had succeeded in fulfilling this role was reflected in the broad range of support it had received from all segments of the business and professional community. In the late 1920s the Pittsburgh Chamber was the largest in the country with 6,000 members and an annual budget of \$250,000. By 1934, however, its membership had dropped to 2,000 and its budget to \$103,000.<sup>6</sup> A Pittsburgh newspaper bluntly delineated the problems plaguing the Chamber in the depression decade:

Ideally, a Chamber of Commerce should have its finger in every civic pie, should be an outlet for civic pride and boosterism,

3. For an account of the demise of the city-county Republican machine in the early 1930s see Samuel J. Astorino, “The Decline of the Republican Dynasty in Pennsylvania, 1929–1934.” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 1962).

4. Bruce M. Stave, *The New Deal and the Last Hurrah: Pittsburgh Machine Politics* (Pittsburgh, 1970), p. 83.

5. Ray Lubove, *Twentieth Century Pittsburgh* (New York, 1969), pp. 20–24.

6. “Financial Statement Pittsburgh Chamber of Commerce Year Ending April 30, 1935,” *Greater Pittsburgh*, 16 (May 1935), 13.

a headquarters for agencies, a clearing house for information, a spreader of publicity throughout the nation, a pressure group for legislation, a salesman of what the city has to offer. Pittsburgh's Chamber is something less than this. It is more than normally torn by the bitter conflicts born of topography and regionalism, of inner personal rivalries, and of opposing economic interests such as retailer vs. wholesaler, wholesaler vs. manufacturer, large industrialist vs. small industrialist, rivers vs. rails.<sup>7</sup>

The writer also noted that in 1935 industrialist John Winslow Hubbard had helped pull the Tourist and Convention Bureau and the Bureau for Industrial Expansion out of the Chamber, thus leaving the organization minus two of its most important agencies and functions. For a while even the Citizens Committee on Flood Control (CCFC) contemplated disassociating itself from the Chamber.<sup>8</sup>

At least two factors accounted for the fragmentation of authority and the decentralization of the decision-making process that occurred in Pittsburgh in the 1930s. First, the economic collapse that began toward the end of 1929 shattered the confidence of the people in the wisdom of the business elite. Pittsburghers, like other Americans, rejected the notion—vigorously propagated by businessmen in the 1920s—that the interests of business and the interests of the larger society were identical. In Pittsburgh, this loss of confidence helped cause the collapse of the City-County Republican machine and its replacement by a Democratic machine representing the middle and lower classes of the metropolitan area.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, the economic collapse exacerbated conflicts within the business community as evidenced by the factional bickering within the Chamber of Commerce.

A second factor accounting for fragmentation relates to the dissension that often accompanies the transfer of leadership from one group to another group or from one generation to another generation. In the depression decade, community leadership passed from the leaders of the Progressive era and the 1920s to a younger generation. William Larimer Mellon's retirement from both the active management of local-state Republican politics and the

7. *Pittsburgh Bulletin Index* (11 January 1940).

8. *Ibid.*

9. Stave, *The New Deal*, pp. 183–192.

stewardship of the Mellon family's interests, and the subsequent rise to power of David L. Lawrence in politics and Richard K. Mellon in the corporate world represent outstanding instances of this transfer process. In the 1920s William Larimer Mellon had served as the Republican state chairman. From this position he exercised firm control over Pittsburgh's politics. He and his family maintained control through their financial support of selected mayoralty candidates which were, in turn, limited to one term.<sup>10</sup> The depression shattered the fusion of business and political control embodied in William Larimer Mellon's leadership.

Within the flood control movement, the shift of leadership from George S. Davidson and the Flood Commission of Pittsburgh to State Senator William B. Rodgers and the TSA-CCFC coalition, provides another typical example of the transfer of leadership from an older generation to a younger group of decision-makers who in the late 1930s and early 1940s assumed the positions of leadership in Pittsburgh. This new elite eventually re-established a process of centralized decision-making in response to the grave environmental and economic problems facing post-war Pittsburgh.

Despite fragmentation of the socio-political authority structure and decentralization of local decision-making in the 1930s, flood control continued to occupy much of the thinking of Pittsburgh's business-professional elite. After the monumental "St. Patrick's Day Flood" of 1936<sup>11</sup> paralyzed Pittsburgh and the upper Ohio River basin, the business and professional notables of the city continued a pattern of leadership evident since the early decades of this century. Acting through voluntary agencies, Pittsburgh's socio-economic elite mobilized public opinion on a regional basis and attempted to centralize the decision making process relative to flood control.

When the city council passed a resolution on March 23, asking Mayor William McNair to call a conference of business and industrial leaders to discuss rehabilitation of the flood affected areas, the

10. Astorino, "Republican Dynasty," pp. 68, 73, 77, 80.

11. Cresting at forty-six feet, the great flood of 1936 submerged the mills and factories and low-cost housing along the river banks, the stores and offices in the central business district, the main water pumping station, and electric plants. After rampaging for more than forty-eight hours the flood left in its wake forty-seven dead, 2800 injured, 67,500 homeless, and property losses estimated at about \$50 million in the Pittsburgh metropolitan area.

Chamber of Commerce thwarted this effort at public decision-making by seizing the initiative from the mayor. H. B. Kirkpatrick, president of the Chamber, convened a meeting at the Pittsburgh Athletic Club House on 27 March 1936. After reiterating the earlier view of the Flood Commission that the magnitude of the flood menace made flood control a federal responsibility, Kirkpatrick appointed William P. Witherow, an executive of Republic Steel, to head the Citizens' Committee on Flood Control (CCFC). Kirkpatrick's action thus inaugurated locally the second phase of the Pittsburgh flood control movement and also demonstrated that the Chamber could still do a more effective job of rallying the business and professional community around a common issue than could local governmental officials.<sup>12</sup> While the Chamber appointed yet another "blue ribbon" committee to carry out its mandate, in actual practice, this committee relinquished much of its responsibility to the Tri-State Authority (TSA) under the leadership of State Senator William B. Rodgers.<sup>13</sup>

The selection of Senator Rodgers to lead the second phase of the flood control movement bridged the gap between the business and political community. Rodgers was a member of a prominent family identified since the mid-19th century with Ohio River improvements

12. Other prominent individuals appointed to the executive board of CCFC by Kirkpatrick included Arthur E. Braun, president of the Farmers Deposit National Bank; Michael L. Benedum, president of Benedum-Trees Oil; William Horne Burchfield, vice-president of Joseph Horne Company; Edwin R. Crawford, president of the McKeesport Tin Plate Company; Benjamin F. Fairless, president of U.S. Steel Corporation; Dr. James H. Greene, director of personnel for Kaufmann's Department Stores, Inc. and executive vice-president of the Chamber of Commerce of Greater Pittsburgh; Howard Heinz, president of H. J. Heinz Company; William W. Holloway, president of the Wheeling Steel Corporation; Wilber M. Jacoby, general manager of the Pittsburgh Sun-Telegraph; Francis A. Keathing, president of Grogan Company (jewelers and silversmiths); H. B. Kirkpatrick, president and manager of the Koppers Building, Inc. and president of the Chamber of Commerce of Greater Pittsburgh; John D. Morrow, president of the Pittsburgh Coal Company; A. M. Oppenheimer, director, president, and general manager of the Apollo Steel Company; Frank R. Phillips, president of the Duquesne Light Company; Cornelius D. Scully, president of the Pittsburgh city council; H. S. Wherrett, President of the Pittsburgh Plate Glass Company; Curtis M. Yohe, vice-president of the Pittsburgh and Lake Erie Railroad; and Frank C. Harper, president of the Pittsburgh and Allegheny Milk and Ice Association, and secretary-manager of the Chamber of Commerce of Greater Pittsburgh.

13. The Tri-State Authority consisted primarily of mayors and burgesses and other governmental officials representing communities in the upper Ohio River basin.

and the sand and gravel business. An active member of the Pittsburgh Chamber of Commerce and a pre-New Deal conservative Democrat, the energetic Senator combined a successful career in small business with politics. He was vice-president of McCrady-Rodgers (a sand and gravel firm) and the Moore Enameling Company. In the public service area, Senator Rodgers had served on the Bellevue Borough Council in the 1920s, as the first administrator of the Pennsylvania Emergency Relief Board in 1932, and then as state senator.<sup>14</sup> The choice of Rodgers, a conservative Democrat with small business affiliations, to lead the second phase of the flood control movement reflected the rising influence of downtown merchants and small businessmen on the affairs of the Pittsburgh Chamber of Commerce. The choice of Rodgers also signaled a more cautious, pragmatic approach to environmental reform than had characterized the approach of the Pittsburgh business-professional elite in the Progressive era. In the earlier period, the Flood Commission showed itself as cosmopolitan when it hired as its executive director, George H. Maxwell, a nationally known Progressive reformer and advocate of scientific management of the nation's natural resources under a national waterway commission. Rodgers, on the other hand, supported the de-centralized approach to waterways development advocated by the Corps of Engineers; and he opposed the concept of scientific management of water resources embodied in the National Resources Board proposed by FDR. He, likewise, opposed efforts of the Roosevelt administration to establish administrative control over the Army Engineers. In short, Rodgers' selection reflected the declining influence of big business on the affairs of the Chamber and forecasted the conflict that eventually developed after World War II between the elite leadership of the "Pittsburgh Renaissance" and the Chamber's leadership.

### III. MOTIVATING CONGRESS: PRE-WORLD WAR II

After Congress enacted the Copeland Omnibus Flood Control Act of 1936, the Pittsburgh flood control movement confronted a new problem—how to persuade Congress to appropriate funds for the construction of the nine storage reservoirs authorized for the

14. For a profile of William B. Rodgers see *Pittsburgh Press*, 7 April 1935.

protection of Pittsburgh. Although the Act lodged primary responsibility for flood control with the federal government, nevertheless, the success of the program continued to depend on local initiative. Delays resulting from legal problems, conflicts over policy (both within the federal government and between the commonwealth and the federal government) as well as changing federal priorities required local leaders to maintain a constant vigil in order to sustain a consensus on flood control.

When President Roosevelt visited Johnstown on August 13, 1936, he met with State Senator Rodgers and other representatives of TSA-CCFC. At the meeting the president announced a grant of \$2 million for geological investigations of reservoir sites in the upper Ohio River basin. The money came from the Emergency Appropriation Act of 1936 which stipulated that 90 percent of the labor force employed under the Act had to come from among those in need of relief.<sup>15</sup> Since much of the skilled personnel out of work in 1934–35 had returned to positions in private industry by August of 1936, it took the district engineer almost a year to organize and complete the survey work on the original nine dams.<sup>16</sup>

A second problem delaying the start of construction on the reservoir system involved a dispute between the federal and state governments over the formula for sharing costs. The Omnibus Flood Control Act of 1936 authorized the federal government to assume all construction costs and a local agency to assume the cost of buying land and paying damages. However, the act provided that where land and damage costs exceeded construction costs, the federal government would assume 50 percent of the total project costs. While Rodgers and the TSA-CCFC complained that this formula required Pennsylvania to pay a disproportionate share of flood control costs in the Ohio River Basin, they, nevertheless, urged the state legislature to cooperate with the federal government and promised to work to reduce the state's share of total costs. Accepting this advice, the state legislature enacted a law on 7 August 1936, empowering the Water and Power Resources Board of the Department of Forests and Waters to acquire the land needed for the reservoirs. Following the flood threat of January 1936, the state legislature appropriated \$5 million for acquisition of dam sites. But the Act stipulated that

15. William B. Rodgers, "Report on Flood Control," *Greater Pittsburgh*, 18 (August 1936): 17, 36–37.

16. *Greater Pittsburgh*, 17 (August 1937): 17.



the state must retain and control land titles and potential hydro-electric power rights.<sup>17</sup> This requirement caused a further delay.

Disagreement within the federal government over national resource policy also delayed the start of construction on the reservoir system. The New Deal administration of Franklin D. Roosevelt favored scientific management of the nation's resources reminiscent of the policy advocated by Senator Newlands and Theodore Roosevelt in the Progressive era. FDR wanted to establish a resource planning board to coordinate on a national basis—and to operate through regional federal authorities—flood control, reforestation, soil erosion, navigation, power development, land reclamation, and wild-life conservation. Roosevelt viewed the proposed board not only as a way to bring unity and coherence to resource management but also as a means of establishing administrative control over the Corps of Engineers.<sup>18</sup> With the help of congressmen who favored a “pork barrel” approach to public works financing, and with the support of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the army engineers, fearful of losing their autonomy to another federal agency, succeeded in thwarting New Deal efforts to place them under such a board. William P. Witherow, chairman of the Pittsburgh Chamber's CCFC, served on the National Flood Control Policy Committee of the National Chamber of Commerce. He concurred in the March 1937 committee report opposing a national resource planning board operating through regional federal authorities similar to the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA). The Pittsburgh Chamber's subsequent adoption of the policy of the United States Chamber signaled a fundamental shift from its Progressive era support of scientific management of the nation's water resources under a single federal agency other than the Corps of Engineers.<sup>19</sup>

And finally, disagreements between the state government and the federal government over ownership of reservoir sites and hydro-electric power rights further delayed the start of construction on the reservoir system. When Congress finally appropriated \$30 million for the construction of flood control reservoirs in the Ohio River basin in July 1937, the district engineer immediately initiated

17. William B. Rodgers, “Flood Control Construction Ready,” *Greater Pittsburgh*, 18 (July 1937): 17.

18. Frank E. Smith, *The Politics of Conservation* (New York, 1966), p. 267.

19. Chamber of Commerce of the United States, *Report of Committee on National Flood Control Policy* (Washington, D.C., 1937); H. B. Kirkpatrick, “The Delay in Flood Control,” *Greater Pittsburgh*, 18 (October 1937).

work on the Tionesta and Crooked Creek dams. At the same time the state legislature stipulated in a July 1937 Act that the state must retain and control land titles and potential hydro-electric power rights. This action of the state legislature prompted the War Department to halt construction on the Crooked Creek dam and the Tionesta dam, for federal power regulations stipulated that the federal government could not build dams (with the potential for generating hydro-electric power) on state owned property.<sup>20</sup> While the federal government and the state of Pennsylvania squabbled over ownership of land and water power rights, Congress passed the Flood Control Act of June 1938.

With the enactment of the 1938 act, the federal government assumed complete responsibility for flood control. Moreover, the act clarified to some extent the procedures of the Corps of Engineers. Key provisions of the act granted (1) the War Department the power to acquire project sites at federal expense without the consent of the states; (2) the federal government "full ownership" of all flood controls projects; (3) the Federal Power Commission an equal voice with the Corps of Engineers in determining future developments; and (4) the Corps of Engineers the authority to operate the flood control projects. In addition, the act authorized \$7 million for the start of construction on flood control projects in the upper Ohio River basin. Through these provisions, the act resolved the major conflicts that had delayed construction of the reservoir system above Pittsburgh.

Construction soon commenced on the nine reservoir systems above Pittsburgh, beginning in March with the Crooked Creek dam and in May with the Tionesta dam. The Pittsburgh district of the Corps of Engineers had completed \$18,500.00 worth of construction by October 1938, and it had planned additional work costing \$18,300,000 before the end of fiscal 1939.<sup>21</sup>

However, as construction started on the Mahoning dam in February 1939, the state legislature once again voiced concern over the possible loss of the Commonwealth's mineral and water power rights to the federal government. This concern prompted the state legislature to pass a bill empowering the Commonwealth to block construction of any new reservoirs in Pennsylvania.

20. Kirkpatrick, "The Delay in Flood Control," p. 50.

21. "We Lead in Flood Control," *Greater Pittsburgh*, 19 (October 1938): 7.

This action of the state legislature threatened to delay further work on flood control reservoirs in Pennsylvania. In an effort to resolve the problem, Governor Arthur H. James conferred with William B. Rodgers and H. B. Kirkpatrick, representing the CCFC-TSA. In a talking paper prepared for the conference, Rodgers and Kirkpatrick recommended that:

An attempt be made to compose by the method of consultation and conference any differences that exist between the Federal and State Governments. We believe the Commonwealth will be performing a constructive service to the citizens of Pennsylvania if it cooperates in advancing that program: the flood control program.

As to the possibility of hydro-power generation, we are confident the Federal Government will not use any of the dams now being built, or any that are planned for early construction, for power purposes. . . . we can see no factor in the construction program above outlined that will jeopardize the interests of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania in any real reports of the Army Engineers which state that power development is neither technically nor economically feasible at any of the sites under immediate consideration.<sup>22</sup>

Governor James accepted their advice and on 26 June 1939 he vetoed the state bill.

In 1939, work continued on the reservoir system. For fiscal year 1940, Congress approved additional funds for the Crooked Creek and Tionesta dams and authorized \$4,050,000 for the start of construction on the Loyalhanna Creek dam, \$6,637,000 for the Youghiogheny, and \$14,750,000 for the Conemaugh River dam. As March, 1940, approached, Dr. James H. Greene, executive vice-president of the Pittsburgh Chamber of Commerce, boasted that the federal government had spent \$40,000,000 thus far on flood control for the Pittsburgh area, and that Pittsburgh was "ahead of all other major flood-endangered cities. . . ."<sup>23</sup> Indeed, it appeared that the steady stream of appearances of TSA-CCFC representation before state and federal bodies had paid off. The Tygart dam,

22. A report of the conference and a reprint of the memorandum appeared in *Greater Pittsburgh*, 20 (March 1939): 25.

23. James H. Greene, "The Executive Vice-President's Report," *Greater Pittsburgh*, 21 (February 1940): 5.

started in 1934, opened for operation in 1938. Between March 1938 and June 1940, construction began on five of the nine dams authorized in 1936. As 1941 approached, the future prospects looked bright for all of the flood control projects except the giant Allegheny River reservoir near Warren, Pennsylvania. The Corps of Engineers gave this project a lower priority when the Seneca Indians and the State of New York opposed the acquisition and inundation of their lands for the benefit of Pittsburgh. But events in Europe soon affected the whole flood control program.

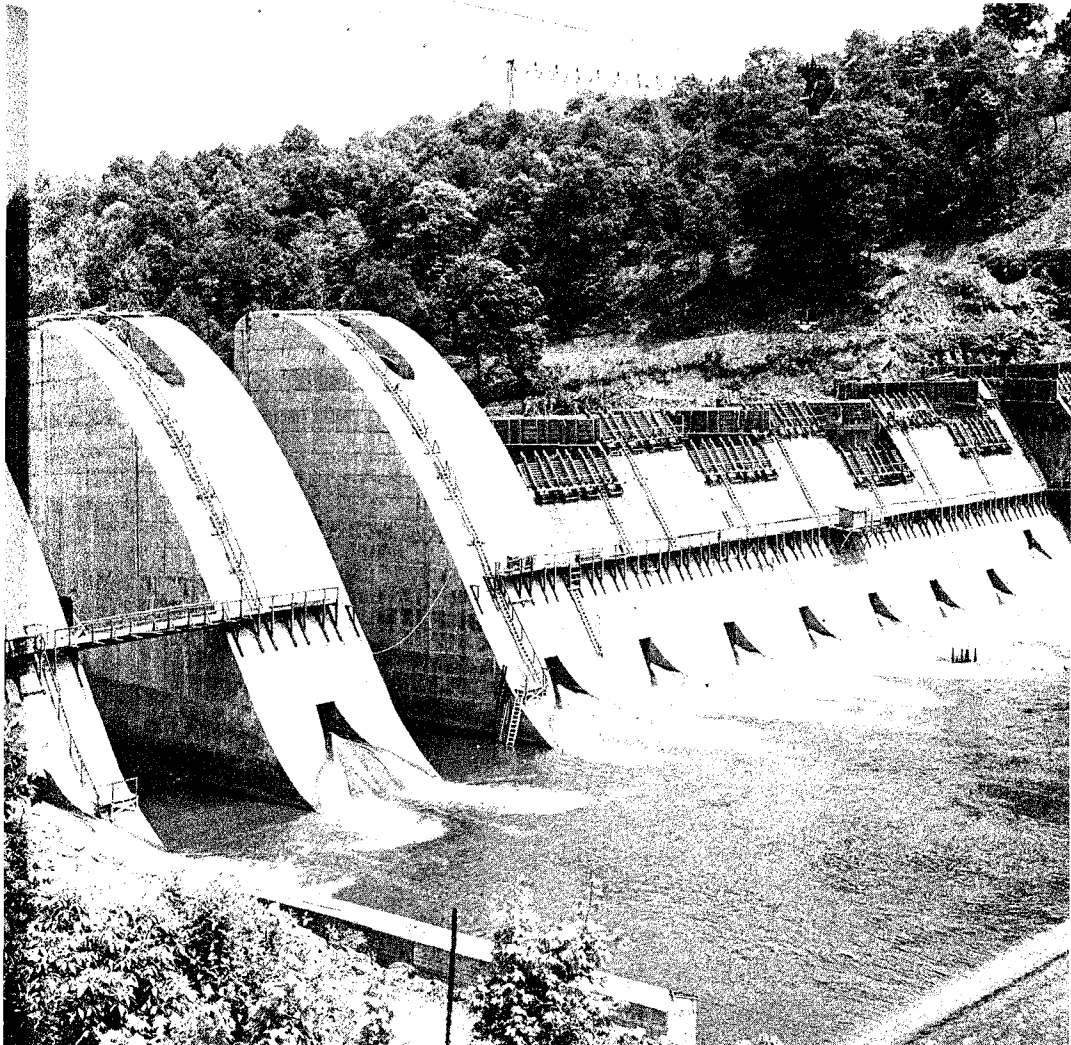
When German armed forces overran Western Europe in the spring and early summer of 1940, Congress shelved flood control in favor of rearmament. This, despite the warnings of TSA-CCFC representatives that "the cleverest fifth column and the most successful air attack in combination would scarcely cripple defense production in this area to the same extent as would a recurrence of Pittsburgh's 1936 flood."<sup>24</sup> Congress did appropriate, however, sufficient funds for completion of the five dams under construction prior to July 1940. But after that date, Congress did not authorize any new construction on the reservoir system for seven years.

#### IV. FLOOD CONTROL AND THE PITTSBURGH RENAISSANCE

At the end of World War II, Pittsburgh faced an uncertain future despite record wartime production and employment. In a report commissioned by the Pittsburgh Chamber of Commerce, the Pittsburgh Civic-Business Council, and the Allegheny Conference on Community Development, the Econometric Institute of New York identified four fundamental problems facing the city.<sup>25</sup> The study noted, first, that Pittsburgh's iron and steel industry was losing its prime position in world competition because of the city's loss of

24. U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Flood Control, *Flood Control Plans and New Projects: Hearings on H.R. 4911, 77th Congress, 1st Session, April 21 to May 14, 1941*, p. 50. Ralph C. Edgar, "Flood Control and the Defense Effort," *Greater Pittsburgh*, 23 (January 1942): 12.

25. The Econometric Institute, "The Long Range Outlook for the Pittsburgh Industrial Area: A Comprehensive Survey of the Magnitude and Control of Economic and Operational Factors Affecting this Area," mimeographed (Pittsburgh: Chamber of Commerce Library, 27 June 1946). For a short summary of the study's findings, see Jacob Baker, "Keeping Pittsburgh in Its Place in the Nation," (Pittsburgh: Institute of Business and Economic Problems, 1946), pp. 69-80.



CONEMAUGH RIVER DAM UNDER CONSTRUCTION.

*Courtesy of Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh.*

proximity to such basic resources as iron ore and limestone. The report proposed the development of cheap water-borne transport as a solution to this problem. Second, the report listed the lack of flood control as the second serious threat to the economic well-being of Pittsburgh. The report observed that "Pittsburgh has been beset more by flood interruption of industrial activity than has any other comparable industrial area in the world." The report identified floods as one of the main reasons why many industries had either moved away from Pittsburgh or refused to come to the city. Third, the report cited industrial and residential blight, particularly in and around the central business district, as having a deleterious effect on the economic and social prospects of the city. To correct the blight, the report recommended a comprehensive program of industrial and residential redevelopment. And finally, the report identified smoke and dust pollution as responsible for the generally intolerable atmospheric conditions existing in the

city and for adding excessive costs to many manufacturing operations. The report concluded that unless Pittsburgh took decisive action to solve these problems, the city faced a bleak future. Many of the large corporations with headquarters in Pittsburgh had already made plans to move their managerial and technical personnel to cities with better environmental conditions.

The economic decline and physical deterioration of the Pittsburgh environment outlined in this report mirrored a more general breakdown of the elite power structure that began in the depression decade. In response to this grave crisis facing the city, a process of centralized decision-making emerged again in Pittsburgh among the elite leaders of the city. Under the leadership of Richard King Mellon, a newly emergent business and professional elite formed the Allegheny Conference on Community Development (ACCD) in 1943 to investigate the nature of the problems confronting the whole region and to develop a step-by-step plan to halt the economic decline and physical deterioration of the Pittsburgh metropolitan area.<sup>26</sup> The Allegheny Conference on Community Development worked mainly through existing agencies. However, if an organization had a reputation for being ineffective, the ACCD took over its responsibilities. The ACCD became, in short, the "master" organization guiding and integrating the efforts of other groups or agencies within the Pittsburgh metropolitan region.

The aggressiveness with which the ACCD pursued its goal of centralizing and integrating the decision-making process led to conflict with the older Pittsburgh Chamber of Commerce. The Chamber of Commerce felt that the ACCD duplicated many of its efforts. Spokesmen for the ACCD, on the other hand, blamed the Chamber for having failed to deal effectively with the multitude of economic

26. For accounts of the origins and goals of the environmental reform movement popularly known as the "Pittsburgh Renaissance" see Park H. Martin, "Narrative of the Allegheny Conference on Community Development and the Pittsburgh Renaissance," mimeographed (Camp Hill, Pennsylvania, 1964); Stephen Lorant, *Pittsburgh: The Story of an American City* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1964), pp. 402-411; and Lubove, *Twentieth Century Pittsburgh*, pp. 106-141.

For an analysis of the elite status of the men who led the Renaissance efforts, see Arnold J. Auerbach, "The Pattern of Community Leadership in Urban Redevelopment: A Pittsburgh Profile" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 1960). Auerbach found that all twenty-five of the men who served on the executive committee of ACCD in 1958-59 were registered Republicans; nineteen were graduates of Ivy League schools; thirteen were Presbyterians and four were Episcopalians; and thirteen were born within a fifty mile radius of Pittsburgh.

and environmental problems facing Pittsburgh. These spokesmen argued that the size and diverse membership of the Chamber made it difficult for the Chamber to reach a consensus on key issues and to take decisive action.<sup>27</sup> In order to minimize conflict between the two organizations, representatives from both met in the spring of 1945 to define their respective areas of responsibility. According to Park Martin, executive director of the ACCD, "of some twenty subjects included on the agenda when the meeting was concluded, seventeen of the subjects were agreed to belong to the Conference program and only three to the Chamber."<sup>28</sup> Since flood control had constituted one of the most historic and successful programs of the Chamber, the ACCD permitted the Chamber to retain its jurisdiction over this program. Other programs relating to economic development and to cleaning up the environment came under the aegis of the ACCD. Another strategy adopted by the ACCD to reduce further conflict with the Chamber included bringing prominent members of the Chamber into the leadership circle of the ACCD.<sup>29</sup> The Chamber thus emerged from this encounter as an action arm of the ACCD rather than a pre-eminent coordinating or policy making agency. When David L. Lawrence, boss of the local Democrat machine, endorsed the ACCD program during his successful 1945 mayoralty campaign and subsequently formed an alliance with the leaders of the Conference, a process of centralized decision making had re-emerged among the elite members of the city's socio-political power structure.<sup>30</sup>

27. Edward J. Hanley, president of Allegheny Ludlum Steel Corporation and a member of the ACCD's Citizens Sponsoring Committee, interview with Nancy Mason in "Pittsburgh Renaissance: Transcriptions of Interviews on the Pittsburgh Renaissance: Part of an Oral History Program Financed by the Buhl Foundation," mimeographed. (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, Graduate School of Public and International Affairs, 1973), 1: 115.

28. Martin, "Narrative," p. 9.

29. The following members of the Chamber served on the ACCD executive committee: Dr. James H. Greene, executive vice-president of the Chamber; A. H. Burchfield, Jr., chairman of the Chamber's Public Relations Committee; J. K. B. Hare, Chairman of the Chamber's National Affairs committee; H. J. Heinz II, member of the Chamber's Flood Control Committee; and Curtis M. Yohe, member of the Chamber's Flood Control Committee.

30. For a discussion of Mayor Lawrence's role in the Renaissance, see David L. Lawrence (as told to John P. Robin and Stephan Lorant), "Re-birth," in Lorant, *Pittsburgh*, pp. 402-411; and Frank Hawkins, "Lawrence of Pittsburgh," *Harper's Magazine*, 213 (August 1956): 55-61.

Having accepted a vital but subordinate role in the decision-making apparatus, the Chamber set about the task of vigorously implementing its flood control responsibilities. When an economy-minded Congress threatened to eliminate the Conemaugh Dam appropriations from the federal budget in 1946, a delegation representing the Chamber of Commerce, area congressmen, and mayor Lawrence descended upon Capitol Hill. Armed with data from the report of the Econometric Institute, Dr. James H. Greene, head of the delegation, told the House Flood Control Committee that "floods and the threat of floods are one of the most important single deterrents to industrial expansion in this district. . . ." <sup>31</sup> Greene urged Congress to complete the Conemaugh first, then start work on the other reservoirs in the system. In response to this appeal, Congress partially relented and appropriated enough money for the start of preliminary work on the dam, including relocation of railroad tracks, telephone lines, and pipe lines. <sup>32</sup>

While the Chamber waged its fight on Capitol Hill, the issue of flood control surfaced as a critical factor in the prospective success of the Pittsburgh Renaissance. Turned down by the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, the ACCD sought private financing for the Point Redevelopment Project by the Equitable Life Assurance Society. According to Park H. Martin, the executive director of the ACCD, when he, Charles J. Graham, and Wallace Richards met on 8 July 1946 with Mr. Thomas I. Parkinson, president of Equitable, "of major interest to Mr. Parkinson was Pittsburgh's progress on smoke elimination and flood control." <sup>33</sup> Later, representatives of Equitable visited Pittsburgh to evaluate the plans of the Urban Redevelopment Authority. They announced interest in the project but linked investment to flood and smoke control. <sup>34</sup>

During the early spring of 1947, Pittsburgh's congressmen warned the Citizens Committee on Flood Control that an economy-minded Congress intended to apply two criteria to pending projects: "Is it economically justified and is there popular demand for it?" <sup>35</sup>

31. James H. Greene, "Statement Before the House Committee on Flood Control." Wednesday, April 10, 1946. Pittsburgh Chamber of Commerce Library File 25.3. Mayor David L. Lawrence to Dr. James H. Greene, 10 April, 1946, *Greater Pittsburgh*, 27 (May 1946): 17.

32. *Greater Pittsburgh*, 28 (February 1947): 6.

33. Martin, "Narrative," p. 63.

34. Edward R. Weidlein, *Allegheny Conference Digest*, 2 (June 1947): 2-3.

35. *Greater Pittsburgh*, 28 (May 1947): 10.



The Chamber of Commerce developed a strategy aimed at satisfying both sets of criteria. First, William B. McFall, president of the Chamber of Commerce, mobilized the full resources of the Chamber, and the organization launched a vigorous campaign to "save the Conemaugh." The strategy by the Chamber emphasized the economic importance of the Pittsburgh region to the nation's economy. Among other arguments, the Chamber stressed the fact that a major flood would curtail production and thus reduce federal tax revenues. The Conemaugh Reservoir, the Chamber pointed out, vitally affected the future of Pittsburgh because it would provide a total flood reduction capacity equal to the combined capacity of the six completed reservoirs. Next, the Chamber organized a publicity and letter writing campaign involving civic organizations, the press, radio, and communities throughout the Ohio River basin.<sup>36</sup>

On the heels of this publicity campaign, a delegation from Pittsburgh appeared before the House War Department Civil Functions Sub-Committee and dramatically presented its case.<sup>37</sup> Commenting on the impact the presentation had on Congress, Congressman Frank Buchanan of Pittsburgh wrote:

Last Saturday, July 26, on the floor of the House, Chairman Engle of the sub-committee on War Department Civil Functions kept repeatedly referring to the Conemaugh Project. The thing that made the lasting impression upon him was the presentation and pictorial review on the Conemaugh Project by the President of the Chamber of Commerce.<sup>38</sup>

The campaign succeeded, for Congress appropriated \$5,200,000 for the continuation of preliminary work on the Conemaugh Project. In December 1948, a headline of the *Pittsburgh Press* announced: "As U.S. Tames River Here—Firms Invest Millions in Old Flood

36. "Conemaugh and United Effort," *Greater Pittsburgh*, 28 (June-July 1947).

37. The delegation included top Chamber of Commerce officials who had directed the publicity campaign: William B. McFall, president; Dr. James H. Greene, executive vice-president; A. H. Burchfield, Jr., chairman, Public Relations Committee; J. K. B. Hare, chairman National Affairs Committee; and William B. Rodgers, Chairman, Flood Control Committee. Mayor David L. Lawrence, County Commissioner John J. Kane, and the congressional delegation from Allegheny County also represented the area at the hearings. *Greater Pittsburgh*, 28, (September 1947): 15.

38. Frank Buchanan to Dr. James H. Greene, 26 (July, 1947), *Greater Pittsburgh*, 28 (September 1947): 15.

Zones.”<sup>39</sup> A year later Congress finally appropriated funds for the start of construction on the dam proper. Actual construction began on 9 May 1949. The next week the county commissioners passed an effective smoke control ordinance. Seven months later the Equitable Life Assurance Society and the Urban Redevelopment Authority agreed to terms on the financing of the twenty-three acres adjacent to Point Park.<sup>40</sup> Three years and \$46,000,000 later, the Conemaugh Dam opened for operation. While attention focused on efforts to “save the Conemaugh,” the Army Engineers, without much fanfare, completed the smaller East Branch Clarion Reservoir in 1952. Thus, by September 1953, eight of the nine reservoirs approved in 1936 were complete and in operation.<sup>41</sup>

Following completion of the Conemaugh, attention shifted to the Allegheny Reservoir. The Army Engineers warned that completion of the Conemaugh did not provide a cure-all for Pittsburgh. The total drainage area above the Point, the Army Engineers observed, amounted to 19,111 square miles. To increase the controlled area to 8,080 square miles, or forty-two percent of the total, would require thirteen reservoirs.<sup>42</sup>

For the first time, however, the campaign to complete the reservoir system above Pittsburgh encountered significant opposition from other voluntary organizations. Opponents of the huge Allegheny Reservoir included the Seneca Indian Nation, New York State, civic clubs, religious organizations, conservationist groups, sportsmen’s clubs, and social welfare groups. The Seneca Indians opposed the reservoir because it would inundate their reservation in New York State. They claimed that under the terms of a treaty they signed with the United States in 1794, the federal government could not take their land. The Senecas based their claim on a key provision in the treaty which stated that:

39. According to the paper, the H. J. Heinz Company announced a \$15,000,000 building program while Jones and Laughlin Steel Corporation announced that it would spend \$70,000,000 for expansion of its plants on South Side, Hazelwood, and Soho. *Pittsburgh Press*, 12 December 1948.

40. Martin, “Narrative,” p. 23.

41. *Greater Pittsburgh*, 35 (September 1953): 15.

42. “The Army Engineers’ View on the Reservoir System of Flood Control for Pittsburgh,” mimeographed (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh Chamber of Commerce Library File 25.4, 1953).

The United States acknowledge all the land within the aforementioned boundaries, to be the property of the Seneca nation; and the United States will never claim the same, nor disturb the Seneca nation, nor any of the six nations, or of their Indian friends residing thereon and united with them, in the free use and enjoyment therefore: but it shall remain theirs, until they choose to sell the same to the people of the United States, who have the right to purchase.<sup>43</sup>

Charging exploitation of the Indians, religious organizations, civic clubs, and social welfare groups opposed the reservoir on moral grounds. New York State opposed the taking of a large section of its territory for the benefit of Pennsylvania. The Federal Sportsmen's Club of Allegheny County, the Federated Garden Clubs of New York, and the New York Conservation Forum argued for a series of small dams. They contended that small dams would provide a larger number of recreational areas and cause less damage to fish and wildlife. The Seneca Indians, on the other hand, proposed a plan to divert the flood waters of the Upper Allegheny Watershed to Lake Erie.

The Pittsburgh Chamber of Commerce took the lead in mobilizing supporters of the Allegheny Reservoir. The supporters included the ACCD, the chamber of commerce of other communities in the Upper Ohio Valley, the Ohio River Basin Sanitation Commission, the Army Engineers, and the U.S. Public Health Service. In answer to the arguments presented by opponents, advocates of the reservoir presented three counter arguments. First, they contended that the Seneca Indians' plan to divert the flood waters to Lake Erie would nullify the non-flood control benefits of the reservoir system: anti-stream pollution, navigation control, low flow regulation, and recreational benefits. Second, they pointed out that a series of small dams would not control enough of the drainage area to offer sufficient protection to downstream communities. Last, they argued that the Indians were citizens of the United States and that the government could take their lands under the power of eminent domain.<sup>44</sup> On 20 June 1957, Congress added its support in favor of

43. U. S. Senate, Committee on Indian Affairs, *Indian Affairs—Laws and Treaties*, compiled by Charles J. Kappler, 57th Congress, 1st Session, 1903, 2: 27.

44. Allen B. Lee, "The Kinzua Dam Project: A Case Study of the Politics of Flood Control" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 1959), 9.



CONEMAUGH RIVER DAM AND RESERVOIR NEAR BLAIRSVILLE, PA. IN THE ALLEGHENY RIVER BASIN.

*Courtesy of Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh.*

the reservoir. In the Omnibus Public Work Bill of that year, Congress included \$1,000,000 for the start of construction on the Allegheny Reservoir.

The Senecas took their fight into the federal courts, but to no avail. The Supreme Court settled the issue on 7 March 1960, in a related case involving the Tuscarora Indians. The court held that the federal government could take Indian lands under the power of eminent domain providing it granted the Indians just compensation.<sup>45</sup> The federal government finally paid the Seneca Indian Nation (about 500 people in 127 families) \$12,128,917 for the loss of their lands.<sup>46</sup> Construction began on the Allegheny Reservoir in September 1960 and took five years to complete. Thus, after twenty-nine years of sustained pressure from Pittsburgh's business-professional elite and their allies, Congress finally completed the key reservoirs authorized in 1936.

45. Federal Power Commission v. Tuscarora Indians, 362 U.S. 99 (1960).

46. *Pittsburgh Press*, 4 October 1964.

## V. CONCLUSION

Between 1936 and the start of American involvement in World War II, several significant trends emerged regarding flood control. At the national level, Congress progressively implemented a comprehensive and coordinated approach. At the same time, however, it protected its control over public works through individual funding of projects. Under this policy, and before the outbreak of World War II, the Army Engineers completed over 50 percent of the reservoir system authorized for the protection of Pittsburgh. Furthermore, the Army Engineers emerged as the principal federal agency responsible for comprehensive and coordinated development of the nation's waterways. At the local level, the campaign for flood control proceeded amid a general disintegration of the elite power structure in Pittsburgh. Economic collapse and the transition of leadership which occurred in the 1930s produced strains within the socio-political structure that fragmented the process of centralized decision-making characteristic of the early decades of this century. The cosmopolitan, avant-garde approach to environmental reform associated with the earlier era was replaced by a more cautious, parochial approach in the depression decade. Flood control, nevertheless, continued amid the fragmentation of the elite power structure for several reasons. First, at the national level, the increasing commitment of the federal government to comprehensive and coordinated development of waterways insured a minimal response to the flood menace facing the nation's river basins. Second, at the local level, fresh memories of the disastrous flood of 1936 plus almost yearly, less serious inundations of the flood plains of the upper Ohio River basin kept the issue of flood control alive among the populace. Within this context, Pittsburgh's business and professional leaders demonstrated a continuing ability to create and maintain a consensus on the issue of a flood control system for Pittsburgh.

A process of centralized decision-making re-emerged in post-World War II Pittsburgh in response to grave environmental and economic problems confronting the city. Under the leadership of Richard King Mellon, a newly emergent business and professional elite formed the ACCD to deal with these problems. Acting as a centralized decision-making agency, the ACCD integrated the efforts of public and private agencies in an attempt to revitalize Pittsburgh's

decaying central business district and regional economy. Flood control emerged as a critical factor in the prospective success of the Pittsburgh Renaissance. After some initial conflict with the ACCD over the jurisdiction of certain programs, including flood control, the Chamber of Commerce became the action arm of the ACCD in the campaign to bring flood control to Pittsburgh. While functioning in this capacity, the Chamber played a vital role in the process of uniting the activities of Pittsburgh's socio-political elite and in mobilizing public opinion on a regional basis. When the Supreme Court finally upheld the right of the government to take Indian lands and to construct the huge Allegheny River Reservoir, twenty-nine years of sustained pressure from Pittsburgh's business and professional elite had ultimately paid off.