

Notes and Queries.

THE LAST PUBLIC EXECUTION IN ALLEGHENY COUNTY— HANGING OF JOHN TIERNAN IN PITTSBURGH IN 1818.

In this advanced age when many of the States have abolished capital punishment, when our own State is drifting in the same direction, and when the persons who are convicted of murder in the first degree, are taken away from the haunts of men and meet their doom in the secrecy of a sealed chamber, it is well to recall that only a hundred years ago a morbid curiosity required that the executions be made public spectacles, and the people took a holiday in order to witness the gruesome sight.

The last person to be publicly hanged in Allegheny County was John Tiernan, whose execution took place on March 25, 1818. Tiernan murdered Pat. Campbell on Turtle Creek hill in the latter part of the year 1817. He was captured after a lively chase and placed in confinement in Pittsburgh, but shortly afterward broke jail and was recaptured at or near Greensburg. He was brought back to the city where he remained until executed.

Pat. Campbell and John Tiernan had a contract for breaking stone on the old Greensburg pike, on Turtle Creek hill, and having finished the task received their pay. Tiernan commenced drinking, while Campbell, who was an inoffensive and sober man, went to the cabin occupied by himself and Tiernan, and retired early in the evening. At this time where the village of Turtle Creek stands, there was a tavern, a store, and a blacksmith shop. Tiernan repaired to the tavern, which was kept by Thomas Chalfant, borrowed an axe and went back to the cabin, and in cold blood killed Campbell, who was asleep.

On January 15, 1818, the grand jury found a true bill against Tiernan for murder. Two days later he was tried, and convicted of murder in the first degree, and sentenced to be hanged on March 25 following. The day of the execution dawned beautifully clear, and thousands of people came into the city to witness the public hanging. The execution took place at the head of Fourth Avenue, then called Fourth Street. Fourth Street ended at Grant Street. Two or three hundred feet beyond this point, and near where Ross Street has been since laid out, a small rivulet called Suke's Run flowed toward the Monongahela River which it entered where the "Pan Handle" Railroad bridge crosses the stream. The run was bordered on both sides by meadows and beyond these the land sloped slightly upward, the whole being called Suke's Run Hollow. In this hollow the gallows was placed. A few rods above the place of execution the run was crossed by a stone bridge.

Tiernan had been lodged in the old jail on Jail Alley, now Delray Street, a short distance south of Diamond Street. He was taken from the jail yard in a cart guarded by Pittsburgh's military com-

pany, the Pittsburgh Blues. The procession, followed by a large crowd, moved up Fourth Street to the gallows, which was immediately surrounded by the Blues. Tiernan, who was dressed in a blue coat, new white trousers, and wore brogans, took his place upon the trap. An enormous crowd stood expectantly about the place of execution. The little bridge, the hill to the east, and the roofs of the houses in the vicinity were black with men, women and children. Lazarus Stewart, the sheriff, cut the rope which held the trap door, and Tiernan fell several feet, and after hanging for some time was taken down and buried beneath the gallows.