THE OLD INDIAN BURYING GROUND

Later used as a Place of Interment by the French, and by the Pioneers of Pittsburgh

By STEPHEN QUINON*

Of the people who worship in the First Presbyterian and Trinity Episcopal churches, how many are aware of the wealth of historic interest in the square in which those churches stand? How many know anything of the gallant men who sleep there, men whose lives abounded in romance, whose names are associated with glorious deeds? That square, bounded by Wood and Smithfield streets, Sixth Avenue and Virgin Alley, is a memorial of struggling and suffering, of disaster and triumph, such as could not easily be found elsewhere. Within its limits, crumbling into a common dust, are the bodies of savages, and civilized French, English, American, Canadian, Indian traders, soldiers, judges, characters which stand out boldly on the background of the past.

One of the earliest references to the square appeared in the Pittsburgh Gazette of August 26, 1786, in a paragraph, copied into Hazard's Register under date of May 28, 1831:

"In laying out the town of Pittsburgh, 5 lots have been assigned for churches and burying grounds. These comprehend the former ground, and which is adjoining to the ancient cemetery of the natives, being one of those mounds before mentioned, and which, judging from the height of the earth in this place, seems to have been a place of sepulchre for ages. These lots are about the center of the town as it is laid out, and an intermediate distance between the rivers. A church is on the way to be built, of squared timbers and moderate dimensions, which may accommodate the people until a larger building can be erected".

Where were "those mounds before mentioned?" What has been preserved of them the article quoted does not say. One of them is that which remains at McKees Rocks, and,

*From The Pittsburgh Times of June 28, 1895.
as learned from a description of Grant’s Hill, written by Judge H. H. Brackenridge, and published in the *Pittsburgh Gazette* of July 29, 1786, there was another on that hill:

“On the summit of the hill there is a mound of earth, supposed to be a catacomb or ancient burying place of the savages”.

Until recently I was of the impression that there was still another at the Point, as Harris, quoted in *The Early History of Western Pennsylvania and the West*, says:

“In our early day the ditch that ran from the Allegheny through Marbury, Liberty and Short streets to the Monongahela, and the mound, and several old brick and log houses that composed a part of old Fort Pitt were standing conspicuous”.

The wording of this left the impression that a third Indian mound was at the place indicated; but the venerable Isaac Craig, than whom there is no higher authority, and to whose courtesy I am indebted for my knowledge of the paragraph relating to the square in question, assures me that the impression is wrong.

The town was laid out by Wood and Vickroy, whose services are commemorated by streets bearing their names, in the summer of 1784, and the plan approved by Tench Francis, attorney of the Penns in September. In that plan the square consists of 8 lots, each 60 by 240 feet, facing Sixth Avenue, and running through from that to Virgin Alley. They began with No. 433 lying along Smithfield Street, and ended with 440, lying along Wood Street. The 5 lots “assigned for churches and burying grounds,” and which “comprehend the former ground” were 439 and 435 inclusive, which were divided equally between the Presbyterian Church and the Episcopal Church. The Presbyterian portion was 439, 438 and half of 437, giving the church 150 feet front by 240 in depth. The Episcopal portion was of corresponding size. These lots had evidently been selected because they had been burying grounds to a period beyond memory.
THE GRAVE OF BEAUJEAU.

In this Square was located the French Cemetery of the Blessed Virgin of the Beautiful River.

There can hardly be a reasonable doubt that within this square was the Catholic cemetery of the Blessed Virgin of the Beautiful River, of the time of the French occupation, from April 1753, to November 1758. It was the burial place of the aboriginees back to the age of the mound builders. Whoever reads the story of the relations between the French and Indians in this region must know that the French were assiduous in complimenting them to wean them from the English interest, and there could have been no better way to compliment them than by laying the French dead alongside the Indian dead. The savage was always approachable through his religious instincts, through his sense of the mystery of the hereafter. To adopt his burial place was a recognition of brotherhood with him. If there had been a French cemetery close to Fort Duquesne it would have been discovered in the course of a century's digging and delving around the Point. The Rev. A. A. Lambing, likewise a high authority on local history, calls my attention to the fact that "when the foundations were dug for the plow works, now a paint works, between the foot of Penn Avenue and Duquesne Way, some 15 years ago or more, two bodies were found, one an Indian and the other a white man. That was just outside the walls of the Fort". That is not proof that a cemetery was there. In the Fall of 1825 a stranger stopping at Lawrenceville one day, while coming into town or going out, saw "a group of persons assembled near an excavation in the Northern Liberties," and curious to learn what the attraction was, walked up and found it was the discovery of three coffins. They were of three soldiers who had been shot by the redoubtable Anthony Wayne, when preparing for his expedition against the Indians. That was in 1792. Neville B. Craig wrote that "Wayne's army was at that time encamped on the beautiful plain on the southeast side of Liberty Street and extending from where
the Episcopal Church stands up to the canal." The Episcopal Church of 1825 stood on the triangular lot, since famous as the sight of the Penn Bank. Wayne was encamped on the grounds of Fort Fayette. These men, shot for desertion, were perhaps, buried where they fell. There may be a question as to whether the authorities of the graveyard around the present churches would have permitted the burial of them there. They were regarded as criminals. Something similar may be the explanation of the burial of the Indian and the white man outside of the walls of the Fort at the Point.

How did Virgin Alley get its name? For years I have tried to ascertain. I believe it got it from the cemetery of the Blessed Virgin of the Beautiful River. When this town was laid out, the people here, as stated in 1786, were Presbyterians, Lutherans, and Episcopalians, though the last were few, and there were some Catholics. Would those Protestants, would the agents of the Quaker Penns, honor the Virgin by calling a part of the town after her? Certainly not. But the alley is named after her. Exactly, but who gave the name originally? The Catholic French! Might it not have been by Denys Baron, priest of the Recollet Order of the Franciscans, chaplain of Fort Duquesne? Without going into details concerning the Indian trails, converging or diverging at the Point, over what route within the present city limits did Forbes travel to Fort Duquesne when he came to drive out the French? In answer to certain inquiries about the Indian trails, Morrison Foster, still another authority on local history, wrote to me:

"There was a path up Liberty Street and along the foot of the hill, about where the line of the Pennsylvania Railroad runs, crossing the Two Mile Run, where Vilsack's brewery is; then straight up the hill past the rear or south of the house, I was born in, where my father lived when he laid out the town of Lawrenceville; thence along the bluff overlooking the Two Mile Run, until it joined the path from Shannopin. By this path Gen. Forbes made his road when he moved on Fort Duquesne. Forbes' Road was there within my recollection".

Liberty Street runs direct from the Union Station to the freight station and to the sites of Fort Duquesne and
Fort Pitt. This was "the main road" as early as 1730. The old writers tell how thickly this region was wooded when the French came. When a death occurred at the Fort it is reasonable to hold that on the way to the Cemetery of the Virgin they followed the main road a certain distance and then turned off into the woods. Virgin Alley begins at Liberty Street the "main road" of old. Was there not a path to the burial ground about where Virgin Alley runs, was it not known among the French by a name derived from the cemetery, and was not that name handed down from the French to the English, who accepted it as an established name? I can conceive of no other way in which that good Catholic name could have been given to the alley or any other in which the fierce Presbyterians could have been reconciled to it. The name bears witness that within that square was "the cemetery of Fort Duquesne, under the title of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin of the Beautiful River" the register of which was kept by Chaplain Baron, a translation of which, with instructive notes, made by Neville B. Craig, may be read in the file of the Daily Pittsburgh Gazette of 1858, in the number of July 5th, in the Mercantile Library of Pittsburgh.

It is worth while to note the first white person ever buried there:

"20th of June, 1754,—died in the Fort Duquesne, on the Belle Riviere, Toussaint Boyer, called Bientourne, bachelor, inhabitant of St. Pierre, in the prairie of Magdalene, aged 22, or thereabouts, having received the sacraments of penitence, of the Viaticum and Extreme Unction. He was buried in the place intended for the cemetery of said fort, with the usual ceremonies, by me."

This young man was a Canadian, as was a more famous one buried there—"M. Leonard Daniel, Esq., Sieur de Beaujeau, captain in the Infantry, commandant of Fort Duquesne and the army." This was the man who defeated Braddock at the crossing of the Monongahela. He was born in Montreal in 1711, and for his valour and enterprise had received the cross of the military order of St. Louis. The battle of Braddock's Field was fought in the afternoon of July 9, 1755. Before setting out for it in the morning, he "had been to confession and made his devotions." About two o'clock it
began, and he was soon mortally wounded. Winthrop Sargent, who devoted a volume to the Braddock Expedition, says in describing the opening of the battle:

"Before them, with long leaps, came Beaujeau, the gayly colored fringes of his hunting shirt and the silver gorget on his bosom, at once bespeaking the chief." Beaujeau was buried on the 12th. Here I quote from a letter to me from Mr. Isaac Craig:

"The French soldiers killed at Braddock's defeat I was told by an old citizen, were buried where the Episcopal chapel now stands."

After a reference to three rough stones there, he continues:

"When the remains of the dead in that churchyard were removed, I told the gentleman who superintended the work of this story, and requested him to see that the removal was executed with special care. It happened that these graves were dug up during my absence from the ground, and when I returned I was handed a piece of gold fringe about 5 inches long, and 2 inches wide, which I am satisfied was a portion of the uniform worn by Monseur de Beaujeau."

Mr. Craig showed me the relic, saying that he thought it must have been a part of the decoration on the shoulder, of a colonial officer taking the place of the epaulette. But it might have been a part of "the gayly colored fringes of his hunting shirt." If that was not from the uniform of Beaujeau from whose could it have been? The French privates or subalterns could not have worn such fringes. The removals spoken of were to make room for Trinity Church and chapel erected in 1869, was it not? I take it as an established fact that the square in question comprises what was originally the burying ground of the savages, which was next the Catholic cemetery of the Blessed Virgin of the Beautiful River.

**LOT OWNERS IN THE SQUARE**

As to the original ownership of that square, outside of the five lots assigned to the churches. They were granted by the Penns in September 1787. In November of that year John Skinner bought lots 433 and 434 from the Penns. The first is the one along Smithfield Street, extending back to Carpenters, now Freiheit Alley. The other lies between the alley and Trinity Church. Who Skinner was I have not
taken pains to inquire. He was not a conspicuous figure in our early history. He sold those lots to John Gibson, and when Gibson went into the clutches of the sheriff, they passed to Wilson Hunt, and then, as I make it out, to Oliver Ormsby, who cut them up into a plan of his own, and sold Nos. 1, 2, 3, 5 and 8 of his plan, part of Woods 434 to Trinity Church for a burying ground, in November of 1827, and it was laid off by the surveyor, G. Bardeou, who has left many marks of his work in Pittsburgh.

No. 440 along Wood Street, from Sixth Avenue, to Virgin Alley, was bought from the Penns by Rev. Samuel Barr, December 4, 1787, for 12 lbs. and 10 shillings "current money of Pennsylvania, in specie." The good Quaker Penns were sound money men. So far as I have noticed in their land dealings they demanded specie every time. No matter about that, though. Barr sold the lot September 16, 1795, to John Wilkins, for 80 lbs., and he sold it August 5, 1796, to John Easton, described as the Tennessean and late sergeant in the fourth regiment of the Army of the United States, who sold it to the trustees of the First Presbyterian Church, December 16, 1801, for 107 lbs. and 10 shillings.

Rev. Samuel Barr, a licentiate of the Presbytery of Londonderry blew into this town in the fall of 1785, and there was not much here which he did not see in about the time it takes to tell it. He assumed charge of the First Presbyterian congregation in an informal way almost as soon as he arrived.

AN OLD HEAD STONE.

The Shawnee Chief Red Pole, Brother of Blue Jacket, Who Fought Wayne at the Fallen Timbers.

On entering Trinity churchyard one sees to his left a crumbling head stone, bearing the name of an Indian, part of the inscription eaten away by the tooth of time.

The following letter by Major Isaac Craig, grandfather of Mr. Isaac Craig, of Allegheny, quartermaster here, to James McHenry, Secretary of War, at Philadelphia, relates some of the story of the inscription:

"Pittsburgh, 17th January, 1797, Sir—the river still continues shut up with ice; Captain Turner and the Indians are therefore, still here, and I am extremely sorry
to have to inform you that about ten days ago, Red Pole, the principal chief, complained of a pain in his breast and head, supposed by Dr. Carmichael to have been occasioned by a slight cold, and for which necessary medicines etc., were applied, but without success, as his complaints had increased, attended with other bad symptoms, and he is now according to the opinions of Doctors Carmichael, Bedford, and Wallace, dangerously ill, notwithstanding every possible attention has been paid to him and to the other Indians, of which they are perfectly sensible, and Blue Jacket in particular acknowledges with gratitude that the kindest possible attention is paid to his sick brother."

That was pneumonia he had, was it not?

This is how the inscription once read:

"MIO-QUA-COO-NA-CAW,
or
Red Pole;
Principal village chief of the Shawnee Nation;
Died at Pittsburgh the 28th of January
1797
Lamented by the United States."

In a letter under date of February 3, 1797, Major Craig informed the Secretary that Red Pole died at 9 A. M. of January 28th, and added:

"I have had the corpse attended and interred in the most respectable manner in our church burying ground, and with your approbation, and to gratify Blue Jacket, and the other chiefs, I wish to place either a tombstone or a headstone to his grave, with any inscription you may please to point out."

The Shawnee were brothers, as intimated, and Neville B. Craig, writing about the incident in 1833, referred to Thatcher's *Indian Biography*, as considering them brothers. Blue Jacket was a spirited man, one who would not be awed by even Mad Anthony Wayne, and forced the Indians to fight him at Fallen Timbers, where they were defeated by a bayonet rush.

These chiefs, in charge of Captain Shaumburg, arrived here Christmas Day, 1796, and were detained by the ice. They were returning from Philadelphia, then the seat of government. The mention of Shaumburg suggests the plot
of the Spaniards to sever the Union, to which end they plied with gold Gen. James Wilkinson, a name familiar here. He succeeded Wayne in command of the army, on Wayne's death in 1796. It is possible, here to merely refer to this fact, and for the sake of illustrating the historic relations of the Pittsburgh square.

Red Pole's body was buried where Trinity Church is, and I have been told that as there was hardly any of it left to remove, the stone only was, and set where it is now.

To the right of the church one sees names which speak volumes—Mackay and Bayard. The Mackay reposing there was the son of Aeneas Mackay, a British soldier in command of the king's troops from South Carolina, who came to the aid of Washington in the advance on Fort Duquesne in 1754, and surrendered with him to the French at Fort Necessity. He was afterwards commandant at Fort Pitt, and when the Revolution broke out, joined the Americans, was commissioned colonel of the 8th Pennsylvania regiment in July, 1776 and died at Quibbletown, N. J., February 14, 1777.

Samuel Mackay reposes near his nephew and namesake, Samuel Mackay Bayard. Stephen Bayard, a descendent of Huguenots, a native of Maryland, whose body lies somewhere in that ground, married the daughter of Aeneas Mackay, the first white child born at Fort Pitt, Elizabeth, after whom her husband called the town of Elizabeth, which he laid out. In 1812 he was offered the commission of a major general, but was compelled to decline it on account of his bodily infirmities. He was major of the 8th, and promoted to a lieutenant-colonelcy after the death of Mackay. On one occasion Lieutenant Gabriel Peterson deposed that at the battle of Brandywine a cannon ball, evidently well spent, "struck Col. Bayard on the head and shoulder, and tumbled him over the ground for near two rods. Deponent helped him up on his feet—he was frantic." Stout old hard hearted Stephen, with his Huguenot blood! It raised his dander at the British to get a cannon ball at the butt of the ear. Somewhere in that ground, over near the Virgin Alley side, William Butler sleeps for his last long sleep. He was a Revolutionary officer who retired from the service in 1783 and died in Pittsburgh in 1789. His brother, Richard, who perished in St. Clair's disastrous expedition, is spoken of by Gen. Henry Lee as "the renowned second and rival of Mor-
gan in the Saratoga encounters." It was Richard who challenged Gen. von Steuben for an affront after the surrender of Yorktown, and it took all the influence of Washington and Rochambeau to dissuade him from the duel. I have been told that there were five of these Butlers, and all men of strong character. They were here at an early period as Indian traders.

This sketch would be incomplete, indeed, if it contained no word about John Gibson, who once owned two of the lots in the square. He was a native of Lancaster, and came over here with Gen. Forbes, when about nineteen years of age. After the French were driven out he settled at Fort Pitt as a trader. During Pontiac's War he was taken prisoner by the Indians, condemned to the stake, but saved through the Indian custom of adoption. A squaw adopted him. I think I have read that he was a prisoner when Boquet, after the relief of Fort Pitt, marched against the Indians on the Muskingum, and that he wrote one of the letters which they sent to Bouquet, during the negotiations for peace. He married the sister of the celebrated Mingo chief, Logan, whose speech sent to Dunmore every schoolboy knows, and it was Gibson who translated it as delivered to Dunmore under an oak tree about seven miles south of Circleville, Ohio. When the War of Independence began he was appointed colonel and served in New York and New Jersey under Washington till 1781, when he was appointed to the command of the western department. He was a member of the Pennsylvania convention, an Associate Justice of Allegheny County, his commission as such can be read in the Recorder's Office; was Secretary of the territory of Indiana in 1801, and held that office until the territory became a state. He died at Braddock in April 1822.