THE OLD MONONGAHELA BRIDGE AND ITS REMINISCENCES.

BY PENDENNIS.

In June I gave a very brief account of the artist who painted the beautiful act drop that has graced Library Hall since 1870, and spoke of the production as one of the finest in the country. A few days ago I was agreeably surprised at receiving the following letter, which will explain the wood cut that appears with this article:
The Old Monongahela Bridge

Weldon, Montgomery County, Pa.,
October 1, 1884.

Dear Sir:—My niece, Miss Mary Sample, sent me, some time since, a slip from the Pittsburgh Dispatch, giving an account of the "Smith family"—of my branch of it. I thought it so well written, and in such good taste, that I was very anxious to ascertain the author, so wrote to my sister, asking her to find who it was that had so kindly mentioned me, stating that I would like to send the writer a little effort in my way in return for his kindness. She soon sent me your address as the author's, and I forward with this a view from the end of the old Monongahela bridge, corner Smithfield and Water streets, which I sketched in 1833, and which I hope may afford you some pleasure, as I believe that the old bridge has long since passed away.

The Lombardy poplar seen on the left is the one which I copied when I made my very first attempt at scene painting. I was then 15 years of age. It was thought by the members of our "Thalia Society" to be "like a tree," and I had, in consequence, all the scenery to paint that was required for the next four years.

Again thanking you for your kindness, I am,
Respectfully yours,
Russell Smith.

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The wood cut fails to show many of the little strange features of the picture, and the beautiful coloring, for which this artist is so noted, must be seen to be appreciated. To those of our people who lived in this city prior to April 10, 1845, the old bridge will be recognized. Its quaint, old-fashioned entrance seems more like the doorway to a country barn than the passage to a bridge crossing an important river. In speaking of it Judge White remarked the other day: "I will never forget the first time I saw the old bridge. I was with my aunt, an old lady, who had long promised to take me in to see the city, and as we reached the top of Coal Hill, coming in from Washington county, where we lived, I first saw the river, and then the bridge. Looking down from the high hill at the two little black holes—as they appeared to me—in the bridge, I said: 'Why, aunt, do horses walk on top of the bridge?' 'No,' said she, 'they go through the bridge.' I told her that I thought she was mistaken, and it was not until we had descended the hill
and nearly reached the entrance did I discover that horses could go through it and over it."

Many of the readers of the Dispatch will remember the ox roast on the sand bar near the bridge. That was in 1838. The bar at that time was about two or three feet above the water, and the day of the roast a pontoon bridge was constructed of keelboats running from the bar to the shore. The roast was a grand jubilee gotten up by the Democrats, after the election of David R. Porter. If I mistake not, the late Col. Wm. Phillips was then a leader in the ranks of the "unterrified," and dealt out the ribs of the roast with lavish hand. I remember the Colonel, then a young and handsome fellow, handing me a small piece of the half-roasted meat, and, as I gulped it down, I thought I had never tasted anything sweeter. A few hours after the meeting had adjourned, the rain commenced to fall, and next morning not a grain of sand of the bar was to be seen above the surface of the water.

At that time the Southside, from the bridge up the river for a mile or two, was extensive open meadow land, with two or three orchards and a dozen or so of dwellings. It was not until after the fire of 1845, which destroyed the greater portion of the lower part of the city, including the old bridge, that the Southside advanced. The Western University was on what is now Third Avenue, between Smithfield and Grant Streets.

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If I mistake not, in 1845, a hose company had its house on Sixth Street, and among its members was O. H. Rippey, who gave up his life while gallantly leading his men on a charge during the late war. Sam Barr, now a member of Congress from the Dauphin district, was then in his prime and exchanged Munchausen stories with Harry Laubie, who was afterward killed and scalped by the Sioux Indians. Gus Bonafon, Wm. Creighton and others who were members of the company, had their rendezvous at that place, and made night hideous with their yells.

In 1848 the boys in blue, with their stiff stocks that made their necks look as though they were carved out of pine sticks, and who had gone to fight the Mexican greasers, returned home. A grand reception was given them, and in the line could be seen the stately judges, officers of the
courts, members of Congress; in fact, the entire populace turned out \textit{en masse} to do honor to the gallant men who had gone to fight for the old flag. Wynkoop's regiment arrived on Saturday amid the ringing of bells and firing of cannon, and on the Sunday following the steamer Jewess arrived, bringing 24 bodies of the dead soldiers, 13 of whom belonged to the Duquesne Grays, Captain Herron commanding. At the grand reception Captain John Birmingham was Chief Marshal and the Hon. Wm. Wilkins orator of the day. Nearly all of those who took prominent part in the procession have since passed beyond the great river. At that time, just where the opera-house now stands—I mean that portion that fronts on Diamond Street—the Presbyterian Church stood, surrounded by what was then a large graveyard. The spot now occupied by the "Howard block" was then a low, marshy frog pond, where the boys after a day's rain "paddled their light canoe," and got well paddled when they returned home. At the corner of Fifth Avenue and Smithfield, Updegraff's little blacksmith shop stood, and many a time and oft did your humble servant receive well-merited chastisement for throwing mud balls at passing wagons.—\textit{The Pittsburgh Dispatch}, October 12, 1884.