REMINDERS OF EARLY PITTSBURGH

By

MRS. C. SIMPSON

My father came to Pittsburgh in 1797 and I was born in 1800 near O’Hara’s glass works, the first establishment of the kind in this vicinity. It was built by Messrs. James O’Hara and Isaac Craig, and Mr. Wm. Eichbaum, father of the late Wm. Eichbaum, was engaged to superintend the erection of the building. It has long since disappeared.

The old fort and magazine near the Point, I remember quite well, and the picket line, still in a good degree of preservation.

Some account has been given of a slide on Mt. Washington, but there was one many years before which I recall quite clearly. It swept off a red frame ferry-house that stood on the edge of the bank above the landing, and the road was rendered impassable for several days, being completely filled up with trees, stumps and rocks.

I have often wondered why no one has ever mentioned the Little Round Church (Episcopal) at the corner of Wood and Liberty streets. Does any one remember it? It is said that Mr. Wm. Price modeled his “Round House” after this building. I recollect it quite well and when it was demolished, but I cannot give the date of its demolition.

And there was also a Catholic church, St. Patrick’s, I think. I cannot define its location, but there was quite an open common about it where I played once with some youthful companions; and there was a clear, beautiful stream of water in front of it. It was but a small building and I am under the impression that it was burned down.

There was a German Lutheran church at a very early period on the corner of Smithfield Street and Strawberry Alley.

The first book-store I remember was the Franklin Book Store on Wood Street, near Fourth Street, as near as I can recall.

Dr. Dawson kept a drug-store at the corner of Fourth
and Wood streets. I do not remember any other drug-store at this time.

Reiter's confectionery was the first establishment of the kind in Pittsburgh; at least it is the only one I remember, and the first bakery was that of Mr. Brown.

Does anyone recall old John Taylor, the "Almanac Man," as he was called? His prognostications of the weather always had a margin of "either the day before or the day after." It seems to me that he was pastor of the Round Church at one time.

The first steam mill stood at the foot of Penn Street on a bluff. It was an object of great curiosity to the country people coming to market. The steam puffing out attracted great attention, and I remember hearing one old farmer say that he believed "if anyone would go close enough it would knock him down." I think this mill became Davis' cracker factory.

I remember quite well the first steamboat built here and the great excitement in launching it. It was customary for the first steamboats to carry, each, a small cannon to fire upon entering and leaving port. Water Street and the wharf would be crowded upon a boat going out, so intense was the curiosity in regard to steam navigation.

When I was a little girl, there were some sailing vessels built here for Gulf service. One of my earliest recollections is going with my mother to see one of these ships, as they were called. It was rigged and ready for sailing, and was going up and down the river short distances with a crowd of gaily dressed ladies and their escorts on board.

My attention, however, was riveted by the sailors running up to the top of the high masts, sometimes hidden by the snowy sails.

Eichbaum's wire factory stood on the bank of the Monongahela River, opposite Birmingham. There were three brothers Eichbaum, Henry, William and Arnold, who with their mother and sisters, lived in a neat frame house near the works. The house had a long porch facing the river.

McClurg's foundry (the old foundry) stood between Fifth Street and Virgin Alley. In the war of 1812 Mr. McClurg had heavy contracts for cannon and balls. The cannon were cast solid and bored out and the boring mill was
on the Allegheny River bank somewhere near where the Arsenal now stands. And I am confident these balls were used in the proving process.

I remember an interesting incident in this connection, which has never made its appearance in print. Mr. McClurg, though of Irish birth, was as intensely loyal to the interests of his adopted country as he was bitter toward England. He had, as I said before, contracts for cannon and balls in the war of 1812, and was keenly interested in its progress. Almost every morning he would come down and read the war news to the molders in the casting-house while they worked.

One morning, in September, 1813, he came as usual, sat down, unfolded his paper, and began to look over it, when all at once he jumped to his feet, shouting, "My balls, boys! My balls, boys! Commodore Perry on the lakes! My balls, boys!" His excitement was so great that his wondering workmen could receive no explanation for some time, the old gentleman continuing to shout, "My balls! My balls!" By and by, however, it was discovered that a supply of balls from his foundry had arrived just in time for Perry to renew the action in his celebrated fight, and to secure the victory.

And no wonder the old gentleman was so proud and happy in regard to his "balls."

November 1, 1880.