ADDRESS OF DR. GEORGE P. DONEHOO AT THE DEDICATION OF THE WASHINGTON CROSSING BRIDGE, PITTSBURGH, PA., DECEMBER 29th, 1924

Let me paint you a picture of what this territory along the shores of the Beautiful River appeared like in the year of our Lord 1753—just one hundred and seventy-one years ago—when the young Virginian, George Washington, and his guide, Christopher Gist, crossed the Allegheny River at this place.

The entire region west of the Allegheny mountain ridges was an unbroken wilderness, covered with enshrouding forests, threaded by the winding Indian trails leading to the Susquehanna and Potomac, to the Muskingum and lower Ohio, and to the Iroquois country in western New York. This vast region, then filled with the wild beasts of the forests, was unoccupied by the white man as a permanent dwelling place. The only spot, where the white man had built a home, was at the western foothills of the Laurel Hills, in the present Fayette county, where Christopher Gist had commenced a small settlement. John Frazier, an Indian trader, had built a trading house at the mouth of Turtle creek, and George Croghan and other traders had similar trading cabins at Logstown and Venango.

The only real residents of the entire upper Ohio Valley were the Red Men, who had been driven from the Delaware and Susquehanna by the rapidly increasing tide of white invaders of their lands. These Delaware and Shawnee had villages at Kittanning, Venango, Shanopins Town, Logstown, Sawcunk, Kuskuski and at other less important sites. Queen Allaquippa, a Senaca woman-chief, lived at the mouth of Turtle Creek. Logstown, at the site of the present Ambridge, was the largest and most important of these villages at this time. Here lived the Half-King Tanachharison, the official representative of the Iroquois Confederation, which claimed the lands in Pennsylvania by right of conquest. The Delaware and Shawnee, living on these lands as tenants, were subject to the Iroquois, and were under the jurisdiction of the Half King on the Ohio and under that of Shikellamy, and afterwards of his son, on the Susquehanna.
The Delaware and Shawnee had been followed from the Susquehanna by the Indian traders of Pennsylvania, Maryland and Virginia, between which there was bitter rivalry for the rich trade in furs and peltries. This trade was the chief reason for the sending of Conrad Weiser to the Ohio by the Province of Pennsylvania, in 1748. This mission of Weiser opened the eyes of the French authorities in Canada to the danger which not only threatened their trade with the great tribes along the Ohio and the northern lakes, but also threatened to cut their possessions in Canada from those along the Mississippi. The French statesmen in Canada soon saw what this English invasion of the Ohio meant. So, in 1749, a military expedition, in command of Céloron de Bienville was sent to take official possession of the Ohio valley. This expedition passed down the Allegheny and Ohio in the summer of 1749.

But, in the meanwhile, the organization of the Ohio Company, in Virginia, in 1748, led to the sending of Christopher Gist to select the 500,000 acres of land on the south side of the Ohio in 1750-51. These activities of the English, chiefly that of the Ohio Company of Virginia, started the movement of an army from Canada to take actual military possession of the entire Ohio valley by the building of a chain of forts connecting their possessions in Canada with those on the Mississippi. So in 1752 French forts were built at Presqu’ Isle, at Erie, and at Le Boeuf, at Waterford, and similar forts were to be erected at Venango and at the “forks of the Ohio”.

This military possession of the Ohio valley by the French army first aroused the Indians, whose soil had been invaded. The Six Nations through the Half King, set in operation an official movement to demand the removal of this army.

The news of this occupation of the Ohio by an armed force aroused the Governor of Virginia, Robert Dinwiddie, to take the first steps to officially notify the French to withdraw from the lands which were claimed by Great Britain. In order to carry out this purpose, he commissioned George Washington, then a young man of but twenty-one years of age, to be his official ambassador to the French army on the waters of the Ohio.
To Robert Dinwiddie, the bluff and oft times wordy Scotchman, belongs the credit for taking the first action to start the machinery of the great movement which was to make for the winning of the West for the Anglo-Saxon race, and to him belongs the credit for bringing upon the stage of world affairs the young man who has become one of the immortals of human history—George Washington. And we Western Pennsylvanians can pride ourselves because it was upon the soil of our part of this great state that Washington first made his entrance upon the pathway which led him to the leadership of a new nation and to immortal fame. Logstown, Vanango, Le Boeuf, Jumonville, Fort Necessity, Braddock's Field, the capture of Fort Duquesne, all prepared him for Germantown, Princeton, Valley Forge, and Yorktown. And these all prepared him for the task of leading a new-born Nation upon the pages of history, where it was to become a World Empire.

Little did Governor Dinwiddie or his young messenger realize the vital consequences of this trip of George Washington over the snow-covered mountains and ice-bound rivers of western Pennsylvania. Parkman well and truly says, "The most momentous and far-reaching question ever brought to issue on this continent was: Shall France remain here, or shall she not?" If, by diplomacy or war, she had preserved but half or less than half, of her American possessions, then a barrier would have been set to the spread of the English-speaking races; there would have been no Revolutionary War; and, for a long time, at least, no independence—the French and Indian War is half lost sight of behind the storm cloud of the War of Independence. Few of this day see the momentous issues involved in it, or the greatness of the danger that it averted. The strife that armed all the civilized world began here, and we can truly say that this "strife which armed the civilized world" began in the quiet mountains and along the forest bounded rivers of western Pennsylvania.

We western Pennsylvanians have been too modest about the vital importance of our history in the making of this great empire which now sweeps westward from the Alleghenies to the Golden Gate of the Pacific. This was not only the "Gateway to the West," through which passed
the endless stream of settlers to the wilderness of Kentucky and the plain of Illinois and Dakota; it was also the "Gateway" through which passed the influences of Anglo-Saxon laws and institutions for the making of the greatest nation of human history. The states in New England, and many of the states in the West, over-emphasize the importance of the events which have historic importance. We Pennsylvanians, and especially we people of the western end of this great Commonwealth, are so modest about our history that we do not realize ourselves how vital our history really is. If Washington had made his entrance upon the stage of human history at Boston or Concord, chapters in American histories would have been devoted to this thrilling, romantic, and vitally important event. Longfellow and Whitier would have written poems about it and Emerson would have written an essay upon it, and perhaps painters would have made it immortal by placing it upon canvas. But, outside of a few select and chosen few, the children and even students of history in other states could not tell you, even if they knew anything about the event, whether Washington crossed the Allegheny River on the ice, after nearly perishing, or whether he crossed the Monongahela at Brownsville or the Ohio at Lexington. And few of them could tell upon what sort of a mission he was when this event happened. Even the school children of this great city know more about Miles Standish and the Pilgrim father, about Barbara Frietchie and Paul Revere than they know about the story of the youthful Washington in his relation to Pittsburgh, and, they are not to blame for not knowing. I may say, in passing, that I had gone to public school, college and seminary in Pittsburgh, and did not know that George Washington ever had any real personal relations with the spots in the city in which I had lived until manhood. I could have told about Lexington, Bunker Hill and Concord, but I could have told absolutely nothing about Jumonville, Fort Necessity, Fort Le Boeuf, and mighty little about Fort Duquesne and Braddock's defeat.

Why should we Pittsburgers go on telling all about and teaching our children all about things which happened in ancient Rome and Babylon and then keep silent about the things which have taken place at our very doors which
are of far more importance in human history than anything which ever happened in these long buried civilizations of the past. We know the history of Romulus and Remus, but we do not know the story of Washington and Gist. We do not know that the conflict in a secluded, shady glen in our mountains of western Pennsylvania was the first bloodshed in that fearful strife which set the world on fire, and that in that conflict the young Washington was the leader just one year after he crossed the Allegheny at this spot.

Washington, accompanied by Christopher Gist and four others left Will's Creek, Cumberland, Maryland, on November 15th, reaching Frazier's at Turtle Creek on the 22nd, (1753). They went on to Logstown, where Washington held a council with the Indians, on the 26th. The party did not leave Logstown for Venango until the 30th, when they set out accompanied by the Half King and three other Indians. They reached Venango on the 4th of December. Here they found Captain Joncaire and two other French officers, having their headquarters in the trading house from which John Frazier had been expelled. Joncaire informed Washington that there was a general officer at "the near fort"—Le Boeuf—and advised them to go there for an answer to his message. They were delayed in their departure for Fort Le Boeuf until the 7th when they started through the rain and the snow, through mire and swamps. They reached Fort LeBoeuf on the 11th. On the 13th Washington presented his letter to the French General, Legardeur de St. Pierre, "an elderly gentleman" with "much the air of a soldier". On the evening of the 14th Washington received the answer of the French General to the letter of Governor Dinwiddie, and was anxious to start on his return journey as soon as possible. But, owing to the various efforts of the French to detain his Indians as long as possible, if not to win them away from him, Washington and Gist did not get away from Fort Le Boeuf until the 16th, and after a most trying and dangerous trip down French creek, they reached Venango on the 22nd. On account of the feeble condition of the horses, Washington decided to make the journey from Venango on foot. As he says in his Journal, "The horses became less able to travel every day; the cold increased very fast; and the roads were becoming much
Worse by a deep snow, continually freezing; therefore as I was uneasy to get back, to make report of my proceedings to his honour the governor, I determined to prosecute my journey, the nearest way through the wood, on foot. I took my necessary papers, pulled off my clothes, and tied myself up in a watch coat. Then, with gun in hand, and pack on my back, in which there were my papers and provisions, I set out with Mr. Gist, fitted in the same manner, on Wednesday the 26th."

After many hardships, and an attempt on Washington's life by a traitorous Indian, they reached the Allegheny River on the 29th.

Gist says in his Journal, "We set out early, got to Allegheny, made a raft, and with much difficulty got over to an island, a little above Shannopin's town. The Major having fallen in from off the raft and my fingers frost-bitten, and the sun down, and very cold, we contented ourselves to encamp upon that island. It was deep water between us and the shore; but the cold did us some service, for in the morning it was frozen hard enough for us to pass over on the ice".

Washington says, in his Journal, "The next day we continued travelling until quite dark, and got to the river about two miles above Shanapins. There was no way of getting over but on a raft, which we set about, with but one poor hatchet, and finished just after sun setting. This was a whole day's work; we next got it launched, then went on board of it, and set off; but before we were half way over we were jammed in the ice in such a manner that we expected every moment our raft to sink and ourselves to perish. I put out my setting pole to try to stop the raft, that the ice might pass by, when the rapidity of the stream threw it with so much violence against the pole, that it jerked me out into ten feet of water; but I fortunately saved myself by catching hold of one of the raft logs. Notwithstanding all our efforts, we could not get to either shore, but were obliged, as we were near an island, to quit the raft and make for it. The cold was so extremely severe, that Mr. Gist had all of his fingers, and some of his toes frozen, and the water was shut up so hard, that we found no difficulty.
in getting off the island on the ice in the morning, and went to Mr. Frazier's."

They left Frazier's on New Year's day, 1754, reaching Gist's plantation on the 2nd of January, and reported to Governor Dinwiddie, at Williamsburg, on the 16th.

Edward Everett says of this journey of Washington, "Such was the journey undertaken by Washington, at a season of the year when the soldier goes into quarter, in a state of weather when a huntsman shrinks from the inclemency of the skies, amidst perils from which his escape was almost miraculous; and this, too, not by a penniless advertiser fighting his way through desperate risks to promotion and bread, but by a young man already known most advantageously in the community, who, by his own honorable industry and bequests of a deceased brother, was already in possession of a fortune. In this his first official step, taken at the age of twenty-one, he displayed a courage, resolution, prudence, disinterestedness, and fortitude which never afterwards failed to mark his conduct. He seemed at once to spring into public life, considerate, wary, fearless; and that Providence which destined him for other and higher duties, manifestly extended a protecting shield over his beloved here." (Orations and Speeches, I, 588).

On the 28th of May following, in a secluded thicket in the Laurel mountains, Washington again met with the French, whom he had gone to Fort Le Boeuf to warn out of the Ohio valley but six months before. Woodrow Wilson says of this fight with Jumonville, "Men on both sides of the sea, knew, when they heard that news, that war had begun. Young Washington had forced the hands of the statesmen in London and Paris, and all Europe presently took fire from the flame he had kindled."

Students of American history are just beginning to realize how vitally important were the events which took place in the opening years of the French and Indian War. The events of the American Revolution loomed so large to the historians who wrote of this Birth of a Nation, that the events which preceded it and which really led to it were neglected. There would have been no United States of America dominated by the Anglo-Saxon race, had there
not been the war which drove France out of the Ohio valley.

George M. Wrong well says, in the Chronicles of America Series, "The destiny of North America might, indeed, well have been other than it is. A France strong on the sea, able to bring across to America great forces, might have held, at any rate, her place on the St. Lawrence and occupied the valleys of the Ohio and Mississippi. We can hardly doubt that the English colonies, united by a common deadly peril, could have held against France most of the Atlantic coast. But she might well have divided with them North America; and today the lands north of the Ohio and westward beyond the Ohio to the Pacific Ocean might have been French. The two nations on the brink of war in 1754 were playing for mighty stakes; and victory was to the power which had control of the sea. France had a great army, Britain a great fleet. In this conflict lay wrapped the secret of the future of North America".

Let us Pennsylvanians never forget that it was upon the soil of Allegheny and Fayette counties and the other counties west of the Laurel Hills, that this great contest really commenced, and let us as western Pennsylvanians never forget that it was upon the shores of our beloved "Beautiful River" that the immortal Washington set into motion the issues which led to Fort Necessity, to Braddock's Field, to the capture of Fort Duquesne, to Lexington, to Concord, to Valley Forge, to Yorktown and to a New Nation.

It is well, Mr. Toastmaster, that you and the members of the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania, started the movement for the naming of the bridge across the Allegheny River, which was today dedicated, in honor of the young man who here first started on his pathway to immortal fame, and it is most praiseworthy that the County Commissioners and others entered into this movement.

And may we, all of us, tell the story of what Washington means to Western Pennsylvania, until all of our school children and the people who come here from other lands, as well as all of us who know the story, be inspired by his hardships, heroism and self-denial, to higher and better things for our beloved land and for our even more beloved home city.