The Pittsburgh Sanitary Fair *

By Charles W. Dahlinger

The President told me that I might speak on any subject that I desired, and accordingly I have decided to say something about the great PITTSBURGH SANITARY FAIR which was held here in JUNE, 1864.

I have always been interested in the history of the Civil War which, without doubt, created the greatest crisis in the entire history of the United States. Accordingly, when a month or two ago I came into possession of an album containing more than twenty photographs of the Sanitary Fair, its buildings and views of the interiors, which was held in the Diamond of Allegheny City, that municipality being attached to Pittsburgh in 1907, my war interest experienced a sudden excitement.

This excitement may have been increased when I told a friend of mine, who by the way holds a high judicial position in this state, while on my way back to my office from lunch, of the find I had made. He remarked at once, "I well remember the Fair". He continued: "I was a boy at that time and my mother was on one of the committees connected with the Fair. I had a ticket of admission, but a boy friend of mine was with me who did not have any. Accordingly I managed to retain my ticket after being admitted to the fair grounds and watched my opportunity and slipped my ticket to my boy friend and he and I saw the fair together".

When the Pittsburgh Fair was held, the Civil War was in its fourth year. Many of the greatest battles had been fought, thousands upon thousands of soldiers had been killed or wounded and all over the North fairs were being held which were called Sanitary Fairs, to raise money for the men engaged in the strife. Pittsburgh was not behind the other communities in this respect. The first Sanitary Fair was held in Chicago, in the autumn of 1863 and in September of that year the ladies of Pittsburgh organized to assist the contemplated fair, and the historian of the Chicago Sanitary Fair speaks in the highest terms of Miss McFadden, Mrs. Brunot and Miss Jacobus, who labored for it as if it were their own, and adds that the contributions that Pittsburgh sent surprised Chicago at the city's lavishness and generosity.

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During the war there were a number of voluntary organizations, headed by the Christian Commission and the Subsistence Commission which were formed to alleviate the hardships of soldier life, to afford physical comfort to the sick and wounded, by supplying lint and bandages for the wounded, and hospital garments for the sick and maimed and shelters for the heads and necks of the soldiers when marching in the hot sun.

But the organization which did the most effective work was the Sanitary Commission whose headquarters were in Washington, which had been organized in 1861 and was under the government authority. The Commission had associate members in all the leading cities of the United States, including Pittsburgh, and who adopted the name of the place where they existed. On March 6, 1864, the Pittsburgh Sanitary Commission decided to hold a Sanitary Fair in their city, and a few days later it was further decided to hold the fair during the month of June and in the Allegheny Diamond.

A special committee was also appointed to visit Cleveland, where a Sanitary Fair had been held and had just closed, and negotiate for the buildings used by that fair. This was all done before permission had been obtained from the Allegheny authorities to hold the fair in the Diamond, and an Executive Committee was appointed, of which that eminent citizen, Felix R. Brunot, was Chairman.

But the Allegheny Councils did not hesitate, and on March 27 a special meeting was held and permission given to hold the Sanitary Fair in the Allegheny Diamond. Market Commissioners were also appointed to confer with the Executive Committee having charge of the fair and were directed to remove the old Town Hall and weigh scales which stood near the northwest corner of Federal and Ohio Streets in the First Ward Diamond Square. The resolution adopted by Councils stated that the fair could occupy both the First and Third Ward Squares.

At a later meeting of Allegheny Councils held on April 8, these bodies decided that they were also entitled to some of the glory arising out of the fair, and John K. Brown, who later became a warm friend of my father, and whom I also knew in his old age, offered the following resolution in Common Council:
“RESOLVED, That the Commissioners of Public Buildings be instructed to have a photograph taken of the Old City Hall (this was no doubt the official title of the building, Allegheny having been a city since 1840) before its demolition, and that copies of the same be furnished members of Councils”. To this Mr. Benny offered an amendment setting forth that the members of Councils be present at the time the picture was taken and have their heads out of the windows. The resolution was passed unanimously. The Select Council concurred with the Common Council after striking out the clause to furnish copies to the members of Councils and inserting the provision authorizing two hundred copies to be made and presented to the Sanitary Fair. In this Common Council concurred.

Rapid progress was made by the Market Commissioners and the weigh scales were removed and the old city hall torn down.

In reference to the destruction of the Old City Hall, the writer was told by a gentleman, who as a young boy saw the building being destroyed, that all the rat terriers in Allegheny were taken to the scene of the destruction to catch the innumerable rats that scampered forth as they were being robbed of their homes in the recesses of the old house.

The Special Committee that had been sent to Cleveland duly purchased the Sanitary Fair buildings, and the materials of which it had been constructed soon arrived in Allegheny. The Executive Committee of the Sanitary Commission at once requested the draymen and teamsters of the two cities to report to the Depot Master of the railroad on Federal Street and donate as much of their time and labor in carrying the materials to the Diamond as they might feel able to spare; and they complied heartily, and carpenters and laborers also volunteered to work on the buildings and donate a portion of their time. The Cleveland buildings had not been as large as the Executive Committee desired their buildings to be and they increased their size. While this caused some delay, the buildings were completed before June 1st, the date set for the opening of the Fair.

All nationalities in the two cities were heartily in favor of the fair and all the churches did much to make it the great success that it became. A large number of Com-
mittees had been appointed to further the interest of the fair and when Wednesday, June 1st, the opening day arrived, enthusiasm for the fair was unbounded.

The day was beautiful beyond compare. All business was suspended at the request of the Mayors of the two cities and a great parade took place. General James S. Negley was Chief Marshall. The invitations sent out to many of the notable citizens of Pittsburgh, Allegheny and other places stated that the parade was to be a “Grand Military and Civic Procession”, and vast throngs of people lined the streets as the parade moved along to the fair ground, Governor Curtin being the most conspicuous figure. At the fair Rev. William Preston, D. D., the Rector of St. Andrew’s Episcopal Church had the invocation. Felix R. Brunot presided, and Governor Curtin spoke, as also did General Negley, and the fair was declared open.

There were six buildings, the Monitor Building, which stood on Federal Street between the new City Hall which had just been completed, and which is still standing, and the Third Ward Square where the Allegheny Carnegie Library now stands, this portion of Federal Street being the ground which had been occupied by the old Market House which had been torn down on the completion of the present Market House the year before. The other buildings were the Mechanics Hall, the Audience Hall, the Floral Hall, The Bazaar and the Dining Hall which occupied different places in the First and Third Ward Squares.

In addition to these buildings the entire upper floor of the new City Hall was occupied by the Art Gallery and the Old Curiosity Shop; and there were also buildings for the exhibition of Live Stock. Then there was a Swiss Cottage in charge of a committee of Swiss Ladies who were intent on disposing of a variety of articles.

One of the most attractive, if not the most attractive feature of the entire Fair, was the miniature lake in the Monitor Building on which a model iron-clad navy floated, consisting of a “Monitor”, two Mortar Schooners and a Sloop of War, all mounted with model guns, and propelled by steam, together with the water batteries, properly mounted between which and the iron-clads a mimic bombardment was kept up.

Throng visited the fair daily and the sale of tickets,
Dining Hall, New City Hall and Monitor Building in Background.

Monitor Building
both to the fair itself and to the different buildings, was very large, but it was a rule of the management that no tickets should knowingly be sold to negroes. Money was contributed by all the leading business and professional men and by the banks, while the workmen gave of their time. When the day for closing the Fair was near, public sales were held of articles of especial interest, such as autograph letters of well known public characters, and photographs of persons and places of interest as well as curiosities and war relics, and good prices were obtained.

Among the autograph letters was one of President Lincoln in which he referred to the Pittsburgh Sanitary Fair. This letter, if in existence today, owing to the almost reverence in which the memory of President Lincoln is now held, not only in Pittsburgh where the Fair was held, but all over the United States and in Europe as well, would be invaluable. The photographs of the Allegheny Town Hall with the Allegheny Councilmen stretching their heads out of the windows, would also attract considerable interest, particularly in that part of Pittsburgh which was formerly Allegheny City. The Fair closed on Saturday, June 18th, and a comparison was made with the receipts of the other Sanitary Fairs, which were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Net Proceeds of Fair</th>
<th>Average to Population</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>St. Louis</td>
<td>$554,501.00</td>
<td>3.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>1,184,000.00</td>
<td>1.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brooklyn</td>
<td>400,000.00</td>
<td>1.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philadelphia</td>
<td>1,035,378.96</td>
<td>1.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleveland</td>
<td>78,551.33</td>
<td>1.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cincinnati</td>
<td>235,405.35</td>
<td>1.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pittsburgh</td>
<td>322,217.98</td>
<td>3.47</td>
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This shows that the average receipts according to population were higher in Pittsburgh than in any of the other cities where fairs were held, the average in Pittsburgh being $3.47 per person.

The Pittsburgh Sanitary Fair was without question the most notable affair that was ever held in Old Allegheny and no less in the City of Pittsburgh.