Address Delivered February 17, 1914 at the Dedication of the Building of the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania

By John N. Boucher, Greensburg, Pa.

I cannot but feel and say to you that you have done me a great honor in asking me here to participate in the house-warming of this magnificent little temple which the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania has constructed as its home. You could not have selected a more appropriate day for its opening, the 160th anniversary of the day on which Ensigns Trent and Ward, with their little handful of forty backwoodsmen, began to build the fort at the fork of the Ohio, and began what proved to be the first permanent occupation of civilized mankind of Southwestern Pennsylvania. I have thought, indeed, that the expulsion of Ward from the building of this little fort, and not the battle of Jumonville which occurred a few weeks later, should be regarded as the beginning of the French and Indian War; but, be that as it may, February 17th is certainly one of the most important anniversaries of the Southwest.

The duty and main object of a historical society, as I understand it, is to preserve the early history and the antiquities of the community. In this spirit, we, in Southwestern Pennsylvania, have always been lax. If I were asked to suggest to you the work on your part which will most improve our community intellectually, and strengthen your society, I would say that it would be to inculcate in the rising generation what I may call the Bostonian or New England spirit. All of you, perhaps, have visited the city of Boston which, not without reason, regards itself as the intellectual hub of America. Now, you will remember that in all the community around and about Boston, the patriotic people have preserved their history with monu-
ments, markers or mementoes of the occurrences of the last three centuries. Not only that, but the same spirit which induced the people to commemorate these events brought up a race of poets and literary men who have written up, and indeed magnified, their prominent and interesting points in history and have made them household words in New England or of the whole country. This spirit I would have engendered here in Southwestern Pennsylvania. It, and not its wealth, has made Boston the most noted city, in some respects, in America. And yet, we in Southwestern Pennsylvania, particularly this point here at the fork of the Ohio, have more genuine history, I am almost constrained to say, than any other section of the Union. Can you tell me of any other point, to contend for the possession of which, two mighty armies crossed the Atlantic Ocean and hewed their way from the seashore three hundred miles through a trackless wilderness and over three ranges of mountains, and in a day when such a journey required almost a year's time? Can any city produce a more remarkable building than the old blockhouse built by Henry Bouquet, the greatest Indian fighter America ever produced, and built on a site, mark you, that George Washington himself marked out of the primeval forest.

This old blockhouse, by the way, seems to be no less important in its modern than in early history. A few years ago, the greatest corporation in the United States concluded to tear it down or remove it to another section, and we men in Southwestern Pennsylvania had so little of that patriotic spirit of which I have spoken as predominating in New England, that we stood by without raising our hands to prevent it. The contest against this great corporation was taken up by a few noble women of Pittsburgh who, almost single-handed and alone, waged the battle and won the victory and preserved this memento of former days on its original site, and made it almost the only tangible piece of property in the world which the Pennsylvania Railroad Company wanted and did not get. Can you imagine what the cultured men of Boston would have done if, a few years ago, the Hartford and New Haven Railroad had attempted to tear Faneuil Hall from its old foundation and place it in another part of the city? All honor to the good women of Pittsburgh, and I verily believe that but for the spirit en-
gendered by that movement on their part, this building would not yet be constructed.

We are lax in many things in that line in Southwestern Pennsylvania. We pay so little attention to our early history, being, perhaps, so busy with what we call more important duties, that we sometimes forget that we have a history more glorious even than many of the eastern sections which are more noted historically than ours. The very nature and manner of our early settlements, advancing as they did from the seaboard westward, was probably the cause of this. We have been so migratory in America—one generation inhabiting a section east of the mountains, the next moving west of them and becoming a new people, the following generation settling still farther westward, and each succeeding settlement forgetting what they had left behind, but making a new history of their own. They may be pardoned for that, for the difficult means of travel and communication with the parent settlements may have been the cause of it in the past. If you go into any part of Southwestern Pennsylvania, or into Pittsburgh, and ask every English-speaking man whom you meet, why the old blockhouse was built, or what was the stratagem by which Bouquet defeated the Indians at Bushy Run and saved Pittsburgh and Southwestern Pennsylvania from devastation and war, an event which even Parkman, the Boston historian, was compelled to write of as the most remarkable victory ever won over the American Indians, if you will put these questions to every man you meet in all our section, not one man in one hundred will be able to give you anything like an intelligent answer. Now, I take it to be the duty of this Historical Society, and all other patriotic societies of a kindred character, to try to instill into the rising generation a spirit that will prompt them to learn of and to appreciate these important incidents in our history.

Washington was most intimately connected in early life with Southwestern Pennsylvania. It was he, as I said, who selected this point as a fort. It was on his way here with Braddock's army that he came in contact for the first time with the drilled troops of Europe and with the first modern artillery in the New World, and it was here that he received his first practical military training. It was near this that he, as Colonel, first took charge of a battalion, and
he gave several years of his life to wrest this country from the French and to implant the English-speaking people who have since built up one of the busiest, wealthiest and most powerful cities in the world. His achievements in after life and the benefits which he wrought out for the human family were such that a monument may be erected to his memory with propriety anywhere in the United States. But there is no community, save one, whose right to call him its special benefactor and to preserve and revere his name for all time is equal to Southwestern Pennsylvania; yet the stranger in this country or within your gates sees scarcely a monument or a tablet of bronze to emphasize his early connection with this locality.

You have honored the name of the brave but unfortunate General Edward Braddock, who gave his life to teach the English race the enormous task they had before them in order to supplant the French at the fork of the Ohio, by giving his name to the very important part of your city. The city of Pittsburgh itself, as was most eloquently said long ago by the historian Bancroft, “will stand at the gateway of the west as a monument to the integrity and friendship of William Pitt as long as the Monongahela and Allegheny shall flow to form the Ohio and as long as the English tongue shall be the language of freedom in the boundless valley which their waters traverse”. That is all well and good, but how about General John Forbes who, amid the falling snows of that chilly November, in 1758, gave your city the name of which it is now so justly proud. Forbes and Bouquet did more for Western Pennsylvania, and Pittsburgh in particular, than any other men of that period. The former, by sheer strength of his iron will, forced his army through the gloomy wilderness and, though debilitated by disease, succeeded on the way in bringing about a treaty with the Indians, by reason of which, the French Fort was surrendered to him without a contest. The Forbes’ campaign and the road which he built from the well settled east opened up the great west which has since been settled by the thriftiest people in America. It was Forbes who broke up the long standing alliance between the French and Indians and who consequently did more than any other to save Western Pennsylvania from the tomahawk and the scalping knife.
Henry Bouquet is no less entitled to be remembered by our people. He shared with Forbes and Washington in the glory of the expulsion of the French and in the opening up of the West. His march to the relief of the starving fortress, in Pontiac's Conspiracy in 1763, must always be considered as one of the most marvelous in our history. "In the wilderness before him", says Parkman, "lay the bleaching bones of Braddock's dead, outnumbering by far the soldiers of his own army." Washington himself prophesied that Bouquet's army would never reach the Ohio. The battle of Bushy Run was but an incident to the march bearing relief to Pittsburgh and to the West, but, taken as a whole, it is without a parallel in the annals of our usually unfortunate warfare with the American Indians. These efforts in behalf of our people were put forth by men born in foreign lands, the latter of whom sleeps, perhaps, in our territory but in an unknown grave. Bouquet was brave enough to perform these services for the benefit of Pittsburgh and the surrounding community. Monuments or tablets to these names, even though in tardy recognition of their service, would show that we, of this generation, appreciate the hardships which they endured and the heroic efforts put forth to found and nurture the civilization, the industry and the culture of Southwestern Pennsylvania. They would bear down to future generations of unborn Pittsburghers and to all the world an enduring evidence of the patriotic spirit of our present generation.

And if we cannot boast that the French and Indian War began here, at Pittsburgh, we can at least claim that the forced surrender of Ensign Ward, the battle in which Jumonville was killed and the battle at Fort Necessity, all of which came closely together and which belong, at all events, to Southwestern Pennsylvania, were the first steps, the beginning of that long strife which for nine years embroiled four great nations in battle and which, in the end, resulted so favorably to the English; that war which so shaped the destinies of our struggling American colonies, that in a few years they surpassed in dominion and power, the empire of Louis the Fifteenth and unitedly compelled the representative of George the Third to surrender his sword to Washington at Yorktown.

I mention these things, not certainly as points in our
history which will be new to this intelligent audience, but to refresh in your memories the fact that we have more important history than most sections and that to preserve it and to teach it to the coming generations is one of the great works that should be performed by the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania. I know of nothing which the city of Pittsburgh has earnestly attempted to do that it did not succeed in. I know that you have the culture and the energy to make your society grow and live for all time, and become the parents of similar societies all over Western Pennsylvania. I trust that it may one day become a fair rival to the great Historical Society in Philadelphia.