A Sketch of Pittsburgh*

The lands in the vicinity of Pittsburgh, especially the bottoms on the Alleghany, are very rich. When this town was a frontier settlement against hostile Indians, the lands, in consequence, sold very low. A few years since a Mr. Wood first surveyed this country, and was offered an extensive tract of it gratis, which he refused. His son has since purchased a considerable farm in the neighborhood of Pittsburgh, and erected a very handsome brick house at the entrance of the town.

Pittsburgh is irregularly built; the streets are narrow, and the houses have the dirty, smoaked appearance of English cities where coals are most used. It is situate on a plain, running to a point, at which the clear stream of the Alleghany and the muddy waters of the Monongahela unite and form a beautiful basin, the source of the far-famed Ohio, or Belle Riviere of the French, which, after running 1183 miles, empties itself into the Mississippi.

The Alleghany is at Pittsburgh about a quarter of a mile wide, and runs at the rate of about four miles an hour. The Monongahela is about half a mile wide, its waters being forced back by the more impetuous stream of the Alleghany. At the confluence of these rivers the French erected a fort, which was captured by the English under general Forbes, in November, 1758. It was soon afterwards abandoned, and one higher up the Alleghany erected, which is now in existence. At the point where the rivers meet, the cliff rises about twenty feet above the waters, the Monongahela bearing a southeast, and the Alleghany a northeast direction. Soon after the capture by the British, the town was laid out, named after the elder William Pitt. About seven miles to the S. E. of this town is the field celebrated for the defeat of general Braddock.

Pittsburgh is extremely well supplied with excellent coal, at least as good as the Carmel coal, which are delivered at the houses in town at the rate of five cents per bushel. The blaze of these coals afford so strong a light, that in winter, it is said, neither tailors nor other mechanics burn candles. Coal is furnished principally from the mountains on the verge of the Monongahela, from which they are

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tumbled into the vessels below. During our revolutionary war one of these coal-mountains caught fire, and was only extinguished by the falling in of its sides, which suffocated the flame. Coals of various quality are found, however, in all directions within seventy miles. The vessels which go down the Ohio use coal as ballast, as it costs only the trouble of digging from the sides of the hills.

Pittsburgh forms one of the great points from which emigrants set out who intend to settle in the immense valley bounded by the Alleghany mountains to the east, the Gulf of Mexico to the south, the frozen regions to the north, and the White mountains to the west. This valley embraces almost every climate, and consequently every soil; but still for its general fertility may be denominated the paradise of the world.

Pittsburgh contained in 1804 about one thousand houses and five thousand inhabitants, many houses being built purposely for the accommodation of emigrants, who, when the Ohio is low, are frequently detained a considerable time. It is however rapidly increasing in size and consequence, and affords many beautiful views. The town is principally built on the Monongahela. This river affords a pleasant sandy margin, of about thirty feet broad; the surface of the cliff is about twenty feet above this strand, and is, when the waters are much out, covered by them. Whenever our population is sufficient to enable us to become a manufacturing people, the situation of Pittsburgh will rend it important, the carriage of heavy articles operating as a premium in favor of those there produced. Its situation at the confluence of two mighty rivers, and at the source of an immense inland navigation, with a supply eternal of excellent coal, plenty of fish, and a rich surrounding country, are advantages few places can afford. The new fort has, since the cession of the adjoining country by the Indians, been converted into a store for the United States, in which they deposit the different articles destined to be distributed through western America, and is only garrisoned by a lieutenant and seven men.

House-rent and all the necessaries of life are cheap at Pittsburgh. It contains a handsome court-house, and tolerable market-house. The town is, however, dirty, consequent on the richness of the adjoining soil, the narrowness of the streets, and the profuse use of coal. A branch of the bank of Pennsylvania is established in this town. The best
hickory wood sells at a dollar and a half the cord. The taverns are equal to any either in Washington or Baltimore; their charges are reasonable.

The common boats which convey passengers and goods down the Ohio are twelve feet wide, and cost, according to their length, a dollar a foot; when well covered, painted, and divided into apartments, they will sell for a dollar and a half the foot. Some are very elegant, and cost more. Of these I once saw two; one belonging to general Wilkinson; the other to colonel Burrows; both were elegant, the first particularly, being gilt, and highly ornamented. Those destined for use more than show are estimated to carry each about half a ton for every foot in length. Of these boats about one hundred, having about twelve immigrants each, were said to be waiting between Brownfield and Geneva, on the Alleghany, and about as many more on the Monongahela, till the waters should rise, to waft them to their intended settlements.

On the 28th of April, 1804, the Ohio rose four feet; it still, however, wanted twelve of the level deemed necessary to navigate the Ohio boats.

The boats which convey flour from Pittsburgh to New Orleans take from 250 to 300 barrels each, that produced on the Monongahela being considered the best. A company lately established sent 250,000 barrels for sale in the year 1804. In the same period it is calculated 100,000 tons of manufactured articles passed through this town down the Ohio; and it is asserted the average increase is 2000 tons annually.

It may some years hence be a matter of curiosity to compare the present with the then state of the manufactories of Pittsburgh. On the Alleghany, and opposite Pittsburgh, are colonel O'Hara's glass works. In the town he has a brew-house, two tan-yards, and a yard for ship-building, in which, in 1804, was building one brig of 250 tons, and from which had lately been launched one ship of 350 tons. A tin-manufactory was established, which then employed twenty-eight persons; a nail-manufactory thirty; a cotton manufacturer had recently fixed himself, and employed but twelve; thirty workmen were engaged in ship, and about fifty in boat-building; thirty were also engaged in the rope-walks, which received their hemp from Ohio and Kentucky states.