Pittsburgh's Awakening One Hundred Years Ago*

By JOHN W. OLIVER

One hundred years ago yesterday, there began a debate in the United States Senate that stands first in the list of great American Debates. I refer, of course, to the memorable Webster-Hayne debate that occurred during the closing days of January 1830. The issue, you will recall, was that eternal question of sectionalism. The Census of 1830 was about to be taken. The Eastern states realized that they were losing ground. The West was gaining. The great migrations following the War of 1812 had lured millions of people from the Atlantic Coast states, and caused them to settle west of the Alleghenies. Nine new states lying west of these mountains had been admitted into the Union since the inauguration of Washington. Their inhabitants numbered close to 5,000,000 people. Each of these states was represented by two United States Senators and one or more Congressmen. They not only held the balance of power, but they were now in actual control of the Federal government. They had just succeeded, for the first time in history, in winning the presidency of the United States for a Westerner, Andrew Jackson. Virginia and Massachusetts, the two states that supplied all of the Presidents up until this time, now saw this honor snatched away, never to be regained, with but the one exception, the election of Woodrow Wilson in 1912 and 1916.

The Eastern states had good reason to be alarmed. Some of the towns in New England were actually losing, rather than gaining in population. Among other causes assigned for this, was the question of cheap lands in the West. And so when Senator Foote of Connecticut, in December 1829, proposed to limit the sale of public lands to those surveys already made, everyone knew what he meant. He would, if he had his way, slow down this westward migration. He would reserve those lands as a source of revenue for the government, and thereby en-

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able the federal government to grow strong in power and wealth. Without realizing it, he had set the stage for the greatest forensic struggle ever witnessed in an American Congress. Instantly Senators Thomas H. Benton of Missouri and Robert Y. Hayne of South Carolina were on their feet. There is not time, nor is this the proper place to review that debate in detail,—except to point out that soon the issue shifted from a discussion of the land question to one of constitutionalism. And it was here that Daniel Webster entered the fray.

I wish I had time to review for you the details of that debate. But I cite it here merely as a background against which I want to project the subject of my paper—viz., Pittsburgh's Awakening One Hundred Years Ago.

For in the midst of these stirring times, this little city of Pittsburgh was perhaps undergoing a greater transformation, a greater re-awakening than any other western city.

So, let us take a look at this city as it was in the year 1830.

First of all, what would be your guess as to its population? It may interest you to know that the same discrepancy existed then as now over population. The local boosters never have, and perhaps never will, accept the Federal Census as being final. In 1830, the official census fixed our population at approximately 17,000—(16,988 to be exact). But the local papers raised the number to 22,000—one estimate fixed it at 24,000. At best, I suggest we compromise on 20,000, for this discussion tonight. This was an increase of between 65 and 70% during the preceding decade.

The Mayor of the city was Matthew B. Lowrie. William Eichbaum, Jr. was Postmaster, and needed two clerks to help handle the city's mail. The Post Office was located in a large double-brick house on Second Street, near Market.

Three newspapers were published here in 1830: the Pittsburgh Gazette; the Allegheny Democrat, and the Christian Herald.

Pittsburgh was well supplied with physicians. Doctors Bishop, Brooks, Callahan, Dawson, Geddes, Hayes, Irwin, McDowell, Ryan, Sugg, Sellers, and Thistle, inserted professional cards in the newspapers of that year. Two of
these doctors deserve more than passing notice. Dr. Jeremiah Brooks, who located here in 1830, enjoyed a tremendous practice. He was active in the organization of the Passavant Hospital, and connected with it until his death. Dr. Callahan won recognition by his articles on medicine and general medical practice, which appeared in the American Journal of Medical Science. Other articles from his pen appeared in the local newspapers of this period. The Pittsburgh Medical Society went on record about this time, declaring in favor of suppressing the vice of intemperance.

Education in Pittsburgh in 1830

On January 30, 1830 an important mass meeting was held in this city. The meeting, attended by the leading citizens of Pittsburgh, was presided over by Mayor Lowrie. Edward P. Gazzam acted as Secretary. The question before them was the lamentable condition of the educational facilities in Pennsylvania. A resolution was adopted approving the memorial of The Pennsylvania Society For The Promotion of Public Schools, and sent to the Pennsylvania General Assembly. This resolution noted with regret the imperfections of the public school system in Pennsylvania, and desired that steps be taken to remedy the same. "We lament, the memorial continued, that a Commonwealth like ours, so powerful, wealthy, distinguished for wise laws and gigantic internal improvements, should remain inferior to any of her sister states." The state legislature was called upon to establish a uniform system of schools in every district of the state where the inhabitants desired them, to be supported by public expense.

The resolution goes on to point out how New England States, and our neighboring state of New York conduct their public schools;—so successful were these states, that the necessity for supporting private schools had almost disappeared. I might add here that this movement bore fruit,—for as you recall, it was during the decade of the 1830's that Thaddeus Stevens finally got the system of public schools established in Pennsylvania.

One discovers that at least four private schools opened their doors here during the year 1830. Samuel P. Reynolds, author of a series of arithmetics, opened an academy in Robinson's Row, Allegheny. In April, John Winter
opened an academy on Fourth Street, near the ferry. G. and J. Smith opened an evening school and day seminary on Third Street.

Education for young ladies was provided by a Miss Parry, who opened the Pittsburgh Seminary For Young Ladies, at corner of Grant and Second Street. Michael McSharry opened an Academic Seminary in Gray’s Row on St. Clair Street, to give instruction in all the higher branches.

Music and Art

Then as now, Pittsburgh was renowned for its interest in the artistic, the cultural side of life. One hundred years ago this very month, the music lovers of this city were attending the concerts of Mr. and Mrs. Pearman. They were taking the town by storm. The newspapers carried daily accounts of the recitals,—and one discovers at least three editorials devoted to the praises of these artists. As the concert series drew near the close, the artists felt it necessary to insert this notice,—“Mr. & Mrs. Pearman beg leave to announce that they will give their last concert on Thursday evening the 8th, in Mr. Bond’s Concert Ball, Penn Street. Mr. Pearman will on that evening give his celebrated imitations of various instruments, the whole to conclude with his imitation of a cat’s concert, to the air of “Nel cor piu non mi sento.” Concert to begin at 7 o’clock; tickets 50 cents.”

Another concert was announced by a Mr. W. C. Peters, assisted by a number of professors and amateurs of this city. Included in his list is a beautiful symphony entitled The Shepherd’s Feast, interrupted by a thunderstorm, composed by C. von Bonhorst Esq. It is a fine piece of music, and reflects great credit on its author. Although scientific, it is easily understood, and we predict will meet with “thundering” applause. This was followed by a trio called “Hark To The Music Stealing Soft”. The words are by a young gentleman of this city. It is also very fine, the commencement being very soft and mellifluous.

We learn also of a talented Pittsburgh painter, a Mr. A. Bowman. During the 1820’s a wealthy Pittburgher sent him abroad, where he studied under Sir Thomas Lawrence, President of the Royal Academy of London. He be-
came a protege of General Lafayette, with whom he lived a year. He returned in 1830, and became a popular portrait painter of prominent ladies and gentlemen of this city.

True, Pittsburgh did not have its internationally famous Carnegie Library, Museum and Art Gallery one hundred years ago; but the city did boast of an embryo museum even in 1830. It was conducted by one J. R. Lambdin, and stood on Fourth and Market Streets. He exhibited paintings, curios, stuffed quadrupeds, foreign and American birds, minerals, fossils, reptiles, coins, medals, Indian curiosities, etc.

Manufacturing and Business Developments

Finally, I come to the subject which seems to set Pittsburgh off from other cities, viz. her manufacturing, business, and industrial development. Turn back the pages of history to 1830, and what do we find as compared to 1930?

In 1830, 43 steamboats were built in this city. A steamboat, the Allegheny, was launched in March 1830 for service on the Allegheny river. It navigated as far north as Olean, N. Y., and on its return trip brought 27 tons of freight. The Erie-Gazette, Mar. 1830, announced that from 90 to 100 flatboats would soon leave French Creek for Pittsburgh; each loaded with 27 tons of hay, oats, potatoes, salt, stoves, bark, lumber, etc. Each boat's cargo would sell for $500 in Pittsburgh. Also in this same year 1830, a little steamboat began regular trips on the Monongahela river, running from Pittsburgh to Brownsville.

In 1830, 100 steam engines were manufactured here, and 9,000 tons of iron were rolled. Five rolling mills, and three slitting mills had been erected here during the two preceding years,—and it is learned that of the iron manufactured here during that period, 600 tons were converted into other articles before they left the city.

During this period, four glass houses were in operation containing 32 pots. They manufactured flint glass. The value of window-glass and bottles manufactured in this district in 1830, was estimated at more than $500,000.

S. B. McKenzie and D. Blackstock in 1830 were manufacturing cotton and woolen machinery. Archibald Lamont was making vises of such superiority that they re-
ceived special mention from a committee of Judges of Franklin Institute.

The Gazette of March 1831 announced "we are assured that the consumption of iron in and about Pittsburgh now exceeds 18,000 tons, and still rapidly increases."

Such in brief was Pittsburgh one hundred years ago. The city was just on the eve of a great awakening. The canal era and the railroad era were just dawning. The next two decades were to witness a tremendous expansion in stage and river transportation,—these to be followed in the next decade by the coming of the railroads. Once these bonds of steel began to link Pittsburgh with the cities of the Atlantic seaboard, the destiny of this city was assured.

A century has passed. A new census is about to be taken. What will it reveal of the Pittsburgh of 1930? The statistician of the Pittsburgh Chamber of Commerce, gave out a statement about a month ago, just as the year 1929 was drawing to a close, in which he estimated that the people of Pittsburgh will spend upwards of $2,063,000,000 in this year 1930. The annual payroll for Allegheny County is placed at $1,200,000,000. What would those venerable old city Fathers think, if they should be summoned from their resting places, and could take a glance at these staggering sums? Bewildered you say, amazed, shocked! But I wonder if they would be any more surprised or perplexed than would the members of this generation, if we are called forth to witness the changes that are to occur in this city within the next 100 years? He indeed is a bold prophet who dares to predict what the Pittsburgh of the year 2,030 will be. With your permission, I suggest that this be left with the program committee of the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania one hundred years hence.