THE HISTORICAL TOUR OF 1932

The inspirational and educational value of visiting the scenes of happenings of former days, and of there, in those settings, recalling some of the events and developments that have made a community or region what it is today was well demonstrated by the historical tour conducted jointly by the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania and the summer session of the University of Pittsburgh on July 15 and 16 last. Not only were those who made the trip helped to see the past as a living reality apart from books and documents, but the communities visited were in some measure stirred, it is believed, to a new appreciation of the importance of preserving some of the physical and all possible of the literary remains of their own pasts. Moreover the venture — for nothing of the sort had ever been attempted in this region on the same scale before — served to make more generally known the fact that neither of the sponsors is a Pittsburgh institution only, and that the historical society, true to its name, takes all western Pennsylvania history as its province and welcomes to its membership all western Pennsylvanians and others interested in that history. And if, as appeared to be the case, all concerned had an enjoyable as well as a profitable time, had an outing as well as a course in history, the solid benefits will last the longer, for even the historically minded are human.

The objective selected was Erie and the route chosen followed in the main that taken by Washington on his way to Fort Le Boeuf in 1753. That historic journey was naturally the theme of central interest in this, the Washington bicentennial year, but in sightseeing and discussions along the way, the present-day pilgrims took occasion also, both literally and figuratively, to follow other trails and visit other scenes of importance in western Pennsylvania history.
Upwards of two hundred people, about half of whom went all the way, joined the expedition at one or another stage, and at some of the stops in the open, hundreds of the local people gathered for the exercises. In the motorcade that wound its way, under state police escort, up hill and down dale, through city streets and along country highways (and, unfortunately, into a cul-de-sac or two) en route to Erie, were a bus and private cars varying in number from about twenty to fifty.

The start was made from the Historical Building in Pittsburgh early in the afternoon of Friday, the fifteenth. The heavens seemed inclined to frown upon the undertaking but gave up the effort after a shower or two later in the afternoon had failed to dampen the enthusiasm though they had retarded the progress of the travelers. In keeping with its central aim the expedition left the city by way of the Washington Crossing Bridge, which marks the point where Washington and Gist, on their return trip from Fort Le Bœuf, crossed the Allegheny River and where the former barely escaped being drowned. Then circling around to the west through the wooded hills north of the city, the pilgrims headed for Ambridge and there, during a half-hour visit at "Old Economy," turned forward the pages of history and dwelt upon the memory of that interesting group of German immigrants, who, organized on a communal basis as the Harmony Society, settled and flourished for a time at Harmony, Pennsylvania, in 1805, then at New Harmony, Indiana, in 1815, and finally at Economy, now Ambridge, Pennsylvania, in 1825. Under the guidance of Mr. John A. Duss and his associates, and without payment of the usual admission fee, the visitors were shown through the Great House, the center of the old community, now maintained as a museum; through the Music Hall and the gardens; and into the cool, impressively equipped, but otherwise disappointing wine cellar.

A short distance out of Ambridge, along the Beaver Road, the expedition again touched the trail of Washington, this
time passing close to the long since obliterated site of Logstown, the Indian village whence Washington struck north through the Indian country to the French forts. Here, under the guidance of Colonel J. P. Leaf of Rochester, at a point by the roadside marked by two monuments, one erected by the Pennsylvania Historical Commission and the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania and the other by the Fort McIntosh Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, the travelers paused long enough for a general view, not only of the site of Logstown, but also of the adjoining site of the military camp, some traces of which are still clearly visible, that was established here in 1792 by General Anthony Wayne and his “Legion of the United States” in preparation for their campaign against the western Indians.

Continuing down the Ohio, through Baden, Conway, Freedom, and Rochester, under the direction of the Honorable Louis E. Graham, United States attorney for the western district of Pennsylvania, the motorcade next stopped at the site of Fort McIntosh in the borough of Beaver. There, in a beautifully parked area on a high bluff overlooking the Ohio, at a spot marked by the Fort McIntosh Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, Mr. Graham spoke briefly of the history of the frontier fort located there—a subject that he had previously discussed at some length in a paper read before the historical society and published in this magazine. He told how the fort, the first military post of the United States established on the “Indian” side of the Ohio, was erected by General Lachlan McIntosh in 1778; how it was used more or less intermittently for a number of years as a center of operations against or negotiations with the Indians; and how, when it was finally abandoned in the winter of 1790–91, a blockhouse was erected a few miles up the Beaver River, in what is now New Brighton, to supply the

1 See ante, p. 93-119.
measure of protection still required there for a time behind the advancing frontier.

Upon leaving Beaver, the expedition circled around through New Brighton, past the site of the aforesaid blockhouse and, proceeding northeast through Unionville, Zelienople, and Harmony, site of the first American settlement of the above-mentioned Harmony Society, again picked up the trail of Washington and Gist.

Under the guidance of Dr. C. Hale Sipe of Butler, the travelers visited a number of points of special interest in this part of the region traversed by Washington and his party. Stops were made and explanatory talks given by Dr. Sipe at Eidenau, or Harmony Junction, in view of the site of an old Indian village supposed by some to have been the "Murthering Town" mentioned in Washington's and Gist’s accounts of their journey; at the monument erected by the General Richard Butler Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, near the highway about three miles northeast of Evans City, which calls attention to the supposed spot where Washington on his return trip narrowly escaped death at the hands of a treacherous Indian; and at Amberson’s Bridge, on the Connoquenessing west of the village of the latter name, near another of the supposed sites of "Murthering Town." From the latter point the pilgrims turned northward, heading for Grove City, the day’s objective, and proceeded by way of the old Franklin-Pittsburgh Pike, which for many miles follows closely the course taken by Washington over the old Indian route known as the Venango Trail. At the borough of Prospect, where the citizens turned out en masse to welcome the visitors — with display of flags and fire apparatus and with music by the local band — actual traces of the old trail were pointed out by Dr. L. M. Roth, member of a family long resident in that community.

Arriving at Grove City considerably behind schedule, the travelers were none the less cordially welcomed at the Penn-Grove Hotel by Dr. L. H. Beeler of Grove City College and
a large group of leading men and women of the city, and without much further delay were ushered into a large banquet hall, where upwards of two hundred people, visitors and townspeople combined, sat down to a delicious chicken dinner, served on flower-bedecked tables, to the accompaniment of music from an orchestra under the direction of Mr. Frank Campbell. Followed then an interesting program of informal talks and of papers and addresses, interspersed with vocal duets by the Misses Sarah and Terzah Williamson. Dean A. J. Calderwood of Grove City College, introduced as toastmaster of the evening by Dr. Beeler, opened the program by calling on Dr. Homer Henderson, president of the Grove City Commercial Club, to give the address of welcome, to which Dr. Solon J. Buck, director of the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania, responded. A number of prominent men among the visitors were then informally introduced to the company by Dean Calderwood, including, among those not mentioned in other connections in this account, Professor John A. Lacock, author, historian, and lecturer, of Boston, and the Honorable Philip H. Dewey, secretary of internal affairs of the commonwealth of Pennsylvania. This feature of the program was concluded with a special mark of appreciation for the presence of Dr. Albert Bushnell Hart, professor emeritus of government of Harvard University, official historian of the United States George Washington Bicentennial Commission, and a native of the county in which Grove City is located, who was to speak on a number of the later tour programs. To him Dr. Beeler presented, as a token of esteem from the people of Grove City and Mercer County and in recognition of Dr. Hart’s work in the study and interpretation of the life and character of the first president, a portrait of Washington done on a hand-wrought plaque of pure aluminum, which Dr. Hart received in a spirit perhaps best suggested by his closing words, uttered with the plaque raised and his eyes on the portrait: “George Washington, thou art placed upon pure metal because thou hadst a pure soul.”
The more formal part of the program comprised two carefully prepared papers, one by Mr. David K. McCarrell, formerly of the Carnegie Institute of Technology, on “The Development of the Pennsylvania Railroad, 1845-60,” and the other by Dr. Roy H. Johnson of Thiel College, on “The Religious Factor in Pioneer Life,” each of which, it is expected, will be published in a later number of this magazine, and an address by the Reverend John S. Duncan of Grove City, on “The Early History of Mercer County.” Dr. Duncan appeared in the role of a “pinch-hitter,” in the absence of one of the scheduled speakers, but his genial observations on the history of his community were something more than a mere “playing of the game.” He spoke of the coming of the first settlers to the county toward the close of the eighteenth century; of the Stokely, Robertson, Drane, Tait, Junnings, and other pioneer families; of the lure of “depreciation” and “donation” lands; of the beginnings of agriculture and the lumber and iron industries; of the founding of churches and schools and newspapers; and of national figures associated in various ways with the history of the county — all with a wealth of anecdote and apt allusion that imparted a not-to-be-recaptured flavor to the discourse. In closing, Dr. Duncan paid tribute to the work of the pioneers and expressed the hope that we of today may take such pride in the achievements of our ancestors as to make ourselves worthy of similar remembrance by our own remote descendants.

On Saturday the expedition proceeded, with longer runs and fewer stops, to Erie, going by way of Franklin, Meadville, and Waterford, thus following in the footsteps of Washington up the valley of French Creek.

The trip from Grove City to Franklin was made under the guidance of Mr. Loren D. Schoppe, secretary of the Franklin Chamber of Commerce. At the Franklin city limits the party was met by the drum and bugle corps of the Jesse G. Greer Post, Veterans of Foreign Wars, and escorted into the city. The business section and many of the private homes displayed
American flags, and in the store windows of a number of the merchants were special exhibits of pictures and articles of historical interest. After a half-hour tour of the principal historic sites in the city, the visitors and a large number of the townspeople gathered for a short meeting in the city park, in front of a bandstand dressed in patriotic colors and adorned with flowers of varieties reminiscent of colonial and revolutionary days. The Honorable Robert M. Ewing of Pittsburgh, president of the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania, presided, and after the usual exchange of felicitations, yielded the platform to Mr. Joseph Riesenman, Jr., president of the newly organized Franklin Historical Society, who presented a paper on "Franklin in the Days of Washington," the greater part of which was published in full in the Franklin News-Herald of July 16. Beginning with a plea for recognition of the primacy of the Keystone State, including, of course, the western part of it, in scenic beauty, natural resources, and industrial development, as well as in richness of historical background, the speaker traced the first stages of development of the city, from the days of the small Indian village last known as Venango, where Washington stopped on his way to Fort Le Bœuf, to the formal laying out there, in 1795, in the wake of explorer, trader, and soldier, of the white man's town of Franklin. That that development was of more than local significance the sites of four different frontier forts within the city limits bear witness, and the visitors, having just had a passing view of each of these sites under Mr. Riesenman's guidance, listened with especial interest to his account of the building of Fort Machault by the French in 1753 and of its destruction and abandonment by them following the fall of Fort Duquesne in 1758; of the erection of Fort Venango by the English in 1760 and of its capture and destruction by the Indians in 1763; of the construction of Fort Franklin by American soldiers in 1778 and of its replacement, in 1796, by the "Old Garrison," the last bulwark needed against a vanishing Indian menace.
On the way from Franklin to Meadville a brief, unscheduled stop was made at the instance of Mr. Riesenman to note a site, the significance of which he expected to explain at a later stop. An opening for such explanation did not present itself, because the expedition was running increasingly behind schedule, and it should now be observed that the site noted was that of the burial place of a pioneer, whom death overtook in this region in 1777, and whose gravestone, uncovered some ten years ago during construction of the Lakes to Sea highway, is now encased in stonework appropriately marked with bronze tablets.

At Meadville the pilgrims were greeted at the public library by a large and representative group of citizens, including the Honorable John E. Reynolds, chairman of the historical committee of the Meadville Library, Art, and Historical Association, and prime mover in preparations for the occasion. Because of the shortness of the time, speeches of welcome were dispensed with and the visitors were taken at once on a tour of the city under the leadership of Mr. Warren P. Norton, superintendent of schools, assisted by Boy Scout guides. Among the many points of historical interest visited or noted in passing, though not in the order here indicated, were the sites of a number of early military establishments, including those of two eighteenth-century blockhouses, those of two wings of the mobilization camp of the Pennsylvania and Ohio militia in the War of 1812, and that of the arsenal built at a safe distance from Lake Erie in 1816-17; Bentley Hall, Allegheny College, built in 1820 and said to be one of the finest examples of the colonial style in America; a remaining portion of the home of General David Mead, founder of the city, and the site of his mill; the places where stood the first courthouse erected and the first bank chartered in northwestern Pennsylvania; and the stopping places of famous visitors, such as Audubon and Lafayette. Over part of the way through the city, along Water Street, the tourists followed
approximately the route taken by Washington through this locality.

Luncheon, arranged for by the Meadville committee, was served on the lawn at the Venango Inn, about ten miles out on the road to Erie. Fortunately for the success of the tour as a whole, but not for all participants at this point, the party had by now swelled to such proportions that not all could be seated in the open-air dining room at the Inn, and not a few accepted with good grace the humbler fare hurriedly provided at a lunch counter and restaurant across the road. All had an opportunity, however, to hear the greater part, at least, of the program that followed the luncheon, a program intended to bring into perspective in its entirety the historic route over the latter stages of which the pilgrims were about to make their way. Dr. William H. Crawford, president emeritus of Allegheny College, presided, and first called upon, rather than introduced, Dr. Albert Bushnell Hart. The latter, exercising his prerogative as a distinguished guest and devoted student of Washington in the large, touched lightly on the subject of "Washington's Route from Virginia to Venango," broadly outlined the occasion for the mission of the young Virginian, spoke of his own and Professor Lacock's efforts to trace Washington's route northward from Logstown, and dwelt forcefully and at some length on the greatness and many-sidedness of the character of Washington and of the latter's preëminence or distinction in many roles, including those of traveler and frontiersman. Among other things, also, Dr. Hart paid his respects to the "debunking" biographers, at least one of whose works he said he had found by actual count to be full of untrue statements, and observed that the best books about Washington are the extensive and revealing published diaries and other writings of Washington himself. The Honorable John E. Reynolds of Meadville concluded the program with an interesting paper on "The Venango Trail in the French Creek Valley," which it is
expected will be published in a later number of this magazine. Suffice it to say here that the paper gave an intimate description of the route followed by Washington through this region, so far as it has been traced in detail, together with mention of other distinguished travelers who passed over it in the early days.

Proceeding then to Waterford, under the guidance of Mrs. F. H. Coon, regent of the Fort Le Bœuf Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, and a delegation from Waterford, the tourists next visited the “Washington Sentinel,” the historic hemlock, owned and cared for by the above-mentioned patriotic society, that overlooks the site of Fort Le Bœuf and, following this, the bronze statue of Washington erected by the Pennsylvania Historical Commission and the citizens of Waterford and neighboring communities at the site of the fort itself. Because of the lateness of the hour of arrival at Waterford, and of further delay occasioned by a traffic tangle at the somewhat isolated Washington hemlock, which was not in a position to entertain all at once the unexpectedly large number of cars in line at this point, the pilgrims then felt impelled regretfully to forego a full savoring of the history and traditions of the site foremost in mind so much of the way, and to make all possible speed to Erie, whose official escort had waited long and patiently, and where many another interesting historic site remained to be seen in the short time left before dinner—to say nothing of a needed interval of rest and renovation after a rather strenuous day.

The remainder of the afternoon was spent in making a tour of historic sites in Erie, principally along the water front, under the guidance of Mr. J. Elmer Reed, secretary of the Erie County Historical Society, and of others of a delegation that had met the expedition at Waterford. At the foot of Parade Street, some time was spent at the site of the French fort, Presqu’ Isle, that was built in 1753 as a link in the chain of outposts intended, with Le Bœuf, Venango, and
Duquesne to the south, to extend French control over the Ohio Valley. From this point, about which the city of Erie later arose, the pilgrims were conducted to the grounds of the Pennsylvania State Soldiers’ and Sailors’ Home, in the northeast section of the city, and shown a replica of the blockhouse, erected here in 1795, in which General Anthony Wayne died while on his way back from his victorious campaigns against the western Indians. Returning then to the main harbor front, the pilgrims visited or noted in passing a number of exceptionally interesting reminders of the operations here of the force under Commodore Perry in the War of 1812, including the hull of the flagship Niagara, in her “last port” at the foot of State Street, and the sites of the Perry shipyards, warehouses, and fortifications, described in some detail, together with other points of interest, in *Erie the Historical*, a leaflet published by the local historical society. Unfortunately there was not time for the visitors to make the scheduled run out to Presqu’ Isle State Park on the peninsula, but the bus party and a number of those in private cars made this trip the following day before returning to Pittsburgh.

On Saturday evening, after an informal and thoroughly enjoyable dinner at the Reed House, presided over by Mr. A. B. Harris, president of the Erie County Historical Society, the party assembled at the headquarters of that society in the old customs house for the final meeting of the tour. Here, after inspecting an interesting historical exhibit especially arranged for the occasion, the visitors enjoyed a program of addresses and papers enlivened by musical numbers, including songs of the days of the War of 1812, sung by Miss Lillian Peters, and the Washington bicentennial song, “Father of the Land We Love,” sung by Mr. Frederick Phelps. Dr. W. W. D. Sones, head of the Erie Center of the University of Pittsburgh; presided, and the address of welcome and the response were made, respectively, by the Honorable James P. Rossiter, mayor of Erie, and Dr. Solon J. Buck of Pittsburgh.

The first speaker on the historical program, Dr. C. Hale
Sipe, disposed briefly of his announced subject, "Early Traders of Western Pennsylvania," lest his great interest in it, he said, betray him into talking indefinitely about it, and discussed in turn a number of other factors in the development of this region. The speaker noted, however, the coming of the first English-speaking traders from the east into the wilderness of western Pennsylvania, as early as 1726, on the trail of the emigrating Delawares; told something of the activities of George Croghan as illustrative of the part the trader sometimes played in negotiations for the good will of the Indians; and briefly characterized the general run of traders, outside of Croghan and his like, as "a lively set," or, quoting Franklin, "the most vicious and abandoned wretches in the English nation." Turning then to other subjects, Dr. Sipe quite appropriately dwelt longest on the reasons, known now to all too few Pennsylvanians, he said, why Virginia, and George Washington as the emissary in 1753 of the governor of that colony, interposed in the affairs of a region now so long known as a part of Pennsylvania. In this connection the speaker recalled the claim of Virginia to the greater part of western Pennsylvania; explained its basis in Indian history; pointed out the advantage taken of it by the Ohio Company, a Virginia agency, through a grant of land that included much more of western Pennsylvania, Dr. Sipe asserted, than the bounds described by most "recognized" historians of the United States would indicate; and told something of the actual conflict of jurisdictions that arose in this region just before the Revolution and continued until Virginia withdrew her claim in 1780.

Mr. J. Elmer Reed then read portions of an interesting paper of unknown but apparently capable authorship, presented by the reader under the title "The Erie Indians and Their Fate." In it was told the story, or so much of it as the writer could piece together from tradition and history or by conjecture, of the Erie or "People of the Cat," whom the first white men found occupying a strip of territory along
the south side of Lake Erie, and whom the Iroquois wiped out, dispersed, or absorbed about the middle of the seventeenth century. This band of nearly forgotten barbarians, observed the writer, scarcely appeared on the scene of history before they vanished from sight. "Not a vestige of them, as a people, remains," he continued, "but their fading embankments, the ashes of their fireplaces, their rude implements of stone, and the crumbling bones of their dead . . . alone testify to their presence here."

The subject of the closing address, "George Washington," gave the speaker, Dr. Albert Bushnell Hart, something of the latitude needed for expression of the wealth of ideas and depth of feeling always to be drawn from or aroused in him at mention of that name. Beginning with a statement of his belief that "the highest function of history is to appreciate and understand the outstanding characters," that "it is the character of the men in any community that tells us most about that community and people," and that Washington was the most important American of his time and an outstanding figure in all history, Dr. Hart spoke eloquently of Washington's achievements, of the many-sidedness of his character, and of his superior qualities of mind and heart. He dwelt particularly on Washington as a man among men, not a perfect man, to be sure, though even in his swearing one likened to "an angel from heaven." "The thing we care most about," said Dr. Hart, "is not his public service: it was his service as a man of enormous power, a man of high intelligence, a man of unusual instincts of honor and obligation . . . the most intellectual writer of his time, and the most copious writer of the colonial period." Particular emphasis, also, was laid upon Washington's importance as a factor in the development of the West. He alone among statesmen of his time, said Dr. Hart, was looking forward to the creation of western states, not simply provinces or dominions; he was interested in the development of the Ohio Valley, in the original settlement of the Western Reserve, and in the possibilities of
regions still farther west. Concluding, Dr. Hart said: "There is not in history a character whose mind was more directed toward making the country in which he lived a better place. The more you know about the development of George Washington the more you will see that George Washington was a great spirit, that his belief in the West was absolutely essential for the development of this community and of western Pennsylvania."

So ended the two-day pilgrimage. Despite certain shortcomings in smoothness of operation, the venture had succeeded beyond all expectations, and many of those who participated expressed the hope that such an expedition might become an annual event. If, in the conduct of such tours of other parts of western Pennsylvania and the adjoining territory, the same measure of hospitality and hearty cooperation is received as was accorded by the communities already visited, the success of future pilgrimages is assured.

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HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA

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