THE MONONGAHELA WHARF IN KEELBOAT DAYS

[From a painting by Lemuel McLellis in the possession of the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania]
ITTSBURGH's commercial history during the last century or so has consisted largely of a losing battle to retain her right to the early title of "the gateway to the West." Preeminent in 1800, she has gradually lost ground. The Cumberland Road was primarily a benefit to Wheeling, and the Erie Canal tapped the Great Lakes region and even drew from the interior towns of Ohio that had previously looked upon Pittsburgh as their trading center. The most crushing blow of all was the building of the various trans-Appalachian railroads other than the Pennsylvania. Today, though a greater commercial center than ever, Pittsburgh can no longer lay exclusive claim to the proud title that she held during the first fifty years of American national existence.

Pittsburgh's early importance was based largely upon her command of the headwaters of the Ohio and her proximity to Philadelphia, then the commercial and manufacturing center of the country. The Youghiogheny, Monongahela, Conemaugh, and Allegheny rivers all emptied

1 Read at a meeting of the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania on November 29, 1932. The author, who is a research assistant on the staff of the Western Pennsylvania Historical Survey, has written an unpublished thesis on "The Keel Boat Age on Western Waters." Ed.

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their waters past her wharves. Farther down the Ohio, the Beaver furnished a direct route from Lake Erie.

Strangely enough the first commerce of western Pennsylvania was not water-borne. As the pressure of the white settlements increased, the Delaware and Shawnee Indians took advantage of the disintegration of the Iroquois and began to filter over the mountains to the territory that the confederacy had depopulated during the days of its power. White traders accompanied them, bringing their goods across the mountains on pack horses. Because the trade, as it extended westward, cut across the prevailing direction of the streams, pack horses continued in use.

George Croghan, the grand mogul of the Pennsylvania traders, extended his activities as far west as the Wabash and haunted the southern shore of Lake Erie near Sandusky, where he could entice the French Indians across by way of the islands and trade for their packs of prime beaver furs. Along the Ohio he traded as far down as the Kentucky River and on the Allegheny River at the mouth of Pine Creek in what is now Etna he had his principal storehouse and plantation. There, also, he kept a number of bateaux for use in transporting goods on the rivers. In addition to this post he had others at Logstown and Venango and on Beaver Creek and the Youghiogheny.²

Perhaps a second reason why river transportation played so small a part in the Pennsylvania trade was the rudeness of the water craft then in use. Bark canoes, of course, were light and were paddled upstream with comparative ease, but they were too fragile to be practical on the snag-infested Ohio. Pirogues, which were canoes made of hollowed-out tree trunks, were used extensively but were heavy and clumsy as well as dangerous in rough water. Bateaux were flat-bottomed skiffs built of planks but they had the same drawbacks as pirogues. Neither were easily rowed upstream.

River traffic, however, had developed sufficiently by 1752 to impress upon both the French and the English the importance of controlling it through the occupation of the forks of the Ohio. During the war that

² Albert T. Volwiler, George Croghan and the Westward Movement, 1741-1782, 32-42 (Cleveland, 1926).
followed, Fort Duquesne was provisioned from Canada by way of French Creek and the Allegheny and from Illinois by way of the Ohio. With the close of the French and Indian War, river trade entered upon an era of importance that was to last for a century. The Ohio region had always furnished more skins than beaver furs, though the Pennsylvania traders had diverted some beaver from Canada. Now furs mostly followed their natural outlet down the St. Lawrence, but because Erie and Detroit were garrisoned from Forbes's army, the Pittsburgh-Allegheny River route was favored in provisioning them. At the same time, some Philadelphia merchants were opening up a trade with the Illinois and with Detroit, and this activity gave Pittsburgh added importance. Moreover, scarcely had the French and Indians stolen away before Forbes's cautious advance than the adventurous and land-hungry frontiersmen of Virginia and Pennsylvania began to pour into the Monongahela Valley, and they soon learned to look upon Pittsburgh as their chief shopping center.

These canny settlers considered that the accessibility of the market for their agricultural products actually increased as they moved toward the Monongahela and the Allegheny. Hugh Henry Brackenridge wrote that before he emigrated to the West he and his friends calculated "that a farm in the neighbourhood of these rivers, was nearer the market of any part of the world, than a farm within twenty miles of Philadelphia." Cattle and swine could be made to carry themselves to market, and hemp, flour, and whiskey could be sent down the rivers to New Orleans and thence abroad. There was much ado about the possibilities of ship-building on the Ohio—a Philadelphia writer proposed Pittsburgh for the rôle of builder as early as 1761.

Pittsburgh in 1760 had become a thriving village of 201 houses and huts, finished or building, and 149 people in addition to a large transient population of soldiers and hunters. George Morgan, junior partner of


4 "To the Inhabitants of the Western Country," in the Pittsburgh Gazette, April 28, 1787; Abraham Weatherwise, pseud., Father Abraham's Almanac, not paged (Philadelphia, 1761).
the Philadelphia house of Baynton, Wharton, and Morgan, erected Pittsburgh's first warehouse in 1764—the first shingle-roofed building in the town. In the summer of 1766, Baynton, Wharton, and Morgan boasted that they had six hundred pack horses and many wagons engaged in carrying goods between Pittsburgh and Philadelphia. At the same time they planned on keeping sixty-five bateaux and over three hundred men on the river between Pittsburgh and the Illinois. In that year goods valued at fifty thousand pounds were sent to the Illinois—all of them through Pittsburgh. Settlers found a ready market for their farm products. The problem of getting boats upstream was solved by building cleated runways on each side of the bateau so that the crew could thrust long poles in the mud of the river bottom and literally walk the boat upstream.

The advent of the English at the forks of the Ohio started a great clanging of hammers and rasping of saws in the new boat yards. As early as 1760 Jehu Eyre and sixteen helpers spent several weeks building bateaux at Fort Pitt and Erie, and in 1763 three shipwrights were sent by the British to the former place. Baynton, Wharton, and Morgan sent boatwrights and sawyers from Philadelphia, paying the former the munificent sum of eleven pounds a month. Tools and ironwork had to be brought over the mountains, and distance from headquarters encouraged carelessness in the workmen and complicated business by breeding quarrels over jurisdiction. In July, 1766, when the company planned to send out their boats later than announced they wrote to their agent to keep it secret from the carpenters, for "if once the Carpenters had Knowledge thereof, they would Slacken their work immediately. . . . Don't spare a few gallons rum extraordinary at proper times, to effect this great work for us."


The Revolution put a sudden, though fortunately temporary, stop to this incipient prosperity. Philadelphia's trade with the Illinois was ruined. The Indians, largely under British influence, lay in wait to capture river craft. Work still went on in the boat yards, for munitions and military supplies had to be carried on the rivers, and in fact several trips were made to New Orleans for gunpowder and other supplies. Gunboats and flatboats were built by the score, and the business extended up the Monongahela for it was there that George Rogers Clark obtained some of his boats for his expeditions.⁸

Eventually, however, commerce managed to work its way out of the doldrums. Toward the close of the war the need of a market for Monongahela flour became so great that certain adventurous souls dared to open a trade with New Orleans. On April 29, 1782, General William Irvine wrote from Pittsburgh that he had given permits for ten boatloads of flour to be exported to New Orleans and Kentucky, and he estimated that all together they included at least three hundred tons. His information was that another fleet of ten or twelve boats of even larger burdens would soon arrive. A few days later he was describing the flour trade as though it were a business of long standing. He wrote that the seasons for exporting were from the middle of February to the first of June and from the first of November to the last of December, and that “a boat which will carry forty tons costs about forty pounds; five men with a super-cargo are enough to work the boat.” He explained that one super-cargo could serve for several boats, as they could keep together in fleets, and he stated that boatmen received from three to four pounds a month. It may have been one of the boats mentioned by Irvine that, with its cargo of three hundred barrels of flour, fell into the hands of the Delawares on March 22, 1782. The crew reported to the commandant at Detroit that other boats were to follow. In April or May British irregulars on the Mississippi captured an American huckster with a boatload of flour.⁹

⁸ Draper Manuscripts, 30 J (State Historical Society of Wisconsin); various letters, 1775–79, in the letter books of Colonel George Morgan (3 vols.) in the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh.

⁹ Consul W. Butterfield, ed., Washington-Irvine Correspondence, 202, 206 (Madison, Wisconsin, 1882); letter from Major At. S. De Peyster, commandant at Detroit, May
The only man who can be identified with these ventures with any degree of certainty is Jacob Yoder, a Pennsylvania German, residing near Redstone. He landed his cargo at New Orleans in May and sold it to the Spanish commandant, who gave him a draft on the captain general of Cuba. He invested in furs and hides at Havana and sold them in Baltimore at a profit. The next year he repeated the venture but this time it was not a financial success. In the winter of 1782–83 two Frenchmen, Barthelemy Tardiveau and John Honoré made trading voyages from Redstone to New Orleans, apparently in partnership but on different boats. Both men had trouble with the Indians and the former was robbed.10

These voyages probably marked the advent of flatboats on the western waters. Shaped much like a modern house boat, though with an infinite variation in detail, they speedily became the chief means of downstream transportation. The average flatboat was about fifteen by fifty feet and carried forty or fifty tons. There were two varieties: Kentucky boats, roofed over about two-thirds of their length and built for the comparatively calm waters of the Ohio; and New Orleans boats, which were built much more strongly and roofed over the entire length.11

The opening of the trade with New Orleans caused a further demand for boats, though this traffic often labored under serious restrictions imposed by the Spanish. The expeditions against the Indians in the seventeen nineties boomed the boating business, for practically everything used in the armies had to be shipped from Pittsburgh. During five months in
1793 Major Isaac Craig, the deputy quartermaster-general, forwarded to Wayne's army 104 flatboats laden with provisions, horses, and equipment, in addition to goods sent by other craft. Soon after the turn of the century Pittsburgh was supposed to be building boats each year to the value of twelve thousand dollars while Redstone, now called Browns-ville, was making one hundred annually for the immigrant business. Even the Allegheny was sending to Pittsburgh laden flatboats, which,

once emptied, could be sold to immigrants at a reduced price. A new flatboat ranged in price from $1.00 to $1.50 a foot or from $50 to $75 for an average craft. Boatbuilders received wages of about $1.00 a day.

Boatbuilders were not always honest and careful in constructing and caulking their boats. Cramer in his *Navigator* warned immigrants and traders that they must exercise the greatest care in purchasing and that they should be accompanied, if possible, by persons familiar with boats who could detect rotten planks and defective caulking. Three-quarters of the accidents, he said, were the result of bad building with knotty, rotten plank, and of using tender wood just above the gunwale. The custom of caulking only as high as the gunwale joint was dangerous and Cramer advised travelers to take along a few pounds of oakum and a mallet and caulking iron.

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12 Invoice of stores forwarded to Fort Washington in 1793, in the Craig Papers.


14 These statistics are taken from numerous contracts in the Craig Papers.
The term "Kentucky boat" came to have a secondary meaning as applied to shoddily built boats. Cramer himself gave an instance of defective workmanship, and the tale was amusingly paraphrased by a St. Louis newspaper. In the fall of 1807 a certain Mr. Winchester's boat struck a rock a few miles below Pittsburgh and sank, ruining or damaging several thousand dollars' worth of merchandise. The proprietor, blaming the patroon for carelessness, brought suit before Justice Richardson of Pittsburgh, who incidentally had gained through sad experience considerable knowledge about Kentucky boats. The defendant, with two witnesses, went to the scene of the accident and after a great deal of trouble procured a section of the plank that had broken on the rock and let the water into the boat. On the day of the trial he presented the plank as evidence, at the same time observing, "Your Honor will see that it was my misfortune to have been placed in charge of one of these damned Kentucky boats." His honor received the plank and found that it was thoroughly rotten and defective. After being satisfied that it was really from the part of the boat that had failed to withstand the shock of collision Justice Richardson delivered his opinion: "This court had the misfortune once to place a valuable cargo on a Kentucky boat, not knowing it to be such; which sank and went down in seventeen feet of water, this court verily believed, by coming in contact with the head of a yellow-bellied catfish, there being no snag, rock, or other obstruction near her at the time; and this court, being satisfied of the premises in this cause, doth order that the same be dismissed at plaintiff's costs, to have included therein the expenses of the defendant in going to and returning from the wreck, for the purpose of obtaining such damnable and irrefutable evidence as this bottom plank has furnished."15

For upstream traffic there came into use, probably in the seventeen eighties, a craft called the keel boat. It was built on a keel, like a whaleship, and was long, narrow, and pointed at both ends. Surviving illustrations show it as resembling the Venetian gondola with a long cabin to protect the cargo. The keel boat was from fifty to eighty feet long and

15 Cramer, Navigator, 18, 23 (sixth edition); newspaper account quoted in J. Thomas Scharf, History of Saint Louis City and County, 2:1091 (Philadelphia, 1883), and in Emerson W. Gould, Fifty Years on the Mississippi, 55 (St. Louis, 1889).
from six to twelve feet wide. It was furnished with runways for the pole-men and on account of its shape was more easily propelled than the bateau. Sometimes a high block was placed at the stern with notches cut in the side. The steersman mounted the block by means of the notches and straddled the steering oar while he gave orders to the crew, who were meanwhile engaged in rowing or poling.\textsuperscript{16}

\textbf{An Ohio Keelboat}

The smaller keel boats penetrated far up the tributary streams, acting as carriers between them and Pittsburgh, and the larger ones traversed the river as far down as Louisville or in some cases St. Louis and New Orleans. Freight rates, of course, varied with distance, but upstream from New Orleans they were about eight dollars a hundred weight and from Louisville about three dollars. Downstream they were roughly from a quarter to a third of those upstream.\textsuperscript{17} About 1805 there were said to be 50 keels of 30 tons each plying between Pittsburgh and Cincinnati, and twelve years later, according to Morgan Neville, there were 150 engaged in the upper Ohio trade. The round trip from Pittsburgh

\textsuperscript{16} Melish, Travels, 2 : 85, 111; Schultz, Jr., Travels, 1 : 131; William P. Strickland, \textit{The Pioneers of the West}, 195–197 (New York, 1868); James Hall, \textit{Letters from the West; Containing Sketches of Scenery, Manners, and Customs}, 323 (London, 1828); Henry M. Brackenridge, \textit{Recollections of Persons and Places in the West}, 172 (Philadelphia, 1868); Samuel Wilkeson, "Early Recollections of the West," in the \textit{American Pioneer}, 2 : 271 (June, 1843).

\textsuperscript{17} Niles' \textit{Weekly Register}, 31 : 58 (September 23, 1826); \textit{Western Spy} (Cincinnati), January 5, 1811; Henry B. Fearon, \textit{Sketches of America, a Narrative of a Journey... through the Eastern and Western States}, 262 (London, 1818). The \textit{Louisiana Gazette} from 1804 to 1812 occasionally published the freight rates as well as the prices current.
to Louisville occupied two months and each boat was supposed to make it three times a year.\textsuperscript{18}

No picture of any river town in western Pennsylvania would be complete without notice of the omnipresent immigrants. The farmer found them his readiest and most gullible market, the boatwright did most of his work for them, the warehouseman stored their goods, the merchant disposed of his cloth and farm implements at two prices to the helpless newcomers. The printers found a ready sale for numerous editions of hastily thrown together and sometimes disastrously inaccurate river guides. The money spent by immigrants was doubtless one of the largest sources of western cash and the towns on the headwaters of the Ohio exploited this rich mine almost alone until the completion of the Erie Canal.

The two chief points of departure for river traffic were Pittsburgh and Wheeling. The most serious obstacle Pittsburgh merchants encountered was low water and in consequence most shipments were timed to leave before the summer drought set in. The average loaded keel boat drew about three feet and since the stage of the rivers was often less than three feet, it was not unusual for a boat to wait weeks or months for a sufficient depth of water. At one time in 1818 there were thirty keel boats tied up at Pittsburgh waiting for enough water to float them to Kentucky and three million dollars' worth of goods was being delayed.\textsuperscript{19} It was this handicap that made Wheeling preferred by merchants and immigrants in the summer, though there is evidence that the river for a hundred miles below that town was well nigh as shallow as it was above. Ordinarily Pittsburgh's ample warehouse facilities and larger outfitting stores gave it the advantage over Wheeling.\textsuperscript{20}

Occasional attempts at packet service were made. The first mention of a packet is found in an advertisement in the \textit{Pittsburgh Gazette} of

\textsuperscript{18} Norman Walker, "Commerce of the Mississippi River from Memphis to the Gulf of Mexico," in 50 Congress, 1 session, \textit{House Executive Documents}, no. 6, part 2, p. 185 (serial 2552); Morgan Neville, quoted in James Hall, \textit{Notes on the Western States}, 236 (Philadelphia, 1838); James Hall, \textit{The West: Its Commerce and Navigation}, 13 (Cincinnati, 1848).

\textsuperscript{19} \textit{Pittsburgh Gazette}, November 17, December 11, 1818, September 17, 1819.

\textsuperscript{20} Cramer, \textit{Navigator}, 20 (sixth edition); John Gibson to Major Craig, June 17, 1793, Craig Papers, letter book A.
In it John Blair announced that he expected to pass up and down the Monongahela every week with a boat and would deliver newspapers at a reasonable rate. This service extended for thirty-five miles above Pittsburgh. In the same issue John M'Donald, with an eye to the business of the mills up river and to the carrying trade between Pittsburgh and the Monongahela landing nearest Washington, Pennsylvania, announced that he had started weekly trips and would deliver the Pittsburgh Gazette to subscribers. He also proposed to erect a storehouse at his landing for goods. M'Donald remained in the packet business for a number of years.

In October, 1793, Jacob Myers inaugurated a fortnightly packet service between Pittsburgh and Cincinnati. The first boat left Pittsburgh on October 14 and the second on November 5 and Myers planned to add two more boats so that there would be weekly service. He stated in his advertisement that "the Proprietor . . . being influenced by a love of philanthropy and desire of being serviceable to the public, has taken great pains to render the accommodations on board the Boats as agreeable and convenient as they could possibly be made." Protection against the Indians was provided by high bulwarks thick enough to withstand rifle shots and pierced with portholes. Each boat carried six one-pounders, probably swivels, and a number of muskets. The number in the crews is not stated but was supposed to be sufficient for defense. To obviate the necessity of landing in dangerous vicinities the boats were provided with sanitary conveniences. Passengers were boarded and liquored by the management "at the most reasonable rates possible," and a separate cabin was provided for the women passengers. There was a set of "Rules and Regulations for maintaining order on board, and for the good management of the Boats." Unfortunately no copy of these seems to have survived nor any statement of the schedule on which the boats ran. Freight and letters were carried and insurance was sold at a "moderate" rate, but the particulars of what was charged are unknown. Myers' boats were propelled by oars and sails and were intended to serve not only as conveyors, of freight and passengers but also as convoys for other boats. In spite of this expenditure of liquor and rhetoric the venture seems not to have outlasted the winter, for the next May in discussing the advisability of carry-
ing passengers on the proposed Ohio mail-boat line Major Craig stated his opinion that "the idea of Passenger Packet-Boats ought at Present to be abandoned." 21

There is no telling how many boat owners attempted packet service. What was probably the last such service before the introduction of the steamboat was that of John Walker, who advertised in the *Pittsburgh Gazette* of January 21, 1815, that "the fast sailing boat Torpedo has commenced running between Elizabethtown and Pittsburgh. She will leave Elizabethtown every Tuesday Morning at 9 o’clock, and arrive at Pittsburgh the same Evening; will leave Pittsburgh on Wednesday at 2 o’clock, p.m. and arrive at Elizabethtown on Thursday." He was trying to attract the business of wagoners, and offered to carry a wagonload one way for five dollars or both ways for seven dollars. Loads of iron were transported at the same rate.

One of the most picturesque chapters in early western Pennsylvania history was that of the construction of ocean vessels, which had to travel two thousand miles before they could reach their destined element. As one bard sang:

The keel of a stately ship was laid  
In the Port of Pitt in glee—  
In the ebbing flood of the River of Blood,  
Two thousand miles from the sea! 22

Henry Clay, that tireless promoter of industrial progress, related in the course of an address before the House of Representatives on January 22, 1812, an incident illustrative of the spirit of commercial enterprise on the western waters. "A vessel, built at Pittsburg, having crossed the Atlantic ... entered a European port (he believed that of Leghorn). The master of the vessel laid his papers before the proper custom-house officer, which, of course, stated the place of her departure. The officer boldly denied the existence of any such American port as Pittsburg, and threatened a seizure of the vessel, as being furnished with forged papers.

21 Advertisements, "Ohio Packet Boats," in the *Pittsburgh Gazette*, November 2 to November 30, 1793; Centinel of the Northwestern Territory, November 23, 1793, January 11, 1794, quoted in Hall, *Notes on the Western States*, 223-225; Kentucky Gazette, December 7, 1793; Craig to Pickering, May 9, 1794, in Craig Papers, letter book B.

22 "The Spectre Ship of Port Pitt," in Frank Cowan, Southwestern Pennsylvania in Song and Story, 127 (Greensburg, 1878).
The affrighted master procured a map of the United States, and, pointing out the Gulf of Mexico, took the officer to the mouth of the Mississippi, traced the course of the Mississippi more than a thousand miles, to the mouth of the Ohio, and conducting him still a thousand miles higher, to the junction of the Alleghany and Monongahela,—there, he exclaimed, stands Pittsburg, the port from which I sailed! The custom-house officer, prior to the production of this evidence, would have as soon believed that the vessel had performed a voyage from the moon.  

The first seagoing vessel from the upper waters was probably the unnamed schooner built in 1793 by a Dr. Waters somewhere between Brownsville and Pittsburgh. After passing down the rivers and making the voyage to Philadelphia it engaged in commerce at least until 1797.  

The first western Pennsylvania ship of which there is any detailed record is the "Monongahela Farmer," built at Elizabeth and launched April 23, 1801. With a cargo of flour, whiskey, hides, hemp, flax, and other products the little ship drifted downstream to New Orleans. There it was found that the flour had soured so it had to be sold to cracker makers. The vessel itself was sold and used in the trade between the eastern coast and the West Indies and New Orleans. During the period of trouble with France at the close of the eighteenth century, fear of a conflict with Spain, a French ally, caused the building of two row galleys at Pittsburgh under the supervision of Major Craig. The first one, the

23 Speech "On the Increase of the Navy," in Henry Clay, Works, 5:294 (edited by Calvin Colton—New York, 1863). The true identity of ship and port will probably never be known. James T. Lloyd, Lloyd's Steamboat Directory and Disasters on the Western Waters, 41 (Cincinnati, 1856), gives the ship as the brig "Dean" and the port as Leghorn; James L. Bishop, A History of American Manufactures from 1608 to 1860, 2:111, note 1 (Philadelphia, 1864), speaks of "an East Indian port"; and Charles Cist, comp., The Cincinnati Miscellany, or, Antiquities of the West, 1:234 (Cincinnati, 1845–46) names the "Western Trader" as the ship, Marseilles as the port, and Captain John Brevoort as commander. Gould, in Fifty Years on the Mississippi, 99, characteristically embellishes Clay's speech by adding that the customs officer closed with "I knew America could show many wonderful things, but a fresh water sea port is something I never dreamed of."


25 "A Century of Boat Building," in the Elizabeth Herald, June 7, 1900; Pittsburgh Gazette, May 1, 15, 1801; Louisiana Gazette, August 23, December 30, 1808.
"President Adams," was launched May 19, 1798, with General Wilkinson presiding at a celebration, the expenses of which were paid by the government. The boat departed on June 8 bearing the commander in chief and escorted by a fleet of Kentucky boats and smaller craft.⁶

Shipbuilding at Pittsburgh was carried on principally by Eliphalet Beebe and by the firm of Tarascon Brothers, James Berthoud & Company. The Tarascons were originally from Bordeaux and were established as merchants in Philadelphia when they saw the large profits to be gained by building ships at the headwaters of the Ohio in the midst of as fine and cheap timber as the country produced. Accordingly they sent two representatives, Charles Brugiere and James Berthoud, to investigate conditions around Pittsburgh and to report upon the navigability of the Ohio and the Mississippi. The result was that they established at Pittsburgh a shipyard with dependent smith shops and rigging and sail loft, as well as a store and warehouse where they carried on merchandising business.⁷

The first Pittsburgh ship was probably the brig "Dean," 170 tons, built on the Allegheny, which sailed in January, 1803. She went over the Falls of the Ohio the next month together with a Marietta ship, and a Louisville paper recorded that "a number of the citizens went over in these vessels to assist in keeping them in the current, and were entertained with various refreshments by the Captains." Upon the arrival of the "Dean" at Liverpool she was spoken of as "the first vessel which ever came to Europe from the western waters of the U. S." Altogether at least seventeen ships, averaging about 150 tons each, were built at Pittsburgh, and three or four others came from Elizabeth or its vicinity. There is preserved in the private library of the late Joseph B. Shea of Pittsburgh a map of the city drawn in 1805 by William Masson, a local sailmaker, showing the rivers and the part of the present city known as the "Triangle." Here and there upon the rivers are beautifully colored thumb-nail sketches of the ships already built or on the stocks, and beneath them are written their names and the yards in which they origi-

⁶ Memorandum Book, dated May 19, 1794, in the Craig Papers; Neville B. Craig, The History of Pittsburgh, 285 (Pittsburgh, 1851).
⁷ Sherman Day, Historical Collections of the State of Pennsylvania, 62 (Philadelphia, c1843); Pittsburgh Gazette, July 24, 1801, September 24, November 12, 1802.
nated. The banks bear other thumb-nail sketches, one of a shipyard, the others of residences and public buildings. What gala occasions the launchings of Pittsburgh ships must have been and how local toastmasters must have pointed with pride and boasted of civic progress. An old resident tells of seeing one of these new ships sailing up and down the river "with a crowd of gaily dressed ladies and their escorts on board" while the sailors ran nimbly up the rigging and scampered about amidst the billowy clouds of snowy white canvas.

In 1802, a few months before Pittsburgh launched her first ship the Frenchman François A. Michaux visited there. In his description of the town at that time he reported that "Pittsburgh has been long considered by the Americans as the key to the western country... though this town has lost its importance as a military post, it has acquired a still greater one in respect to commerce. It serves as a staple for the different sorts of merchandise that Philadelphia and Baltimore send, in the beginning of spring and autumn, for supplying the states of Ohio, Kentucky, and the settlement of Natches." Michaux was also impressed by Pittsburgh's thriving export trade:

Pittsburgh is not only the staple of the Philadelphia and Baltimore trade with the western country, but of the numerous settlements that are formed upon the Monongahela and Alleghany. The territorial produce of that part of the country finds an easy and advantageous conveyance by the Ohio and Mississippi. Corn, hams and dried pork are the principal articles sent to New Orleans, whence they are re-exported into the Carribbees. They also export for the consumption of Louisiana, bar-iron, coarse linen, bottles manufactured at Pittsburgh, whiskey, and salt butter. A great part of these provisions come from Redstone... All these advantages joined together have, within these ten years, increased tenfold the population and price of articles in the town [Pittsburgh], and contribute to its improvements, which daily grow more and more rapid.

Trips from New Orleans to Pittsburgh were made frequently and in June, 1814, a firm advertised the cargoes of six keel boats expected up

28 Pittsburgh Gazette, January 21, March 18, 1803; Cramer, Navigator, 10 (sixth edition); Liverpool Saturday's Advertiser, July 9, 1803, quoted in the Western Spy, October 5, 1803. Masson's map of Pittsburgh is reproduced in Charles H. Ambler, A History of Transportation in the Ohio Valley, 95 (Glendale, California, 1932).


30 Travels to the West of the Alleghany Mountains, 59-61 (London, 1805).
from New Orleans that month. In 1817 a two-masted barge of 150 tons burden was in the trade and in 1814 Cramer recorded that "a great number of barges constantly ply between this and the country below." A barge was the river equivalent of a small ship and was propelled by oars, poles, and sails or drawn by a cordelle or rope from shore. In 1810 Pittsburgh imported from down river between May 1 and November 14 689 tons of spun yarn, hemp worth about two hundred thousand dollars, 10 tons of tobacco, and 120 tons of cotton. One thousand tons of Kentucky goods were said to have been shipped from Maysville to Pittsburgh during the boating season of 1812. The passing domestic trade of Pittsburgh was estimated by Zadok Cramer at one million dollars a year. These statistics can give only an incomplete picture of Pittsburgh's trade and of the city's dependence upon the West and South. The manufacture of cotton, tobacco, rope, and bagging were directly dependent upon those sections. In addition, Missouri lead, Mexican copper, Spanish hides, Kentucky glazed powder, whiskey, country linen, saltpeter, bacon, sugar, Spanish wool, and West Indian products came up the river.31

A traffic in Onondaga salt by way of Lake Erie and French Creek was begun by James O'Hara. In 1800 Erie received 723 barrels, which were distributed all along the lake; in 1809 it received 14,346 destined for Pittsburgh and its vicinity. Before long, however, brisk competition began from the salt works on the Kanawha and elsewhere.32 Most important of all, Pittsburgh became an iron manufacturing center and headquarters for cast and wrought iron, wire, nails, and tools. In addition it began the manufacture of glass, leather goods, white lead and paints, chemicals, flour, and other products too numerous to mention. Lumber and logs were floated in rafts down the Allegheny and Monongahela to Pittsburgh and beyond. In spite of difficulties, trade across the mountains flourished and the Conemaugh and Youghiogheny rivers became impor-

31 Robinson & Barber, advertisement in the Pittsburgh Gazette, June 3, 1814; Charles F. Goss, ed., Cincinnati, the Queen City, 1788-1912, 2 : 105 (Cincinnati, 1912); Cramer, Navigator, 63-65 (eighth edition, 1814); Bosler & Co., advertisement in the Pittsburgh Gazette, April 27, 1816.

32 Cramer, Navigator, 46 (eighth edition); Liberty Hall (Cincinnati), January 27, 1807; Commonwealth (Pittsburgh), July 19, August 2, 30, 1809; Pittsburgh Gazette, October 9, 1812; Western Spy, January 8, 1806; Craig, Pittsburgh, 284; Flint, Recollections, 24.
tant transportation routes leading into the Allegheny and the Monongahela respectively.

Pennsylvania furnished a very respectable proportion of the flatboat arrivals at New Orleans. Basing the figures upon the news columns of the *Louisiana Gazette* from 1805 to 1807, 130 boats (or about 17 per cent of the total number arriving at New Orleans) came annually from the Keystone State. In the twelve months from September, 1850, to August, 1851, the number of boats from Pennsylvania was 222 (24 per cent of the total arrivals). These statistics refer only to flatboats arriving at New Orleans. Hundreds of others must have departed each year, laden with produce, manufactures, or immigrants, and bound for way ports. In fact in 1807 Major Craig was complaining that at Pittsburgh the shore was so lined with boats, many of them empty, that incoming craft were often unable to find room and were forced to go on downstream and land their cargoes where they could.33

Each year scores of flatboats left the forks of the Ohio outfitted with shelves and counters often arranged with attractiveness and ingenuity. Since they served as the department stores of the rivers they carried large stocks of all the varied products of their parent city. Each trading boat bore a calico flag to indicate its character and would respond to a hail from some dweller on the banks or tie up near a plantation or hamlet too small to afford a store. Its arrival was announced by a blast on a tin horn and the natives with money to spend or goods to barter would flock to the landing.34

The War of 1812 was a positive benefit to Pittsburgh. By cutting off the sea route, it caused more of the commerce from south to north to flow through Pittsburgh, and the resulting impetus to trade was sustained until the day of the railroad. The trade for 1813 was estimated at four

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million dollars and over four thousand wagonloads of goods crossed the mountains from Pittsburgh to Philadelphia. Bosler & Co. alone imported 275 tons of goods from New Orleans between April 1 and September 1, 1814.35

Immense as this trade seemed to the citizens of early western Pennsylvania the region was to advance even more during the following years. In 1810 the progressive author of the *Navigator* wrote that there was on foot a new mode of navigating the western waters. Steam had been applied to a boat on the Hudson River in such a manner as to drive it against wind and tide at the rate of four miles an hour and now there was such a boat building at Pittsburgh and another at Frankfort. "It will be a novel sight," he concluded, "and as pleasing as novel to see a huge boat working her way up the windings of the Ohio, without the appearance of sail, oar, pole, or any manual labour about her—moving within the secrets of her own wonderful mechanism, and propelled by power undiscernable!" On October 18, 1811, the editor of the *Pittsburgh Gazette* wrote, "With pleasure we announce, that the Steam Boat lately built at this place...fully answers the most sanguine expectations that were formed of her sailing." As the "Orleans" steamed down the river and the keelboatmen dropped their poles to watch her pass at the terrific speed of eight miles an hour, she was acting as the harbinger of a new era in western transportation.16

The supremacy of the steamboat, however, was not to be won without difficulty. For almost a decade the keel boats and barges flourished. Business increased so consistently that merchants found it profitable to build their barges larger and larger, until river craft actually rivaled the smaller ocean trading vessels in size. The keelboatmen, moreover, anchored by self interest to the old ways, were frankly contemptuous of the steamboat. In their eyes it was "a scheme to destroy their business and expose people's lives.... They would like to see that new fangled ma-


chime try 'Horsetail Ripple' or 'Letart's Falls,' to get up them without the aid of good setting poles, or 'cordelles'...it could not be done 'no how.'"

Truth to tell the keelboatmen were not far wrong. The first steamboats were clumsy, unwieldy affairs, hard to manage on a curve and too deep set in the water to battle successfully the swift western currents even had their engines been more perfect. To complete the caricature it was supposed that only sea captains could manage them, so the West had the ludicrous spectacle of bluff old salts with trumpets clapped to their mouths shouting nautical phrases at deck hands who had never seen the ocean. Then when they were misunderstood the captains went into spasms of blasphemy that must have aroused the admiration of western connoisseurs of billingsgate. For some time it was not at all certain that steamboats would win. The danger of explosion, and delays caused by low water and rapids made them distrusted. The final triumph came, through the inventive genius of Captain Henry Shreve, a former keel boat master of Brownsville, who in 1816 built the "Washington," which carried its boilers on deck and traversed the surface of the water instead of plowing the depths.

For a few years Pittsburgh seemed destined to rule the commerce of the West, but the building of the National Road, the shrewdness of De Witt Clinton, and the ingenuity of the railroad men soon dealt that hope a series of swift and telling blows. River transportation, nevertheless, had set the mold for the future development of western Pennsylvania. The

37 Edmund Flagg, The Far West: or, a Tour beyond the Mountains, 1 : 121 (New-York, 1838); Robert Buchanan, in the Cincinnati Gazette, ca. 1878, from a newspaper clipping copied and preserved in a scrapbook in the Craig Papers. Buchanan was born about 1796 and became a steamboat captain in 1821.

38 Buchanan, in the Cincinnati Gazette; Walker, in 50 Congress, 1 session, House Executive Documents, no. 6, part 2, p. 194 (serial 2552).

exigencies of trade had so patterned the map that, even though roads and railways have largely supplanted rivers as the channels of commerce, there has been little change in the names and locations of important population centers. The fact that goods could be floated to their markets in the West and South not only made Pittsburgh an entrepôt for eastern wares but led to the early utilization of western Pennsylvania's ore and wood in the production of iron. This start, together with vast coal deposits, enabled the region to hold its lead in the iron industry, even when the ore had to be brought from Michigan and Minnesota. The same factors to a greater or less degree influenced the development of lumbering, woodworking, boat building, glaziery, the ceramic industries, and, doubtless, others. The Pennsylvania Railroad, built over the old Philadelphia-Pittsburgh route, found Pittsburgh a useful point for tapping the river trade and snatched for itself a goodly share of the intersectional commerce. Pittsburgh's supremacy as "the gateway to the West" has gone, but she has become in turn "the workshop of the world."