HISTORICAL SOCIETY NOTES

SUMMER TOUR, 1964

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The Twenty-first Summer Tour of the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania consisted of a bus trip to Wheeling, West Virginia, where members boarded the party boat Chaperon for a round-trip of about eight hours up the Ohio River. Several groups of the passengers went directly from their homes to Wheeling, while the bus riders followed Route 19, the newly constructed Highway 70 and Route 40.

Leaving the point of embarkation, the boat passed under the Wheeling suspension bridge, the oldest of its kind in America, and we were reminded that Charles Ellet was the successful bidder over John Roebling and finished the construction in 1849. On May 17, 1854, however, a heavy wind storm destroyed the original structure — 1010 feet long, with 17-foot wagonway and 3½-foot walkway, supported by 12 cables and weighing 400 tons. The actual destruction was due to an up-and-down swaying motion caused by the wind, which threw the floor of the bridge into the river. In 1860 the structure was rebuilt by Roebling, at a cost of $42,000. It was much used during the Civil War and World Wars I and II, but now trucks are forbidden — as a precautionary measure.

Moving upstream, the Chaperon passed near several interesting towns, dams and locks, including: Bridgeport, Martin’s Ferry, Short Creek, Rayland, Brilliant, Pike Island (named for its shape) at which point there is a new lock and dam, Follansbee and Wellsburg. This portion of the Ohio played an important part in the national history of the 1800’s. Congressmen and even Presidents made this trip in connection with journeys over the National Pike, now Route 40, extending to Wheeling from Washington, Brownsville and other towns.

Captain Frederick Way, Jr., a passenger on the tour, known for his studies of river activities, gave a running account of the area communities, islands, locks and dams, steel plants, factories and personages, of the area.

Lunch and dinner were served on the boat. Music was furnished by an organist. The weather was pleasant. All of these important details will be remembered by the 127 passengers — and the service rendered by Director Robert D. Christie in making the tour a success.