

## PITTSBURGH'S GREAT FIRE OF 1845<sup>1</sup>

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SOME years ago I was in Philadelphia on research work that took me to the Historical Society of Pennsylvania on Locust Street. Shortly, two women sat down at the end of the same long table and their conversation soon made clear to their neighbors that one was a genealogist whom the other had come to consult about her family records. The trail evidently led back to western Pennsylvania, for my attention was quite diverted from my own work by hearing the genealogist say most emphatically: "Oh! Pittsburgh! You won't get any records there. They were all burned in the big fire they had many years ago."

Ever since, I have been curious about what records were destroyed and what preserved in the two disastrous fires in Pittsburgh's history. The earlier, usually spoken of as the "big" or "great fire," occurred in 1845 and destroyed a large part of the city, although it did not reach the courthouse. The second, in 1882, did little damage in the city but did destroy the courthouse. The tax lists of Allegheny County were among the records that were then consumed, but other items, including wills and deeds, were saved.

An account of any event written soon after it occurred is naturally of first importance, and we are fortunate to have some material of this type on the great fire. A booklet entitled *A Full Account of the Great Fire at Pittsburgh, on the Tenth Day of April, 1845: with the Individual Losses, and Contributions for Relief*, compiled by J. Heron Foster and published in Pittsburgh by J. W. Cook in 1845, is the most complete record extant and has been used for the descriptions of this event to be found in the several histories of Pittsburgh and Allegheny County. The

<sup>1</sup> Presented, with the exception of a few additions, at a meeting of the Allegheny County Committee of the Colonial Dames of America on March 17, 1942, accompanied by an exhibit of articles saved from the fire.—Ed.

newspapers of the time carry news of the event, and there are printed letters from eyewitnesses that still further build up the picture.

When one reads our local histories it is obvious that all too often the writers have contented themselves with material that was easily secured. One account has been copied from another with perhaps a different and more entertaining manner of expression, but the primary material has not been added to or even checked for correctness. They are all cut on the same pattern, with a little variation of trimming here and there. Little or no attempt has been made to collect the stories or traditions of this disaster in a form that would be considered authentic by future historical writers.

Like charity, research should begin at home, and in such a group as our Allegheny County Colonial Dames there are those whose forbears had a part in the building of Pittsburgh and who shared in both her fortunes and her misfortunes. It is therefore not a matter of personal or family pride to relate the happenings of earlier days, but it becomes our duty to reduce our knowledge of them to such form that it can be put down in black and white for future reference.

Those who were living in 1845 have passed on. Their children who heard the story from their lips are very few today. The future histories of Pittsburgh must naturally be written by a younger generation and their work must be based on thorough research with investigation of material that has not been used and possibly has not heretofore been available.

As I see it, it is the responsibility of present-day groups such as this to collect and preserve records and traditions, and further to make them available to those who will be the writers of our history. If the interpretation of a period of history is made through understanding the past, our work achieves importance.

In 1945 there will occur the one hundredth anniversary of the great fire, and it seems to me fitting and a real opportunity for our Allegheny County Committee to begin to collect some of the stories, some of the more intimate happenings that our members may know of. Three years may seem too far away, but anyone who works over records realizes that it is not a bit too soon to make a start. .

## THE GREAT FIRE

March, coming in as a lamb, had gone out like a lion, raging on into the next month. It was now Thursday, the tenth day of April in the year 1845, and up the streets from the river heavy winds continued to blow as they had for more than two weeks past. Such April days all too surely bring with them an urge for spring house-cleaning, and for this event Pittsburgh housekeepers never had waited until Nature was in a perfect mood. Back in 1845, too, windows and walls showed up all too clearly the accumulation of a winter's grime, for smoke had poured out from the stacks of the steamboats anchored close by in the Monongahela River, from cotton factories, iron foundries, and glassworks, as well as from the soft coal fires of the stoves and grates of the closely built houses. Winter laundry work was also a problem, but now early spring had arrived, the sun shone brightly overhead, and the air was dry and cold. A perfect wash day, for the high wind would dry the clothes quickly.

We do not know her name, but living in a small frame house at Second and Ferry Streets was a woman who has been classed with Mrs. O'Leary and her cow of Chicago fire fame. We can picture her even now as she carried out the big black iron kettle and set it up in the yard near the wall of the ice house next door on Ferry Street. Perhaps she had to pump the water, but even if drawn from an outside tap it took time to fill the kettle. Shavings to start the fire were brought and soon this was blazing merrily. Again we can see her as she hurried to the house to gather up the clothes to be washed. The noon whistles from the boats and factories began to blow and that meant dinner time so the washing was doubtless put aside and the fire in the yard soon forgotten.

The wind that had come up in the morning blew harder all the time and soon sparks from the untended fire were carried towards the ice house and set it ablaze. Several adjoining frame houses on Second Street, also owned by William Diehl, Sr., and occupied by tenants, flared up and became a total loss. It had been expected that the fire, if it did cross to the other side of Ferry, would reach the streets toward the Allegheny, such as Liberty and Penn, and the householders in this district proceeded with all possible preparations for saving their possessions and for fighting the flames.

However, this was to prove no ordinary fire, for contrary April was about to live up to her reputation. The wind shifted quite unexpectedly away from the Point district, carrying burning embers and blazing shingles directly across to the other side of Second Street, entirely destroying the Globe Cotton Factory and an adjacent brick dwelling. Driving along Ferry it reached the Third Presbyterian Church from whose steeple the alarm continued to ring. This imposing building of brick, with its entrance on Third Street, had a flat roof surmounted by a breast-high wooden cornice. On this roof burning flakes kept dropping so that the fire fighters who had gathered there battled continuously to save this barrier for the safety of the city beyond. Members of the congregation joined the firemen, helping by the use of wet cloths to protect the danger spots. Finally the rear portion of the cornice burst into flames but the axe men quickly chopped it down, dropping it into the fiery mass below. The church was saved as well as the section of Pittsburgh northeast of that part of Ferry Street.

Veering winds continued to blow gustily and now the fire began to spread in a fan-shaped direction at most incredible speed. At times it leaped across the entire width of a street leaving a building in ashes while one adjoining escaped completely. This fan of flame continued until by the time it reached Wood Street four squares were gone. There were points where the blaze reached out past Fourth Street to Diamond Alley, extending on one side of Wood to the bookstore and bindery of Luke Loomis. On the opposite side of Wood, the destruction continued up the Alley to that corner of Smithfield diagonally across from the present Kaufmann's store, where a brick house and tobacco factory alone remained.

Rows of houses and single dwellings, both brick and frame, Philo Hall, where the mayor had his offices, livery stables, the Bank of Pittsburgh (considered fireproof), the Baptist and Associate Reformed churches, the stone building of the Western University of Pennsylvania and the president's house, all met the same fate. All these were on the northern rim of the conflagration.

In imagination let us also follow what may be considered the center of the fan as the fire at the same time spread up Second to Market Street and on to Wood. This was the district where many of the physicians of

the city were located, among them Dr. Jacob Dimmitt on the corner of Chancery Lane and Second, Drs. J. P. Tibbetts, Samuel Dilworth, and Shepley Ross Holmes on Second, Dr. James Horner on Market, and Dr. A. N. McDowell on Wood. Up both sides of Second, and along the cross streets too, were substantial homes where established citizens had lived for years.

To complete our picture let us look at the southern edge of the fan. Here the fire had already spread toward the Monongahela, crossing Front, or First as we know it, just above Chancery Lane. This was largely a warehouse section being convenient to the boats lined up along the river. An iron roof on one large warehouse proved its salvation while its next door neighbor was destroyed. Proceeding along First, the fire reached a wholesale grocery where the immense stock of sugar, molasses, coffee, and groceries of all descriptions became an almost total loss. Market Street at First proved only a brief stop-gap, for the flames crossed here and spread to the river. When it had reached Wood Street, the fire extended across five squares, from the river to First or Front, to Second, to Third, to Fourth, to Diamond Alley.

On Wood Street were also many warehouses, mostly three-and four-story brick buildings. Over near Second Street was the large Merchant's Hotel newly fitted up. All these were ablaze at the same time with the wind blowing a gale and filling the air with smoke, dust, and heat. Water Street presented a scene that is difficult to describe, for from the rows of warehouses and commission houses all sorts of property had been moved to the wharf, but the boxes, bales, and bags had but "jumped from the frying pan into the fire," for the heat became so intense that with added falling sparks and licking flames the entire mass was soon ablaze and burned to the very water's edge. The many steamboats had already made their escape, dropping down the river to the mouth of Saw Mill Run, the present West End.

And now the fan had spread to include Smithfield Street. At the corner of Water Street, overlooking the river, stood Pittsburgh's pride, the beautiful Monongahela House. Famous throughout the country, it was by far the finest hotel in the West and only the year before had been redecorated and refurnished. A visitor to the city, a guest at this hotel, writes of taking his carpetbag and after an hour's difficult walk arriving

in Allegheny City. Here he turned to view the scene he had just left, which he describes as a fearsome but beautiful sight, with the flames seeming to center on the many-storied Monongahela House.

All this happened between twelve and two o'clock, at which time burning pieces of wood like flaming torches were being scattered by the wind as far as half a mile away, setting up so many fires that there was no chance of stopping them. Every man who had been fighting the further spread of the fire now hurried home to save what he could. Smithfield Street was crowded with drays, wagons, handcars, wheelbarrows, and men, women, and children. Vehicles and people alike were laden with household goods on their way across the Smithfield Street bridge to the safety of the opposite shore. But not every household in this section comprising the Second Ward had even this chance, for the fire swept up Second from Smithfield to Grant and Ross so rapidly that many were glad to escape with their bare lives.

Just where the ramp of the Boulevard of the Allies extends over Second Avenue was the Scotch Hill market, and near this spot occurred one of the only two substantiated deaths, for Samuel Kingston, a well-known lawyer returned to his home near the market intent on saving a valuable piano. In the confusion and smoke he is thought to have entered the wrong house, for his remains were found later a door or so from his own residence.

Some of you may remember this part of Pittsburgh before the boulevard was built and Second Avenue widened. You will be able to locate this section if you recall the park that occupied the site of the market house. A few of the red brick houses built soon after the fire still remain.

And now another calamity was added. The bridge across the Monongahela, the goal of the hurrying people, caught fire and in ten minutes its wooden cover and framework had burned and dropped into the river, leaving nothing but the stone supports with great gaps of water between. One can but wonder that people were so miraculously saved from the death that surged about them, for we are told the smoke and heat were suffocating and the pavements like heated ovens. Well they might be when zinc roofs melted and ran down the spouts, when window-glass became a molten mass, and when gold and silver in a safe were later found fused into one lump.

Thirteen-year-old John R. Banks, a student at the Western University, writing to his father two days after the fire, described his own experience, in part, as follows:

At dinner time when I went to the University and David[?] proposed we should go on top and water the roof. But not another person could be found in the place but we thought we would go on top where although the fire was half a mile distant the dead cinders were flying thick. We went down town and when we came back the whole place was on fire. Two of my books were burnt. Mr. Stevens carried about one hundred dollars worth of things to the river where they were burnt. He however saved some of the labrotary. Uncle Blacks three houses in fourth street were burnt to the ground but fortunately he was insured three thousand dollars in Philadelphia.<sup>2</sup>

As the afternoon wore on the fire continued to burn. Again on the north it reached the square bounded by Fourth and Ross Streets, across from where the City-County Building now stands. In this square only one building was left, a frame hotel. Drastic measures were resorted to, and brick buildings adjoining the hotel were blown up with gunpowder. Even the canal could not check the flames which crossed that space and moved down toward the river. The escape of some property was almost uncanny as destruction continued along the banks of the Monongahela to the end of Pipetown or Kensington, a district largely made up of manufacturing plants and workmen's houses.

About six the wind began to die down and one account says: "By seven it was all over."

Perhaps someone is thinking: Where were the fire companies? What did they do to stop the fire? Let me remind you that at first no particular anxiety was felt for checking the flames. The city had always been remarkably exempt from devastating fires, with two rivers so close. In 1845 there was the further protection of several volunteer companies with engines and hose, as well as a newly completed water system. A city waterworks had been first installed in 1828. The basin was located on Grant Street between Diamond and Fifth where the Frick Building now stands. A pipe line extended along Fifth Avenue and water was

<sup>2</sup> This letter is in the files of the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania, which has published it in full, with the exception of a sketch-map of the burned district, *ante*, 10:62 (January, 1927). The "Mr. Stevens" referred to was Lemuel Stephens, professor of chemistry, mathematics, and natural philosophy at the university. "Uncle Black," it may be concluded from Foster's lists of burned and reconstructed dwellings, was the Reverend Andrew W. Black, a son of Professor John Black, and a trustee of the university.

drawn from the river at Duquesne Way and Cecil Alley by means of an 84-horsepower steam engine. From the basin it was piped to houses and mills. The basin was moreover a favorite strolling spot of summer evenings, for its banks planted with trees made this into a park area.

But Pittsburgh was growing; new streets in new sections were being opened, and many substantial houses erected. Only the year previous, in 1844, Pittsburgh had achieved an enlarged water system. The old basin had been abandoned and a larger reservoir built on Bedford Avenue overlooking the present Union Station. With new pipe lines why should not the citizens feel amply protected?

The fire companies had also increased since that day in 1794 when the first little hand engine named the "Eagle" was brought over the mountains on a wagon from Philadelphia. Light enough to be picked up and carried by several men to the scene of a fire, this was the forerunner of a series of bigger and better engines acquired as the years went by. Following the Eagle Company came the Vigilant, the Neptune, the Niagara, the Washington companies, and so on. These volunteer companies were run like private clubs. Members were properly proposed and elected, and fined or even expelled for breaking rules. Each company had its own constitution and elected officers.

This, however, is a story in itself and we can only pause to note that they were at their stations fighting the fire on April 10, 1845. They were able to save some buildings, but all too soon the flow of water ceased until they were only pumping mud in place of water. The system was too new to be properly working, the reservoir was not full, the pipes on the old streets were too small, and there were not enough fire plugs. The fire hose was of leather, for rubber was not yet in use for such purposes, and reports from the minutes of one company, the Neptune, for April, 1845, show great damage to the equipment.<sup>3</sup>

Fire insurance is another matter of interest and I shall only note that a few such companies were operating here at the time, mostly Pennsylvania companies.

#### AFTERMATH

One wonders what Pittsburgh looked like the morning after the fire.

<sup>3</sup> These minutes and other records of the Neptune company are in the collections of the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania.



The visitor already spoken of passed through the burned district the next day, and this is what he says: "So intense had been the heat that scarcely any appearance of wood was to be seen; even the ashes had disappeared. But for the smoke and recent appearances it might have been taken for the ruins of some ancient city long since destroyed."<sup>4</sup> And from a newspaper editorial: "Yesterday morning we walked around the Burnt District. The appearance of things is awful—nothing but an immense forest of walls, and chimneys is visible, and desolate heaps of brick and mortar. The fierce fire licked every combustible clean up. Nothing that would burn escaped. The Wharf was covered with Merchandise of every description, furniture, &c., and many piles which were rolled out as it was thought beyond the reach of the flames, were consumed. Piles of burnt and partially consumed Coffee, Sugar, Nails, Iron, Cotton, Paper, Tea, &c, &c, were scattered along it."<sup>5</sup>

Across the Monongahela, where stretched the naked piers of the old bridge, could be seen piles of furniture, bedding, etc., scattered over the hills.

The destruction of the Second or South Ward, nearly the oldest part of the city, was complete and overwhelming. It was left almost without inhabitant, only two or three dwellings remaining. "The more complete destruction of any ward we think was never known," observed the *Gazette*.

Competent writers have stated that the fire spread over what was at that time the wealthiest and best business section of the city, covering nearly sixty acres. Over eleven hundred dwellings, warehouses, churches, hotels, stores, schools, and other public buildings were burned. The records of the Western University of Pennsylvania, which had been kept from 1787 to 1845, perished with the buildings.

Several thousands of persons were left homeless, and many without other resources were actually destitute. Take for example the experience of the Anshutz family, as described in a letter written on June 30 that year by George Simpson Anshutz, son of George, Jr., and grandson of George Anshutz, the pioneer iron manufacturer. The letter was addressed to the writer's uncle, John Simpson of Huntingdon, and it reads

<sup>4</sup> Foster, *A Full Account of the Great Fire at Pittsburgh*, 8.

<sup>5</sup> *Pittsburgh Daily Gazette and Advertiser*, April 12, 1845.

in part as follows: "It is hard times for us all. Pa lost everything he had but what was on his back at the fire on the tenth of April and was badly burned himself. He now lives about a mile from town. I did not lose much but am at present obliged to put up with the third story of a house on Market Street—the only one of our connections that escaped was Linford. . . . I intended to have gone down to see you all this summer but cannot do so now as I must look out for something to make a living."<sup>6</sup>

The money loss was variously estimated at from five to twenty-five millions. A minor but deplorable loss was due to the inevitable looters, whose activities are reflected in newspaper advertisements, of which the following, taken from the *Gazette*<sup>7</sup> and reproduced here in substance if not in form, are samples:

LOST—A New Feather Bed was taken from the house of the subscriber in a hurry, when the late fire was raging. Any information respecting it will be thankfully received by the subscriber.

Jos. Fleming at Shires' [Shiras'] Brewery

LOST—In the late fire, a large brass Store Key. Also, a green Chest, filled with fine linen sheets and quilts, all marked—some "C. A. L." The chest and also the drawer containing the Key were taken by some one from the bank of the river, above the bridge—probably by mistake. A reward will be given for them if left at No. 57 Market street.

HAIRCLOTH LOST—During the confusion incident to the removal of goods during the fire, from my store, I directed a bale of Hair Cloth, containing a great variety of figured patterns, value \$250, to be thrown upon one of the drays. Said Bale has not been seen since, and was most probably stolen. Cabinet makers and others will please be on their guard. . . .

James M. Cooper, 61 Market Street

MISSING—The following articles were taken out of our warehouse during the fire, which we have reason to believe were not burned, viz: 2 large boxes Dry Goods . . . 2 oval Window Sashes, glazed. The person or persons having any of the above described articles will confer a favor by leaving them with S. F. Von Bonnhorst & Co., No. 31, Front St.

N. B.—There was also taken from the warehouse of J. Irwin & Son, now occupied by Spang & Co., a bale Carpeting, bale very muddy marked Shaw & Co., Cincinnati.

Hundreds of dwelling houses were destroyed, and *The Mystery*,

<sup>6</sup> This letter and other Anshutz family papers are in the collections of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

<sup>7</sup> *Pittsburgh Daily Gazette and Advertiser*, April 15, 21, 26, 1845.

quoting the *Pittsburgh Morning Chronicle*, reported the names of owners or occupants of eighty-seven of them as follows:<sup>8</sup>

*Second Street*

Gen. A. Cochran	Col. J. Ross	Dr. Werneberg
B. Bakewell	Dr. Tibbetts	Dr. Holmes
M. Tindle	S. McClurken	S. R. Johnson
Rev. Mr. Bryan	A. Brown	Arthur Toner
S. Horner	J. Phipps	Mrs. Ward
W. Douglas	D. Kinkead	D. Jones
W. Christy	J. Kennedy	Allen Kramer
J. A. Bartram	Dr. T. H. Fowler	J. McCurdy
J. Stewart	T. Phillips	J. D. Wick
J. Tomlinson	J. N. Jones	Geo. Anshutz
L. T. Childs	W. Eichbaum	J. Fitchman
E. J. Roberts	R. P. McCurdy	
Richard Biddle	D. R. Jacobs	

*Third Street*

P. S. Berford	D. Grant	T. M'Kown
M. F. Irwin	J. M'Ilroy	W. C. Robinson
J. Thaw	M. Rogers	George Singer
J. B. Morehead	W. J. Howard (Mayor)	J. Miller
M. Kane	S. West	T. Rowe
L. Rodgers	J. Miles	Dan'l Robinson

*Fourth Street*

W. Elder	H. Stevenson	Mrs. Murry
A. Millar	J. C. Davitt	A. Burke
Reade Washington	J. J. Kuhn	W. M. Wright
W. E. Austin	J. W. Daily	Rev. M. Bird
A. Bonnaffon	Dr. Edrington	

*Smithfield Street*

E. Merritt	Dr. Bruce	Mrs. L. Young
J. K. Henderson	J. W. Woodwell	J. Thaw [residence]
A. Fulton	S. Balsley	
F. Bauders	E. M. Beach	

*Water Street*

Josiah King	R. Christy	Mrs. Savage
<i>Ross Street</i>	<i>Grant Street</i>	<i>Diamond Alley</i>
R. Robb	Thos. Simmons	Rody Patterson
A. Jaynes	R. A. Bausman	

<sup>8</sup> *The Mystery* (Pittsburgh), April 16, 1845 (photostat). No copy of the issue of the *Chronicle* quoted is readily available. *The Mystery*, a weekly paper devoted to the interests of the colored race, was started in 1844 and edited by Martin R. Delany. Advertisements concerning it appeared in other local papers during its short career, but no copy was known to have survived until the original of the photostat referred to (vol. 2, no. 34) was brought to the attention of Miss Rose Demorest, head of the Pennsylvania Room in the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh, and was lent to that library for reproduction.

## RECONSTRUCTION

On Saturday, two days after the fire, a town meeting was held in the Diamond where a large number of people passed the following resolution: "Resolved, That we suggest to the Mayor and Councils of Pittsburgh, the propriety of appointing a committee of one person from each square in the burned district, to ascertain the names of individuals and families who have been rendered destitute by the late fire, and to furnish when requested, to any individual or family, a certificate to that effect."<sup>9</sup> William J. Howard was mayor, and George W. Jackson, father of John B. and Miss Mary Jackson, was president of the select council at this time.

Contributions of money, clothing, and food poured in from all directions. There were collections taken in Pittsburgh itself—many donations coming from those who had themselves been burned out. In Philadelphia the sum of over \$38,000 was made up by churches, wards, schools, mills, and societies of various kinds, including the proceeds of benefit concerts and one day's receipts of a line of omnibuses. From northern New Hampshire to southern Louisiana, from western Michigan, and even from far off Europe money poured in until it amounted to nearly \$200,000.

But even more interesting were the food donations; 100 lbs. of flour and 3,000 lbs. of bacon from Wheeling; 58 bushels of potatoes and a bedstead from Meadville; flour, dress goods, and a barrel of sauerkraut from Economy; and so on.

And now what was Pittsburgh going to do for herself? Again we go to the newspapers. Here is one editor's opinion: "We have carefully inquired of many of our clearest headed business men, those thoroughly conversant with the resources of the city, as to the probable effect of this disaster upon its prosperity. . . . We are fully convinced that though the commercial prospects of the city are terribly shaken, yet it *is not totally prostrated*, and in due time will rise above it all. . . . There is no repining—no despair—no sullenness; but a calm, determined spirit which must carry them up again."

Soon after the fire the newspapers carried notices of removals to new

<sup>9</sup> *Pittsburgh Daily Gazette and Advertiser*, April 14, 1845.

addresses, and fire sales were advertised. The following, from the *Gazette* of April 14 and 22, are but a few examples:

**REMOVAL BY FIRE**—A. McCurdy has taken a room, for a time, in the session house of Trinity Church, Virgin Alley, between Wood and Smithfield sts., where he will give some bargains in *FURNITURE* if called on soon. Some of his Furniture is slightly damaged in removing, and will be sold very low if taken immediately.

J. W. Woodwell respectfully informs his friends and customers that he has taken a wareroom on Hand street, between Liberty and Penn, near Thorn's Drug Store, and offers the *furniture* saved from the fire at low prices . . . he will have an assortment of common articles manufactured in a few days, such as Chairs, Bureaus, Breakfast Tables, Bedsteads, &c, &c.

**BURNT OUT AND REBUILT**—The Phoenix, late the Great Western Blind Factory—P. A. Westervelt has the pleasure to inform his old customers and the public generally, that he has pitched his tent on the ruins of the Old Venetian Blind Factory on Fourth, a few doors above Smithfield street, where he has on hand a few finished blinds saved from the Conflagration, and is also prepared with stock to furnish Blinds to order on short notice.

So come on friends with Orders, and I hope, with the aid of Providence, and a portion of your patronage, again to rise, like the Phoenix, triumphant above the ruin with which I am surrounded. Orders by letter from a distance, thankfully received and faithfully attended to.

We gather from the following notice, in the *Gazette* of April 15, that life in general was beginning to be normal:

**WESTERN UNIVERSITY**—The students of this Institution are requested to assemble on Wednesday morning April 16th, at 9:00 o'clock in the Lecture Room of Trinity Church.

H. Dyer, Principal

One wonders where the homeless families would find places to live and how business could ever be carried on again amidst such desolation. Mr. Heron's pamphlet, however, struck a note of optimism when he listed by streets the residences and other buildings that had been erected or contracted for in the three months following the fire. Warehouses in particular were under way almost at once, for with such numbers of people needing food, clothing, and furnishings of all kinds, the cargoes coming in by river and canal must needs be protected. Building materials were of course in great demand. Many shops and warehouses interspersed with dwellings made their appearance on Water and Front

Streets. On Second, also, warehouses, stores, shops, and dwellings were rising on the old sites.

The Bank of Pittsburgh on Third, shorn of all woodwork by the flames, was being repaired, and in addition a number of homes on that street were being rebuilt, among them that of Mayor Howard. Fourth showed new offices for the lawyers and the Vigilant Engine House rebuilding, while on Diamond Alley above Wood, the new livery stables of R. Patterson rose on the ruins of the old. Wood Street's burned warehouses had many successors, including the James Woods Hotel building with its ten storerooms on the first floor and one hundred rooms above. Another engine house, that of the Duquesne Company, had been built with a cupola fifty feet high on Smithfield, and here too might be seen the Monongahela House rising once again. Grant had some rebuilt dwelling houses, the Baptist Church, and the Livingston, Roggen & Co. factory, better known as the Pittsburgh Novelty Works.

In addition to the families and business firms who rebuilt or repaired their destroyed homes, stores, and warehouses on the same sites, there were some who moved to other established addresses and others who made their way to newer sections just being opened up. A study of the next business directory, compiled the year after for publication early in 1847, shows firms at new stands, and families in entirely new surroundings.

One such section was the present Oakland district, where even before the fire a few families were planning to make their homes. Old Pittsburghers connect Oakland with the Eichbaum family, and the year of the fire saw William Eichbaum putting up a fine residence on the ten acres of the old Chadwick farm which he had bought. Built of brick and covered with a form of cement, it had elaborate iron railings and trimmings. Later known as the Morehead residence, it finally became the property of the Free Kindergarten Association, and on its site is now built the Montefiore Hospital. Mr. Eichbaum called his place "Oakland" because his house was in the midst of a grove of oaks, and his name, translated from German, meant oak tree. He had lived for many years on Second Street, and his house was among those burned in 1845, whereupon he rented another house on Third Street, and there the family lived until the floors of the new house in the country had been put down.

Another section was outer Penn Street about where Fourteenth and Fifteenth Streets are today. Fourteenth was then Factory Street and Fifteenth was Adams Street. Some may yet remember the red brick house of Dr. Peter. Shoenberger in that neighborhood, which was later used as an office of the Shoenberger Steel Company.

East Liberty became a haven for others, but there still remained those who felt that no other place but First, Second, or Third Street could ever be home. Back, then, some of them came, when a park replaced the Scotch Hill market of upper Second Street and substantial brick houses appeared on both sides. Among them was George Anshutz, who bought a new red brick house and appears listed in the directory of 1850, as in earlier years, George Anshutz, "gent." of Second Street.

Wylie and Webster Streets, then newly laid out, were most desirable places in which to live, and in 1847 many names are recorded in this district. Other families moved to Allegheny, also popular as a residential district. Lower Penn Street was already well filled with the homes of many of Pittsburgh's best families and after the fire there were removals from the burnt district to that street as well as to the shorter side streets leading off from it.

This stretching out to the newer parts of Pittsburgh proceeded for a number of years, and as early as 1850, five years after the fire, we can find many of the retired business men who had acquired entirely new addresses.

#### SOME FAMILY TRADITIONS AND RELICS

The charm of local history is in its details, according to one of our local historians, and we are interested nearly one hundred years later to learn something of those people of Pittsburgh who found themselves homeless, their treasured possessions consumed, and too often their means of livelihood gone. Even Pittsburgh residents of long standing are sometimes vague as to the area that was devastated, and unless their own families were involved they know little of those who were burned out, of where they had lived, and to what new sections many of them removed. Our histories tell us that houses were rebuilt, that they were better houses than the ones they replaced, that men of business gathered together what assets they could salvage and started out all over again.

But there were scars that remained for many a year in the hearts of those who had had to leave behind the things they loved; things that could never be replaced, such as letters, pictures, furniture, glass, china, and silver. Pittsburgh homes had much in the way of treasures, for it must be remembered that however primitive had been the life in the days when Pittsburgh was a frontier settlement, this great catastrophe took place during one of the most prosperous periods. The boats going down to New Orleans took iron and lumber, but we must bear in mind the returning cargoes which brought back many unusual articles. Our warehouses were filled with food from warmer climes.

Stories of the big fire have long intrigued me, and I think this dates from a time when a very old lady was making a visit to my husband's family. She was born in Pittsburgh, where her father owned a cracker mill in the Point district, and she well remembered and was able to tell of things that happened in her youth. She was little and frail, with soft white hair, but all the while she was putting her fine stitches in table linens or similar work, she would rock slowly back and forth and talk at length of the days that were gone. On one afternoon the subject of the Big Fire came up and she recounted incident after incident about this person and that, of where they lived and the straits to which they were put. She was a young woman then, and after it was certain that her home and her father's business were safe she wandered about with some companions to see the sights. I am only sorry I did not write down her stories, but of course the names meant nothing to me at that time. One tale was of a dignified citizen, dressed in his best clothing and wearing his silk hat, who hastened along the street jealously guarding a mousetrap he carried in both hands. Another bore a lighted candle down the steps of his house, carefully shielding the flame from the heavy wind. It is said that people in such situations always leave the valuables behind and gather up the trifles.

The conversation took a truly interesting turn when this old "resider" went on to discuss the plight of a relative who was expecting a child. The event was hastened by the shock and excitement, but Dr. Shepley R. Holmes, who had been expected to be in attendance, was not available, as he had just loaded his furniture on a dray and had hauled it to the Monongahela bridge at the end of Smithfield Street.



Here he had it placed on a raft and tied to one of the bridge piers. At the time his presence was so greatly needed, he was making frantic efforts to get a boatman to take the raft to a safe place, but alas, the fire was too rapid, for the bridge caught fire and the raft, furniture, and paintings met a like fate! At the same time the home of his patient was threatened, and again the flames moved so quickly that there was nothing for her and her family to do but flee. A wagon of sorts was found and a horse to draw it, and out along the newly opened Pennsylvania Avenue, now Fifth Avenue, moved the procession through the country, the anxious feminine members striving to keep up on foot with the slowly plodding horse. They had an acquaintance living out there who they knew would welcome them and give them shelter—could the patient but hold out. Her name and that of her hostess did not register with me, but I do remember that when the journey was ended and shelter reached, everyone hurried to make things comfortable for the poor waiting woman, having to take time, however, to set up a bedstead, which had to be roped before feather bed and bedding could be assembled. At any rate, the proprieties of that day and generation were observed in part, for this baby of the fire was born under a roof and in a properly made bed.

When I asked about how far out in the country they had to go, I was told, about where Chatham Street is now. But the interest for me was not yet exhausted, for my mother-in-law asked if I would like to help her get some things out of the big safe downstairs. This proved to be a package wrapped in tissue paper and carefully tied. It contained some yellowed baby dresses, bonnets, shawls, etc. The story is that my husband's great-grandfather, George Anshutz, lived on Second just above Smithfield Street. He had retired from business, and in his household were then staying his married son with his wife and young family, among whom was my mother-in-law. You will remember this was the section where the fire was the fiercest, and into the garden had been moved the piano, paintings, and other valued possessions, but there was neither time nor a way to save them, for the fire came so fast that the women of the household were hastily rushed out, helped over the brick wall, and somehow made their way out of the fire zone. As they went past a highboy near the door each one gathered as much as could be

hastily crammed into a pillowcase, and this constituted their entire baggage. There, too, a new baby was expected, but in place of the garments prepared for her coming, baby clothes that her father had worn were seized by mistake. I am glad to report that even if her outfit was reduced to ashes, she herself was entirely well behaved and waited until May 9 to open her eyes on this astonishing world. My husband's grandfather got as far as the wall with a gilt clock enclosed in an oval glass globe. The fire advanced so rapidly that he set the clock down and only saved himself by hastily climbing over the wall. Later, incredible as it may sound, the clock was found with its globe intact, for the fire had weakened the wall until the bricks fell down in some way forming an arch over the one thing of value left to the family. This clock is owned by the last of the name in this line—a cousin who lives in West Virginia.

Among other articles saved from the Anshutz house were an elaborately embroidered infant's dress and cap—referred to above—and a silk shawl. The baby clothes had been worn as an infant by George Anshutz' son, Alfred, and the shawl had belonged to the first Mrs. Shepley Ross Holmes, the mother of Mrs. Alfred Anshutz. The lot on which this house stood ran through to First Street from Second and was later sold to James B. Murray, who erected thereon the residence bought in 1865 for the Homeopathic Hospital. The Gilmore Drug Company building now occupies this ground. Both George Anshutz and Dr. Shepley Ross Holmes were great-grandfathers of Mr. Marcellin C. Adams.

Other families also are known to have preserved various articles that came through the fire, and the writer hopes that the following brief description of them will elicit information about others possibly still in existence.

One is a clock made of white marble, with a gilt pendulum in the shape of a cupid, which was owned by John Thaw, father of William Thaw and grandfather of Mrs. William Reid (Mary Thaw) Thompson, the present owner. Mr. Thaw's home on Smithfield, between First and Second, was burned. He himself carried this clock in his arms over the Smithfield Street bridge, and he was the last person to cross, for the burning bridge fell into the Monongahela River just as he stepped off it. Incidentally, John Thaw was treasurer of the Monongahela Bridge Company, which had built and was operating this toll bridge, and he

and many another prominent Pittsburgher of that time lost heavily through its destruction.

Mr. Henry H. Phillips is the owner of a third clock that was rescued from the fire which totally destroyed the residence of his grandfather, John Bakewell. Pieces of family silver, now still in use, were among the articles that remained lying on the ground overnight on Grant's Hill. John Bakewell was a member of the glass firm of Bakewell, Pears & Company, of which his father, Benjamin Bakewell, was the head.

A beautifully embroidered crepe shawl, rich coral in color and with deep knotted fringe, is owned by Mrs. Patrick Hamilton Thomson of Pittsburgh, whose grandmother, Mrs. James Benney, presented it to her with the statement: "This was saved from the great fire."

A handleless cup and a saucer that came through the fire are in the collections of the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania, the gift of Miss Sophie G. McCormick of Pittsburgh, now deceased.

A cup and a saucer of the same style and pattern are owned by Mrs. William J. Crittenden of Shields, Pennsylvania, who makes the following statement concerning them: "As long as I can remember, this cup and saucer were my Grandmother Winifred Amelia Chaplin Shield's most treasured ornament of her curio cabinet. 'It came through the fire, dear, and some day maybe it will be yours.' My mother remembers that in her childhood bedroom, away back on a high shelf, there were several just like it."

Two similar saucers and one cup of this same stock belong to Mrs. Sumner Boyer Ely of Pittsburgh, whose statement follows: "My father, Thomas Bowdoin Updike, who was living in Pittsburgh at this time, secured these pieces and sent them back to his relatives in Rhode Island as souvenirs. They were part of the stock of a china or queensware store on Wood Street. The floor of the building burned, letting the china and glassware fall through to the basement. Marks on one saucer show plainly where the straw packing was burnt in by the intense heat. For more than forty years this china remained in Rhode Island, when it was given back to me that it might find a place among the few remaining relics of Pittsburgh's Great Fire."

Since the homes of the original owners of these pieces were not among those burned, it is probable that all the cups and saucers described were

bought and treasured as souvenirs. From the pattern and type, however, we learn what kind of china the housekeepers of Pittsburgh might have been using in 1845. Incidentally, the marking on all the pieces corresponds with that of the Salopian Porcelain, later Coalport, of England. This white porcelain was sold to be decorated at other factories, and birds, insects, fruits, and small sprigs were among the patterns used. On most of the pieces mentioned a small fruit or sprig design shows through the iridescent glaze caused by the fire.