BOOK REVIEWS


Pittsburgh history has often been pictured from its political and industrial viewpoints but less often from the social or family side. *Whirling Spindle* supplies this gap so adequately that we may well applaud the author’s long contemplated purpose to portray this neglected facet of her many-sided “home town.”

The author is well equipped for this “labor of love” by authorship of numerous magazine articles and books, and her demonstrated possession of a very light touch merits the high mark of the professional book-critic, that of being “objective” in treatment, even though writing of her own families. These families, the Blacks and Moorheads, were important, not only in themselves, but also as bringing into the tapestry of the author’s narrative a great number of other figures important in Pittsburgh and elsewhere.

The period covered, 1841 to our day, as the author very discerningly says, is that “of the transformation of Pittsburgh from a small provincial town to a big, important and beautiful city where the fine arts flourish in the midst of iron, steel and glass factories.” Her account of this significant period is preceded by a short but adequate sketch of the foreground of her families from the coming to America of her first ancestor in 1771. The main account covers the period from 1841 to 1865 and the careers of the principal actors, Colonel Samuel W. Black and General James K. Moorhead.

The colorful story of Colonel Black as a distinguished Pittsburgh lawyer, lieutenant colonel of Pennsylvania Volunteers in the Mexican War, governor of the stormy territory of Nebraska under President Buchanan, and colonel of the 62nd Regiment, Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry, during the Civil War until his untimely fall at the battle of Gaines Mill, fully documented by many letters, is engagingly told. Similarly, the story of two Moorheads, Lieutenant and later Captain, William J. Moorhead, father, and General Moorhead, Congressman, founder of the Monongahela Navigation Company and ironmaster, grandfather of the author, includes interesting accounts of their careers and campaigns and covers the author’s visits to Civil War camps and Washington.
Following these histories laid in more distant fields, *Whirling Spindle* in its final third is a broad sparkling account of the social life of Pittsburgh families in their progression of homes in Minersville, on Ridge Avenue, and in Shadyside; their schools, churches, amusements, and cultural life as well as some references to business affairs, with side lights on connections in Philadelphia, Washington, and abroad.

As usual with publications of the University of Pittsburgh Press, its format and press-work have as great distinction and attraction as the skill of the author and the subject matter of her book.

Altogether, *Whirling Spindle* is well worth reading and owning.

*Pittsburgh*  
HENRY O. EVANS


Thaddeus Stevens, grim, brutally frank, clubfooted, the dictator of Congress during the Civil War and reconstruction period, has never lacked attention from historians and journalists. The seeming enigmas of his long career and testy personality have fascinated biographers, who have tried to explain him by fitting him into a pattern of their own making. Some have noted the savage wit that characterized his speech and conjectured that he was an illegitimate son of Talleyrand. Some have wandered down Freudian paths and surmised that his failure to marry resulted from a glandular maladjustment or from his worship of his mother. Others have seen the key to his character in his alleged love for his mulatto housekeeper. All have pictured him as a bitter soul, tortured by hatred of the South and panting to punish and humiliate the Southern people. "None has taken adequately into account," remarks Professor Current, "the simple fact that he was, above everything else, a man of politics seeking always to get and exercise the powers of public office." Emphasizing this theme but not neglecting the intriguing personal aspects of his subject, Dr. Current has produced a scholarly and gracefully written biography. It is by far the best life of Stevens we have, and should be read by every student of the Civil War, of reconstruction, and of Pennsylvania history.

Dr. Current's volume treats all phases of Stevens' varied life: his birth and growth in Vermont; his removal to Pennsylvania where he practiced law in Gettysburg and Lancaster and became the owner of the Caledonia Iron Works; his first ventures into politics as an Antimason and Know-Nothing; his appear-