

EDITOR'S NOTE

This issue of the *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine* (Vol. 28, Nos. 1 and 2, for March-June, 1945) is devoted to accounts of the Historical Society's observance of the centennial of Pittsburgh's Big Fire of April 10, 1845, in order to sustain and extend the exceptionally widespread popular interest aroused by the undertaking, at home and abroad, especially among members of old Pittsburgh families.

The first suggestion that such a commemoration be held came from Mrs. Marcellin C. Adams, a trustee of the Society and author of a carefully written article on "Pittsburgh's Great Fire of 1845" in the March-June, 1942, issue of this magazine. At a meeting of the council of the Society in September, 1942, she proposed, and the council agreed, that the Society go on record as planning to sponsor, in 1945, a suitable observance of the centennial of that memorable catastrophe. Definite action toward that end came at a meeting of the council in February, 1944, when a committee was appointed that presently came to be known as the "1845 Committee." It consisted of Henry King Siebeneck, Esq., chairman, Mrs. Adams, and Henry Oliver Evans, Esq., with the addition, from time to time later, of Mr. Robert D. Christie, Miss Margaret Townsend Scully, Mr. Edward Crump, Jr., and Hon. Frank L. Duggan.

The object was to commemorate, not the disaster itself, but the spirit and energy with which the stricken city arose phoenix-like from its ashes and went on to greater and greater achievement as a center of industry and culture.

The committee held many meetings and among other things organized a temporary association of "Descendants of Pittsburghers of 1845," with an enrollment, ultimately, of upwards of a thousand members; arranged for an outstanding loan exhibit in the Historical Building; enlisted the services of the Pittsburgh Drama League in the staging of an appropriate play under the direction of Mrs. Elmer D. Harshbarger, and

of Col. George E. Fairley, city director of public safety, in providing a colorful parade between the two meetings held; secured prominent speakers; and published a special pamphlet for the occasion, entitled *1845-1945: An Historical Commemoration*.

The main outline of the day's proceedings, and not a few of the details, were conceived by Mr. Siebeneck, and all members of the committee took part in the development of one or more of the features finally provided. Mr. Siebeneck and Mrs. Adams were chiefly instrumental in securing, installing, and labelling the loan exhibits; Miss Scully, in arranging for the staging of the historical play, which she herself wrote with the collaboration of Miss Madge Miller of the Drama League; Mr. Evans, in preparing the section of the above-mentioned pamphlet relating to fire insurance and old Pittsburgh firms, and in arranging for the parade; and Mr. Christie, in the compilation and printing of the aforesaid pamphlet.

President Garland and other officers and trustees of the Society also contributed to the success of the undertaking. For many weeks before the event, one of the trustees, Colonel Charles C. McGovern, called attention to it in his Sunday night broadcasts over Radio Station WJAS, thus building up attendance, increasing the number of enrolled "Descendants," and securing relics of the 1840's for exhibition.

To the considerable cost of the undertaking the "Descendants" contributed one-dollar membership fees; the city and county made substantial appropriations; some twenty-eight private individuals and a philanthropic foundation gave sums ranging from five to five hundred dollars; fire insurance agencies and old Pittsburgh firms added to the fund; and sales of the centennial booklet helped defray the cost of printing it.

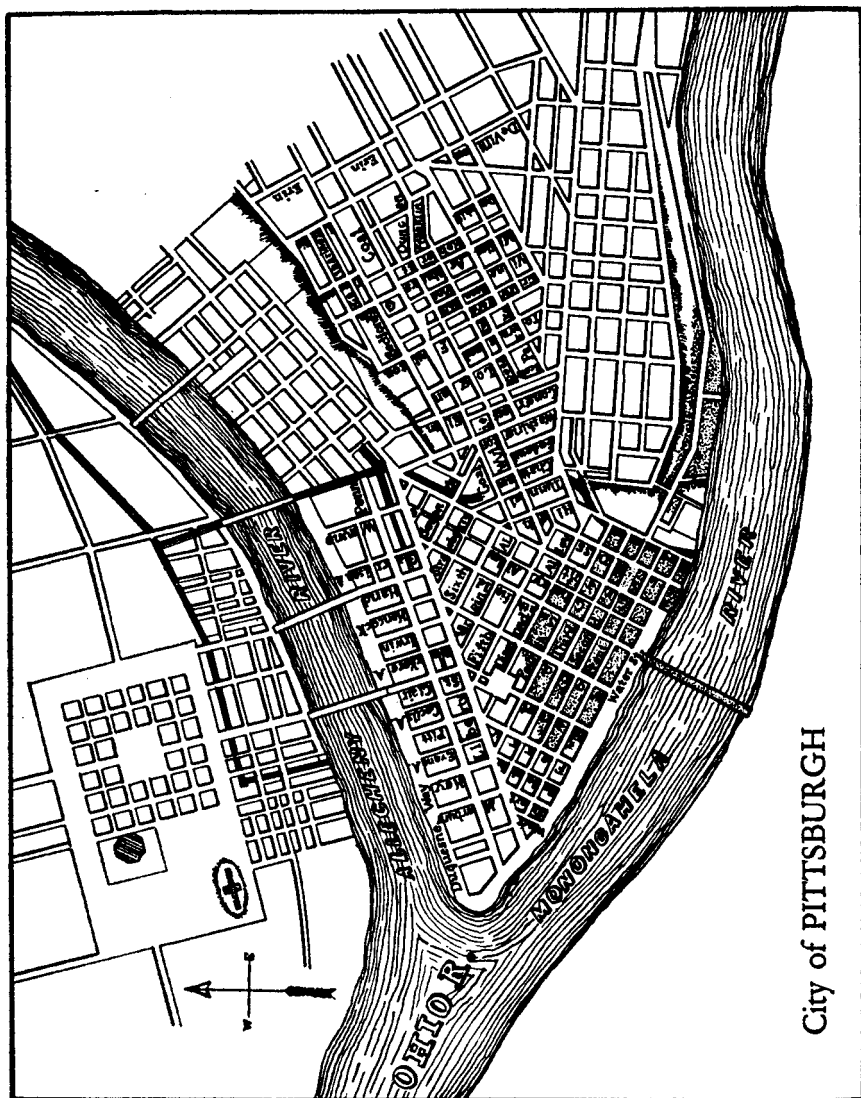
Copies of the latter are still available at fifty cents each. The pamphlet includes: a list of the officers of the "Descendants of Pittsburghers of 1845," and of all the "Descendants" enrolled before the time of printing; the main outlines of the programs on April 10; catalogues of the portraits and objects on display in the Historical Building from April 10 to 12; an article on American fire protection and insurance, with special reference to Pittsburgh in 1845; and a list of century-old Pitts-

burgh firms. A supplementary list of "Descendants," whose names were received too late for inclusion in the pamphlet, and revised lists of the exhibits are included in this number of the magazine.

Also included here, as the frontispiece, is a contemporary map of the burned district, based on a cut appearing at the head of a letter written by J. H. McClelland of Pittsburgh, on April 27, 1845, to his sister, Mrs. Thomas McQuestin "near Belfast in Ireland," and loaned for this purpose by the writer's granddaughter, Mrs. W. S. (Rachel McClelland) Sutton of Pittsburgh.

To the left of the original cut, in the writer's own hand, appears the following: "The shaded part on the Monongahela River around which I have, for greater distinctness, drawn my pen is the part that was burnt on 10th of April 1845. The part contained all the principal warehouses & the dwellings of about 6000 people: all of which was burnt up in *six hours*. The space burned over measures *55 acres*." (Note: Because the writer's dotted line around the shaded area somewhat obscures its exact outlines, the editor has taken the liberty of having the engraver remove it in the reproduction.)

To the right of the original is the interesting notation: "North of the Alleghany River is part of the city Alleghany.—This *unfinished* plate was in the hands of the engraver when the great fire took place, when he immediately shaded the squares which were burnt & struck off these letter sheets."



PITTSBURGH IN 1858
 (The burned district is shaded, as explained on page 3.)