

## LIFE IN PITTSBURGH IN 1845

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WHAT SORT of town was Pittsburgh in 1845? Suppose we take a stroll about the town! What we know as Pittsburgh had a population then of about forty thousand people. The city centered in what is now known as the Golden Triangle; extended up the Allegheny River to the Forks of the Road; up over the Hill District to Scotch Bottom, about where the Jones and Laughlin furnaces on Second Avenue now are; and along the Monongahela River past the Scotch Hill Market at Second and Grant Streets, in the little park we all remember, through Pipetown.

Along the Allegheny River were boroughs such as Lawrenceville where Stephen C. Foster's father, William B. Foster, had been splitting up larger plots of land into lots and selling them to homebuilders.

Beyond Black Horse Hill was another borough called "the Eastern Liberties of Pittsburgh" after the English custom and phrase, principally farms or properties of the O'Haras, Croghans, Negleys, Rouns and Winebiddles, and country houses. One of these near us here, was named by its owner, Neville B. Craig, "Bellefield," after his wife Belle.

Allegheny was a separate city. On the flat by the river, called the First Bank, was General William Robinson's "Buena Vista," a large colonial house with fine gardens running down to the river. The flat was cut in two by the canal, with a basin or landing place at Canal Street just before the canal crossed the river on a smelly wooden viaduct, then down river under Federal Street to another basin and ending at the Allegheny River.

On the height above, called the Second Bank, were fine houses surrounding the Commons, with its Penitentiary and Western Theological Seminary, and along Ridge and Stockton Avenues.

On the south side of the Monongahela River was a series of boroughs,

beginning at James O'Hara's glass works near Saw Mill Run, Temperanceville, Birmingham, East Birmingham, South Birmingham and Sidneyville, laid out by the heirs of John Ormsby. Here were fine homes of the Ormsbys, with gardens to the river, Ormsby Castle on the hill with fine gardens again and even a private race-course. So much for an outline of the topography.

Pittsburgh was, of course, a river town in 1845. The first railroad, the beginning of the Pennsylvania Railroad west, was six years away, and an all rail route on the Pennsylvania east was not to come until seven years later.

Practically all those who came to Pittsburgh or left Pittsburgh in 1845 traveled by water. If you were coming from New York City, say, you would cross the river to Jersey and take a railroad train which would land you near Broad Street Station in Philadelphia. There you would take the new Pennsylvania Railroad cars, which would be hauled up to the comparative heights of West Philadelphia by a sort of an incline plane, and proceed then through Lancaster to Columbia, Pennsylvania, on the Susquehanna. There you would leave the train again and take the canal up the Susquehanna past Harrisburg and along the Juniata to near Hollidaysburg. There the canal boats would be lifted over the mountains by a series of inclined planes, and after passing through the first railroad tunnel in the United States, an 800-foot engineering marvel of those days, you would come to Johnstown; then down along the Conemaugh, Kiskiminetas, and Allegheny rivers to Pittsburgh.

Or, if you were coming from Baltimore and Washington, you would come by stagecoach on the National Road to Brownsville on the Monongahela, or West Newton on the Youghiogheny, and then by packet to Pittsburgh. If you were coming from Buffalo or Cleveland, a canal would bring you to Beaver, where another packet, serving also the lower river points of Wheeling, Cincinnati, and Louisville, would land you on the Water Street wharf at Pittsburgh. Pittsburgh had many famous visitors by these routes.

The Monongahela River wharf from Bakewell, Pears and Company's glass house at Grant Street, under the wooden Monongahela Bridge, down to the Point, was a solid line of boats, so continuous you

could step from one to another all the way. There were all kinds, large side-wheel packets, with scroll-saw ornamentation, red-carpeted, stuffy, central "saloon," surrounded by "staterooms." Or smaller stern-wheeler towboats bringing country produce from river points in exchange for Pittsburgh products, iron, glass, cotton and woolen cloth, and other manufactured goods. Or flat barges filled with the granite ware so much used by our grandmothers for apple butter, piccalilli, and other end-products of real "Victory gardens." Or rafts of timber from the upper reaches of the Monongahela or Allegheny rivers, for boat building or other needs of the great growth of the West just really beginning then. Slackwatering of the Monongahela had just begun and the river was full of coal barges waiting to go down as far as New Orleans with the usual spring rise.

Water Street was, of course, the first principal street of Pittsburgh, lined with warehouses, containing the offices of the many commission and forwarding agents and manufacturers of the day. At Smithfield Street was the magnificent Monongahela House, the finest hotel west of the Alleghenies, with its large central lobby or foyer extending four stories to the roof, with galleries on each floor serving the bedrooms crowded with heavily carved walnut furniture, china wash basins and velvet curtains for the high windows. It even had its own ice house.

At the other end of the street, near the Point, was the steam grist mill, the first west of the Alleghenies, and the steam engine manufactory of Oliver Evans, the famous inventor, and his sons, Cadwallader and George Evans. Here were built the first high pressure marine engines for steamboats which soon displaced the low pressure engines of Roosevelt and Fulton used in the "New Orleans," Pittsburgh's first steamboat.

Market Street was the principal shopping street, with trade spreading first to Wood and then to Smithfield streets. The old market house was our first city hall and courthouse, but the courts had moved not long before to the new courthouse on Grant's Hill and the mayor's office to Philo Hall on Third Street, leaving the second floor of the market house for a civic auditorium, and the first with an open-air farmers' market for its original purpose.

First, Second, Third, and Fourth streets were built up mainly with

residences and some business houses. Stephen C. Foster was to be seen strolling up Third Street, a bouquet of flowers with colonial paper-frill in hand, to make a social call. Our first office building, Burke's, that fine architectural gem, now the home of the Denny Estate, on Fourth near Market; N. Holmes' bank, the Bank of Pittsburgh, and the Farmers Deposit Bank were establishing Fourth Street as Pittsburgh's Wall Street.

On Third Street was Philo Hall, the home of the Philological Institute, with its hall for public meetings, library and reading room, and the four-story stone building of the Western University of Pittsburgh. The lawyers were following the courts to upper Fourth Avenue and Grant Street, known also as "Bakewell Colony," because of the many Bakewell homes there. Across from the courthouse on Grant Street were the city reservoir, the Catholic Cathedral, and the Baptist Church.

Fifth Street was just beginning to become a business street. It still had Pittsburgh's first foundry at Fifth and Smithfield; a stable yard for the large Conestoga wagon freighting business; a theatre; and a hotel at Fifth and Wood. The Red Lion, with another stabling yard and sales yard, was on Sixth near the river, and the St. Charles Hotel was on Wood Street opposite Lafayette Hall, one of the birthplaces of the Republican party later on. So much for an outline of the business side of 1845 Pittsburgh.

We have often heard people say that our forebears had dreary and uninteresting days. Those who say this either do not know their history or do not think. The Pittsburghers of 1945, many of us here to-night and thousands of others, are, in the main, descendants of the Pittsburghers of 1845. We have inherited their characteristics and would be the last to admit that we lead narrow lives. Why, therefore, say that our forebears did so? But if we look at the record we gain more positive proof than this general argument.

It's true our forefathers did not have the windy mouthings of radio, or the nightly inanities of Hollywood, but one doubts, often, whether they did not get greater and more lasting value out of their hours than we do. The church, of course, bulked much more in their lives than it does in ours, not only in attendance on the regular, formal services but

also in its auxiliary work, prayer meetings, sewing societies, missionary meetings, suppers, bazaars, picnics, etc. Pittsburgh has always been a city of churches, and in those days the churches were active community centers. The public school system was in its beginning and the churches were used for academies, lecture halls, and public meetings.

Lectures were a large and popular part of public life in those days. Charles Dickens, wine and dined here while he tarried waiting for a down-river packet which *might* not blow up (as many of them did), had large audiences for his readings. Ralph Waldo Emerson, with his thrilling voice and elocution, his new and striking presentation of New England transcendentalism, was at the zenith of his great success as a lecturer. The new developments of science as set forth by visiting speakers were eagerly welcomed. Even lectures on mesmerism and phrenology brought crowds.

But our ancestors of one hundred years ago also had less serious amusements. Pittsburghers had plenty of amusement. Famous stars, largely Shakespearean, supported by local actors in minor parts, held forth. Visiting opera companies and music shows, together with active local musical talent, filled that need.

Social life was active, also. Penn Avenue was beginning to become the favored residential street, with large fine houses, and gardens stretching to the Allegheny River. The Shoenberger house, lately the home of the Pittsburgh Club, the only one left, was a fine example. Wining, dining, and dancing in those homes was frequent. As you drive down to the ramp on Duquesne Way you may still see some fine old fanlight doorways. Public balls were also frequent, at the Monongahela and St. Charles hotels and many other halls, for volunteer fire companies and many different organizations.

Boat races and horse races were favorites, with cock fights for the more sanguinary-minded. Prize fights are not often mentioned. Perhaps brawls between rival volunteer fire companies racing to fires supplied that need, together with politics, because Pittsburghers of 1845 took their politics seriously. We even had duels—and fatal ones, too—over politics. "Harry" Clay was a popular idol in Pittsburgh, with fighting Andy Jackson a close second. The newspapers were full of verbal as-

saults, and soap-box street orating was a feature of every campaign, with indictment and conviction of a demagogic mayor as an index of political fever heat.

No, 1845 Pittsburghers had a full life. We have a right to be proud of them. They worked hard at their business, they were equally intent on improving themselves, they played hard. As a result, we have a great past to remember, a rich present to enjoy, and a great responsibility for the future of Pittsburgh.