“OLD MAN ELOQUENT” VISITS PITTSBURGH

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IN RECENT YEARS Pittsburghers have witnessed numerous celebrations in honor of visiting political leaders and military heroes. Usually the city press has kept readers well informed regarding the hour of the guest's arrival, the line of march, the ceremonies and speeches—in short, all of the great man's activities during his stay. But no celebrity of this era and no series of events have received more enthusiastic attention than was accorded John Quincy Adams and the round of activities that accompanied his visit to Pittsburgh in November, 1843.

It must be remembered, of course, that Adams, then seventy-six years old, had, like Tennyson's Ulysses, "become a name." After occupying a succession of diplomatic posts, and serving as a United States senator, as secretary of state under Monroe, and as the sixth President of the United States, he had gained still greater renown throughout the country by waging, almost single-handed, a fight for the right of petition and for the removal of the gag rule. His personal integrity and his unwavering perseverance in the performance of all his duties had earned him the respect of political friend and foe alike. The frequency of his speeches in Congress and the vigor of his delivery had won him the name of "Old Man Eloquent," and he was in almost constant demand as a patriotic orator and lyceum lecturer. Indeed, he had eventually been compelled in self-protection to enter a notice in the National Intelligencer stating that he could not possibly accept all such invitations that came to him.¹

In spite of ill health and the exhaustion that followed a speaking tour across New York State, Adams was unable to resist the request that he deliver an address in Cincinnati on November 10, 1843, at the laying of the cornerstone of an astronomical observatory. For nearly half a century he had been interested in astronomy; and ever since his inauguration as President of the United States, when his plea for a "lighthouse

¹ September 21, 1841.
of the skies” had been derided by his political opponents, he had stubbornly but unsuccessfully urged the establishment of a national observatory. He firmly believed that the progress of civilization depended on the enlightenment of mankind, and that learning, freedom, science, and government were inevitably linked. Since the founding of an astronomical observatory was the kind of educational enterprise of which he strongly approved, he accepted the invitation from Cincinnati.

As he must have foreseen, the news that he was to put in an appearance west of the Alleghenies stimulated communities on his route to clamor for a visit from him; and among those to whose request he gave ear was Pittsburgh. On October 12, 1843, the Daily Aurora, a short-lived Pittsburgh paper not in sympathy with Adams’ political views, published two letters of acceptance dated October 2—one addressed to A. Hay, then mayor of Pittsburgh, the other to the fifty citizens who constituted the “Committee of a Meeting of the Friends of Liberty” in Pittsburgh. In the second, John Quincy wrote:

Fellow Citizens:—Your letter of 23d August, enclosing a copy of Resolutions adopted at a meeting of Friends of Liberty, at Pittsburgh, and containing an invitation to me in the name of that meeting to visit your city on my way to, or on returning from my contemplated call to Cincinnati, was received by me on the 29th of August and with it a notice of a general meeting of the inhabitants of Pittsburgh without distinction of party, at which the same invitation was extended to me, in the corporate name of that city.

I trust the friends of Liberty will not attribute the delay which has postponed the expression of my heartfelt gratitude for their kindness, to any deficiency of sensibility to their invitation. The concurrence in it of that portion of the people whose political opinions more nearly coincide with mine, gives to the whole people the claim to all my gratitude, and in accepting the tendered hospitality of all, I have only to say that if my earnest wish were the measure of my power, it would reciprocate to every individual the good feeling and friendly sentiment which it is my happiness to experience from all.

I am, with respectful affection, gentlemen, your friend and fellow citizen,

John Quincy Adams

The Aurora’s only comment was: “To his admirers, this will be an event of some importance.”
Although not friendly toward Adams, the *Aurora* kept track of his progress as he traveled westward from Quincy. On November 6 it noted his first stop, at Springfield, Massachusetts, where he delivered a lecture on "Man in all the various grades of life." The next day the same paper remarked that he had "passed through Utica on Friday afternoon"; and on November 8 it reported: "Ex-President Adams arrived in Buffalo, (N.Y.) on Saturday last, and on Monday morning took passage in the steamer Gen. Wayne, for Erie, on his route to Cincinnati." The *Aurora* did not mention his arrival in Cleveland, where a reception was held in his honor, or in Cincinnati, where he remained for several days. But on November 9 it contained the following item: "vote a go!—Our papers are disputing among themselves as to which shall be foremost in doing homage to John Quincy Adams. Dr. Delany should head the procession of Editors welcoming him to our city." Since Dr. Martin R. Delaney was at that time issuing *The Mystery*, a weekly paper devoted to the interests of the colored race, the dig at what the *Aurora* considered Adams' abolitionist activities is more than plain.

To appreciate the thoroughness with which the citizens of Pittsburgh prepared for Adams' arrival, one has only to examine either the *Morning Chronicle* for November 14 or the *Morning Post* for November 15, where the various reception committees are listed. For anyone interested in the history of Pittsburgh and of Western Pennsylvania, most of these names will have special significance:


Pittsburgh and Allegheny City Committee of Arrangement—Alexander Hay, Mayor of Pittsburgh; Thomas Barnett, Mayor of Allegheny City; Rob't.

2 This lecture, one of his most popular, was published in the *American Review* for July, 1845, under the title "Society and Civilization."
Cassiot, John Morrison, J. Fleming, W. M. Edgar, J. B. M'Fadden, M. Robertson, and H. D. King.

His Honor, the Mayor, is to welcome him to our city, in behalf of our citizens; and Wilson M'Candless, esq., receive him at the Exchange Hotel.

According to word received by Wilson McCandless and transmitted by him to the local papers, Adams was scheduled to reach Pittsburgh on Friday, November 17. But on that date the Aurora reported with apparent glee: "Mr. Adams arrived in this city yesterday: thus stealing a march upon those who wished to welcome him with the éclat of a public reception." The Morning Post on the same day assured its readers that although the early arrival of the distinguished guest had "disappointed many of our citizens who had intended to give him a hearty reception at the wharf this morning," the reception ceremony, "as arranged by the committee, with the exception of his arrival at 10 o'clock," would take place as announced.

The fullest newspaper account of the matter appeared in the Morning Chronicle for November 17. Even more explicit is the entry in Adams' diary for November 16:

Between two and three this morning we passed by Wheeling, in Virginia, where many of our fellow-passengers left us, and the deputation from Pittsburgh—Messrs. Denny, Bakewell, Eichbaum, Darragh, and Stevens—came on board to meet us. As we passed, a gun was fired from our boat, and returned from the shore. There had been talk at Wheeling of inviting me to the place and giving me a reception. Many persons wished it, and many thought an invitation had been sent to me; but there was none. We passed equally by Steubenville, in Ohio, and Beaver, in Pennsylvania, without notice. The deputation from Pittsburgh had expected our arrival there to-morrow morning, and all the arrangements had been made for a magnificent reception at that time. Among the rest, all the fire-company associations had held meetings and passed sundry resolutions for having a grand display of their own; and Mr. Brentlinger, as a deputation, (presented) a copy of their resolutions—one of which was that I should be conducted to some public building, where I was to be addressed in their name and should be requested to deliver an oration. And a temperance association, not to be behindhand with the firemen, had held meetings and chosen a deputation to invite me to deliver an oration upon temperance.
I delivered to Mr. Brentlinger an answer declining to pronounce the oration to the firemen. I shall take the same course with the temperance association. The Pittsburgh deputation were sadly disconcerted at our arrival before the time, and seriously proposed that we should land at Rapp's settlement of Economy, pass the night there, and proceed to Pittsburgh to-morrow in another steamer to be sent down for us; but this project was abandoned, and at half-past three in the afternoon we landed at Pittsburgh. There was a considerable crowd of people assembled on the wharf, to whom, from the steamer, Mr. Harmar Denny introduced me by name, and who received me with three cheers. The Mayor of the city, Mr. Alexander Hay, came on board to meet me, and at my own request walked with me to the Exchange Hotel, followed by the crowd, who were notified that the procession and reception would take place to-morrow morning, as it was regulated by the programme published in the newspapers of this day. The multitudes then, after three cheers, dispersed; but individuals were pressing in the whole evening.3

The Exchange Hotel, Adams' base of operations while in Pittsburgh, was then the best hotel in the city, and it apparently enjoyed an excellent reputation in other parts of the country. Therefore it was considered a suitable lodging place for famous guests. In 1842, the year before Adams' visit, no less a person than Charles Dickens had stopped there for three days with Mrs. Dickens. But no such crowds had gathered outside to cheer him as honored Adams. Comparatively little attention had been paid him by newspapers or by citizens. The Morning Chronicle had noted the arrival of Mr. and Mrs. Dickens in a two-sentence item, and on the day of their departure had remarked upon the "quiet hospitality" with which they had been received.4

Whether abroad in the city or in his room at the Exchange, Adams had hardly a moment to himself. Receptions, parades, and visitations occupied his attention throughout most of his waking hours. The high point of his stay, as far as his hosts were concerned, was reached on Friday, his first day in the city, when the main reception was held and speeches


4 For an account of Dickens' visit to Pittsburgh, see Leland D. Baldwin, "Charles Dickens in Western Pennsylvania," ante 19:27–46 (March, 1936), and W. Glyde Wilkins, Charles Dickens in America, 200–201 (New York, 1911).
were delivered by both Wilson McCandless and Adams before a large outdoor audience. From the *Morning Chronicle*’s detailed description of these ceremonies a small portion will suffice to give an impression of the occasion:

On Friday morning, at an early hour, the members of our Fire Companies assembled at their Engine Houses, and the citizens generally, of all classes, old and young, gave themselves a holiday, in honor of the visit of the distinguished Ex-President to our city. The procession formed under the directions of the Marshals, on Liberty Street, as had been previously arranged, and proceeded to the Exchange Hotel, where Mr. Adams, accompanied by the members of the several committees appointed by the citizens to wait upon him, joined them in carriages, and they proceeded through the principal streets of the city. While the procession was advancing, an immense concourse of people had assembled in front of the Hotel, anxious to catch a glimpse of the man who belongs to no party, and is so remarkable for his power over the passions, and his fearless and independent manner of expressing his ideas.

Before the procession had returned, a rain came on, which rendered the situation of those in the open street peculiarly unpleasant—but still they tarried, and the crowd grew thicker and thicker. All were anxious to hear the tones of emphatic eloquence from that “wonderful man, who in his person combines the Agitator, Poet, Philosopher, Statesman, Critic, and Orator.”

Upon the return of the procession, Mr. Adams appeared upon the stand which had been erected in front of the Hotel, and was received with enthusiastic cheers by the vast multitudes assembled—most of whom then gazed upon his venerable countenance for the first time.

For Adams’ impression of the occasion we have only to turn to the entry in his diary:

The pageant of this day was of no earthly importance. It was ostensibly all honorary to me. I had been invited by the city authorities to visit the city on my way to or from Cincinnati; and it was a reception. A large procession, at the head of which I was exhibited in a barouche with four handsome horses, accompanied by the Mayor of the city, Mr. Hay, Mr. Harmar Denny, and Mr. Richard Biddle, started from the Exchange Hotel, where we lodge, with military companies, martial music, and all the companies of the Firemen’s Association, in their respective showy and variegated uniforms, traversed, through the abundant mud streams, all the principal streets of the city, with a heavy,
drenching rain pouring down all the time. We were returned to the same Exchange, whence, from an open balcony, Mr. McCandless delivered by heart the welcoming address, of which he had sent me a copy. My answer was very short, apologizing for having come before the time, and declaring my unwillingness to detain them in the rain. The procession then terminated, the crowd dispersed, but came up in squads to my chamber to shake hands with me through the whole day.5

The address delivered by Wilson McCandless contained tributes not only to George Washington, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, and John Quincy Adams, but also to Pittsburgh. After describing "the first armed vessel that ever floated on the western waters," a "row-galley" built in Pittsburgh in 1798, and named the "John Adams," he called attention to the changes that had been wrought in less than half a century:

Look at the contrast now! Instead of the barge, and the row-galley, our skilful mechanics in 1843 completed, on the very bastions of old Fort Duquesne, an iron ship of war that is to carry on the Northern Lakes the stars and stripes of our beloved country—and a frigate is now in progress of construction, which with her "iron sides," is destined to defend the honor of the American name "in every sea under the whole heavens."

When your venerated Sire, with burning zeal, proclaimed independence now, independence forever; when, with heroic and inflexible resolution, he signed his name to the great charter of our liberty, the place on which you now stand was a barren and unproductive forest. Now, "as the swollen column of ascending smoke," so swells her grandeur. From a thousand chimneys are emitted the living evidences of her prosperity. The flaming fire, the busy hammer, the revolving roller, all give daily, hourly proof of her rapid advancement. Here the rough misshapen elements of nature are formed and moulded to suit the purposes of man. Here machines to mitigate the toil of the laborer, and to facilitate intercourse between the States, are made with a skill unsurpassed even by the old world. Here the anchor is forged to give security and protection to the weather-beaten mariner. Here the shovel and the mattock, the plough and the harrow, go forth to ease the labors of the husbandman. And here the naked are clothed and the hungry fed, by the evolution of machinery "and the potent agency of steam."6

6 Ex-President John Quincy Adams in Pittsburgh in 1843: Address of Welcome, by Wilson McCandless, and Mr. Adams' Reply, 6–7, 9–11 (Pittsburgh, 1873).
Adams' response was shorter and less interesting. After an introductory apology for his having arrived ahead of time—an apology which gave him an opportunity to quote his beloved Shakespeare—he expressed his gratitude at being invited to appear before the audience that he was addressing. His pleasure was due chiefly to the fact that although he had few personal friends in Pittsburgh who approved of his political course, members of all political parties had joined in the invitation to him. "This was an honor," he said, "which has never been extended to me before, and I am not aware that it has been to any other." And he looked upon that circumstance as prophetic of what might be expected in his country's future. Following these few remarks, he invoked the blessings of a bounteous Providence upon the community.

Slight though his speech was, even the Daily Aurora reported that it "was listened to with great attention." No doubt the audience appreciated the effort that this man of seventy-six had been expending since setting out on his travels two weeks before. He could hardly have been expected to give such an oration as that which he had delivered at Cincinnati and over which he had labored for weeks. But had Pittsburgh boasted or even planned to erect an astronomical observatory, John Quincy would undoubtedly have exerted himself to prepare an appropriate address. Unfortunately the Buhl Planetarium was a century distant.

On Friday evening Adams attended "a very elegant party and supper at Mr. Harmar Denny's." The following day he was taken by Mr. Denny and two other citizens to see Mr. Lorenz's iron works across the Monongahela, and "another establishment, where we saw the process of rolling and hammering iron, and the work of the red-hot ball hammered into a bloom, and the blast." After recrossing the river, the party went to the top of the court house, "whence beautiful prospects were in view—the junction of the Monongahela and Allegheny Rivers, the Allegheny City itself, and the hills all around." The next visit was "to Captain Howard and the iron ship on the stocks, which he is building for the government." Thence they rode to the United States Arsenal, about three miles from the city, where they were "received and temperately

7 With two exceptions, noted below, this and the following quotations are from Memoirs, 11:436-439.
entertained by Captain and Mrs. Harding.” Returning to Pittsburgh, they visited the cotton factory of Mr. Bakewell. And by three o’clock they were back at the Exchange Hotel.

The remainder of Saturday afternoon Adams spent receiving “the visits of ladies and gentlemen indiscriminately,” and shaking hands with them all. In the evening, together with Mr. Grinnell and Mr. Johnson, he paid a call at the home of Miss Rhey, one of his traveling companions on the trip from Cincinnati, who had sent him a bouquet of flowers and had invited him to her parents’ home that evening. In his diary he noted: “We were followed in the dark by a number of persons from the Exchange Hotel to Mr. Rhey’s door.” But apparently the celebrity chasers molested him in no way.

From the Rheys’, Adams went to the Monongahela House to visit a Mrs. Campbell; but he had been there only ten minutes when Mayor Hay rushed in to report that the Firemen’s Association torchlight procession was approaching. Although John Quincy had refused requests to address that organization, he felt it necessary to step out on the balcony, thank the company for the honor done him, but excuse himself, “from physical disability for declining a large discourse.” After giving him “three bouncing cheers,” the throng passed on to the home of Wilson McCandless, whom they persuaded to give them a speech.

On Monday, November 20, the *Morning Chronicle* described both the firemen’s visit and Adams himself in the following sentence: “It was the spontaneous gathering of generous, noble, and true hearted men, to do honor to him who has contributed so largely to the advancement and interest of his country—who has ever been the implacible[ sic ] enemy of every species of ‘tyranny over the mind of men,’ and an unwavering advocate of universal liberty, and whose life is his country’s most glorious history.” In the same issue the *Chronicle* printed a “Gem of Poetry” which Adams had written for a young lady who had been a fellow passenger on the Ben Franklin No. 6 between Cincinnati and Pittsburgh five days before. Although it is of no literary value, it deserves to be given here chiefly because it has not been published elsewhere:
To Miss ——— ———.

of N——E, M——R County, Pennsylvania.

If, in life's dull and toilsome way,
   The Pilgrim chance to meet,
On some rare, bright auspicious day,
   A jewel at his feet——
The memory of that gem shall give
   A balsam to his heart;
And while, hereafter he shall live,
   Unnumbered joys impart.

That pilgrim's fortune, now is mine——
   And this the day of joy:
I see the precious jewel shine——
   Pure gold without alloy:
And Memory, brooding o'er the past,
   Shall ever bless the day,
When fortune, in her kindness, cast
   The jewel in my way.

After reading these verses, one can understand why Adams once expressed himself as follows: "I have kept copies of all my contributions to albums, and I sicken at the sight of them."8

How John Quincy spent his Sunday in Pittsburgh is not indicated either in his Memoirs or in the local newspapers. The diary entry for Monday, November 20, which fails to mention anything that had happened between Saturday night and Monday morning, begins with the following interesting observations:

We left Pittsburgh at eight o'clock this morning, for Washington, Pennsylvania. My stay at Pittsburgh from Thursday last, when we reached it, has been tumultuary, honorary, and inexpressibly irksome. I had received from Pittsburgh, at various times, testimonials of sympathy, which had already bound me in gratitude to the city, and I was pleased with an invitation which gave me the opportunity of expressing it in person; but these mass-meetings, at which I find myself held up as a show, where the most fulsome adulation is addressed to me face to face in the presence of thousands, and where long premeditated written discourses are read to me, to be answered without a moment of reflection—all this is so adverse to my nature that it has, in a great measure, solved the continuity of my existence, and I am like one coming out of a trance or a fainting-fit, unconscious of what has been passing around me.

8 Memoirs, 10:125, June 13, 1839.
That Adams was not unappreciative of the entertainment that had been provided him while in Pittsburgh is evident from the sentence regarding Mayor Hay and Mr. Denny: "To the unremitting kindness and attentions of these gentlemen during the whole of our visit here, I have been under the greatest obligations." But it is little wonder that a man of his age should have felt somewhat dazed after the rush of events that Adams had been experiencing since his departure from Quincy.

Nor was this tour entirely over. The trip from Pittsburgh to Washington, Pennsylvania, required the entire day, chiefly because Adams consented to stop in Canonsburg and visit Jefferson College. There he responded to an address by President Brown and shook hands with the students. Once in Washington, he had to attend a reception in his honor, reply to addresses by the president of Washington College and the principal of the Female Seminary, and submit to another round of handshaking. That evening he went to a supper party given by Mr. McKennan, at which he met "about thirty gentlemen, professors and teachers at the college, and inhabitants of the vicinity, all well-bred, intelligent men." He responded to a toast with the words: "The county of Washington, the town of Washington, and the college of Washington, Pennsylvania. Success, prosperity, and happiness to all who belong to them."

The next day, Tuesday, November 21, the Adams party proceeded to Brownsville, and from there to Uniontown. In both places Adams was honored as he had been in Canonsburg and Washington with feasts, speeches, and handshaking. And after making a few remarks following the address of welcome at Uniontown, he took his leave of Western Pennsylvania. That he was almost exhausted is evident from the complaint in his diary: "The stamina of my constitution are sinking under the hardships and exposures of traveling at this season and at my time of life."

It was believed by members of Adams' family that his journey to Ohio and Pennsylvania definitely overtaxed his strength and shortened his life. At any rate, he was to live only four years longer. Less than a year before his death he received from Wilson McCandless a gift for which he was quick to return his thanks in a letter dated 1st April, 1847. Since it contains not only an expression of Adams' feelings regarding his stay in
Pittsburgh but also his opinion of a Pittsburgh author whose name is to be found in all reputable histories of American literature, that letter may serve as a fitting conclusion to this account of John Quincy Adams' visit to Western Pennsylvania.

Dear Sir: I cannot lose a moment before acknowledging the receipt of your letter of the 29th ult., and of the valuable present which accompanies it—the two volumes of the new edition of Judge H. H. Brackenridge's "Modern Chivalry, or the Adventures of Captain Farrago and Teague O'Regan." My visit to Pittsburgh in 1843, and my intercourse with yourself, with the citizens of the place and Allegheny, at that time, afford me some of the most pleasing recollections of my life, grateful recollections of my obligations to yourself and them.

I had read the first part of Modern Chivalry and formed a pleasant acquaintance with Captain Farrago and his man Teague, at their first appearance more than half a century since, and they had then excited much of my attention as illustrations of life and manners peculiar to the times and localities, not entirely effaced when I became more familiarly acquainted with them, by this visit to the latter.

Captain Farrago and Teague O'Regan are legitimate descendants, on one side from the La Mancha and his squire Sancho, on the other, from Sir Hudi-bras and his man Ralph, and if not primitive conceptions themselves, are at least as lineal in their descent as the pious Aeneas from the impetuous and vindictive son of Pelias.

The reappearance of this work, as a second edition, since the author's death, more than half a century after its first publication, well warrants the prediction that it will last beyond the period fixed by the ancient statutes, for the canonization of poets, a full century. I shall read it over again, I have no doubt, with a refreshing revival of the pleasure with which I greeted it on its first appearance; and if this expression of my opinion can give any satisfaction to the remaining relatives of Judge Brackenridge, or to yourself, it is entirely at your disposal, being with a vivid sense and grateful remembrance of your kindness, and that of my fellow-citizens of Pittsburgh and Allegheny.

Your friend and obedient servant,

J. Q. Adams

9 This letter is included with the speeches of McCandless and Adams in Ex-President John Quincy Adams in Pittsburgh in 1843, 15–16.