HISTORICAL SOCIETY NOTES

THE HISTORICAL TOUR OF 1950

Veterans of some or all of the eight annual two-day historical tours conducted jointly by the Summer Sessions of the University of Pittsburgh and the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania, in the years from 1932 to 1939, were delighted, along with not a few newcomers, over the resumption, this year, of these jointly sponsored "peripatetic," or motorized, history seminars.

In those earlier years many places of historical interest in Western Pennsylvania and adjoining states were visited, the outermost points being, successively, Erie, Morgantown, West Virginia, Bedford, Altoona, Clarion, Somerset, Blennerhassett Island below Marietta, Ohio, and the Cornplanter Grant above Warren, Pennsylvania.

The late World War and other factors account for the ten-year break in the series, during which the Historical Society contented itself (except during the days of gas-rationing and aging automobiles) with less extensive pilgrimages to places that could be reached in an afternoon or a day, such as "Old Economy" at Ambridge in 1940; Bedford, and return along the general course of the Old Forbes Road, in 1941; Fort Necessity and "Little Washington" in 1946; Grove City in 1947; the Historical House at West Overton in 1948, and again in 1949.

This year's newly revived joint tour, the ninth in the series, took place on Friday and Saturday, July 21 and 22, with Titusville and Drake Well Memorial Park as the outermost objectives, reached by way of Ambridge, Beaver, Beaver Falls, New Castle, New Wilmington, and Franklin.

Shortly after noon on Friday, the twenty-first, some seventeen cars, carrying upwards of fifty "pilgrims," lined up in front of the Historical Building ready for the start. As of old, all the travelers were supplied with detailed itineraries giving exact directions as to the route to be followed, as well as data about the principal historic places along the way, including those that could be viewed only in passing, as the motorcade slowed down and blossomed with outstretched arms and pointing fingers, after the example of the tour conductors in the pilot car. As it turned out, none in the motorcade had need for the "sailing directions," for both state and local police did an excellent job of shepherding the caravan and keeping it intact all the way through.
En route to "Old Economy," along the Ohio River Boulevard and the Beaver Road, most of the places to be viewed were off to the left, as for examples, the Western Pennsylvania State Penitentiary, Brunot's Island, the borough of McKees Rocks, Neville Island and the Dravo plant, Coraopolis, a U. S. Coast Guard Station, and plants of the Bethlehem Steel Company, General Motors Corporation, and American Bridge Company. On the right, though not always to be seen, were Dixmont Hospital, Ethelbert Nevin's home, "Vineacre," in Edgeworth, and Leetsdale High School.

At "Old Economy" in Ambridge, the party spent about an hour and a half, first listening to a talk by Mr. Lawrence S. Thurman, the senior curator, in old St. John's Lutheran Church, and then viewing in groups, severally led by Mr. Thurman and his guides, the many interesting exhibits in the Great House, Music Hall, Kitchen, Wine Cellar, Garden, etc., of this third and last settlement of the old Harmony Society.

Off again to Beaver, the next stop, pointing fingers called attention to such places, on the left, as the sites of historic Logstown and Legionville, the boroughs of Aliquippa and Monaca, and on the right, Mt. Gallitzin Academy.

In Beaver the party stopped along the River Road, on a high bluff overlooking the Ohio River Valley, for a brief visit to the site of Fort McIntosh, the first United States military post established north of the Ohio River. Here, Mr. C. Stanton Belfour, secretary and director of the Pittsburgh Foundation, and long-time co-planner and conductor of these tours, introduced Dr. Russell J. Ferguson, professor of history at the University of Pittsburgh, who in turn introduced the speaker of the occasion, Dr. John W. Oliver, head of the history department of that university. After the latter's brief but vivid account of the history and significance of this important frontier outpost, 1778-1791, interesting comments were elicited from one of the "tourists," Mr. C. V. Starrett, associate director of the Buhl Foundation, and a native of the Beaver Valley region. A pleasant touch was added by residents along the River Road, who had put out their flags and were providing light refreshments for such of the visitors as were fortunate enough to "get wise" to the fact.

The expedition then started rolling northward, past the former home of the late U. S. Senator Matthew S. Quay in Beaver, and the
marker in New Brighton indicating the site of the Big Beaver Blockhouse, erected in 1788-89 and garrisoned for several years to protect communication via Beaver Creek with the Great Lakes.

Thence a few miles through Beaver Falls to College Hill, the location of Geneva College, an institution founded in 1848 by the Reformed Presbyterian Church at Northwood, Ohio, and re-established here in 1880. Here the pilgrims "debarked" for a short meeting in the Little Theater in the Macartney Library building, and then adjourned to the "Brigadoon" for refreshments. At the meeting the group was welcomed by Mr. J. L. Bowers, the college's director of public relations; response was made by Mrs. Agnes L. Starrett, editor of the University of Pittsburgh Press, and a brief address was given by Dr. Clarence E. Macartney, pastor of the First Presbyterian Church in Pittsburgh, and one with long-time family and personal connections with the college.

Onward, then, toward New Castle, by way of Moravia, where two markers indicate the site of Friedensstadt, a village founded in 1770 by Christian Delaware Indians brought from the upper Allegheny by the Rev. David Zeisberger, and abandoned in 1773 when the inhabitants moved westward into Ohio. A few miles farther on, two other markers were noted: one indicating the site of a group of Indian villages known as the Kuskuskies; the other erected in memory of the Moravian missionary, Christian Frederick Post, who visited these villages in 1758 as part of his diplomatic paving of the way for the Forbes expedition against Fort Duquesne.

Arrived at New Castle—journey's end for the day—the travelers, and about an equal number of local residents, gathered in the Castleton Hotel for a dinner meeting presided over by Dr. Wilbur Flannery, president of the Greater New Castle Association. Response to the address of welcome was made by Mr. Edward Crump, Jr., a vice president of the visiting historical society. Then followed the principal speaker of the evening, the Hon. W. Walter Braham, president judge of the Court of Common Pleas of Lawrence County, who outlined the early Indian history of the county and its backgrounds in an address that was considered, by both laymen and professional historians in attendance, to be the clearest and most informative exposition of the subject ever presented.

Saturday morning, the twenty-second, found the motorcade again
in motion and heading for Titusville by way of New Wilmington, Mercer, and Franklin—to mention only the principal points of interest along this leg of the trip. At New Wilmington a brief visit was made at Westminster College, founded nearly a century ago, where chimes greeted the party’s arrival, and where, in the college chapel, Mr. George Seibel, librarian of the Carnegie Free Library of Allegheny (northside Pittsburgh), responded for the visitors to the welcoming words of Dean William Vander Lugt. The borough of Mercer had to be passed through with only pointing fingers and data in the itineraries to bring out its historical significance. At Franklin, proud possessor of the sites of four early forts, French, English, and American, the group gathered in the public square for words of welcome from Mayor James G. Bohlender, a response by the writer, and a brief address by local historian Joseph Riesenman, Jr.

A run of some twenty miles then found the motorcade entering Titusville, in time for the scheduled luncheon meeting at the Colonel Drake Hotel, presided over by Mr. Charles B. Stegner, chairman of the Drake Well Advisory Board. No formal address had been arranged for, so the eighty or ninety people in attendance devoted themselves to “satisfying the inner man,” the while words of welcome were offered by Mayor C. C. Hampton; responses were given for the visitors by Charles A. Locke and John G. Buchanan, Esqs.; bows were taken by a number of local people, including Mrs. Carroll D. Kearns of the Drake Well Advisory Board; and appreciation was expressed for the efficient services of the state police escort and of the tour conductors.

For dessert, figuratively speaking, the motorcade then moved on for another mile or two to the Drake Well Memorial Park, for a leisurely inspection of the pioneer Drake Oil Well and the Museum; and to hear an address, in a shaded corner of the spacious grounds, on this, “The Most Famous Oil Well in History,” by Dr. Paul H. Giddens, curator of the Drake Museum, professor of history at Allegheny College, and a leading authority on the history of the oil industry.

After this, the crowning event of the tour, the motorists were free to wend their ways homeward at times and by roads of their own choosing. The weather had been ideal throughout; there were no serious mishaps; the formal addresses were exceptionally able; there were no longwinded or “stuffy” informal remarks; and, greatest marvel of all, to a co-planner and conductor of earlier tours, was the smooth way in
which the expedition was conducted—almost exactly “according to plan.” For all but the weather, most of the credit is due to Messrs. Carrioll F. Reynolds and Viers W. Adams of the University of Pittsburgh, acting under the experienced guidance and with the help of Mr. Belfour. The writer agrees with other tour veterans that this was the best managed and most delightful expedition in the series.

Franklin F. Holbrook