BOOK REVIEWS


One more segment of the history of early western Pennsylvania has been neatly fitted into place with the publication of this book. Originally a doctoral dissertation submitted to the graduate school of the University of Pittsburgh, this monograph, as the author states in her preface, traces the development of Pittsburgh’s economic activities in the first half of the nineteenth century and demonstrates “the influence of the growth of manufacturing and the improvement of channels of trade on Pittsburgh’s commerce.” A definitive history of manufacturing in western Pennsylvania still has to make its appearance.

By the turn of the century Pittsburgh had developed from a frontier fort and outpost into an entrepot for western goods. It served, too, as the outfitting point for the adventurous who would make their way westward. To supply the new western communities and the city’s own growing population, manufacturing developed rapidly. Considerable commerce was carried on with the East, but the essential flow of Pittsburgh’s goods ran westward. The first half of the nineteenth century saw the reversal of that flow. Pittsburgh shifted its position “as Provider for the West” to a city that was an integral part of Pennsylvania firmly welded to the financial interests of the East. In the development of her theme, the author treats of the river systems, eastern turnpikes, canals, commercial rivalry with Wheeling and other centers, the struggle for eastern rail connections, and of the credit facilities and financial institutions of Pittsburgh.

Of particular interest is the long chapter dealing with the development and operation of the State Works of Pennsylvania, that intricate combination of railroads, viaducts, and canals, sometimes described as one of the “mechanical marvels of the age.” The significance of the Pennsylvania state system in welding Pittsburgh to the East has been largely overlooked. Just recently, one historian dismissed it as being chiefly of value to “honeymooners” and to the ubiquitous European traveler looking for something picturesque and bizarre to describe to his fellow countrymen.
This work is the product of sound scholarship and meticulous attention to detail. The author has succeeded in producing a work of surprising readability in view of the number of tables, charts, and columns of figures that usually serve to deaden an otherwise interesting narrative. Not only does this monograph cover the subject thoroughly but it ties in the economic crises and the political developments that are so much a part of Pennsylvania history. The book is thoroughly documented and seems to be remarkably free from typographical errors. Of particular interest to some readers also will be the appendixes which give in tabular form the "Value of Pittsburgh Manufactures, 1800-1850"; the "Tonnage of Monongahela Slackwater, 1845-1850"; and "A Compilation of the Tonnage Carried Over the Pennsylvania State System, 1835-1850." This is indeed a welcome contribution to the growing collection of definitive works chronicling the history of western Pennsylvania.

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