TROUBLE strode into Pittsburgh with the young Reverend Robert Steele in 1799. He was a stranger to the town and its people, but his presence soon disrupted the unity of certain Pittsburgh Presbyterians.

The first thirty-two years of his life had been lived in turbulent Ireland. He came from that strife-torn land to Pittsburgh to preach the word of God as he understood it, and he preached it, but some Pittsburgh Presbyterians of great piety were opposed to him after they heard his first sermon from the pulpit of the First Presbyterian Church. The church did not have a pastor then, and several ministers were serving it as supplies. Those Presbyterians who had found the Rev. Mr. Steele's sermons distasteful, bore with him for a time, but his words continued to sow seeds of dissatisfaction within them. He was aware of the tempest rising against him, but he would not yield to the dissidents and they would not abandon their tenets for his.

After he became pastor of the First Presbyterian Church the dissidents determined to get relief, if possible, from a situation which, to them, was intolerable. They chose a few men of prestige to acquaint the Pittsburgh Synod with their position. The men chosen were James Morrison, William Borrett, William Semple and William Gazzam. They were true Christian gentlemen. In October, 1803, they prepared, signed and presented the following petition to the Synod:

To the Reverend Synod, now sitting in the borough of Pittsburgh (this memorial), most humbly showeth:

That we, the subscribers, being appointed by a number of our brethren, either already united to the Presbyterian Church or desirous of being so united, as becometh the general supporters of the Christian cause, do

Mrs. Bothwell, a member of this Society, has contributed the following articles to the Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine: "Devereux Smith, Fearless Pioneer" in 1957, and "Precious Records," and "Pittsburgh's Most Disastrous Sunday" in 1958.—Ed.
represent that we have not united in the call of the Rev. Robert Steele as Pastor of the Presbyterian Church in Pittsburgh, but that, nevertheless, being adverse to a separation, if it could be avoided consistently with spiritual advantage, did for some time attend the preaching of the said reverend gentleman, and most of us did subscribe to his support, but finding no kind of spiritual advantage, have long since withdrawn and are now as sheep without a sheperd. We bring forward no charges against Mr. Steele or any member of said church, considering that even if sufficient should exist, this is not our present object, but assure the Reverend Synod that our present object is to receive the immediate benefits of what we deem to be a Gospel Ministry.1

The tenor of their petition attests to their tact and their integrity. There is pathos in their statement that they found "no kind of spiritual advantage" in the preaching of the Rev. Mr. Steele and that they had "long since withdrawn" from the church and were "as sheep without a sheperd." Their assertion that their "present object" was "to receive the immediate benefits" of what they deemed "to be a Gospel Ministry" stressed their spiritual need.

The Synod sought to placate them by authorizing Presbytery to send supplies to them. Synod probably hoped that time would end their opposition to the Rev. Mr. Steele, but it only strengthened their determination to stand aloof from him and the First Presbyterian Church.

Eventually, in October, 1804, with the sanction of the General Assembly, the Second Presbyterian Congregation of Pittsburgh came into existence.

The Rev. Robert Steele must be regarded as a reluctant founder of the second church. The other founders were the persons who had found dissatisfaction with the First Presbyterian Church and its pastor, but their representatives are the ones who are generally recognized as the founders of the second church. Very little has been written about those four men, Messrs. Morrison, Borrett, Semple and Gazzam, who deserved more acclaim than they received.

James Morrison, one of the founders, was a Pittsburgh merchant who had been a member of the First Presbyterian Church for some years. Pew No. 32 in that church was in his name. He was a zealous worker for his church and commanded general respect. His withdrawal from the First Church must have caused him mental anguish. It was in his house that the first services of the formally organized Second Presbyterian Church were held.

William Borrett, another of the founders, was sometimes re-

ferred to as Mr. Barrett and, in fact, printed copies of the petition of 1803, mentioned herein above, mistakenly show his name as "Wm. Barrett." He was forty-six years old when the petition was presented in 1803. His daughter, Lydia, who was then fifteen years old, later became the bride of Jeffrey Scaife. The name of Scaife has been a familiar one to many generations of Pittsburghers. Mr. Borrett was a business man of great ability who did as much for Pittsburgh, in his way and in his day, as his great, great, great grandson, Alan M. Scaife, deceased, did for it for many years before his death in July, 1958, at fifty-eight years of age. Mr. Borrett died at ninety-two years of age on May 7, 1849, at the home of his daughter, Mrs. Jeffrey Scaife, who was then a widow. There had existed for years a doubt as to the exact date of Mr. Borrett's death, but the records of the Second Presbyterian Church, when searched recently, dispelled that doubt.

William Semple, another of the founders, was a very pious man. He was thirty-two years old when the petition of 1803 was presented to the Synod. He was born near Dublin, Ireland; came to America in 1795 and to Pittsburgh five years later, where he, too, became a merchant. He promptly became an asset to the community and won its hearty approval.

William Gazzam, whose name was the last on the petition of 1803, was an Englishman who came to Pittsburgh with his family in 1800. He, too, was a merchant and a good citizen. The contribution made by him and his family to the spiritual and material growth of Pittsburgh is noteworthy. He died eight years after he signed the petition, and he had the spiritual satisfaction in his last years of knowing that he was one of the founders of the Second Presbyterian Church.

The priceless records of the Second Presbyterian Church reveal the recollections of James Morrison, as furnished to it in writing years ago, as to the origin of the second church, and some of those recollections were as follows:

The first that came was the Rev'd Wylie ... Notice was given that he would preach in the Court House, but when the Sabbath morning came, it was found that the Janitor, acting under instructions from a County Commissioner, who was an elder in the 1st Church, would not open the door. A man was then stationed on the steps to inform the people who might come that the meeting would be held at Mr. Morrison's house. The meeting was held there—and then and there was preached the first sermon to the Congregation of the 2d Church. The first place of stated worship
Mr. Morrison was alluding to the first supply sent to the newly-established congregation when he stated, "The first that came was the Revd Wylie." The Rev. William Wylie was certainly that man. The "Father McCurdy" mentioned was, undoubtedly, the Rev. Elisha McCurdy.

Another account that sheds light on the activities of the founders of the Second Church was written by John McCombs, who married Miss Hannah Morrison of Pittsburgh in 1802 and came with her to Pittsburgh in 1803 from Canonsburg, Pa. He wrote:

"About this time I set up the family altar as the worship of God in my house... In the same year, 1803, my family united with a small society associated for public worship and mutual edification, which met in private houses, as they had no house of worship."

The following were among the heads of families composing the society, Mr. James Morrison, Mr. William Semple, Mr. William Barrett, Mr. William Gazzam, Mr. Joseph McCullough, with their families and others. These met regularly on the Sabbath for religious services. This small society, feeling desirous of having the gospel preached to them and to have the way prepared for their being organized into a church, united in an application to the Presbytery for some supplies. Their application was finally granted, and they were organized under the name of the Second Presbyterian Church of Pittsburgh. The first sermon to this small congregation was by the Rev. Wm. Wylie. The discourse was very solemn and appropriate to the occasion. . . ."

The John McCombs (or McComb) just mentioned was the third son of John McCombs who settled near Lancaster, Pa., about 1770. A descendant is Dr. John P. McComb of Pittsburgh, Pa., who has been rendering medical services in Pittsburgh since 1913 to a vast number of people who have been his patients. He was head of the Department of Obstetrics at Shadyside Hospital for many years.

Joseph McCullough, who was mentioned in the account by Mr. McCombs set out above, can, with many others, be regarded as a founder of the Second Presbyterian Church. He had a boatyard at the Point where old-fashioned flat boats were built. He was an Elder of the Second Church when he died in 1842 at ninety-one years of age.

The congregation acquired Lot No. 381 in 1808 with the
intention of erecting a church when funds were available. The lot was the third one below Smithfield street and it ran through from Fifth Street (now Fifth Avenue) to Diamond Street (now Forbes). The congregation’s first church was erected on that lot and its first graveyard was on it or adjacent to it. The church served the congregation from 1814 to March 26, 1844. The church minutes state that a fire on that day destroyed the church and the session house and that the congregation had been invited to become members “of our sister church.” It must be stressed that this fire occurred in 1844 and not in 1845 as some writers have mistakenly reported. A graphic account of the fire was given in the Daily Morning Post of March 26, 1844. Some tears must have been shed, not only because of the fire but because it necessitated the removal of the dead from what had been believed to be their final resting place.

Pennsylvania granted a charter to The Second Presbyterian Congregation of Pittsburgh on October 15, 1815, on its application of April 6, 1815. It is the very first charter recorded in Book 1 of the Charter Records of Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, but, strangely, it was not recorded until April 1, 1856. Twenty-four names were signed to the application for a charter. Two of the

in the deed, which is recorded in D.B. 34, p. 196, Allegheny County, Pa., that they acquired the property as trustees of the church, such was actually the case. It was so stated in the deed, dated November 13, 1822, recorded in D.B. 34, p. 198, by which the same property was conveyed to Thomas Hartley, John Thompson, Robert Christy, Isaac Harris and Luke Loomis, “Trustees of the Second Presbyterian Congregation of Pittsburgh” by William Borrett, James Morrison and Jane, his wife; William Semple and Ann, his wife; William Banton, Ann Mason and Wm., her husband; Rebeccah Miltenberger and George, her husband; Mary Brown and James, her husband; Clementina Banton and Henrietta Kepner; Sarah Simpson, Nancy Darlington and Benjamin, her husband; John McCullough, William McCullough, James McCullough, Jane McCullough, Mary McCullough, and Margaret McCullough and James Briceland and Rachel, his wife. The grantees in the deed of May 20, 1808, had been, as indicated above, six persons, and the reason for the joinder of the additional number of grantees in the deed of Nov. 13, 1822, conveying to the Trustees of 1822 the property acquired from the Earlies in 1808 was that, in the interim, William McCullough and Mansfield Banton, two of the six grantees in the aforementioned deed of May 20, 1808, had died and it became necessary for their heirs to join in the aforementioned deed of 1822.

4 The signatures on the application for a charter were as follows: James Morrison, Christian Latshaw, John W. Johnson, John McCombs, Mathew B. Lowrie, Wm. Semple, Morris M. Matthews, James Craspan, Reuben Neal, Robert Cochran, Henry Westbay, John P. Skelton, Ben Hindrick, Gilbert McKewen, John Douthitt, Joseph Roseman, George Cochran, John Fearis, Adam Moreland, Wm. Willock, James Brown, Elias Williams, James M. Riddle, Wm. Rieger. Article I identified the Trustees as “The Reverend Thomas Hunt, James Morrison, John McCombs, Christian Latshaw and William Semple.”
signers were James Morrison and William Semple who, presumably, were the same men who had signed the famous petition of 1803. Another signer of the application was John McCombs.

The history of the Second Presbyterian Church down through the years has been fascinating, but it cannot be told in this article. The church has seen happier years than this one. It is now on Eighth Street between Fort Duquesne Boulevard and Penn Avenue and is almost hemmed in by automobiles on parking lots. It does not have a pastor. The Reverend James Golden Miller became its pastor in 1949 and served it faithfully for nearly a decade before leaving Pittsburgh last year.

Time and the tides of circumstances have created new problems for the Second Presbyterian Church—problems which some regard as almost insurmountable. The Church may possibly be sacrificed to the perishable thing called progress. The founders of the Church and their successors deserve to have it live on as long as Pittsburgh exists. May it survive forever!