In 1955 the Historical Society's annual tour took the form of a boat trip up the Allegheny River to Kittanning and was considered so satisfactory that many members requested a similar trip down the Ohio River. This was planned for the summer of 1960.

On Saturday, July 16, 251 people boarded the pleasure boat Chaperon on the Pittsburgh side of the Allegheny River just below the Sixth Street bridge. The day was ideal for such a trip and the accommodations on the boat were most satisfying. Refreshments were available throughout the day and in the evening a delicious plate dinner was served.

Leaving the wharf about 2 p.m., the Chaperon proceeded smoothly down the river as far as the mouth of the Beaver River at Rochester where the return trip was begun about 6:30. On the trip down the Ohio River Captain Fred Way, an authority on river lore, lectured on the historical significance of the many interesting sites. The first of these was Brunot's Island, a name associated with the well-known Brunot family that for a time lived on the island. Here they were visited by Lafayette, a friend of Dr. Felix Brunot. At this region Chartiers Creek empties into the Ohio River. Also in this region is the McKees Rocks Bridge, the highest bridge over the Ohio. On the opposite side of the river is seen the Western Penitentiary and the Pittsburgh Screw and Bolt factory.

Mr. Christie called attention to the fact that McKees Rocks at the mouth of Chartiers Creek was known to the French as "Ecrité Rocher" or "the place of the rock with pictures" and that it was thought suitable for the location of the fort which Washington later located at the Point. Its importance lay in the fact that with one portage a canoe could follow a course almost due west to a point on the Ohio near Steubenville thus avoiding the great bend in the Ohio through Beaver. This would reduce by many miles the distance to the lower Ohio.

Proceeding down the river Captain Way pointed out the wall
of the former Davis Island Dam, opened in the 1880's. Neville Island, the longest island in the Ohio (4 miles), was originally called "Long Island." It was also called Montour's Island, named for the famous Indian interpreter, Andrew Montour. General William Irvine was given the island by the Penns, and later General John Neville owned it although there is no record that he ever lived here. General Isaac Craig, however, lived here, and died here in 1826.

The lock and dam opposite Emsworth is the first of 46 locks on the 970 miles of the Ohio. This lock was reached by us at 3:30 p.m. Navigation is rarely suspended on this dam and lock, the last time being during the famous flood of 1936. Before the dams were constructed it was possible for men and horses to wade the river.

On Neville Island are many industrial plants such as the Dravo Corporation, the Union Barge Line, and the old Varnish works that supplied varnish for the construction of the Panama Canal locks. Opposite the lower end of the island are seen the Coast Guard Base and Coraopolis (once called Milltown). Ahead is Lock No. 3 (Lock No. 2 was discontinued many years ago).

On both sides of the river were seen some fine old homes of pioneers in river transportation, as well as those of Mary Roberts Rinehart, and Ethelbert Nevin who lived on the east side of the river near Sewickley. The bridge over the river, connecting Sewickley and Coraopolis, was built in 1911, superseding a ferry at that point.

Captain Way called attention to the services rendered boats by the operators of the locks. Any boat that cannot be carried around the dam is entitled to free service of the lock. As boats approach, the lockmen are alerted by radio and by whistle—the latter indicating which side of the lock will be used. Lights on the shores are guideposts for the pilots, and buoys are used as additional guides in the river channels such as those at Shousetown, now Glenwillard. The river serves as a source of pleasure to the many owners and passengers of pleasure craft, and water skiing has become a popular sport.

As the boat moved smoothly down the river past Leetsdale, Ambridge and Aliquippa, Dr. Thurman pointed out the industrial plants of the American Bridge and Jones & Laughlin. He recited the important part played by the Harmony society in the early development of these sites from 1824 to 1915, especially at Old Economy, where 17 buildings are now being restored by the Pennsylvania Historical
Commission. As we moved farther down the river Dr. Thurman pointed to the sites of Logstown and Legionville where conferences were held by the Indians, and near where Céloron is supposed to have buried one of his plates claiming the region for the French. In turn the towns of Monaca (Phillipsburg) and Baden (land once owned by father of James G. Blaine), Logan’s Cemetery (burial site of many Revolutionary and Civil War soldiers), and Crow’s Island were pointed out.

After the return trip was begun at the mouth of the Beaver River, and dinner had been served, the boat travellers settled down to enjoy the music furnished by a three-piece orchestra and accordion, and to view the beautiful sights as the buildings along the shores lighted up. The passengers were unanimous in their impression that this was one of the finest trips the Historical Society had ever conducted, for which they gave Director Christie and his staff well-deserved praise and credit. (The owner and master of the Chaperon is Frank H. Johnston. Mr. Johnston’s son Frank is pilot and his wife supervises services of many kinds.)

CHATTER DE LA TOUR

ROBERT D. CHRISTIE

The party-boat Chaperon on which we toured a short length of the Ohio River might truthfully be called a matron of both experience and propriety. “Experience” because she has seen the river from the bottom as well as the top and “propriety” because, in a way, she is immaculate. It should be said in explanation that her present owners acquired her after a long rest on the bottom of la Belle Riviere. Once a stern-wheeler, she was reconstructed without motive power. With the wheel and the pilot-house removed she acquired two observation decks at one end and, in case you did not notice, a cabin and sort of bar at the other end. The throb of engines gave place to vibrationless preparation of food. The loss of independent movement to party space was compensated for by the neat little towboat which pushes her around. Her cleanliness was not due to her sub-surface experience, but the cause may be deduced when we say that the first guests to arrive were not taken aboard
promptly because we wished to save them the embarrassment of having a mop and bucket thrust into their hands. You may have observed she was still wet behind the ears. (After all, our smokeless city does have a little something in the air—shall we say ore-dust?)

The romanticists who accompanied us to Kittanning on a previous boat trip expressed a preference for return to Pittsburgh by boat, regardless of the hour, rather than return by bus as arranged. This gave us the idea of timing this cruise to end under the night lights of the city which few historians have seen from the water. The idea seems to have met with approval.

Appeals for good weather on previous land tours had been delegated to Methodists and Catholics with good results but this one being on water was of special concern and was accordingly entrusted to Presbyterians and their influence was apparent. True they did not produce a moon but that is in another department. We had no cause for complaint.

The deck hand in the black and white shirt, whom you may have observed testing the tension of the ropes in the locks, was in reality Captain F. H. Johnston, owner of the Chaperon. He later appeared at the gangplank as we were leaving, wearing a handsome uniform which led this un-nautical reporter to think he was a police inspector who wished to discuss some legal matters connected with parking. Actually the man who piloted the boat was a son of the captain but we give them both credit for "safe home." You may be surprised to learn that this same deck hand told this writer that he had cooked all the chickens and all the vegetables on engines of the towboat and it was our pleasure to report that one guest had observed that they could not have been cooked better by the Park Plaza. We can now confide that one portion of roast beef cost us $1.00 more than an order of chicken. They were equally acceptable and good. We ended up 50-50 as planned and no shortage anywhere. The patience of so many hungry people in the unusual group gamble of service was gratifying and prevented a long queue which everyone hates.

The commentary on the history of the river by Captain Fred Way and Dr. Lawrence Thurman was informative and entertaining and added much to the trip. We are especially indebted to Captain Way in other respects because his knowledge of the rivers and his helpful cooperation, so graciously given, have encouraged us to
attempt both our river trips with success.

Special thanks is due the wife of Captain Johnston. She was personally responsible for every form of hand-to-mouth service. It is no mean accomplishment to serve 257 hot, tasty dinners without delay in the cramped quarters of a boat, and no one could have been more cheerfully cooperative, not only in this but in countless other ways.

Many people contribute to the success of such an undertaking and at every turn there was a spirit of friendly helpfulness. It was manifest in our summer president’s extracting us from a difficult parking situation and in such matters as printing, mailing, consulting, medical service, many forms of gangplank service, and so forth. Without naming individuals we thank them all and at the same time we pay our respects to the congenial and considerate attitude of our guests, whom it was a pleasure to serve.

There is favorable talk of a trip in the same boat next year. Avoiding mills and congested locks on the Monongahela, we might go by bus to Brownsville. We would then go by boat to Morgantown and return to Brownsville the same way, then back to Pittsburgh by bus. It has many advantages as well as some problems of feasibility, timing and cost, but it is being considered.

FOOTNOTES TO
WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA HISTORY

The Archives of this Society contain three documents concerning David Leech which are pertinent to the current issue of this magazine.

Who was David Leech?

Harris’ Pittsburgh Business Directory for the Year 1837 lists David Leech as “Leech, Capt. David, owner of Canal Packet Line.” Boucher in A Century and a Half of Pittsburgh and Her People says further that “In 1830 David Leech owned and conducted a line of canal boats between Blairsville and Pittsburg, the rates being:
for freight, twenty cents per hundred pounds, and two cents a mile for passengers."

With this background in mind it is easy to understand why Captain Leech petitions, as follows, for a "private basin" in the Pennsylvania Canal.

Petition D. Leech for a private basin

To the Board of Council for the City of Pittsburgh the petition of the undersigned representeth that having made extensive arrangement for placing a regular line of freight and packet boats on the Western Division of Pennsylvania Canal to run in connection by Portage with a line on the Eastern Division by means of which he expects to be permanently engaged in the transportation of merchandise East and West by the Canal to a large amount. It has been found necessary for this purpose as well in obedience to the law regulating the navigation of the Canal that he should have a private basin or recess of suitable capacity for about to tie up without interfering with the ordinary surface of the Canal for which purpose he proposes to excavate a basin. Say not exceeding ninety feet along the Canal on the berm side and not exceeding fifteen feet back from Said berm shore at a point between the Aqueduct and Penn Street contiguous to the Latter where he contemplates erecting a warehouse. In pursuance of this design your petitioner has made application to the board of Canal Commissioners whose consent in writing on the conditions therein setforth he here with submits and respectfully asks of your board that they will grant a concurant privilege for the purposes above indicated and your petitioner will pay cash

Pittsburgh 25 June 1832

David Leech

The Canal Commissioners Approve David Leech's Petition

Harrisburg May 18th 1832

Resolved that David Leech be authorized to construct a basin under the direction of the Engineer on the Western Division of the
berm side of the Canal in the city of Pittsburg on or along side of his leased property between Penn Street and the aqueduct.

Provided that Said basin shall be at least fifteen feet wide and ninety feet long so that a boat shall not occupy the premise [?] of the Canal while receiving or discharging her cargo-

And provided further that a plan of Said basin shall be submitted to the corporate authority of the city of Pittsburg and then consent thereto obtained and that a footway shall be left along side of Said basin of such width as shall be decided by the same corporate authority

Extract from the Journal of the Board of Can Comm
Sign R. Shunk, Secy.

Report of the Committee Appointed by Common and Select Councils of Pittsburgh to Investigate the Petition of David Leech

The committee, after going upon the ground, and having ascertained the objects of the petitioner, and duly considered all the circumstances of the case, are of the opinion, that no public injury and no private inconvenience will result from concurring in the resolution of the Canal Commissioners and in granting the privilege to the petitioner therein conferred. Your committee, therefore, respectfully beg leave to conclude their report by offering for the consideration of councils the following Resolution—

Resolved, by Select and common councils of the city of Pittsburgh, that they concur in the resolution of the Canal Commissioners of the 18th May 1832, giving to Mr. David Leech the privilege of a basin opposite to his warehouse between Penn Street and the Aqueduct—Provided that Said basin shall not exceed in width fifteen feet, nor 90 feet in length, and provided also, that in its erection it shall be made safe, and secured against danger to passengers who may have cause to pass and re-pass along that side of Canal—And further: that the Said David Leech, shall leave between his warehouse and the Said basin, a space of at least fifteen feet, for public use and the accommodation of foot and other passengers, to be kept as clear and unincumbered, as it is his duty to keep that,
which is hereby released to his own use. And provided further, that if the city authorities should hereafter deem said alteration injurious to the interest of the city, the said David Leech shall, at his own proper expense, cause the same to be placed in the manner in which it now stands.

All which is respectfully Submitted

John B. Butler
John M. Snowden
John Callaghan
John Turbett

The Petition was "Read & Concurred in" by Select and Common Councils December 30, 1883.

The Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine will purchase certain issues of the magazine now out of stock and needed for libraries: Volume 1 numbers 1 and 4 (1918); Volume 4 number 1 (1921); Volume 7 number 4 (1924); Volume 9 number 1 (1926); Volume 40 number 4 (1957). Copies sent to the Editor, The Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine, 4338 Bigelow Boulevard, Pittsburgh 13, Pennsylvania, will be paid for at the rate of $1.50 per issue. (Only a limited number of Volume 40 number 4 can be purchased.)