SOME SPORTS IN PITTSBURGH DURING THE NATIONAL PERIOD, 1775-1860

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INTRODUCTION

Through the gateway of Pittsburgh passed a multitude of people during the National Period from 1775 to 1860. Some settled in this area to develop homes and businesses. In addition to their various customs and mores, many brought with them a love for different sports. To them, sport was a diversion from the daily routine of clearing the land, fighting the elements and unfriendly Indians, and establishing a place for themselves and their families in this new land. Some of these people became participants in the various sports and/or took a stand for the continuance or abolishment of one or all of them.

The evolution of Pittsburgh from a small settlement in 1775 into a borough in 1794 and a city in 1816 was accompanied by governmental factions which promoted or opposed activities of a sporting nature. Newspapers also made their ideas concerning sports known, some calling for the cessation of some sports, others openly promoting them.

Many accounts have been written of the history of Pittsburgh during this period but few have presented documented reports of the sports engaged in by these people. The small number that have appeared have given only a brief account of the sports without much detail.

One hundred and eight years have passed since the end of the National Period. If this portion of Pittsburgh history is to be recorded in a well-documented summary it must be done now. The assistance which sports may have provided to the development of the city of Pittsburgh is an important facet in the overall history of the city.

DISORDERLY SPORTS IN A DISORDERLY TOWN 1775-1794

With the end of the Revolutionary War came the disbursement of the majority of troops from Fort Pitt. Those remaining on active duty at Pittsburgh consisted of the 4th Pennsylvania Regiment of Artillery.

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commanded by Brigadier General William Irvine.

The activities of the fort were few and time not spent on patrol was used for gambling, frequenting the taverns of the small settlement, or playing at "long bullets." This game was usually played on a road or street where there were no rocks or weeds to obstruct the path of the "bullet" which was thrown or "jerked" along a prescribed path. Two or more persons took part in the game and "... if more than two persons participated in the game, each party of contestants was under the direction of a captain." According to Ross, each team was supplied with a bullet. A starting line was drawn on the ground. Each team made six throws — three in a designated direction away from the starting line and three back toward the starting line. The first throw was made from the starting line. The second and third throws were made from the spots where the bullet had come to rest after the preceding throws. At the end of three throws the two teams exchanged bullets and threw back toward the starting line. Thus, the team that had thrown the bullet the farthest on the first three throws gained the advantage, for the fourth throw was made from the spot where the bullet lay after the third throw. The fifth and sixth throws were also made from the spots where the bullet lay after the preceding throws. The team whose bullet was ahead at the end of the sixth throw was declared the winner.

Johnston gave a different description of the game. Scrawls or markers were placed in the ground at a distance of sixty, eighty, and a hundred yards. One throw was permitted. The bullets that struck at or beyond the first scrawl counted one, those striking at or beyond the other scrawls counted two and three respectively. In order to accelerate the velocity of the bullet the players approached the starting

1 *Pittsburgh in Ye Olden Time* (Pittsburgh: Charles C. Benton, 1908), 5. Pittsburgh in 1769 consisted of 464 persons and the population was close to 7000 in 1817.

2 See a letter from M. A. Ross in "Notes & Queries," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, VI (1882), 370, in which he states that a bullet was "a wrought-iron ball weighing from 16 to 20 ounces" and a letter from H.R. in William Henry Egle's *Notes and Queries* (Harrisburg: Harrisburg Publishing Co., 1895), 25, which states that the bullets weighed "from a pound and a half to two and a half" and were "cast for artillery purposes."

3 From a letter by Geo. Johnston in "Notes & Queries," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, VIII (1884), 351-352, where "jerking" consisted of "bringing the upper part of the arm by a quick half rotary motion of the shoulder-joint, in contact with the side of the body, and when the upper part of the arm reached a perpendicular position, releasing the bullet from the grasp of the hand..."


5 Ross.

6 Johnston.
line at the fastest speed possible. Some players became proficient at releasing the bullet at the moment they touched the starting line.

Officers and soldiers alike participated in the game which was objectionable to some because of gambling and the constant danger to participants and bystanders of being hit by the flying bullets. The following letter was presented to Irvine in 1782 by five townspeople in an effort to prohibit the playing of long bullets.

The Humble Petition of a part of the Inhabitance of the Town of Pittsburgh Most Humbly Begett; that your Honour will be pleased to take it into Consideration, That as Several of the Officers, Soldiers, of the Town has of late made a Constant Practice, in Playing at Long Bullets, in the Street that goes up by the Brewhouse, and that a Number of Children belonging to us, who are Dwellers in the Same Street, are in Danger of their Lives, by the said evil Practice, We therefore hope (since we have no Civil Magistrate to Apply too) that your Honour will Condescend to put a Stop to such Practice, in the Streets, by your Own Special Orders; And by your Honours Endeavours we are forever Bound to pray and Shall forever, — Remain, Sir your Honours most Obedient Humble Servants to Serve . . . .

No mention is made of any injury or death occurring to players or bystanders but an order appeared in the Fort Pitt Orderly Book on May 31, 1782, which indicated that Irvine "... in the most express terms forbids it done in the future." No borough or city law against bullet playing appeared until April 22, 1794, when a person could be fined three dollars for "... bullet playing in any place, for money or other valuable thing; or in any public highway, with or without a bet." While a military order prohibited the soldiers from engaging in this sport, the townspeople, without local law, participated in sports such as horseracing, cock fighting and long bullets without fear of fine or imprisonment. Other objectionable sports which they probably played during that time were shuffleboard, bowling and billiards, because the first borough laws in 1794 provided a penalty for engaging in them.

8 John Bradley, Thomas Girty, William Brady, Jos. McClelland, and John, whose last name is not legible on the original document.
11 By-laws and Ordinances of the City of Pittsburgh (Pittsburgh: Johnston & Stockton, 1828), 307.
12 Ibid., 307-308.
Order from General Irvine to officers and soldiers of Fort Pitt prohibiting the playing of long bullets
The lawless town at that time was a collection of small log houses inhabited mainly by Scotch and Irish. Lee recorded in 1784 that the houses were "... as dirty as in the north of Ireland, or even Scotland." In 1790, Forman described Pittsburgh as "... the muddiest place that I ever was in." McClure stated that the people were "... much addicted to drinking, gambling, horse race, and fighting" and Lee wrote that the town contained "... four attorneys, two doctors, and not a priest of any persuasion, nor church, nor chapel; so that they are likely to be damned without the benefit of clergy." The Gazette, in 1786, found the town "... literally overrun with criminals." Captain John Wilkins gave the following description of Pittsburgh in 1783:

I found the place filled with old officers and soldiers, followers of the army, mixed with a few families of credit. All sorts of wickedness were carried on to excess, and there was no appearance of morality or regular order. There appeared to be no signs of religion among the people, and it seemed to me that the Presbyterian ministers were afraid to come to the place lest they should be mocked or mistreated.

The absence of morality and religion probably played a part in the sporting life of this time. Without moral or civil law, the townspeople sought out any way of spending their leisure time that suited their backwoods' taste. Gambling and fighting prevailed at all events of a sporting nature. "There was little in the motley assortment to commend itself to an aesthetic sensibility."

The few creditable people of Pittsburgh presented plans for a Presbyterian church, the first church in Pittsburgh, in 1786. The church, however, did not provide much influential opposition to such sports as horseracing and cock fighting. Wilkins complained in his diary that:

... although there were a number of respectable families residing in Pittsburgh in 1786, still the majority were more inclined to interest themselves in horseracing, etc., than to contribute to the building of the First Presbyterian Church.

13 Arthur Lee, Diary (December 17, 1784). Copy of original in Carnegie Library, Oakland Branch, Pittsburgh, Pa.
14 Charles C. Dawson, "Autobiography of Major Samuel S. Forman of Syracuse, N. Y., from the Original Manuscript." The Historical Magazine and Notes and Queries Concerning the Antiquities, History and Biography of America, Vol. VI (second series), No. 6 (Dec. 1869), 325.
16 Arthur Lee.
17 Pittsburgh Gazette, September 23, 1786.
18 Centennial Volume of the First Presbyterian Church of Pittsburgh, Pa. 1784-1884 (Pittsburgh, 1884), 16-17.
19 Western Pennsylvania Committee on Folklore, Tales of Pioneer Pittsburgh (Pittsburgh: William Penn Ass'n., 1937), foreword.
Not all church supporters opposed horseracing. John Gibson, one of the ten trustees whose names appear on the original charter of the church issued in 1787, placed an advertisement in the Gazette asking his friends to stay at his hotel during the “polite amusement” 21 of the Pittsburgh horse races.

The Pittsburgh races were usually run in the fall of the year on the plain below Grant’s Hill. The first published notice of the races was recorded in the Gazette in 1786 as follows:

Pittsburgh races will commence on Thursday the 19th day of October next, when a purse of One Hundred and Twenty Dollars will be run for, free for any Horse, Mare or Gelding, carrying weight for age (that is, a horse of seven years old to carry ten stone, with a deduction of seven pounds weight for each year he or they shall be younger) Three mile heats, entrance Five Dollars.

On Friday the 20th, will be run for, a purse of Sixty Dollars, free for any Horse, Mare or Gelding, (the horse having won the Purse the preceding day excepted) two mile heats, an aged horse to carry nine stone with the deduction as above, Entrance Three Dollars.

On Saturday the 21st will be run for, a Sweepstake, composed of the entrance money, free for any Horse, Mare or Gelding (the horses having won the purses, excepted) one mile heats, Catching Riders. Three horses start for each Purse or no Race. Horses to start for Purses to be entered with the judge the day preceding the Race, or pay Double Entrance.

The Horses to start precisely at one of the Clock each day. No Jockey will be permitted to ride unless he has some genteel Jockey Habit.22

These three fall days witnessed the emergence of the townspeople from their homes and places of business to the race course. Temporary booths were erected with forked twigs and covered with boughs from trees to serve as refreshment booths. The judges were set upon a scaffold to enable them to see the race clearly above the heads of the onlookers. The spectators were made up of all ages and sexes. Brackenridge recalls that:

... the plain within the course, and near it, was filled with booths as at a fair, where everything was said and done, and sold, and eaten or drunk — where every fifteen or twenty minutes there was a rush to some part, to witness a fisticuff — where dogs barked and bit, and horses trod on men’s toes, and booths fell down on people’s heads! There was Crowder with his fiddle and his votaries, making the dust fly with a four-handed or rather four-footed reel; and a little farther on was Dennis Loughy, the blind poet, like Homer, casting his pearls before swine, chanting his masterpiece, in a tone part nasal and part gutteral, —

“Come, gentleman, gentleman all,
Gen’ral Sincleer shall remem-ber-ed be,
For he lost thirteen hundred men all,
in the Western Tair-to-ree!”

All at once the cry, to horse! to horse! suspended every other business or amusement as effectually as the summons of the faithful. There was a rush

22 Pittsburgh Daily Gazette, September 5, 1786.
toward the starting-post, while many betook themselves to the station best fitted for the enjoyment of the animating sight.\textsuperscript{23}

Horseracing and cock fighting did not exist in Pittsburgh without opposition. The gradual acceptance of religious beliefs and the views of various moralists were made known through the local press. "Z,"\textsuperscript{24} in a letter to the editor of the \textit{Gazette}, called horseracing and cock fighting "... unfriendly to morals and ... the liberties of our country"\textsuperscript{25} because they occasioned idleness, fraud, gaming, profane swearing and hardened the heart against all feelings of humanity. He called for a law forbidding these two diversions in all Christian and republican countries.

Whether any sports continued to exist in the period from 1788 to 1794 is not known because no account is given of any in the available sources. Since no borough laws were passed until 1794 it is assumed that sports were not unlawful but were not well enough attended or participated in to be recorded as newsworthy.

Military order had prohibited the game of long bullets among the soldiers because of the frequent gambling and dangers to the lives of the participants and bystanders which accompanied the games. Religion and public morality did not prohibit, but did dissuade the participation by people in the sports of horseracing, cock fighting and long bullets because of the profanity and gambling which were usually present at these events. It is probable that other objectionable sports such as shuffleboard, bowling and billiards were also played in Pittsburgh during the period between 1775 and 1794. No mention is made of any acceptable sports during this time.

\textbf{Borough and Early City Days: Too Many Odds 1794-1840}

The sports-loving people of Pittsburgh received a sharp blow with the organization of the borough on April 22, 1794. Laws were immediately passed which prohibited engaging in bullet playing, billiards, shuffleboard, cock fighting, horseracing and bowling. The

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\item \textsuperscript{24} This was probably Zadok Cramer, a local publisher, who added a footnote to Cuming's \textit{Sketches of a Tour} (Pittsburgh: Cramer, Spear and Eichbaum, 1810) on page 231 as follows: "We are sorry to have it to acknowledge that horse racing, contrary to an express law of the state, has been more or less practiced within the vicinity of this place a few years back, but are pleased with the prospect of having it totally abolished by the influence of its evident impropriety, operating on the minds of the more thoughtful and judicious."
\item \textsuperscript{25} \textit{Pittsburgh Gazette}, August 16, 1788.
\end{itemize}
fines ranged from three dollars for cock fighting and bullet playing to five hundred dollars for keeping a billiard table.26

Enforcement of these laws was undoubtedly inadequate, for an advertisement appeared in the Gazette on August 27, 1800, noting that the Pittsburgh races would be run on September 15, 16 and 17 on the course in Pittsburgh under the auspices of the Jockey Club.27 The purse for the first race was only sixty dollars as compared with the one hundred and twenty dollar purse offered in 1786.

The borough inhabitants also raced in other towns. Horseracing in McKeesport28 began as early as 1800 when the first notice of an upcoming race appeared in the Gazette.29 The races were run in the same order as the Pittsburgh races but the purses were smaller and no respect was paid to the weight of the rider. It was here that the Pittsburgh Jockey Club moved their races after experiencing failure in the Pittsburgh area.

Horseracing returned to McKeesport in 1801. The purse for the first race was raised from the forty dollars of 1800 to sixty dollars. Alexander Simrall was the appointed starter and the entrance fee was four dollars.30 At least one Pittsburgher, William Irwin, entered the first race, much to his displeasure, as evidenced by his letter to the Gazette on September 25, 1801:

Let no one hereafter expect either justice or pleasure from the Races at M'Kees' Port, if under the direction of the Jockey Club or Judges who presided over the last; although my horse Dancing Master, on every principle of honesty, and agreeable to the rules of racing took the first purse of Sixty Dollars, yet, the Judges wantonly and unjustly gave it in favor of another horse, who had been distanced agreeable to the rules of racing. Should any person dispute the fact, depositions to prove it are lodged in the Office of the Pittsburgh Gazette.31

The Pittsburgh races of that year were held on the course three miles from Pittsburgh on the Allegheny on October 6, 7 and 8.32 The course was outside the limits of the borough but the race maintained its original name. Samuel Mercer of Pittsburgh was the appointed

28 Walter S. Abbott and William E. Harrison, The First One Hundred Years of McKeesport (McKeesport: Press of the McKeesport Times, 1894), 15. "The track ran along Water to Eighth street, then around to near Market street and thence to Second street."
30 Ibid., September 18, 1801.
31 Ibid., September 25, 1801.
32 The area covered by the course is now part of the Arsenal School property in Lawrenceville. This was also referred to later as the course at Two Mile Run.
PITTSBURGH RACES.

On the 22d of October, last, will be run, over a handsome course, near this town, A PURSE OF SEVEN DOLLARS, free for any Horse, Mare, or Gelding, three miles heats, and repeat, carrying weight for age, according to the established rules of racing.

On the 23d, over the same course, for, a PURSE OF FIFTY DOLLARS, two mile heats, and repeat, agreeably to the above rule, free as a gift, the winning horse of the preceding day only excepted.

On the 24th, over the same course, for sweepstakes, three miles heats and repeat, free as above, the winning horses of the two preceding days only excepted.

The Horses to be entered the day preceding each race or double entrance at the post.

Four horses to start, or no race.

Pittsburgh, October 5, 1805.

Announcement of Pittsburgh races of 1805 as it appeared in *The Commonwealth* of October 9, 1805

starter and fee collector. Entrance fees were four dollars for the first day, three dollars for the second day, and two dollars for the third day. Horses were to be entered with Mercer the day before the race or would have to pay double entrance. The Jockey Club noted that "... proper judges will be appointed to determine any dispute that may arise," 33 probably in answer to Irwin's letter of displeasure concerning the McKeesport races.

Although horseracing had been removed from within the borough limits, opposition in the borough was still in evidence. A letter to the editor of the *Gazette*, in opposition to the horse races of 1801, explained that the great evil of the sport was:

... the collection into the town of the most disorderly and unprincipled from all quarters, in their worst habits and moods, with our youth exposed to the contagion of their example, and their importation of frauds, tricks, and debaucheries left among us while our schools or shops are shut up or deserted, and the youth of both sexes run to harm, folly, and debauchery at this fruitful seminary of all vice.34

The letter called on the magistrates of the state and the borough to assert their authority and prohibit horseracing in all areas.

The letter probably found no readers who had the authority to stop the sport for the Pittsburgh races of 1805 were run "... over a

33 *Pittsburgh Gazette*, October 2, 1801.
34 Ibid., October 16, 1801.
handsome course near this town... according to the established rules of racing,” and Cuming, in 1810, wrote that “... there are annual horse races at a course about three miles from town, near the Allegheny, beyond Hill's tavern.”

The sponsors of the McKeesport races of 1811, in an attempt to make their races more principled, mentioned that the jockeys “... must expect to confine themselves to the principles of racing, so far as to avoid any intention of jockeying, jostling, or any thing that may appear unfair.” If horseracing was to remain popular and acceptable to the judicial it had to become respectable.

The Pittsburgh races of that year were run at the Two Mile Run for purses of sixty dollars and thirty dollars plus the sweepstakes which consisted of all the entrance money. No mention is made of the races of 1812 but the races of 1813 were run at Bullocks Pens, near Wilkinsburg, about six miles from Pittsburgh. In this race the prize money was hung on the pole at the finish line each day before the race and the first rider to touch the money was the winner.

Apparently, horseracing was dying a slow death. Notice of the McKeesport races appeared for the last time in the Pittsburgh newspapers in 1815 when the Commonwealth made notice of “... a handsome purse to be run for in M'Keesport, over a handsome course.”

Pittsburgh was incorporated as a city on March 18, 1816, and brought with it more determined city leaders who were intent on keeping the laws. The Moral Society of Pittsburgh announced its support of the civil officers in their attempts to suppress horseracing. The passage of a state law on February 17, 1820, prohibiting horseracing and other “disorderly sports and dissipation” probably aided them.

36 Fortescue Cuming, Sketches of a Tour (Pittsburgh: Cramer, Spear and Eichbaum, 1810), 231.
37 Pittsburgh Gazette, September 27, 1811.
38 Ibid., October 11, 1811.
39 Most newspaper space was devoted to the war with Great Britain in 1812.
40 Marian Silveus, “McNair Correspondence,” Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine, XVIII (September 1935), 248. “Bullocks Pens, more commonly known as Bull Pens, was a small section within the present Wilkinsburg. It was so called because the government had kept cattle for the army there.” James Horner, “Reminiscences of Early Wilkinsburg,” Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine, X (July 1927), 183. Bullocks Pens was the “celebrated hostelry of William Peebles on Penn Ave. in Wilkinsburg.”
42 Ibid., October 14, 1815, Vol. II, No. 8.
43 Ibid., November 26, 1816.
in their venture, for these sports ceased to exist in the Pittsburgh area for over a decade.

All sports during this era were not unlawful. The desire for activities of a sporting nature by the public led to the adoption and development of sports within the law. The popularity of these sports is not known.

One of the sports permitted under borough law was fencing. As early as 1803 a Mr. Arnold opened a school to teach the "... elegant art of fencing." 45 French was also taught in the school which offered fencing lessons four times a week from four to six o'clock in the evening. The terms were eight dollars per quarter for the fencing class. Anthony Colome, in 1812, opened a fencing school at the home of Thomas Algeo on Market Street.46 His class met in two sections, three hours per section, two times a day on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. The tuition, which was to be paid in advance, was one dollar a week.

Other acceptable sports were foot racing and wrestling. These two were mentioned on July 4, 1818, when a group of young men met on one of the surrounding hills "... eager for victory in the race, the throw, the leap and the fall." 47

Hunting and fishing were necessities rather than diversions for most Pittsburghers during this time. One of their favorite hunting areas was situated on an island on the Ohio River about four hundred yards from the place where the Allegheny and Monongahela joined to form the Ohio. Brackenridge recalled that:

It is covered with wood, and at the lower part, is a lofty hill famous for the wild turkeys which inhabit it. The island is not more than one quarter of a mile in length, and in breadth 100 yards.48

The waters of the Allegheny River were:

... high amusement to those who are fond of fishing. The fish of the Alleghany are harder and firmer than those of the Monongahela or Ohio, owing, as is supposed, to the greater coldness and purity of the water. The fish in general of those rivers are good. They are, the pike, weighing frequently 15 or 20 pounds; the perch larger than any I have ever seen in the bay of Chesapeake, which is the only tide from whence I have ever seen perch; there is also the sturgeon and many more kinds of fish.49

45 Pittsburgh Gazette, April 8, 1803, Vol. XVII, No. 866.
46 The Commonwealth, October 13, 1812, Vol. VIII, No. 41.
47 Pittsburgh Gazette, July 10, 1818, Vol. XXXIII, No. 16.
49 Ibid., 9.
The prohibition of the popular sports by city and state laws caused the populace to search for other recreational areas in which to expend their energies. The permissible sports of fencing, foot racing and wrestling probably were not popular for little mention is made of these sports during this period.

Many religious denominations sprang up with their followers being "... attentive on the duties of their worship and but few addicted to gross vices and dissipation." 50 Cramer noted that "the character of the people is that of enterprising and persevering industry; every man to his business is the prevailing maxim, there is therefore little time devoted to amusements." 51

People who did look for amusement acceptable by law found no places where it could be enjoyed.

We have no places even of fashionable resort, or rather, places which polite and fashionable people frequent; where pleasure might be sought and found, or where the useful could be mingled with the agreeable.52

The law, aided by the various religious and moral leaders, had succeeded in ridding the town of places of any type of amusement.

In order to fulfill their needs for competitive sporting activities some took part in clandestine events. These were usually held in a place unknown to the local law officers. The game of "ninepins" was usually played on Bunker Hill which adjoined the city. The penalty for engaging in this game, if caught, was three dollars for every offense.53 Heavy gambling accompanied the game and disputes often arose. The Mercury reported a fight between Joseph Wolff and Thomas McKee over a game of ninepins which "... almost sickens us to describe." 54 Horseracing, cock fighting and dog fighting probably took place in the outlying areas at this time when "... the followers of these sports were cautious enough to leave the confines of the town." 55

In 1835, several of the citizens attempted openly to promote horseracing. The town of twenty-four thousand inhabitants had some sects who were not happy with the conservative view toward sports.

51 Ibid., 66.
52 Samuel Jones, Pittsburgh in the Year 1826 (Pittsburgh: Johnston & Stockton, 1826), 44.
53 By-laws and Ordinances of the City of Pittsburgh (Pittsburgh: Johnston & Stockton, 1828), 307.
54 The Pittsburgh Mercury, August 16, 1826, Vol. XV, No. 737.
The Pittsburgh Association Jockey Club was started in this year and a race was scheduled for the second Tuesday of October. The secretary of the club, who was also editor of the *Manufacturer*, made some uncomplimentary remarks about the office holders of the city, probably decrying their opposition to some sports. The *Mercury* came out in opposition to him, stating:

> However good a judge of "horse flesh" he may be, the people of Allegheny understand the braying of an ass better than to be out-jockeyed by the erudite editor on the second Tuesday of October next.\(^{56}\)

It is not known if the race ever took place.

Some boxing must have been practiced as early as 1836. A match was scheduled to take place and was publicized in advance by placards throughout the city. The event, however, never took place because the Mayor of the city interfered. The *Mercury* mentioned that it "... hoped that this check will put a stop to future displays of this exotic, bulldog nature."\(^ {57}\)

Shooting matches were held but did not gain wide acceptance. One writer in the *Friend* described them as "... hot-beds for intemperance, gambling, swearing, and every vice which follows in train."\(^ {58}\) Possibly the reason for his disdain was that one of his friends had recently been "... hurried instantaneously out of existence by the accidental discharge of a gun at one of these places."\(^ {59}\)

These forty-six years had seen the followers of the law fail and then succeed in their attempts to rid sport of gambling and disorderly participants. The rapid growth of religious denominations had aided the enforcement of city and state laws regarding these elements of sport. With any type of prohibition comes clandestine activities. These were in evidence in Pittsburgh in the form of horseracing, ninepins, boxing, dog fighting and cock fighting. Sports within the law such as fencing and foot racing were probably not very popular. The state and local laws had denied the public of their popular sports. One sport which was acceptable by law was the shooting match which was popular with some but not without objection by others. The pendulum had swung to the end of its continuum. It was time for it to start its swing back toward the compromising middle.

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\(^ {56}\) *The Pittsburgh Mercury*, April 2, 1835, Vol. 23, No. 1196.

\(^ {57}\) Ibid., July 13, 1836, No. 1263.


\(^ {59}\) Ibid.
A Need for Exercise and Competition
Through Sports 1840-1850

The 1840's witnessed a rebirth of some sports and the development of new ones. A growing awareness by the public of the importance of the development of the physical as well as the mental led them to seek it through sports and exercise.

An editorial, stating the need for exercise, appeared on August 6, 1840, as follows:

Throughout all nature, want of motion indicates weakness, corruption, inanimation, and death . . . . An illustrious physician observes, "I know not which is the most necessary to the human frame, food or motion." . . . Were the exercise of the body to be attended to in a corresponding degree, with that of the mind, men of great learning would be more vigorous and healthy . . . the highest refinement of the mind, without improvement of the body, can never present anything more than half a human being.\(^60\)

The Pittsburgh Gymnasium was started in 1840 under the direction of S. Barrett, professor of gymnastic exercise, to provide a place for instruction and exercise. People from five to sixty were invited to attend the exercises which were " . . . arranged to make the figure more graceful." \(^61\) Membership fees per year were six dollars for youths and ten dollars for adults. These were to be paid in advance. Physicians and members of the clergy were admitted free. Hours for practice were from 6 A.M. to 9 P.M. and the German system\(^62\) of gymnastics was taught in addition to infantry and cavalry sword exercises.

While some exercised in the Gymnasium others found exercise on the rivers in the more competitive sport of boat racing. Many boat or barge clubs were founded and racing between the clubs was popular. The Fashion Club and the Col. Black Club were the two largest, each sponsoring several boats. Various classes of boats were raced, being manned by two, four, six or eight oarsmen. The larger boats carried a coxswain. The winning crew was presented with a prize which consisted of money, gold or silver goblets, or a stand of colors.\(^63\)

Races were usually well run by the judges and little, if any, animosity existed among the crews.

There were no angry feelings . . . and but few excuses by either party.

\(^60\) Daily Pittsburgher, August 6, 1840, Vol. II, No. 73.
\(^61\) Ibid., July 9, 1840, No. 49.
\(^62\) Whether or not this was John's system of gymnastics is not recorded. However, the Daily Pittsburgher of July 9, 1840, in observing the form of gymnastics offered, noted: "The public are already informed of the nature of the exercises of the Gymnasium: They know that they were first established in Germany, speedily passed over Europe, were approved in America, and are now adopted in Pittsburgh."
The Black’s crew magnanimously acknowledge their defeat, while the rowers of the Fashion are not loud in their exultations.\textsuperscript{64}

The Fashion Club was probably the most active in competition. Their constant success resulted in many challenges from other clubs since a win over the Fashion would gain the winning club publicity and acceptance as a good crew. Challenges were sent and accepted in a most orderly manner. Each club had a secretary who would send a written challenge to the club they wished to compete against stating the terms and the prize to be contested for. Prizes of money usually ranged from one hundred to two hundred dollars.\textsuperscript{65}

The usual course started and finished beneath the Monongahela bridge. Spectators who could find no places to witness the events from the wharf took places on the bridge. Large crowds usually witnessed the races where “... sedate old men were again boyish in their eagerness ... while the boys — big and little — were in the fullness of joy.”\textsuperscript{66} Betting among the bystanders was popular. “Money was at stake, and in great bulks.”\textsuperscript{67} The \textit{Morning Post} spoke out against the practice, stating: “We wish, by the way, that the betting system would be discarded in these conflicts for mastery.”\textsuperscript{68}

Races also took place between Pittsburgh boats and boats of other river cities. The race between the Pittsburgh boat, \textit{Richard Biddle}, and the Louisville craft, \textit{Grey Eagle}, took place in 1840 for a prize of one thousand dollars. Eight oarsmen plus a coxswain manned the boats over a five-mile course. The \textit{Eagle} beat the \textit{Biddle} by one and a half minutes, running the course in thirty-four minutes. “Louisville is redeemed,”\textsuperscript{69} cried the \textit{Daily Pittsburger}.

Other types of boats raced on the rivers also. Keen rivalry between the steamboats led to memorable races. Explosions were frequent with some loss of life,\textsuperscript{70} but owners and pilots still raced in an

\textsuperscript{64} \textit{Ibid.}, October 1, 1849, Vol. VIII, No. 62.
\textsuperscript{65} See the \textit{Daily Morning Post}, June 13, 1843, Vol. I, No. 235, where the Manchester club challenged the Fashion for one hundred dollars and the Pittsburgh \textit{Morning Post}, August 14, 1843, Vol. I, No. 287, in which the barge clubs, Biddle, King and James were challenged by the Fashion for two hundred dollars.
\textsuperscript{66} \textit{Daily Morning Post}, October 1, 1849, Vol. VIII, No. 62.
\textsuperscript{67} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{68} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{69} \textit{Daily Pittsburger}, October 15, 1840, Vol. II, No. 132.
\textsuperscript{70} See the \textit{Pittsburgh Mercury}, September 21, 1836, Vol. XXII, No. 1273, which referred to the September 8th explosion on the steamboat \textit{Commerce} while racing with the \textit{Paul Jones}, stated: “... Commerce ... burst one of her boilers, killing and scalding a few passengers. These occurrences have become so frequent as scarcely to excite notice.”
effort to prove their boat was fastest and deserving of more business than the defeated.

The races were usually run from city to city. The Messenger No. 2, commanded by Capt. Woodward, in 1849, made the "quickest trip yet" from Cincinnati to Pittsburgh against the Telegraph. The time was forty-four hours and thirteen minutes, thirty-three minutes less than the Telegraph's time. The Telegraph had led at Parkersburg by one hour but the Messenger picked up the hour plus thirty-three minutes between there and Pittsburgh.

At least one boat refused a challenge to race for speed. Concerning a challenge from the Fallston, Adam M'Kee, junior agent for the Cleveland, said:

We desire to say, that we will not accept their challenge for speed as we will positively not race with any boat on the river, but will pledge ourselves to the public to transport freight and passengers with as much safety as any boat in the trade.72

Not to be outdone by the barge clubs and the steamboats, a race occurred between two ferry boats, the Walker and the Worth, in the fall of 1848. The race was held on a Sunday and incurred the wrath of the Morning Post:

We do think the captains or owners of these boats should have consulted the sense of the public before starting upon such an excitement. Our citizens of all classes are generally in favor of duly observing the Sabbath, and any such violation of law and order, as well as of Religion, should be discountenanced.73

A detestable sport to most was racing which took place between the various fire companies of the city. One company would place a fox tail behind their wagon and challenge another company to pass them. A fire alarm was sounded and the race began. The challenged company could claim the fox tail if they passed the challenger. Bystanders and competitors were in danger of their lives during the race. "The members of these companies could not have thought of the many accidents and deaths which have been occasioned by this detestable practice of racing." 74 This was blamed on a few ruffians within the departments which were usually "...so moral and respectable." 75

Of all the sports of the '40's, prize fighting was probably the most objectionable. Called a "beastly affair"76 and a "brutal sport,"77

74 Ibid., June 1, 1849, No. 270.  
75 Ibid., April 16, 1849, No. 230.  
it was likely to be raided by the police. For this reason most events of this type were held in remote spots in town. Few rules, if any, accompanied the bouts and at least one combatant “. . . had one of his ears bitten off, and his arm shockingly lacerated by the teeth of the brute with whom he was engaged.”

Cock fights were also held in places unknown to law officers. One cock pit was in Allegheny where “. . . eight or ten first water loafers were seen passing through . . . on Saturday night, with three or four game cocks along with them.”

For some reason, hog worrying took place without any danger of police interference, for the Post, in 1843, noted: “This sport may be seen all over the city, but the finest exhibition takes place in the 5th ward.”

Military personnel and civilians participated in shooting matches. There were no city or state laws against properly staged shooting matches and prizes ranged from money and watches to rifles and medals. On September 25, 1848, over four hundred persons paid twenty-five cents a shot for a prize of a gold watch worth one hundred dollars in Voegtley’s Hollow. The Morning Post confessed: “The name of the winner we have forgotten.” In 1845, a match was held in Snyder’s Hollow behind the Penitentiary. A sixty dollar rifle was the prize in this match. Both places were in Allegheny, far removed from the dwelling-cluttered confines of Pittsburgh.

While horseracing was illegal under city and state law, public interest in the sport prompted the newspapers to report on races held out of the state. Trotting matches were held within the confines of the city on private courses but these were not publicized. These races were usually the outgrowth of a bet arising at a party or ball on the estate where the private course existed.

Public horseracing, though still unlawful, commenced in 1848 at a course in East Liberty. The public was slow to welcome the re-

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78 Pittsburgh Morning Post, August 21, 1843, Vol. I, No. 293.
80 Ibid., June 30, 1843, No. 227.
81 The Chronicle, July 4, 1845; Daily Morning Post, September 25, 1848, Vol. VIII, No. 57; and Ibid., September 24, 1849, Vol. VIII, No. 56.
83 The Chronicle, July 4, 1845.
newal of the sport in their own backyard. The Post made mention of several accidents which occurred at the races in objecting to the rebirth of horseracing:

We have heard of several accidents having occurred at the races since the commencement of the sport. On Saturday a lad about fourteen was thrown from a horse in the neighborhood, and almost killed. An old gentleman named Bahoup had his leg broken by some horses coming in collision with a buggy — he being mixed up with them in some way. There were others who had limbs broken, heads scraped, and eyes blacked. But such things will be when folks turn out to drive away care and enjoy the world in its looseness.86

Another type of racing was foot racing. It did not reach its prominence until the '50's but the Post made mention of a man named Chaplin who ran a mile in four minutes and nineteen seconds on the Beacon Course in Long Island, New York.87 A local race did take place in 1845 between the editors of two Pittsburgh newspapers, the Chronicle and the Ariel. The Post jokingly mentioned that the race would give an "exhibition of heels, legs and bottom." 88 The race took place on the St. Clair Street bridge. Tobey of the Ariel ran the distance of forty-one rods in twenty-nine seconds, one second ahead of Whitney of the Chronicle.

A novel race took place between a salesman in a mercantile house and a horse at the course in East Liberty in 1849. No account is given as to who won the race but a sum of money was "... transferred from one pocket to another." 89

Billiard playing returned to the city in 1849 minus the gambling which had made it unlawful previously. Messrs. Chestnut and Armstrong opened billiard rooms on Fourth Street near Smithfield Street. The Post called billiards "... one of the most pleasing and healthful exercises that a gentleman can possibly indulge in." 90 The establishment was not unlawful for it was not erected for "... the purpose of gaming for money, or other valuable thing." 91

The 1840's witnessed the need for exercise and the building of a gymnasium to accomplish this purpose. The need for competition was exhibited by the many racing sports that took place. While some such as horseracing, steamboat racing and ferry boat racing did not require much exertion on the part of the human participant, they did fulfill

86 Daily Morning Post, June 20, 1848, Vol. VI, No. 287.
87 Pittsburgh Morning Post, July 12, 1845, Vol. III, No. 263.
88 Ibid., August 5, 1845, No. 283.
89 Daily Morning Post, October 6, 1849, Vol. VIII, No. 67.
91 By-laws and Ordinances of the City of Pittsburgh (Pittsburgh: Johnston & Stockton, 1828), 307.
the need for competition. Other racing sports which satisfied both the exercise and the competitive facets were foot racing and oared boat racing.

The sport of prize fighting found some participants, either as competitors or spectators. The physical needs of exercise were undoubtedly met in the competitors but it was socially unacceptable to take part in this sport. Billiard playing did not meet the exercise requirements but fulfilled the competitive desires of some gentlemen and was socially acceptable.

Cock fighting, hog worrying, and fire wagon racing met the competitive desires of some but were not lawful and did not satisfy the majority of the citizens. These sports, plus horseracing, though not acceptable by law, existed because of the liberal attitudes expressed by some of the citizens.

Sporting life in Pittsburgh once more made its entrance. It remained for those interested to make all sports lawful and rid the city of the objectionable elements of some sports.

(To be continued)