POINT STATE PARK AND THE FORT PITT MUSEUM
CHARLES MORSE STOTZ

From their seats of power in Paris and London two foreign nations contested for the land beyond the mountains in the New World.

The native owner of this land, the Indian, was now an ally, now an enemy, but always the tragic figure in the unequal struggle.

All three were victors in their time, all three losers in the end.

[These lines were written both as introduction and postscript to the story portrayed in the Fort Pitt Museum. It is ironical that we today should possess the country, so aptly termed “delectable,” over which these antagonists once struggled. Their conflict was a bitter one. In retrospect it seems picturesque to us. Their arms, their dress, their customs, their frontier forts and buildings, their grand plans for conquest as well as their informal moments of relaxation, all these things form the subject matter of the museum exhibits.

This is the story of the French and Indian War in what is now western Pennsylvania. The American Revolution touched the local scene but lightly. This first of two articles is concerned with the historical events that are memorialized in the Fort Pitt Museum and an account of the creation of Point State Park which made the museum a practical reality. A subsequent article with illustrations will present a detailed review of the exhibits themselves. C.M.S.]

WITH the formal opening of the Fort Pitt Museum on June 30, 1969, another significant step has been taken toward the completion of Point State Park. As presently scheduled the Point and Manchester Bridges will be razed within the coming year. Work will then start on the very last phase, the construction of the great basin and fountain at the tip of the Point. The entire area of the downtown Triangle will then focus upon this exciting column of water, rising 150 feet in the air. The removal of the bridges, at long last, will reveal the full and dramatic sweep of the hills and

Mr. Stotz, a Fellow of the American Institute of Architects and an officer of this Society, has been a valued contributor to The Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine through the years.—Editor
rivers, little changed in their conformation since the white man established himself at the Forks of the Ohio over two hundred years ago. Point State Park will then take its place among the great city parks of the world, unique in its spectacular setting and rich in historical background.

This is the first of two articles, written in recognition of the new Fort Pitt Museum which is a memorial to the founding of Pittsburgh and a record of its first half century. This article is concerned with the progress of the Park to this time and the evolution of the Fort Pitt Museum within it.

This little triangle of land was brought into sharp international focus in the mid-eighteenth century when it became a prize of critical importance in the worldwide contest for empire between France and England.

To protect their possessions, extending inland from Quebec to New Orleans, the French here made their decisive move to intercept English westward expansion. By seizing the Virginians' little Fort Prince George in 1754 and by building Fort Duquesne on its site, the French established control of the Ohio Valley until 1758. For these four years, this little settlement was a French town that Louis XV hoped to make the permanent capital of his lands beyond the Allegheny Mountains.

After two major military expeditions, the English routed the French and hastily constructed a small temporary fort to secure their hard-won prize. The English had realized, belatedly, that the Ohio River, born at the tip of this triangle, was the open road to the vast interior of the continent and that the nation controlling this natural highway controlled the future of the land. Hence they proceeded to build their most substantial and costly stronghold in America, naming it Fort Pitt and the place Pittsburgh in honor of the prime minister in London who had finally brought success to British arms.

It transpired that the Forks of the Ohio nourished the seeds of a great city. These hills with their rich minerals and these broad rivers were the source of Pittsburgh's ever increasing eminence in transportation, commerce, and industry. It was inevitable that the people should eventually seek to make a suitable memorial at the meeting of the Allegheny and Monongahela rivers.

Beginning in 1838, when Mayor Jonas E. McClintock's proposals to build a memorial park at The Point were frustrated by the demands of river and land traffic, successive generations sought to achieve this end; the project has had more plans offered for its solution over
the years than any other in the Pittsburgh region. The Point remained in modern times a blighted area containing several hundred nondescript buildings and a sprawling freight terminal that surrounded and submerged the one simple, distinguished remnant of our first days — the Blockhouse. This redoubt, one of five that originally stood on the perimeter of Fort Pitt, is the oldest authenticated structure in western Pennsylvania. Miraculously preserved from its construction in 1764, it has been saved for us by the Daughters of the American Revolution and is, of course, the brightest jewel in the new park setting.

Finally, in 1945, the Pittsburgh Regional Planning Association under the leadership of Richard K. Mellon authorized Charles M. Stotz and Ralph E. Griswold to make the definitive study of the lower-triangle area that established the essential features of the park. Their plans, refined through subsequent studies over the intervening years in association with the firm of Clarke and Rapuano, were finally incorporated in plans and specifications prepared for the General State Authority by Charles M. and Edward Stotz, architect and engineer in association with Griswold, Winters and Swain, landscape architects. The work was let in several contracts, between 1963 and 1968. Illustration No. 1 presents an aerial view of the park. The general layout of the park is shown in Illustration No. 6.

This successful culmination of the Point project was the product of many hands, working in harmony over the years toward a single end. Other cities and countries have marveled at the many accomplishments — of which Point Park is but one — of the guiding organization, the Allegheny Conference on Community Development, and have sent delegations to Pittsburgh or have asked that representatives of the Conference visit them, to learn how we in Pittsburgh have accomplished so much in the years since the last war. The Conference at the request of Governor Edward Martin established the Point Park Committee in 1945 to lead the Point project to its successful conclusion. Composed of leaders in business, industry, and commerce as well as the heads of city, county, and state governments, this Committee has served without personal or political prejudice or discord under the able chairmanship of Arthur B. Van Buskirk since its formation.

At the very beginning the basic decision was made to maintain a simple, unified park of monumental sweep, uncluttered by buildings and monuments or any graveyard of memorials and statues. The hills and rivers, little changed by man since the early days, provide a
majestic memorial far more impressive than any man-made monument.

The park design recognizes three basic elements: the highways, the rivers, and the fort sites. While considering the aesthetic and historical aspects of the problem, it was vitally necessary to solve the needs of modern traffic and of the living city. To provide the necessary traffic interchanges it was found necessary to remove the bridges at The Point and to build new and more adequate ones some nine hundred feet upstream. Regrettably, this made the full-scale total restoration of Fort Pitt impossible, but it did provide an eighteen-acre, open park area at The Point itself and another eighteen-acre park area between the highway structures and Commonwealth Place.

The Park is under the jurisdiction of the Pennsylvania Department of Forests and Waters and is properly known as Point State Park. By special arrangement, the Museum within the Monongahela Bastion is administered by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission.

The aerial view (Illustration No. 1) shows the plan layout of the park and its relationship to the traffic system, the downtown triangle buildings and the new buildings in the 23-acre Gateway Center, developed by the Urban Redevelopment Authority under the devoted leadership of the late David L. Lawrence during his tenures as mayor of Pittsburgh and governor of Pennsylvania.

Point State Park begins in front of the Hilton Hotel at Commonwealth Place, from each end of which two broad curving walkways lead to the vaulted opening known as the Portal beneath the highway. The Portal forms the sole entrance to and exit from the park for pedestrians and only those vehicles required in park maintenance. These two walkways enclose the Music Bastion of Fort Pitt, shown in Illustration No. 2.

The ground has been excavated to expose the existing foundations of the original brick walls of Fort Pitt. A small portion of the first four feet of brick masonry has been preserved. Where foundations of buildings erected in modern times have cut away the original brick walls, they have been replaced with brick of identical character. All of the original stone footings remain in place. The visitor may enter this depressed area by a staircase and walk beside the wall. The Flag Bastion (see Illustration No. 6) was reconstructed in 1959.

There is a broad plaza at the eastern end of the Portal, flanked by flags of the United States and Pennsylvania. Large forest trees have been planted on each side of the eastern face of the Portal to
POINT STATE PARK
PITTSBURGH - PENNSYLVANIA

SCALE IN FEET

STOTZ, HESS & MACLACHLAN, ARCHITECTS
GRISWOLD, WINTERS & SWAIN, LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS
FOR THE PENNSYLVANIA DEPARTMENT OF FORESTS & WATERS
frame this feature of the park entrance. When the fountain has been completed it will be seen through the Portal arch on the axis of the Park. The Portal consists of three vaults, 160 feet long and 22 feet high. These vaults are brilliantly illuminated at night by six powerful floodlights located in ornamental basins at the bases of the vaults. The entire area below the vaults is occupied by a shallow pool with a decorative bottom formed of large river cobbles stones set in a fish-scale pattern. This was done to provide an attractive appearance when the water is drained out in the winter. A slightly arched pedestrian bridge, forty feet wide, spans the pool from the eastern to the western plazas.

Illustration No. 3 shows a view toward The Point from the elevated highway. Two areas of forest trees flank the broad sweep of open lawn leading to the monumental 150-foot-high column of water formed by the fountain in its basin at the tip of the triangle. This fountain, symbolizing the water of the rivers that gave Pittsburgh its meaning, will be the very climax and principal feature of the park design.

About halfway down the open area lie the outlines of Fort Duquesne, shown by paths of stone set in the lawn. The center of this tracery is occupied by a large circular bronze marker engraved with the plan of Fort Duquesne taken from the only authentic drawing of the fort, now preserved in the Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris. The stone-paved wharf at the margin of the river has been completed for some years. Most Pittsburghers have enjoyed the concerts of the Wind Symphony and other presentations from the stone steps of the Allegheny River front. An Overlook in the western section on the left of the Portal affords a vantage point from which visitors may look over the lower park and down the Allegheny and Ohio rivers. The monumental scale of the park will not be fully appreciated until the bridges and ramp have been removed, thus permitting a full view of the broad Ohio and the hills beyond.

Illustration No. 4 shows the view looking back toward the city with the Portal and western Plaza on the left and, on the right, the Blockhouse which stands unchanged on its original site, and the Monongahela Bastion which contains the Fort Pitt Museum.

When the visitor reaches the western Plaza he may ascend a gentle ramp to the top of the Bastion, walk the ramparts, examine the cannon in their embrasures, and view the surrounding landscape from the same vantage point as the sentry of other days.

The original park plans, made in 1945, included a modern struc-
ture to house the museum exhibits. The architect, who was also serving as historian, was among the first to agree that the broad sweep of the park should not be interrupted by buildings, even though interior museum space was required. Both purposes were accomplished by creating a large space within the Monongahela Bastion which was to be restored on its original site. There remained two problems to solve. This Bastion was originally a solid mound of earth, without the masonry facing of the eastern fort front. Since it would obviously be impossible to maintain an earth front on a permanent building, it was decided to reconstruct the Monongahela Bastion with the same masonry ramparts used on the eastern side of the fort. There was ample space within the Bastion for museum purposes. The construction is of heavy concrete supporting four feet of earth above.

The completely irregular shape of the Monongahela Bastion, dictated by the plan of Fort Pitt made by Lieutenant Elias Meyer in 1761, was faithfully followed by the architect. The odd shape of the interior led to much study to provide a practical plan, without sacrificing aesthetic considerations. The involved arrangement of the sixty exhibits may be seen in the cut-away view, Illustration No. 5. To further complicate matters it was mandatory that the cases be designed and put under contract before the exhibits they were to contain had been determined.

The visitor enters through a vestibule that is served by a gift shop and the office of the caretaker of the Blockhouse, and thence into the William Pitt Memorial Hall. This Hall is designed with a widening effect to create a climax at the curving wall at the end, upon which will be placed a mural, 55 feet wide and 12 feet high. This painting is being made by Harry Jackson at his studio near Lucca, Italy. It is to be installed later this year. Jackson also designed the brilliant glass mosaic floor panels depicting the soldier, settler, trader, missionary, Indian and riverman. The circular enclosure in the center of the hall contains a model of Fort Pitt and its immediate environs, 15 feet in diameter. A spoken description may be heard by lifting the earphones that hang on the enclosing rail. The arms of William Pitt are executed in glass mosaic on the floor at the entrance to the Memorial Hall. Because of the difficulty in obtaining a correct version of Pitt's arms, the College of Arms in London was commissioned to prepare a colored drawing of authentic character. The frieze of the eastern wall of the Memorial Hall contains the famous statement made by George Washington when he visited the Point on November 22, 1753. "... I spent some Time in viewing the Rivers, and the Land
in the Fork; which I think extremely well situated for a Fort, . . .” And on the western wall an extract from a letter written by General John Forbes to Prime Minister William Pitt. “Pittsburgh, 27th November 1758. . . I have used the freedom of giving your name to Fort Du Quesne, . . .”

From the Memorial Hall one gains access to the administrative offices and the board room. Upon entering the museum area one finds on his left the entrance to a Meeting Room with seats for eighty-four persons. This will be used as an information center for lectures, film presentations and demonstrations. Regular visitation will be arranged for school groups. The Bastion contains a delivery room, work and storage area, heating and air conditioning facilities, a work-in-progress space and a small gallery for traveling shows and special exhibitions.

The second article, to appear in the next issue, will describe the exhibits, their story line and illustrations which could not be obtained in the brief time between the opening of the museum and the preparation of this article. It may be of interest now, however, to explain the working arrangements for the accomplishment of this project.

The General State Authority, acting for the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, executed a professional agreement in 1966 with Stotz, Hess and MacLachlan, architects, to design, place under contract, and supervise the construction of the exhibits for the Fort Pitt Museum. The immediate direction of the work was assigned to Charles M. Stotz, who recommended that a negotiated contract be made with Holiday Displays. This was done by The General State Authority. Harold and Raymond Yoest who had immediate direction of the work for Holiday Displays and Stotz had worked together some years before on the exhibits for the Fort Ligonier Museum which has attracted favorable nationwide attention.

The successful prosecution of this type of work requires close and continuous collaboration between architect and contractor. In this project the architect has been required to go beyond the design of the building and the cases and rooms that contain the exhibits; he has acted in the capacity of curator in developing the historical story line to suit the sequence of cases, rooms and dioramas, write captions and scripts for mechanical recording, do historical research and prepare scale drawings of the full-size rooms, fort models and general design of the exhibits themselves. The Yoest brothers have contributed much from their long experience in museum preparation, craftsmanship, model and diorama construction and study of historical costume, arms, implements and the like.
Illustration No. 1
Aerial view of the completed Point State Park.
Illustration No. 2

View of the Portal from the Hilton Hotel, Commonwealth Place, with walls of Music Bastion in the foreground.
Illustration No. 3

View from the elevated highway looking toward the fountain and tracery of Fort Duquesne.
Illustration No. 4

View toward the city with Blockhouse on the right, and the Monongahela Bastion which contains the Fort Pitt Museum.
The architect organized an historical advisory committee chosen from the staff of the Historical and Museum Commission and the Point Park Steering Committee of the Allegheny Conference on Community Development, consisting of the following persons:


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Comment by Stanton Belfour
President of The Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania

It is indeed fitting that Charles Stotz records the genesis of Point State Park and the Fort Pitt Museum which was dedicated recently. A great deal of planning, research, and decision has been given to this concept since 1945. I have been involved in these deliberations over the years and can attest that Mr. Stotz’s statement should be recorded for the annals of the City.

There are very few architectural historians available to implement what has been envisioned here. Pittsburgh and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania are fortunate in having Charles Stotz as a citizen and resident of the area. He has travelled widely in England, France, and Canada to obtain all necessary information involving military architecture and the ancillary information about coastal and frontier forts. The result is the military museum about the rise and falling apart of Fort Pitt. It is a great story of the French and Indian War. It is important because it determined that the Cross of St. George rather than the Lilies of France would determine the kind of civilization we have in the Upper Ohio Valley.