

roads, technology, management, American folkways, and the upper Ohio and Beaver River valleys.

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The Shaping of the Point: Pittsburgh's Renaissance Park. By ROBERT C. ALBERTS. (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1980. Pp. xvi, 247. List of illustrations, preface, acknowledgments, notes, bibliographical essay, index. \$12.95.)

To the Point we have come so often. Its vast historical importance, its aesthetic eminence in the panorama of the confluence of the rivers seem bound to be apostrophized by pious Pittsburghers — “Gate of Destiny . . . Star of the West!” Yes, but even the devout may find their interest waning — familiarity breeds not so much contempt as ennui. There are times when I, who will yield to no one in my official admiration for the Point, feel that I would like to yap if asked for one more encomium in its praise.

If you, Pittsburgh reader, have felt, at moments, twitches of boredom — get this book! It is the latest and the best contribution to the glory and the mystique of the Point and it will surely revive the interest of the most jaded. There is no doubt that this volume has been, as they say in the trade, “long needed.” Although the research and the groundwork are solid and thorough, this compact publication is written in a lively and bright journalistic style that should appeal to all Pittsburghers whatever their approach to history.

Although the author's main concern is the construction of the park, he is also profoundly concerned with the Point itself. Following his account of how he came to undertake the commission for the book, he discusses the significance of the Point in American history. From George Washington's first view of the confluence in November 1753 to the American Revolution, he gives a succinct account of the French and British military actions that assured the Point its glamorous reputation. After 1800, the Point settled down to being merely part of Pittsburgh, and a very ambiguous, commercial, and begrimed part — with various mutations — it remained until early in the twentieth century, when an aroused city consciousness began to demand change.

In 1836, Mayor Jonas McClintock had proposed a park at the Point and visitors had wondered audibly about the area's sorry

condition. Frederick Law Olmsted in 1910 was the first to make a design for the Point, and in 1914 the Municipal Art Commission presented another scheme, but nothing came of these efforts. Some improvements were made in the Triangle in the 1920s, and in the 1930s, planners like Frederick Bigger and Wallace Richards became interested in the Point area. These men were very important in helping to establish the park. In 1939, the Pittsburgh Regional Planning Association retained Robert Moses, commissioner of parks and parkways of New York City, to investigate conditions in the Triangle. As a result of all this activity, a certain impetus was given to the park movement, but in 1941 the Second World War brought everything to a halt.

Some groundwork was done during the war to prepare the way for the park and other improvements, but it was not until 1945-1946 that the Pittsburgh Renaissance machinery really got going. There is no space in this brief review to go into details of the multitudinous events in connection with the formation of the park, particularly the alliance between David L. Lawrence, Democratic machine politician, and Richard K. Mellon, the great banker, as well as the creation of the Allegheny Conference on Community Development, the remarkable organization that literally pulled Pittsburgh out of its lethargic decay and gave it once more a position of pride and importance.

Once the site of the park was established, design work on the area went on through the late 1940s. Ralph E. Griswold, the prominent local landscape architect, with Charles M. Stotz, a well-known Pittsburgh architect, together produced a plan that, after some modifications, was adopted by the conference. The plan as it finally evolved is a nice compromise of utility, archeology, and amenity; the "moved-back" bridges, the reconstructed remnants of the forts, the flowing ramps and artfully planted paths, the great, low-vaulted portal arch, and the long open vista to the west, all contribute to making the park a masterpiece of what I call the new Mechanistic Baroque.

The park was sufficiently finished to become the centerpiece for the Pittsburgh bicentennial celebration of 1958. There had been some doubt in the past that Pittsburghers would use the park but, after the bicentennial, such fears were laid to rest. The Fort Pitt Museum, constructed from one of the vanished bastions of Fort Pitt, was opened in 1969, only to be closed again in June 1972 when Hurricane Agnes struck and it was flooded. After a thorough renovation it opened again in 1974. Among the humorous sidelights of the book are the minor events in connection with the development of the park:

the state of Pennsylvania's altercation with the Pittsburgh Chapter of the D.A.R. over the Blockhouse (Bouquet's Redoubt) and the battle to save the old bridges at the Point. Alberts's anecdotal vivacity contributes much to the pleasure of reading his account.

The final demolition of the ancient bridges mentioned above made way for the culminating feature of the park—the great columnar fountain — that elegant “logo” which now signals Pittsburgh's presence to the world. It was dedicated in 1974 and a description of its dedication introduces the bright processional text of Alberts's dedicated book.

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