

# Early Printing in Pittsburgh, 1786-1856

By Audrey Abbott Iacone

*'All that mankind has done, thought, gained or been: it is lying as in magic preservation in the pages of books.'* — Thomas Carlyle

JOHANN Gutenberg's invention in 1453 of movable metal type spawned a revolution. His techniques spread rapidly from Mainz to other cities in Germany, and soon, throughout Europe. Recognized as a major innovation of man, this invention had tremendous impact on the course of human events. Once the art of printing arrived in the New World, it travelled ever westward — never many steps behind the earliest pioneers. Eventually, Gutenberg's invention arrived in Pittsburgh.

Before the Revolutionary War, Pittsburgh was a small village sleeping on the fringe of civilization, but with the conclusion of the conflict, the citizens crowded on the eastern coast turned their eyes westward to the open lands just over the Allegheny Mountains. Pittsburgh, nestled where the Allegheny and Monongahela rivers meet to form the Ohio, was a natural gateway to the vast lands that lay to the West. Over roughly a half-century, Pittsburgh became an important publishing center, crucial in the dissemination of written material to frontier areas. The Library of the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania has a number of publications from this period. The following sketch of Pittsburgh's early publishing community places some of these works in historic context. (Those works in the Historical Society's collection are denoted by HSWP.)

Among the early settlers to Pittsburgh was Hugh Henry Brackenridge, a Philadelphia lawyer of tremendous insight and vision. Arriving in 1781, he saw great opportunity in Pittsburgh and felt that the tiny hamlet of less than 40 log houses "would one day be a town of note."<sup>1</sup> He quickly decided that Pittsburgh's potential would not be realized without a means to advertise it. In 1786, when Pittsburgh's population scarcely numbered 300, he enticed two young printers from Philadelphia to come set up a printing shop.

Audrey A. Iacone is the Librarian at the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania. *Opposite page:* One of the city's large bookstores announces its new location after the great fire of 1845.

John Scull and Joseph Hall, both 21, accepted the invitation and carried their printing equipment over the mountains to establish the first printing press west of the Alleghenies.<sup>2</sup> Thus began a fascinating association between Brackenridge and the publishing community of Pittsburgh. Indeed, Brackenridge was not only responsible for encouraging the city's first press, but played a part in promoting many of the early publishers in the region.

At the corner of Water Street and Chancery Lane, Scull and Hall issued the first weekly newspaper, *Pittsburgh Gazette* (HSWP) on July 29, 1786. This pioneer press encountered many obstacles in obtaining materials and in distribution. Since the printing office was also the first post office, the problems of distribution were perhaps reduced; however, troubles with the Indians in Western Pennsylvania affected distribution, and these conditions persisted until 1794, especially in areas west and northwest of the town. As a consequence, the early settlers (and subscribers) lived mostly in the east and southeast.<sup>3</sup>

Scull and Hall also published a number of books and pamphlets. For example, they reproduced in pamphlet form a Fourth of July oration by Major William Jackson, given in Philadelphia. No known copies of this first Pittsburgh pamphlet exist today.<sup>4</sup>

Joseph Hall died shortly after his arrival in Pittsburgh. The *Gazette* announced his passing on November 18, 1786, reporting that he died at age 22 after a short illness. Brackenridge continued as a patron of the fledgling newspaper, contributing articles and probably financial assistance as well. Scull persisted in the enterprise, forming a brief partnership with John Boyd of Philadelphia, on the advice of Brackenridge. The *Gazette* announced the partnership on January 6, 1787.<sup>5</sup>

In May, 1787, the firm of Scull and Boyd published *The ABC with the Shorter Catechism*, and soon followed with Pittsburgh's first almanac, encouraged by Brackenridge; the *Gazette* announced the sale of the *Pittsburgh Almanac, or Western Ephemeris, For the*

1846

Removed to No. 39 Market Street.

# JOHNSTON & STOCKTON, BOOKSELLERS, PRINTERS & BOOKBINDERS,

Corner of Market and Third Streets, Pittsburgh,

Have always on hand,  
Most of the Popular  
**CLASS BOOKS**

USED IN  
**Schools & Colleges**

Throughout the Union;

**BOOKS**  
For School Libraries

AND  
For Teachers' Libraries;

A general assortment of

**DAY-BOOKS, LEGERES,**

Journals, Cash, Invoice,  
Letter, Receipt, Memorandum,

AND OTHER

**BLANK BOOKS,**  
Of Various

**STYLES OF BINDING;**  
Quarto, Packet, Commercial and  
Folio Post, Cap, Bill and  
Wrapping

**PAPERS;**

Steel Pens, Quills, Ink,  
And all other articles of

**STATIONERY,**

Suitable  
For the Counting Room.

Family, Pocket and School

**BIBLES;**

AND

**PRAYER BOOKS,**

TOGETHER WITH  
A large assortment of Books

IN THE  
Various Departments

OF  
**Science & Literature.**

They also execute

**BOOK AND JOB  
PRINTING,**

In Gold, Black and Fancy Colors,

WITH DESPATCH; SUCH AS  
Mercantile and Visiting

**CARDS,**

CHECKS, CIRCULARS,

**BILLS OF LADING,**

Bills of Exchange, Promissory Notes,

**STEAM BOAT BILLS,**

Steam Boat Registers & other Blanks,

**CANAL BILLS,**

Dray Tickets,

**CANAL & RAIL ROAD BLANKS,**

**STAGE BILLS,**

Bill Heads, Invitations,

**LABELS,**

Magistrates' Blanks,

DEEDS, MORTGAGES,

**HAND BILLS, &c.**

ALSO,

**BOOKS & PAMPHLETS,**

Printed on the most reasonable terms.

**PAPER RULING,**

AND

**BOOK BINDING,**

In all its various branches.

1846.	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	1846.	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
January.	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	July.	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
	11	12	13	14	15	16	17		12	13	14	15	16	17	18
	18	19	20	21	22	23	24		19	20	21	22	23	24	25
	25	26	27	28	29	30	31		26	27	28	29	30	31	
Februa.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	August.	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
	8	9	10	11	12	13	14		9	10	11	12	13	14	15
	15	16	17	18	19	20	21		16	17	18	19	20	21	22
	22	23	24	25	26	27	28		23	24	25	26	27	28	29
March.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Septem.	30	31	1	2	3	4	5
	8	9	10	11	12	13	14		6	7	8	9	10	11	12
	15	16	17	18	19	20	21		13	14	15	16	17	18	19
	22	23	24	25	26	27	28		20	21	22	23	24	25	26
April.	29	30	31	1	2	3	4	Octob.	27	28	29	30	31	1	2
	5	6	7	8	9	10	11		4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	12	13	14	15	16	17	18		11	12	13	14	15	16	17
	19	20	21	22	23	24	25		18	19	20	21	22	23	24
	26	27	28	29	30				25	26	27	28	29	30	31
May.	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Novem.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	10	11	12	13	14	15	16		8	9	10	11	12	13	14
	17	18	19	20	21	22	23		15	16	17	18	19	20	21
	24	25	26	27	28	29	30		22	23	24	25	26	27	28
June.	31	1	2	3	4	5	6	Decemb.	29	30	1	2	3	4	5
	7	8	9	10	11	12	13		6	7	8	9	10	11	12
	14	15	16	17	18	19	20		13	14	15	16	17	18	19
	21	22	23	24	25	26	27		20	21	22	23	24	25	26
	28	29	30						27	28	29	30	31		

1847.

1847.	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	1847.	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
January.	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	March.	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
	10	11	12	13	14	15	16		14	15	16	17	18	19	20
	17	18	19	20	21	22	23		21	22	23	24	25	26	27
	24	25	26	27	28	29	30		28	29	30	31			
Februa.	31	1	2	3	4	5	6	April.	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	7	8	9	10	11	12	13		11	12	13	14	15	16	17
	14	15	16	17	18	19	20		18	19	20	21	22	23	24
	21	22	23	24	25	26	27		25	26	27	28	29	30	

## BANKS.

**Bank of Pittsburgh.**—Capital \$1,200,000.—President, John Graham.—Cashier, John Snyder.—Directors, C. Anshutz, Geo. Hogg, Malcolm Leech, David Shields, John Irwin, Geo. A. Berry, D. T. Morgan, C. F. Spang, John Bissell, Lewis Hutchison, Alex. Laughlin, G. W. Jackson.  
DISCOUNT DAYS, Wednesday and Saturday.

**Merchants & Manufacturers' Bank.**—Capital \$600,000.—President, Thomas Scott.—Cashier, William H. Denny.—Directors, Geo. R. White, F. G. Bailey, G. E. Warner, J. W. Burbridge, P. McCormick, Morris Jones, John Anderson, R. C. Townsend, J. H. Shoenberger, Wilson McCandless, R. Galway, W. Morrison.  
DISCOUNT DAYS, Monday and Thursday.

**Exchange Bank of Pittsburgh.**—Capital \$1,000,000.—President, Wm. Robinson, Jr.—Cashier, Thos. M. Howe.—Directors, G. A. Bayard, Morgan Robertson, Wm. Lippincott, James Anderson, Tobias Myers, Wm. McCully, Harman Denny, Harvey Childs, B. A. Fahnestock, S. Stoner, George Weyman, James R. Dick.  
DISCOUNT DAYS, Tuesday and Friday.

**Farmers' Deposit Bank.**—Capital \$200,000, privileged to increase to \$500,000.—President, J. Marshall.—Cashier, Thompson Bell.—Directors, Joseph Long, Joseph Love, Robt. Knox, J. Carson, John Dean, J. Painter.  
DISCOUNT DAY, Tuesday.

## EXCHANGE BROKERS.

**N. HOLMES & SON, Bankers and Brokers,** No. 53 Market Street, one door below 4th.

**SIBBET & JONES, Bankers & Brokers,** corner of Wood and Fourth Streets.

**WM. A. HILL & Co. Bankers and Exchange Brokers,** No. 64 Wood Street, one door from N. E. corner of 4th.

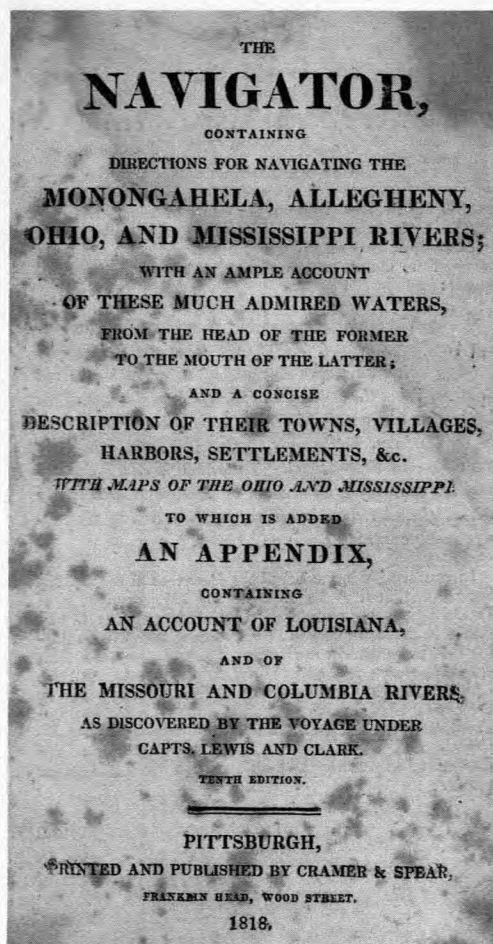
**WARRICK MARTIN & Co. Exchange Brokers,** N. E. corner of Wood and Third Streets.

**ALLEN KRAMER, Exchange Broker & Banker,** S. W. corner of Wood and Third Streets.

**J. W. ROBERTSON & Co. Bankers & Brokers,** St. Charles Hotel Buildings, corner of Wood & 3d Sts.

**WM. LARIMER, Jr. Exchange and Money Broker,** one door from Bank of Pittsburgh, Fourth Street.

**W. S. HARRIS, Exchange Broker,** corner of Wood Street and Virgin Alley.



Title page from Zadok Cramer's *The Navigator*. Published in 1801, this famous river guide was almost indispensable to settlers traveling west through Pittsburgh.

mountains. When his supplies did not arrive in time, Scull had to obtain cartridge paper from the nearby military post. In June, 1797, the publisher announced that this problem had been alleviated by the recently built Jackson and Sharpless paper mill on Redstone Creek in Fayette County; this also reduced the subscription price.

In 1793, Scull published Volume III of Hugh Henry Brackenridge's *Modern Chivalry*, the first novel printed in Pittsburgh. John McCulloch had printed volumes I and II in Philadelphia in 1792. Volume IV appeared in 1797. One of the earliest examples of American fiction, this picaresque novel relates the adventures of Captain John Farrago and his trusty servant, Teague O'Regan. Although this popular book appeared in 10 editions in the first half of the nineteenth century, the Pittsburgh edition remains relatively rare.

Scull undertook the printing of the laws of the U.S. government in 1799. He did not print them within

*Year of our Lord, 1788.* This is the earliest known Pittsburgh imprint extant today.

In July, 1788, Boyd attempted to establish a circulating library, having a goal of 500 volumes as well as the newest American magazines, but this enterprise was never realized. The next month, the partnership ended when Boyd hung himself; the reasons for his suicide are not known.<sup>6</sup>

Scull continued the firm by himself until 1816. He endured many frustrations; subscribers were slow to pay; sources for articles and financing were limited; paper was scarce and expensive since it had to be carried over the

the columns of the newspaper, but took a unique approach. For six months, the *Gazette* published laws on the last two pages of each issue. The pages could then be detached by the reader and folded into an eight-page pamphlet with consecutively numbered pages. Eventually all the pamphlets could be bound together into a permanent book.

As westward migration increased, so did the population of the city, and John Scull's printing office grew and prospered with Pittsburgh. After his retirement in 1816 — he died February 8, 1828 — the firm continued under the guidance of his son John Irwin Scull, working with Morgan Neville. The young Scull sold to William Eichbaum and Samuel R. Johnston in 1820.

Soon the city grew large enough to accommodate other newspapers. John Israel established Pittsburgh's second press, the *Tree of Liberty* (HSWP), an anti-Federalist paper, in August, 1800. He had previously published the *Herald of Liberty* in Washington, Pa., but came to Pittsburgh at the request of Brackenridge, who had fallen out with Scull over political issues. Subsequently, Israel and Scull engaged in a long and bitter battle which ended with Scull pressing and winning a libel suit against Israel. In 1806, Israel retired from the *Tree of Liberty*, but the paper continued until about 1810 under the leadership of Walter Forward and then, William Foster.<sup>7</sup>

Ephraim Pentland began a third Pittsburgh press in July 1805 known as the *Commonwealth* (HSWP); in 1810, Benjamin Brown replaced Pentland. The paper continued until 1818, when Pentland re-established control in partnership with Silas Engles, and renamed it the *Statesman* (HSWP). A fourth early newspaper of note was the *Mercury* (HSWP), begun in 1811 by James C. Gilleland, and purchased the next year by John Snowden.

Brackenridge also had a hand in the establishment of the first bookstore west of the Alleghenies by encouraging John C. Gilkison to settle in Pittsburgh for this purpose. Gilkison opened his shop in 1798, chiefly offering textbooks for sale or borrow. The store passed into Brackenridge's hands when Gilkison died in March, 1800, but soon was sold to Zadok Cramer, who reopened the store in June under the name "Sign of the Franklin Head." Originally a bookstore and book bindery, Cramer soon added publishing to the business.

The Franklin Head Bookstore, located on Market Street between First and Second streets, provided a variety of books for westward migrants. The most important imprints were almanacs and books on religious topics, followed closely by textbooks, undoubtedly regarded as necessary for the home-bound instruction of isolated farm children. Books on government and music were also popular.<sup>8</sup>

Cramer became an important figure in the publishing community, making a career of "firsts," and pub-



lishing about 70 books and pamphlets. He succeeded in establishing a circulating library. Cramer had learned printing and book binding early in his career in Washington, Pa. Although Cramer lacked a printing press until 1805, he used other printers. He was responsible for two series of almanacs, *Pittsburgh Almanack for the Year of our Lord 1802* and the *Pittsburgh Magazine Almanac*, the latter including selections of the best verse and prose of the day. Israel printed these almanacs. Cramer authored a famous river guide, *The Navigator*, printed by Scull, which first appeared in 1801, and saw numerous editions, the first two being very rare today. This popular book, which was produced in a new edition almost every year, described in great detail the Ohio Valley to the Mississippi River. Detailed maps printed from woodcuts accompanied the navigational information. As the inevitable multitude of settlers arrived in Pittsburgh, pausing on their journey West for provisions, Cramer's *Navigator* became almost indispensable. The significance of this book cannot be overstated.

Once Cramer had a press, he continued his career as a publisher, producing a number of important books. In 1807, he printed John Brown's *A Dictionary of the Holy Bible* in two volumes (HSWP). This may have been the first illustrated book issued west of the Alleghenies. These two octavo volumes contained a total of 24 plates, including a folded frontispiece, and were printed on fine paper. The plates were the work of W. Kneass of Philadelphia. Subscribers to these volumes included Scull, Pentland and President Thomas Jefferson.

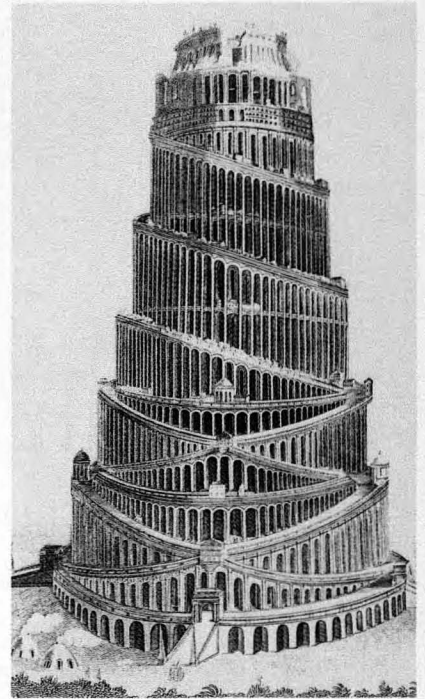
In 1807, Cramer published the first printed account of the Lewis and Clark expedition. Briefly entitled *A Journal of the Voyages and Travels of a Corps of Discovery, Under the Command of Capt. Lewis and Capt. Clark of the Army of the United States, From the Mouth of the River Missouri Through the Interior Parts of North America to the Pacific Ocean, During the Years 1804, 1805, & 1806...* (HSWP), it was written by Patrick Gass, a member of the expedition. In the same year, Cramer produced the *New System of Mercantile Arithmetic* (HSWP), and in 1809 he applied for a copyright for the *United States Spelling Book*. Cramer eventually formed a partnership with John Spear and William Eichbaum, Jr., and the firm in 1813 issued *The Western Gleaner*, one of the earliest magazines west of the Alleghenies.

When he died on August 1, 1814, Cramer's wife, Elizabeth, continued in his place. Eichbaum retired in 1817. Cramer's daughter, Susan, replaced her mother in 1818, and the firm of Cramer and Spear continued until 1835.

Other early Pittsburgh printers included James M. Riddle, who issued the first *Pittsburg Directory* (HSWP) in 1815, and Patterson and Lambdin, (*Pittsburgh Town and Country Magazine Almanac*, HSWP), and

Henry Holdship (*The Western Farmer's Almanac for the Year of Lord...*, HSWP), all of whom published the exceedingly popular almanacs of the day. By 1856, there were 35 printing firms in the Pittsburgh area. Brackenridge, who died in Carlisle, Pa., in June, 1816, played, as did his sons to a lesser extent, an important role in the establishment and promotion of printing in Pittsburgh.

After the Revolutionary War, the rapid growth of Pittsburgh spawned printing enterprises and allowed them to flourish as printers supplied those books deemed necessary by settlers migrating west. As the flow of migrants waned, as the modes of transportation became more efficient (train rather than wagon or raft), and as the centers of printing became entrenched in the East — New York, Philadelphia and Boston — the importance of Pittsburgh as a printing center diminished. But for roughly 60 years, the city and its pioneer printers rendered a vital service to the expanding nation. ■



Engraving depicting the Tower of Babel, from *A Dictionary of the Holy Bible*, 1807. Engravings for the book were imported from Philadelphia.

<sup>1</sup>Hugh Henry Brackenridge, *Gazette Publications* (Carlisle, Pa.: 1806), 7.

<sup>2</sup>They carried perhaps the most celebrated of early American presses, a small wooden hand machine, fashioned by Adam Ramage. See J. Cutler Andrews, *Pittsburgh's Post-Gazette: The First Newspaper West of the Alleghenies* (Boston: 1936), 2.

<sup>3</sup>Rollo G. Silver, *The American Printer* (Charlottesville, Va.: 1967), 142.

<sup>4</sup>Douglas C. McMurtrie, *A History of Printing in the United States*, 4 vols. (New York: 1936), Vol. II, 88. This pamphlet sold for a half-dollar.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>6</sup>Boyd hung himself on the bluff that overlooks the Monongahela River (in the area of present-day Duquesne University). The hill subsequently became known as Boyd's Hill.

<sup>7</sup>McMurtrie, *A History of Printing in the United States*, Vol. II, 92.

<sup>8</sup>Evelyn C. Edie, "A Checklist of Pittsburgh Imprints From 1821 through 1840, With A Historical Introduction" (unpublished diss., Catholic University of America, 1955), 19.