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THE PRESS IN WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA TO 1812¹

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IN HIS BOOK entitled *Ideas in Motion*, Dixon Ryan Fox has suggested that the advance of culture across the wilderness might be marked by the gazettes; that there was a newspaper frontier in the development of the West. It seems logical, therefore, to accord the pioneer printer a place in the sun with the explorer, the trader, and the early settler.

In western Pennsylvania, as elsewhere, newspapers first appeared in the centers of population. Pittsburgh, the seat of the first trans-Allegheny journal, was a shabby river port in 1786, containing less than forty log houses and scarcely more than three hundred people, but the Point had

¹ This article is the result of research conducted by Mr. Field as fellow of the Western Pennsylvania Historical Survey, 1931-34, and later supplemented in a few details by the work of his successor, Mr. John W. Harpster, in connection with the preparation of Dr. Solon J. Buck's forthcoming volume on "The Planting of Civilization in Western Pennsylvania." Mr. Field is now state director of the Illinois Historical Records Survey and is affiliated with the history department of Northwestern University. Ed.

The fullest account of western Pennsylvania newspapers is to be found in Clarence S. Brigham, "Bibliography of American Newspapers," in *American Antiquarian Society, Proceedings*, 30:81-150 (1920); 32:346-379 (1922). In addition to the use of this work and of sources indicated in the text and footnotes, including, of course, extant files of the early newspapers themselves, some dependence has been placed upon county and local histories and histories of printing.

begun to buzz with commercial activity, the rivers were dotted with craft waiting to carry passengers and their belongings down the Ohio, and at the levee boats were being loaded with cargoes for New Orleans. The village at the junction of the Allegheny and Monongahela rivers had very early become the gateway to the West. To John Scull, a newly arrived Quaker youth of twenty-one, the activity of the tiny hamlet seemed but the beginning of a vigorous future, if not prophetic of its development as the great entrepôt of the West. The Revolution was scarcely over and the Treaty of Paris but recent news on the frontier. Chaos resulting from the lack of a strong central government pervaded the seaboard. In the West where life was also unsettled, where ties with the East were nonexistent or at best weak, where commercial interests were bound up with the Spanish-controlled Mississippi, there was little love for the Union—even a strong feeling that dissolution was imminent. The existence of the Northwest Territory, a federal domain created by cessions of the land claims of Virginia, Massachusetts, and Connecticut, served as the only thread of interest to attract the West to the new federal constitution that was then being urged.

In sympathy with this nationalist movement and a firm believer in a strong central government was young Scull, who had just come from eastern Pennsylvania to establish a journal in the sparsely settled region at the headwaters of the Ohio that would be friendly to such a policy. Associated with him was Joseph Hall, another youth of twenty-one and a printer by trade. Together, on July 29, 1786, they published the first issue of the *Pittsburgh Gazette* on an old hand press purchased from Andrew Brown, proprietor of the *Philadelphia Federal Gazette*, and hauled by wagon across the mountains. Hall died in November, and Scull, who was left as "editor, reporter, typesetter, and delivery boy," was forced to seek another helper. He turned to Hugh Henry Brackenridge, the man who had first induced the young printers to seek their uncertain fortunes in this pioneer enterprise. Brackenridge, who was then attending the general assembly in Philadelphia, "sent one John Boyd out to Pittsburgh with a letter of introduction." On January 6, 1787, Scull announced Boyd's association with the *Gazette*, but Boyd's part in determining the policy of the paper was evidently negligible. During the

month of July, 1788, Boyd was instrumental in establishing a circulating library in Pittsburgh, for which subscriptions were received at the office of the *Gazette*, but shortly afterward, for reasons unknown to anyone, he left his work and hanged himself on the hill just back of the present courthouse. Scull ignored the affair in his columns and continued his paper alone. A staunch Federalist, a loyal friend to the new government, he continued at the helm, weathering many political storms and surviving many personal controversies. He printed a paper that has since taken part in every presidential campaign, and through the files of his journal one may catch glimpses of America moving west and of the transformation of a crude frontier outpost into an industrial town. It was 1818 when he finally retired and his son John, with Morgan Neville, succeeded him. But the *Gazette* kept marching on.²

The founder of the *Pittsburgh Gazette* could brook no criticism of the Federalist party. He was conscientious in partisan affairs and regarded the conduct of the rapidly growing Jeffersonian party as treasonable. For a number of years Scull was without a competitor in the region and fourteen years passed before a rival press was established in Pittsburgh. Late in the 1790's he began to deny the critics of the Adams administration access to his columns. This blow fell rather heavily upon Brackenridge, Dr. Andrew Richardson, and others. In 1797 plans were made for the establishment of an anti-Federalist organ in Pittsburgh but it was 1800 before they materialized. On August 17 of that year, John D. Israel, who had founded the *Herald of Liberty* at Washington in 1798, issued the first number of the *Tree of Liberty* from a house owned by Brackenridge. The title of the paper was intended to typify its mission, for it ardently advocated Jeffersonian principles and attacked Federalist measures at every opportunity. The significance of the name was further indicated in a conspicuously displayed motto, "And the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations." The growth of the *Tree* was part and parcel with the growth of Jeffersonian democracy in the region. The Federalists, and particularly their organ, the *Pittsburgh Gazette*, charged

² A full account of the history of this journal, with not a few references to its earliest contemporaries, is to be found in J. Cutler Andrews, *Pittsburgh's Post-Gazette* (Boston, 1936).

Brackenridge with being the owner of the new paper and responsible for its "pernicious" utterances, but Brackenridge repudiated this statement, saying that although he had originally intended to establish a newspaper he had given up the idea upon hearing of Israel's intention. With the issue of December 24, 1805, Israel withdrew, and the paper was thereafter published by Walter Forward for the proprietors. Three weeks later Forward became the sole owner and he continued so at least until May 6, 1806. The next issue extant, that of May 24, 1809, shows that the paper was then being published by William Foster. It is not known when the *Tree of Liberty* was discontinued, but it is included in Thomas' list of newspapers of 1810.³

The Jeffersonian party in western Pennsylvania did not have unity within itself; it acted harmoniously only as it confronted the Federalists. Signs of schism appeared early in the frontier democracy that was flourishing west of the mountains. The Brackenridge wing of the party was not radical enough for the followers of Gallatin, who were the chief supporters of Jefferson's administration. The breach widened into an open rupture, and to make vocal the opinions of the more radical Democrats, Ephraim Pentland established the *Commonwealth* at Pittsburgh on July 24, 1805. The editor sought to maintain "a press in the western part of Pennsylvania that should speak the people's will . . . support their supreme authority . . . and counteract the base, insidious endeavours of their unprincipled opponents." Under the motto "Virtue, Liberty, and Independence" he complained of the apostasy of the press, sought "to keep alive and constantly before the people, the spirit which gave life, vigor, and efficacy to the union of America," and warmly defended "the sovereignty of the people." With the issue of January 10, 1810, Pentland was succeeded by Benjamin Brown, who had formerly been connected with the *Washington Reporter*. Feeling it necessary to comment on his political creed and outline his policies Brown stated:

Be it known, then, that I am a democratic republican; one of that unfashionable class, which, by the *lords* of the land, are despised for their adherence to the cause of the "*rabble*." I know not, nor will I ever acknowledge,

³ Isaiah Thomas, *The History of Printing in America, with a Biography of Printers, and an Account of Newspapers*, 2: 299-301 (Albany, 1874).

any other government under Heaven than that of the people. I will oppose, with all my might, every system which tends to undermine their supremacy; and I will, if in my power, "lash the rascals" who dare traduce them.

Brown remained with the paper until 1814 and it can readily be seen that he followed in Pentland's footsteps. The *Commonwealth* continued until 1818 when it was succeeded by the *Statesman*. These two papers were the lineal predecessors of the *Pittsburgh Post*, established in 1842.

The partisan nature of the press in the early nineteenth century was its chief characteristic. In the main the term "newspaper" was a misnomer, for the chief function of the journals of that day was that of disseminating political propaganda rather than that of chronicling the course of events. The press catered to the cultural and intellectual interests of its readers by publishing a variety of reading material, such as essays, poems, reprints from other papers, and extracts from the works of well-known writers, but the literary aspects of the newspapers were generally given secondary consideration. With the establishment of the *Pittsburgh Mercury* by James C. Gilleland, on September 26, 1811, a new type of paper appeared in the journalistic field. From the nature of its contents it might be classed as a magazine, but its make-up and appearance place it among the newspapers of the period. The *Mercury* did not ignore politics but it placed less emphasis on such matters than did the other *Pittsburgh* papers and at the same time gave more space to material of a literary nature. It is best described in the words of the editor himself who spoke of it as "A Political & Literary Work." Gilleland set out to fill his paper "chiefly with original matter." He continued:

But, not calculating on any merit my productions may possess, I have engaged the assistance of others, with whom the public will certainly be pleased, if the labours of taste and genius can afford them any pleasure.

In the department of literature we shall find many things to attend to. Essays, literary, moral and humorous—tales—sketches, historical and biographical—criticisms—literary notices—remarks upon the works of the fine arts—accounts of our country—of its productions natural and artificial—its curiosities, &c. &c.

To the lovers of poetry, we shall occasionally furnish at first or second hand, according as we can afford, odes, epigrams, songs, and all such literary confections.

Every thing, in short, shall be given that may instruct or amuse.

The *Mercury* continued until April 4, 1812, when Gilleland sold it to John M. Snowden, one of the founders of the Greensburg *Farmers Register*, who resumed publication of the Pittsburgh sheet three months later, on July 9. The new editor sought to conduct his paper on "the most liberal and independent principles" and to avoid "all personalities and party abuse—all political dogmatism and denunciation." Feeling that personal and political bitterness had been "too generally characteristic of our public journals" he hoped to keep the columns of the *Mercury* diffused with a candid but impartial spirit. Late in the decade of the twenties Snowden was succeeded by his son and in 1832 the *Mercury* was consolidated with the *Allegheny Republican*.

Two minor Pittsburgh publications belong to the period under discussion, although it was 1813 before one of them appeared. Very little is known of the *Pioneer*, established in February, 1812, except that it was a monthly edited by the Reverend David Graham and published by S. Engles & Co. A more important publishing venture was Zadok Cramer's *Western Gleaner or Repository for Arts, Sciences, and Literature*, which appeared in December, 1813, four months after Cramer's death. It was a monthly magazine of sixty-four pages and although it cannot be compared with similar publications of the present time from the point of view of literary excellence, in its day it ranked high in its field.

In the meantime newspapers had begun to appear in other towns throughout the region, and these will be discussed by towns in the order of the appearance of the first newspaper published in each. Following Pittsburgh, in a progression that roughly described an arc about that center, came Washington, Uniontown, Greensburg, Somerset, and Meadville, and then, in first one and then another part of the region, presaging the general outcropping of local sheets soon to follow, came Bedford, Beaver, Erie, Brownsville, Kittanning, and Mercer into the journalistic field.

The first newspaper to be published in Washington, and the second in western Pennsylvania, was the *Western Telegraphe, and Washington Advertiser*, established on August 17, 1795, by John Colerick, William Hunter, and William H. Beaumont. It was an ultra-Federalist journal and carried in its headpiece the motto, "Free, but not licentious," a de-

scriptive phrase that was not relished by the Jeffersonians. After May 17, 1797, the firm dissolved and Colerick continued the publication alone until his death in 1804. Thereafter for a number of years the paper was published for the benefit of his family. In September, 1809, Alexander Armstrong became the publisher "for the family of the late John Colerick, and himself," started a new volume and numbering, and in October, 1810, took over the paper himself, shortening the title to *Western Telegraphe*. The date of the last known issue is July 18, 1811, and apparently the paper ceased publication later that year.

The second Washington newspaper, and the first organ of the Jeffersonian party in the region, was the *Herald of Liberty*, established by John D. Israel on February 6, 1798. The editor's democracy and acceptance of Rousseau's political philosophy were well illustrated by the motto displayed on the first page, "Man is man and who is more?" The *Herald* continued under Israel's management until February 2, 1802, when he felt that it was no longer needed in the service of his party. Interesting, indeed, are his comments upon this point:

The Editor of the *Herald* finding that the causes which called for the establishment of a Republican Paper in this place, having ceased in some measure to exist—finding that in the State, as well as the General Government, men of principle and virtue are entrusted with our affairs—finding that the Constitution begins to act upon its proper spring,—finding that economy is recommended and pursued by those entrusted with the purse-strings of the nation—& finding that in this Western Country, Republicanism has become respectable and completely triumphant, has determined to *suspend* the publication of the *Herald* from this day, at least until occasion calls for its re-establishment.⁴

Pittsburgh was more important as a commercial center than Washington, but the little village to the southwest was not inferior to its neighbor as far as intellectual and cultural interests went. For a time Washington was supporting two newspapers while Pittsburgh had but one. With the establishment of the *Tree of Liberty* in 1800, honors were even, and when the *Commonwealth* was launched five years later, Pittsburgh forged ahead. In the meantime, however, in 1802, the first periodical west of the Alleghenies, the *Western Missionary Magazine*, was founded at Washington and it was published intermittently until 1806.

⁴ *Tree of Liberty* (Pittsburgh), February 6, 1802.

No doubt this magazine served as a medium for the expression of religious views on the frontier, provided the people with devotional literature, and found its way back East where it was distributed in the interest of the missionary cause.

Washington was located on one of the main routes of travel and through this village passed countless thousands of people on their way to the West. In the summer of 1808 William Sample was driving through town in a wagon containing the equipment for a printing office with which he intended to start a paper farther west. When his plans became known he was persuaded to remain and establish a paper there, and the result was the appearance, beginning on August 15, of the *Washington Reporter*, issued by Sample and his brother-in-law, Benjamin Brown. On February 9, 1810, the latter retired from the firm and Sample continued as editor until 1819, when he was appointed prothonotary. Although many of the early papers were ephemeral in character, the *Reporter* became a permanent organ in the community. Years later it was changed to a daily, and as such it still continues.

Judged by the number of papers that appeared in Washington in those days the publishing business in southwestern Pennsylvania must have been a flourishing and profitable one. Almost like mushrooms various publications sprang up, to perish, many of them, in like manner. The *Western Corrector*, a weekly edited by Thomas Thompson, appeared late in 1809, or early the next year, and survived at least until February 19, 1811, the date of the last known issue. The *Washingtonian*, a Democratic newspaper edited by James A. Bayard, Jr., first appeared on December 15, 1812. It displayed conspicuously the following words of Jefferson for its motto, "The minority possess their equal rights which equal laws must protect, and to violate would be offensive." It is not known when this paper ceased to exist but it is mentioned in the *Washington Reporter* of February 28, 1814. In 1811 advertisements appeared in the local papers soliciting subscriptions for a literary periodical to be known as the *Washington Museum*, which was to be published weekly by a society of gentlemen and managed by William Baird. The price of this sixteen-page octavo was to be three dollars for one year. Nothing more is known of the *Museum* and it is doubtful if it ever ap-

peared. Contemporary journals also mention the existence of a paper published in Washington known as the *Mercury*, but no information as to its history is available.

Pittsburgh and Washington still had but one newspaper each when Uniontown entered the field with the third newspaper to be established in western Pennsylvania, the *Fayette Gazette, and Union Advertiser*.⁵ The earliest issue located, that of February 10, 1798 (volume 1, number 5), indicates that this paper probably first appeared on the thirteenth of the preceding month, although it may have appeared as early as December 5, 1797. The publishers of this ultra-Federalist weekly were Jacob Stewart and C. Mowry. The former was an uncle of Andrew Stewart, the famous "Tariff Andy" who later represented his district in Congress. The *Gazette* was supplanted by Allen and Springer's *Genius of Liberty and Fayette Advertiser*, on February 22, 1805, but it is not known whether this weekly was founded apart from the *Gazette* and later merged with it, or whether the new paper was simply a continuation of the older publication under a new name. At any rate it shifted from the political allegiance of its predecessor to become a Jeffersonian organ, and under its title it carried these words of Governor McKean as a motto: "The charm of novelty should not be permitted so to fascinate as to give mere innovation the semblance of reform." From 1808 to 1818 the paper was published by Jesse Beeson, and it has continued, under changing auspices and variations of title, to the present day, having by now long since become a daily under the shortened title *Genius*.

The *Fayette and Greene Spectator*, published by William Campbell, appeared in Uniontown on January 10, 1811. In 1812 Campbell was succeeded by James Lodge and Company, who continued the paper until as late as April 23, 1814.

Six newspapers had been established in western Pennsylvania before the end of the eighteenth century. All of them have been discussed except the Greensburg *Farmers Register*, a weekly started on May 24, 1799, by

⁵ At about the same time appeared the *Western Sky* at Beula in Cambria County, according to an article in the Ebensburg *Alleghenian* of February 7, 1861, but there was apparently only one number of the former, printed sometime in 1798 to further the claims of Beula as a likely place for the county seat, and the town itself did not long survive.

John M. Snowden and William M'Corkle. It was a profitable venture but with the issue of May 23, 1803, the partnership was dissolved and the paper was continued by Snowden alone. Although this weekly was not a political organ it was Jeffersonian in sympathy and the forerunner of later Democratic journals. William S. Graham took over the paper in 1808 and in 1812, without change in serial numbering, renamed it the *Greensburgh & Indiana Register*, because of increasing circulation in Indiana County and to make the paper more useful as an advertising medium. Graham died in 1815, and in 1818 the paper became the *Westmoreland Republican*.

Snowden and M'Corkle were either keenly alive to community interests or were greatly concerned about their own financial prosperity for on June 21, 1799, they proposed through the columns of their paper the issuance of a German edition of the *Farmers Register*. They felt that:

The Germans of this western country, whose patriotic exertions have hitherto been unaided by a press, sensible of its utility, have too long regretted the want of a newspaper published in their *own language*, at their own doors; and when their respectability either in point of wealth numbers, or public spirit, is considered, it is not doubted but they will afford the present undertaking a liberal patronage.

The *German Farmers Register* was to "contain the foreign and domestic intelligence of the week, public papers, sketches of the proceedings of Congress, &c." It appeared on November 22, 1800, the first German paper to be published in the western country. Subscriptions for it were received in Pittsburgh at the office of the *Tree of Liberty*, then recently established.

Westmoreland County was not without a Federalist paper although the first one was somewhat late in making its appearance. In 1811 David McLean established the *Greensburgh Gazette*, ostensibly the first political organ in the county. No copies of this paper, of the period under discussion, are known to exist.

To the southeast of Greensburg was Somerset County, a region into which the Germans had come in large numbers. It is therefore no surprise that the first newspaper in the county was the *German Farmer*, a weekly printed in both English and German, by John Youngman, and evidently in existence in 1804. All that is known about this paper, and

about the *Somerset Gazette*, another German weekly published at Somerset, in 1806-07, is derived from bills for printing, presented in the case of the latter by one George Maurer, and from an order of the county commissioners that certain advertisements be published in the *Gazette*. Early in 1806 the *Bedford Gazette* mentioned a proposal of General Alexander Ogle of Somerset to found a paper to be known as the *Hornet* that would support the party of Jefferson in his county. The Bedford paper excoriated this project with great vehemence, and it is not known whether the proposed sheet ever appeared. Another Somerset newspaper, which did appear in the period under review and which survived for at least four years, was the *Westliche Telegraph*, established, apparently, in December, 1812, by Friedrich Goeb and Company, and published in German and English editions.

At the close of the year 1804 eight newspapers and one periodical had sprung up in western Pennsylvania. All of these publications, however, were located in the southwestern part of the state and all except two were within a radius of only thirty miles from Pittsburgh. The first newspaper in northwestern Pennsylvania was the *Crawford Weekly Messenger*, a radical Republican weekly founded at Meadville on January 2, 1805, by Thomas Atkinson and William Brendle. It was issued from a press purchased by Atkinson in Lancaster County where it had been used during the days of the Revolution in printing money for the Continental Congress when that body sat at Lancaster and York. With the issue of July 10, 1805, Atkinson became the sole publisher, and he remained with the paper until the 1830's. Between 1809 and 1811, Jacob Herrington published a paper at Meadville (probably the *Crawford Democrat*) in opposition to the *Weekly Messenger*. He then removed to Mercer, where he established the *Western Press*. Very little is known about the *Democrat* but contemporary papers mention the death of its editor, Edward Cole, on December 13, 1813. It was probably a conservative Republican journal.

Although it is true that some of the papers founded during this period were short-lived, many of them are still in existence and others became the forerunners of journals that later grew to be important. The *Bedford Gazette*, first issued on September 21, 1805, is still published. It was

founded as a Federalist weekly by Charles M'Dowell, who continued as editor until 1832. On August 2, 1809, the Pittsburgh *Commonwealth* published a proposal of Samuel Maffet of Philadelphia to establish the *Bedford Democrat*, a paper to be devoted to "all interesting facts relative to agriculture, domestic manufactures and whatever else can be useful and instructive." The local interests and political proceedings of Bedford, Somerset, and the neighboring counties were to receive special attention. With a chivalry often expressed by the early editors but rarely observed, the sponsor promised to respect "private character" and to recount the "actions of public men . . . with impartiality and candor." For some unknown reason Maffet's plans did not materialize, and the Jeffersonian party was not represented by a newspaper in Bedford County.

The second newspaper to be published in the region north of Pittsburgh was established at Beavertown on November 4, 1807. It was a "folio of four pages," was intended to be "a map of busy life, its fluctuations and its vast concerns," and bore the classical title *Minerva*.⁶ It supported the radical wing of the Republican party and occasionally crossed swords with the Pittsburgh *Tree of Liberty*. The editor, John Berry, was a man of influence and served one term on the borough council. The *Minerva* was in existence as late as January 9, 1811. The *Western Cabinet*, established at Beavertown on September 28 in the same year, resembled its predecessor. Edited by Joseph W. White, a local politician, it was probably a Republican paper despite the fact that it carried a quotation from Washington for its motto: "The basis of our political system is the right of the people to make and to alter the constitution of Government." The last known issue is that of February 24, 1812, but the paper probably continued until early in 1813. It was not until 1808 that the extreme northwestern part of Pennsylvania was served by a local newspaper. On May 26 of that year George Wyeth established the Erie *Mirror*, but beginning with the issue of November 26 the place of publication was given as Presque Isle, the earlier name of Erie. Although it was aligned with the waning Federalist cause, it was for other reasons that this paper was discontinued with the issue of June 1, 1811.

Little is known of the early newspaper history of the last four towns

⁶ Joseph H. Bausman, *History of Beaver County, and Its Centennial Celebration*, 1:454 (New York, 1904).

to appear on the newspaper map of the region before 1813. The *Brownsville Gazette* was founded by John Berry on January 4, 1809, but early in 1810 it was being published by William Campbell. The *Western Repository* was started in the same town by James Alexander on December 28, 1809, according to the serial numbering of the only copy located, that of May 23, 1810. The existence of still another Brownsville paper, the *Western Palladium*, is known only through an advertisement of its sale in the *Washington Reporter* of May 4, 1812. The *Western Eagle*, a weekly established at Kittanning on September 20, 1810, by James Alexander, was discontinued in 1812 but was revived for a short time in 1814. At Mercer, on February 22, 1811, Jacob Herrington established the *Western Press*, a journal presumably devoted to the Republican cause. Finally, the *Pittsburgh Mercury* for December 11, 1811, mentions the *Monongahela Expositor*, published at Monongahela City, but this is the only known account of the paper.

In their general make-up these early newspapers resembled each other and their contemporaries east of the Alleghenies. They varied in size of sheet and style of type, but in most cases changes in these respects were infrequent. The issues usually contained four pages of four columns each. The *Pittsburgh Gazette*, however, was an exception, for it began with a three-column layout and so continued until early in the 1790's when another column was added and the size of the paper was enlarged. Late in the summer of 1811 a fifth column appeared and the page size was again expanded. Most of these frontier journals were printed on a fairly heavy and durable paper that took ink well and left few blurs or smudges. The reading matter was clear and sharp and though browned with age and worn with use these papers are still legible. The size of Scull's *Gazette* was altered five times prior to 1812. The first two issues, according to Killikelly,⁷ were 10 x 16 inches but the size was soon reduced owing to a scarcity of paper. The earliest whole issue extant, that of August 26, 1786 (number 3), is 9½ x 15 inches, a size that was maintained with few exceptions for several years. Occasionally papers of smaller size appeared, as in the case of two particularly noticeable issues between November 17 and December 15, 1787, and May 24 and July

⁷ Sarah H. Killikelly, *The History of Pittsburgh, Its Rise and Progress*, 91 (Pittsburgh, 1906).

5, 1788, in which the sheet size varied in width from 8 to $8\frac{1}{2}$ inches and in length from 11 to $13\frac{1}{2}$ inches. The paper in these issues, as was often the case with "extras" or supplementary numbers, was of poor quality. Coarse in texture, rough to the touch, and of a bluish-gray cast, it took ink less well than did the paper used in the regular issues and appeared to be far less durable. Other changes were made in the size of the *Gazette's* pages from time to time, the largest dimension being reached in the issue of August 2, 1811, which measured $12\frac{1}{2} \times 19\frac{1}{2}$ inches. The Pittsburgh *Tree of Liberty* maintained a sheet size of $10\frac{3}{4} \times 18$ inches for about four years from the date of its establishment. The Pittsburgh *Commonwealth*, during the first six years of its existence, never varied from a page size of $10\frac{1}{2} \times 17\frac{1}{4}$ inches, but when the subscribers began to complain that the excessive advertising it carried rendered impossible the insertion of reading matter of interest the editor proposed "to enlarge the paper to a super-royal size [$13\frac{1}{4} \times 18\frac{3}{4}$]"—the size of the Philadelphia papers," which would enable him "to give a regular history of the proceedings of congress and the state legislature—a much greater quantity of foreign intelligence, and many essays on interesting subjects, which our present confined limits entirely preclude."⁸ The Pittsburgh *Mercury* started with a page size of 12×19 inches, but when it was revived by Snowden in July, 1812, after a lapse of three months, the size was reduced to $11 \times 17\frac{3}{4}$ inches. The largest sheet to appear before 1813 was the *Crawford Weekly Messenger* (Meadville), which measured 17×20 inches. The Greensburg *Farmers Register* continued a page size of $11\frac{1}{4} \times 18\frac{1}{4}$ inches for several years but eventually the size was reduced to $9\frac{1}{2} \times 13$ inches, the smallest sheet published for any length of time during this period.

The size of the page was somewhat dependent upon the supply and price of paper. In the earlier years this article had to be transported across the mountains. Upon several occasions when the pack horses failed to bring supplies or were late in arriving the enterprising editor of the *Pittsburgh Gazette* borrowed cartridge paper from Fort Pitt. In a suppliant letter of July 1, 1792, he humbly besought Major Isaac Craig, quartermaster and military storekeeper at Pittsburgh, for the loan of three reams

⁸ *Commonwealth* (Pittsburgh), April 22, 1811.

of paper. In 1797 Jackson and Sharpless set up the first paper mill west of the Alleghenies, on Redstone Creek, four miles east of Brownsville. Scull was not the only one to derive benefit from having the source of his paper supply so much nearer at hand; the subscribers also profited, for the price of the paper dropped from 17s.6d. (\$4.37½) to two dollars a year. In November, 1807, the Beavertown *Minerva* announced the building of the Ohio Paper Mill at the mouth of Little Beaver Creek near Georgetown. This was the third mill west of the mountains and doubtless it furnished paper for a great many frontier journals, especially in the near-by towns. After 1811 the Greensburg *Farmers Register* secured its paper from a mill that had been established by Markle and Doum on Sewickley Creek, twelve miles west of Greensburg.

Similar factors influenced the regularity or irregularity of the appearance of a newspaper. If there was little news, if the publisher happened to be out of town for a few days, if a sufficient amount of paper could not be secured, or if funds appeared to be running low, publication might be delayed for several days. On the other hand if conditions were favorable the paper might be issued more often or at an earlier date than the public expected. The day of the week chosen for publication changed repeatedly. The *Pittsburgh Gazette* was issued irregularly and at various times on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Saturday. The Greensburg *Farmers Register* first appeared on Friday but in a short time changed to Saturday. Evidently the Pittsburgh *Mercury* sought by experiment to find a satisfactory publication day for it was issued on three different days during the first month of its existence. The Erie *Mirror* was first published on Thursday but it soon announced a change to Saturday because the southern mail often arrived so late on Wednesday that news could not be extracted for Thursday's issue. During the summer months when the rivers were low and the paper mills could not run, the Uniontown *Genius of Liberty* and probably other papers were forced to suspend publication until enough rain should fall to swell the streams and start the mills. The interregnum sometimes ran for weeks because the publishers lacked enough capital to enable them to stock sufficient paper to carry them over the dry periods.

Although there was very little variety in the make-up of these news-

papers, they differed in detail. Across the top of the first page were usually to be found the title, date and place of publication, serial numbering, and sometimes the name of the publisher and the price of a single copy. The plain and simple head that characterized the issues of the *Pittsburgh Gazette* during the early years was changed to a very ornate one on November 28, 1789; thereafter it appeared in gothic letters accompanied by a woodcut of an Indian and a soldier holding between them an open issue of the *Gazette* suspended over a shield bearing the picture of a galloping reindeer. Sometime between 1790 and 1793 the use of this woodcut was discontinued, the gothic heading was abandoned, and a return was made to the format of earlier days. The Greensburg *Farmers Register* used as a decorative feature the figure of an open book or "register" with rays extending from the sides and top to resemble a half sun. The title of the Pittsburgh *Tree of Liberty* was not confined to printed words alone but was represented by the use of a rebus in the form of a stately tree covered with luxuriant foliage. A woodcut of the goddess of wisdom wearing a plumed helmet adorned the headpiece of the Beavertown *Minerva*. The Erie *Mirror* presented an appearance that was different from other papers, for the title was not spread across the top of the page but was set up in small capitals at the head of the left-hand column. Besides the special features, the newspapers contained brief statements of ownership, usually to be found on the last page, and subscription terms and advertising rates.

Of the early newspapers generally it may be said that the first three pages were usually filled with news from Europe, commonly labelled "Foreign Intelligence," news from the East or from the frontier that bore the general heading "Domestic Intelligence," brief items of local interest, and letters to the editor. Advertisements were generally to be found on pages 3 and 4, with the "Poet's Corner" and a variety of literary matter filling out the last page. There were, however, a number of other schemes that were often used. Advertisements might be so numerous as almost to fill the entire paper, or they might be omitted altogether. The news content varied greatly; sometimes there was a profusion of news from Europe, scant space being devoted to domestic events, and sometimes the reverse was true. Several letters to the editor

might be included, or weeks might pass before any appeared. Sometimes quite a little padding was done; sometimes none at all.

What the circulation of these papers was, it is difficult to say. Few statistics are available and approximations are difficult to establish. By 1790 the *Pittsburgh Gazette* was widely circulated among the sixty thousand inhabitants of the four southwestern counties, Allegheny, Fayette, Washington, and Westmoreland. A year after the founding of the *Herald of Liberty* at Washington the editor boasted of a circulation of 1,296 which was still increasing. The *Pittsburgh Mercury* began with 150 subscribers but within six months the editor stated there were nearly 400. The various towns in which newspapers were located were not large enough to furnish sufficient support even for a single journal each, and a clientele had to be secured in the surrounding country. It is certain that there were many people in the rural districts who were eager to learn what they could about current events and thus would be glad to have news sheets. To the north and east of Greensburg the *Farmers Register* was circulated through the communities of Salem, Derry, New Alexandria, Crooked Creek, Cherry Run, Newport, "Over Conemaugh," and in the Ligonier Valley. To the south and west it was received at North Huntingdon, Cookstown, Morristown, Connellsville, Mount Pleasant, and the "Forks of the Yough." The *German Farmers Register* by the very nature of its reading public had an extensive circulation and was received at Uniontown, Pittsburgh, Washington, and Morganza. It was evidently one of the few frontier papers that circulated in the East for it had subscribers at Strassburg, Greencastle, and Chambersburg. Political notices in the *Pittsburgh Tree of Liberty* from Erie, Crawford, Venango, and Warren counties illustrate not only the permeating influence of the press but also the spread of Jeffersonian democracy. The *Pittsburgh Commonwealth* circulated in nearly every county in western Pennsylvania; it was received in the northern panhandle of Virginia, found its way back East to Carlisle, and had subscribers in Detroit. The circulation even of a small paper like the *Erie Mirror* was not limited to its home county, for it was received at Chautauqua, New York, at Meadville and Mercer, and as far south as Butler.

The problem of getting the newspapers into the hands of subscribers

was a vexatious one. The *Pittsburgh Gazette* had very early foreseen that "the establishment of newspapers, in a few of the most populous country towns," would "contribute very much to diffuse knowledge through the state. To accomplish this, the means of conveying the papers should be made easy, by the assistance of the legislature."⁹ There was no post office in Pittsburgh until Scull improvised one and later came to be recognized as the postmaster by the government. There was no regular delivery service for years, and subscribers had to make arrangements about receiving their papers; sometimes the editor relied upon friends to carry papers to subscribers in rural districts. Soon after the *Gazette* was founded John M'Donald advertised his boat service as "the most speedy and sure way of transporting the Pittsburgh Gazette to the subscribers on Youghioghenny, Peter's creek, Mingo creek and Pigeon creek."¹⁰ At the same time John Blair advertised a boat line to Gasting's Ferry, thirty-five miles up the Monongahela, and promised to deliver papers "every week, at a more reasonable rate than any other conveyance and without disappointment." For about six months, beginning with its issue of March 24, 1787, the *Gazette* carried a notice from the post office at Philadelphia announcing the early establishment of a mail route from Alexandria, Virginia, to Pittsburgh by way of Cumberland and Bedford, adding that "if any person inclines to form a more direct communication between this city [*Philadelphia*] and Fort Pitt, by carrying mail regularly from this office to Bedford, so as to tally with the Virginia post, that route may now be contracted for upon advantageous terms." In July, 1794, a mail line was established between Wheeling and Limestone (now Maysville), Kentucky, which made the round trip every two weeks. The mail was carried from Pittsburgh to Wheeling on horseback. In 1798 a post road was established between Pittsburgh and Zanesville by way of Washington and Wheeling. With accommodations such as these, editors had less cause to complain about the lack of facilities for distribution.

Financial returns came to the owners of newspapers mainly through subscriptions and advertisements. The subscription rate of the *Pittsburgh*

⁹ *Pittsburgh Gazette*, March 10, 1787.

¹⁰ *Pittsburgh Gazette*, September 2, 1786.

Gazette has already been mentioned. The *Commonwealth* was regularly delivered to people in Pittsburgh at the rate of two dollars a year payable half yearly in advance, and fifty cents was added if a subscriber desired to have his paper forwarded by post rider. Subscriptions for less than six months were not received and for that period "the whole amount must be advanced." The Greensburg *Farmers Register* considered subscriptions as automatically renewed unless otherwise notified at the time of expiration. The average subscription rate was two dollars a year although there was some variation from this figure. The Pittsburgh *Mercury* and the *German Farmers Register* of Greensburg each cost but a dollar and a half a year while the rate for the *Farmers Register* was two and a quarter. Charges for printing advertisements were fairly uniform and most of the papers followed the policy of the *Pittsburgh Gazette* of inserting advertisements not exceeding a square three times for a dollar and of charging proportionately for those exceeding a square. It would be difficult to ascertain the amount of money received from advertising, but doubtedless, as in the case of modern newspapers, the income from this source was far greater than that from subscriptions.

In paying for their newspapers, as in settling their other bills, it seems that large numbers of western Pennsylvanians were exceedingly tardy. The scarcity of money on the frontier and the migratory character of many of the people made collections difficult. The editor of the *Pittsburgh Gazette* was quite willing to accept pelts, corn, wheat, whiskey, barley, or wood in payment for subscriptions. At one time John Israel, editor of the Pittsburgh *Tree of Liberty*, journeyed to Meadville during a session of court there in order to collect money due him for subscriptions and advertisements. The discontinuance of Israel's *Herald of Liberty* at Washington, which he claimed was no longer needed in the Republican cause, has already been mentioned, but there were other reasons for suspending publication: it would afford the editor, Israel observed, "a favorable opportunity to collect the large amount of debts due him by delinquents"; and continuing he addressed "those, who have by their delinquency in some measure caused the present suspension" and promised that if they would "discharge their respective accounts . . . the

necessity of pursuing legal steps for the recovery" would be superseded.¹¹ Four years after the founding of the Pittsburgh *Commonwealth* there appeared in it this inescapable appeal:

TO SUBSCRIBERS,

Who are two, three, and four years in arrears.

Such as *intend* to pay, the editor hopes will pay soon—and such *do not intend to pay*, or who subscribed with a determination *never to pay*, are desired to let us know, as soon as possible, that such is their intention.¹²

In 1811 Benjamin Brown, Pentland's successor as editor of the *Commonwealth*, complained that after two years he had "not received one fourth of the sum which was justly his due." In order that he might meet his debts he was determined to exact payment from those who owed him. Gentle reminders such as "making out and presenting accounts" had been "found to be almost useless" and so harsher measures "most painful to himself," and "disagreeable to his *patrons*" might be relied upon.¹³ It is doubtful if threats to discontinue subscriptions and suspend publication or warnings that legal measures would be taken, if necessary, ever secured adequate results. The uncertainty of collections doubtless accounts for the fact that numerous proposals to issue papers never materialized.

Were the early newspapers in western Pennsylvania profitable ventures? They must have been fairly so, if one may judge from the number that appeared, but the business could hardly have been very lucrative. Subscribers were few; weekly editions did not permit subscription rates high enough to yield large profits. The difficulties of collection forced the printers to turn to other activities. Some of them published books and sold stationery, legal blanks, and all kinds of printed forms; others actively engaged in politics. Snowden and M'Corkle of the Greensburg *Farmers Register* sold Dr. Fisher's pills at twenty-five cents a box, which were guaranteed to cure colds, headaches, loss of appetite, rheumatism, and almost any other ailment that might affect the human body.

Most of the news printed came from a distance. A paper usually con-

¹¹ *Tree of Liberty* (Pittsburgh), February 6, 1802.

¹² *Commonwealth* (Pittsburgh), June 21, 1809.

¹³ *Commonwealth* (Pittsburgh), December 9, 1811.

tained many items from Europe and considerable domestic intelligence, but scarcely any local news appeared. In contrast with modern news-gathering facilities those of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were extremely slow and cumbersome. The earliest extant issue of the *Pittsburgh Gazette* printed news that had taken 150 days to come from Naples; 130 days from Paris and Madrid; 116 days from The Hague; 112 days from Dublin; 107 days from London; 33 days from Boston; 30 days from Richmond; 29 days from New York; 21 days from Philadelphia. By 1800 means of communication had been sufficiently improved so that Paris news only 84 days old and news from London 82 days old was printed in the *Gazette*. News from Philadelphia and New York came through in 16 and 17 days respectively. Sometimes when there was more news on hand than could be printed it was held over for the next issue. The fact that news was weeks or months old did not deter people from reading it with interest. No matter how old it was, it was always fresh to them. Whether they would have preferred more local news or literary compositions to the great preponderance of foreign news that appeared, it is difficult to say. Americans were greatly concerned about the wars, alliances, and treaties of Europe. The campaigns of Napoleon, the various revolutionary movements, even the "doings of royalty" were seized upon with avidity by these self-assertive democrats of western Pennsylvania.

Toward the close of the first decade of the nineteenth century the amount of foreign news began to decline. The embargo had dealt New England commerce a staggering blow and when that section turned to manufacturing not only was there a decrease in communication between America and Europe but greater concern for indigenous things was born. The expansion of the frontier into the northwest and southwest, the question of internal improvements, and the War of 1812 gave the country a national consciousness it had not had before, and in western Pennsylvania, as elsewhere in the United States, the people turned their eyes from across the sea to affairs closer home.

When it came to matters of domestic news, politics was the chief concern. Each election brought forth an abundance of news and many personal letters that frequently reeked with bitterness. There must have been

a widespread interest in governmental affairs, for many columns were devoted to the laws passed by and the proceedings of the state legislature, to territorial ordinances, proclamations issued by the governors, and a variety of legal notices; debates in Congress, federal laws, and presidential messages were also given a great deal of attention. Detailed accounts of matters like the Burr trial were presented to the readers, news from eastern cities was taken regularly from journals arriving on the frontier and often republished verbatim, and occasionally the sensational or unusual found its way into print. While it is true that much that passed for news was of a monotonous strain, there was also some variety that gave color and life to the contents of the paper. Early in 1810 the *Pittsburgh Commonwealth* took notice of the increase of the salt trade at Erie. A heavy snowstorm in Somerset County late in April, 1801, received honorable mention among the storms of the year by the *Greensburg Farmers Register* and the *Pittsburgh Tree of Liberty*. The departure of Albert Gallatin for Washington, where he was to take charge of the treasury, elicited comment from the *Fayette Gazette* of Uniontown. The *Pittsburgh Mercury* probably led in the variety of news and in the manner with which the events of the day were presented. Addressing "the lovers of news," Mr. Gilleland expressed himself on these points in the first issue as follows:

I shall give all the valuable and interesting intelligence I can procure; but, not in the tedious and affected jargon of common news-writers disliking, as I do, the art they use to fill columns with accounts of events that should be given in a few lines. I shall write my own articles of news in a plain and decent style, such as may be relished by the learned and understood by the unlearned.¹⁴

And so from the pages of the *Mercury* one reads the brief statement that a yellow fever epidemic in New Orleans was causing twenty-five deaths daily; a graphic account of the Prophet's advance to Vincennes and of the erection of blockhouses and military posts on the western frontier by the government to obviate future alarm; a colorful report of a hurricane at Charleston, South Carolina; a brief announcement of the opening of a new road between Pittsburgh and Sandusky; and of scandalous occur-

¹⁴ *Mercury* (Pittsburgh), September 26, 1811.

rences at the University of North Carolina that led to the suspension of thirty-eight students.

Except on rare occasions there were no headlines to indicate what a column contained and usually no emphasis was given to events of special interest. The meeting of the constitutional convention in Philadelphia was ignored by the *Pittsburgh Gazette* as a matter of news but it was mentioned in connection with a toast that had been drunk at a Fourth of July celebration. Even the organization of the new government in the spring of 1789 received scant attention.

After wandering all over Europe and a large part of America the reader finally arrived at home. It was customary to emphasize foreign events by placing them in the most conspicuous position while local items were apparently viewed as being of little importance and were therefore placed after all other news. Such events as fires, marriages, storms, deaths, and public meetings were reported with great brevity. Duels and fights were embellished with more details than ordinary occurrences and as in the newspapers of today anything unusual was generally given preference over seemingly more important things. For instance, two lines were sufficient to chronicle the death of Ephraim Jones, a former sheriff of Allegheny County, while in the same paper two column inches were devoted to the accidental death of one James Irwin who fell from a horse on his way to church: the loss to Irwin's family, to his friends, and to society was bemoaned by the editor, who observed that the fate of this young man who had been "cut off in the flower of youth and in the glow of health . . . should warn us of the uncertainty of life, and the necessity of being prepared for our latter end."¹⁵ Besides occasional personal items, community activities were accorded some space. The annual celebration of the Fourth of July was not neglected and from the advance announcements and the various accounts of this event these gatherings must have been immensely popular. Toasts were drunk, oxen were roasted, and salutes were fired in honor of the day, the union of the states, the memory of Washington, President Madison, Vice President Clinton, Thomas Jefferson, the heroes of the Revolution, Governor Snyder, the American Congress, the state legislature, agriculture and manufactures, commerce,

¹⁵ *Commonwealth* (Pittsburgh), July 1, 1807.

the militia, American citizens on British men-o'-war, the fortification of ports and harbors, public schools, and "the fair daughters of Columbia." An announcement of Dr. Aigster's "Chemical Lectures," to which "all friends of science" were "admitted gratis," was carried in the Pittsburgh *Mercury*, but the interest of the public in these scientific discourses was not mentioned. Of greater concern, no doubt, was the Pittsburgh Moral Society sponsored by Ebenezer Denny for the purpose of suppressing vice, reforming evil manners, and increasing useful knowledge. Perhaps of even greater interest was such news as the launching at Elizabeth-town of "the schooner MONONGAHELA"—destined to sail down the Ohio and Mississippi to the sea—whose "construction, strength, and beauty, reflects the highest credit on the workmen, and especially upon the director and master builder."¹⁶

Sometimes the printers had no difficulty in obtaining enough news to fill all the space at their disposal but often they were forced to turn to any kind of material upon which they could lay their hands. Selections were frequently copied from other newspapers or from books or magazines. Some of these, such as "Gallantry," "Fashions," and "Grace," which was translated from the French "for the sole use of lovers of polite literature," may have been useful in modifying frontier crudities and in standardizing certain social amenities. Others, such as "Geological Sketches" of the various states, "Are the Planets Inhabited or Not?" and "Extracts from the Edinburg Review" on gas light, contained matters of scientific interest. Literary tastes were gratified by Tom Paine's "Forgetfulness," "The Story of a Bellows-Mender," "The Fate of Genius," and "The Philosophic Cobbler." Essays on the "Military Character of Messena" and "Charles II," a "Sketch of Bonaparte," and a description of the "Battle of Bennington" by "an old soldier who was in action" show that matters of historical record and contemporary interest were not neglected. Political subjects received a great deal of attention, and articles on "Partyism and Patriotism," "The Fallen John Adams," "The British Will Recede," and dozens of other items supplemented the political news of the day. A "Philosophical, Historical, and Moral Essay on Old Maids" and an account of "Female Curiosity" presented the

¹⁶ *Farmers Register* (Greensburg), May 24, 1800.

frontiersmen with a heavy, stilted type of humor that today appears absurd. Of domestic interest and helpfulness must have been the "Remedy to pacify an angry Husband."

Contributions by local authors were always popular and usually took the form of essays or letters to the editor. The most popular and best known of the various local writers was Hugh Henry Brackenridge, who had been instrumental in establishing the *Pittsburgh Gazette* and later the *Pittsburgh Tree of Liberty*. For almost fifteen years Brackenridge used the pages of the *Gazette* as a medium for publishing his various literary productions, for advertising the advantages of the Pennsylvania frontier, and for promoting his own political fortunes. In a series of articles entitled "Observations on the Country at the Head of the Ohio," Brackenridge essayed to publicize the western country, called attention to its needs, and pleaded for the development of Pittsburgh on the ground that its location was of strategic commercial importance. Next to Brackenridge, William Findley of Greensburg was probably the most outstanding contributor to the press. Through the *Greensburg Farmers Register* he often addressed the people under the *nom de plume* of "Sidney" on a variety of questions of a public and political nature, and upon becoming a member of Congress he continued to use this means of keeping in touch with his constituents.

Letters to the editor, usually discursive and dealing with politics, frequently bitter and filled with personal abuse, came in great numbers from the pens of local contributors. The editor of the *Erie Mirror*, in the first issue of that paper, openly requested "the assistance of all literary and scientific gentlemen . . . reserving, however, the right of judging the admissibility of essays, containing heterodox principles, or satirical personalities." Feeling, no doubt, that an appeal in prose was not sufficient, the editor gave wings to his poetic fancies in part as follows:

Write, correspondents, write, whene'er you will,
'Twill save me trouble, & my paper fill;
Display your genius, and inspire the great,
To deeds of valor, e'en to save the state,
'Twill sure subserve our common country's cause,
To expound her statutes and great nature's laws;

Then why permit such diffidence suppress
 Your useful labors?—Ye Bards, caress
 The muse—Historians deal in prose,
 In matter prolix, and in style verbose—¹⁷

Wyeth, however, was not firm enough to refuse articles from irresponsible persons and as the result of the publication of an offensive one he had to give up his enterprise and leave town. Not always were the letters from "Cato," "Vindex," "Subscriber," or "Farmer" given space in these pioneer journals. Mr. Gilleland, editor of the Pittsburgh *Mercury*, rejected a communication from "Skolastikos" on the ground that the author evidently misunderstood "the nature of my paper," criticized his contributor's "Fourth of July Eloquence," and took occasion to remark upon the "pedantic affected use of high sounding words that shew only the bad taste of the writer. I want no dignity above that of good sense—no beauty beyond simple elegance." Upon receiving "several anonymous communications calculated to wound the feelings of certain private individuals," the same editor became indignant: "Parade with your weapons I say, good folks, and fight openly—but let no one imagine that I will assist him to 'stab in the dark.'" ¹⁸ The editor of the Beavertown *Minerva* asserted that he would "gladly receive and cheerfully publish political essays from either party, when such essay is written with moderation and couched in respectful language." But he would never consent that the pages of his paper should become "the channel through which partizans may give vent to their gall." ¹⁹ The open forum conducted by the newspapers afforded little intellectual stimulation, and scant is the information to be derived from the various letters penned by local scribes. Such communications were, in the main, polemics, and the authors were generally so blinded by prejudice that it was difficult for them even to approach objectivity. These newspaper controversies may have served as "moral equivalents" for duels, fisticuffs, and other frontier methods of settling personal differences, but undoubtedly in some instances the abusive lan-

¹⁷ *Mirror* (Erie), May 26, 1808.

¹⁸ *Mercury* (Pittsburgh), September 26, 1811; February 1, 1812.

¹⁹ *Minerva* (Beavertown), November 4, 1807, quoted in Francis S. Reader, *History of the Newspapers of Beaver County, Pennsylvania*, 11 (New Brighton, Pennsylvania, 1905).

guage employed, the accusations made, and the frankness of expression led to physical combat.

Politics and news did not force the exclusion of the "Poet's Corner." To the readers of newspapers of a century and more ago this feature of the press was a happy break in the monotonous recital of European events and domestic occurrences, and as it was usually placed on the last page, the advertising section was relieved of a stereotyped appearance. Ornate, florid, rhetorical, and imitative of the classical poets, the selections printed, whether copied from other papers or written by local authors, impress one today as being stiff, saccharine, and ludicrous, although some of the verses possess a jingle-like rhythm comparable to the rhymes of Mother Goose. The political theme seemed dominant even in the newspaper's poetic offerings and as the election of 1800 drew near some local bard appropriately penned "A Federalist's Soliloquy." The impending failure of the Federalists at the polls was hailed with "Republican Glee," a poem to be read "with my jug in one hand." The nascent spread-eagleism of the period and the frontiersman's belief in "the divine right of democracy" were given expression in such lines as an "Ode to the True Sons of Liberty" and "The Triumph of Freedom." The War of 1812 aroused patriotic outbursts in poetry, and with an awareness of the enemy across the sea one writer began:

Long time has Great Britain provok'd us to war,
And Congress hath said, we'll no longer forbear,
Hark! Maddison calls—we are willing to hear,
In the cause of our country, we'll go out volunteer.²⁰

But another saw the frontier aspect of the conflict and in poetic exclamation penned "Indian War," which begins:

Hark, the fierce yell, the savage cry!
The war-whoop rends the western sky!
Extermination leads the van,
Death spares not female, child, nor man!²¹

In contrast to the spontaneous enthusiasm of the two poems just mentioned are the more stately and dramatic lines:

²⁰ *Mercury* (Pittsburgh), July 30, 1812.

²¹ *Mercury* (Pittsburgh), October 15, 1812.

Soul of Columbia, quenchless spirit come!
 Unroll thy standard to the sullen sky,
 Bind on thy wardrobes, beat thy furious drum;
 Rouse, rouse thy lion heart, and fire thy Eagle eye.
 Dost thou not hear the hum of gathering war?
 Dost thou not know
 The insidious foe
 Yokes her gaunt wolves, and mounts the midnight car?²²

Not all of the poetry centered around political activity and national honor. Face to face with nature, many a writer on the frontier was inspired to poetic expression by the various physical manifestations of the world in which he lived. One writer saw "The Firefly" as a "little rambler of the night." A forerunner of Whittier, writing "On the Prospect of Winter," began by moralizing:

Oh! may our follies, like the falling trees,
 Be stript of every leaf by autumn's wind;
 May ev'ry branch of vice embrace the breeze,
 And nothing leave but virtue's fruit behind.²³

An "Ode to Morning," reverent and colorful, was addressed to:

O Thou who wrap'st the infant day
 In various robes of blushing grey.²⁴

A storm at Erie in August, 1808, led to some verses by an author who, "dejected and downcast, thus invoked his wonted peace."²⁵

Frontier recreation was well pictured in a poem "On Husking" and even commonplace habits such as drinking and the use of tobacco were glorified in verse. Although one may well believe a western Pennsylvania poet was inspired to write an ode to "Whiskey," it is only by stretching the imagination that one may conceive of an "Elegy on a Quid of Tobacco." Local pride was probably responsible for the "Eriead" and its fulsome praise of the village on the lake led the *Mirror* to accept this contribution of "Erienus" for publication. The "Poet's Corner" was not devoid of amusing selections but oftentimes the humor was coarse,

²² *Commonwealth* (Pittsburgh), June 23, 1812.

²³ *Farmers Register* (Greensburg), August 23, November 9, 1799.

²⁴ *Tree of Liberty* (Pittsburgh), April 24, 1802.

²⁵ *Mirror* (Erie), October 15, 1808.

strained, or pointless. Women and marriage were often the targets at which shafts of wit were aimed and lines like these were not uncommon:

A Woman, speaks *without a tongue*! You stare,
But truth, a greater wonder would declare,
Should women *with a tongue* from speech forbear.

or these:

Here lies my wife—here let her lie;
For she's at rest—and so am I.²⁶

The Poet's Corner was even used to remind delinquent subscribers of their long overdue accounts.

These early western Pennsylvania newspapers were usually edited in an impersonal fashion and few are the editors whose names are synonymous with the papers they published. While it is true that the various editors had local reputations, their fame did not extend far beyond the county in which they lived, and with their passing they were soon forgotten. Pittsburgh editors were naturally more in the limelight than those in other towns. Men like Charles M'Dowell of the *Bedford Gazette* and Thomas Atkinson of the *Crawford Weekly Messenger* (Meadville) became identified with their papers by virtue of many years of service. George Wyeth of the *Erie Mirror* achieved some notoriety by being driven out of town. Snowden and M'Corkle of Greensburg gained distinction through their *German Farmers Register*, the first foreign-language newspaper in western Pennsylvania. Of high character and marked literary excellence were the editorials of John Berry, publisher of the Beavertown *Minerva*. John Scull of the *Pittsburgh Gazette* was undoubtedly the outstanding editor of the period. As the pioneer journalist west of the Alleghenies and for almost fifteen years the sole publisher in this section of the state, Scull's reputation and the circulation of his paper grew largely because of circumstances. The fact that the identity of the *Gazette* has been preserved for almost 150 years lends additional significance to Scull's publishing enterprise. Although most editorials were inspired by politics, during its early years the *Gazette* was nonpartisan and evaded controversy. Scull believed that a newspaper should represent the whole community irrespective of party and that it should open its columns

²⁶ *Tree of Liberty* (Pittsburgh), April 18, 1801.

to all worthy causes and ideals. In giving expression to his ideals he wrote:

If my undertaking was novel and hazardous my conduct has been honest. In my profession as a printer I never forgot my duty as a man. If I was a printer, I felt also I was a member of society and a subject of government, and I respect both . . . I never printed for hire, nor for party, and for protection of worth and the exposure of vileness my press has ever been open, of whatever party the worth or vileness were. I have made my conscience my guide, and used the best means in my power to inform it.²⁷

The Whiskey Insurrection, in which the *Gazette* quietly but firmly supported the federal government, and the rise of the Jeffersonian party with its organ, the Pittsburgh *Tree of Liberty*, dispelled Scull's dream of keeping a newspaper free from subservience to the designs of partisans. The discontent bred among the frontier farmers by the odious federal excise crystallized around Brackenridge, and when the rebels turned to smashing stills, hustling revenue officers about, and finally burned the house of General Neville, the chief revenue officer, a noticeable coldness developed between Scull and his erstwhile friend and chief contributor. Party differences soon came between the two men to such an extent that during the campaign of 1800 Scull determined that no longer would the columns of his newspaper be open to the "pernicious" ideas of Brackenridge. It was at this time that John Israel established the *Tree of Liberty*. Congratulating western Pennsylvania citizens on the probable appearance of two more Republican papers on the frontier, the Greensburg *Farmers Register* commented upon the alarm of "the Western Pioneer (Johnny Scull) . . . at the prospect of another press in Pittsburgh." In answer to Scull's statement that his press had "not teemed with abuse of government, its officers, and supporters," the *Register* observed: "True; but it has teemed with abuse of those who have dared to question its infallibility—it has teemed with courtly sycophancy and the rankest adulation—circumstances infinitely more dangerous to the liberty of the citizens."²⁸

With startling frankness the *Pittsburgh Gazette* and the *Tree of Liberty* exchanged views on the current political situation. Brackenridge and

²⁷ *Pittsburgh Gazette*, August 5, 1803, quoted in Erasmus Wilson, ed., *Standard History of Pittsburgh*, 839 (Chicago, 1898).

²⁸ *Farmers Register* (Greensburg), December 7, 1799.

Scull locked horns on numerous occasions but the editor of the *Gazette* lacked the brilliance, logic, and finesse to enable him to cope effectively with his opponent. On October 11, 1800, when a Republican was chosen inspector of elections in the borough, the *Tree of Liberty* jubilantly observed: "The People are no longer to be led up like tame asses to vote against their inclination for the characters that Ross Woods and Addison recommend.—They now think and act for themselves." After the presidential election of 1800, its enthusiasm was unbounded, and in high glee it commented: "It is laughable to hear some of the hot-blooded Federalists groaning and moaning at the result of the last election. They know not what cause to attribute it to.—They curse the *Tree* and all its leaves."²⁹ About a year later, when Jefferson invited Tom Paine to revisit his native land, an act that caused the President to be severely scored by the Federalists, Israel replied by pointing out the work of Paine in the cause of freedom and queried: "Why do they *the Federalists* not blackguard James Ross for *singing psalms* over a *card table*,—for mimicking the Rev. John M'Millen. Why do they not tell you that he was nearly choaked by a penny which was thrown down his throat, when he was mocking the Rev. Mr. Henderson . . . Oh ye hypocrites! Ye Pharisees! Ye Federalists!—When will ye learn consistency?—When will ye be honest?"³⁰ In 1803 the *Tree of Liberty* became so violent in its attacks, especially upon the *Gazette*, that Scull sued Israel for libel, and although both sides were equally guilty, a verdict was returned for the plaintiff.

The *Gazette* was particularly bitter in its treatment of Brackenridge, and upon one occasion Scull alluded to his former friend in the following manner:

You who get two or three thousand dollars a year for setting up a slanderous press and for two or three journeys through the State to sit as a mute on the bench, and wear the new cockade, in your drunken frolics through the country, can afford to buy a press and hire types, and pay under-devils to set types and fetch and carry tales. I cannot afford such things. I have no salary, post, or pension.

²⁹ *Tree of Liberty* (Pittsburgh), October 25, 1800, quoted in Charles W. Dahlinger, *Pittsburgh, A Sketch of Its Early Social Life*, 132 (New York and London, 1916).

³⁰ *Tree of Liberty* (Pittsburgh), September 19, 1801.

A week later Scull attacked Brackenridge with even more invective:

Mr. Brackenridge cannot expect to live long. He has already outlived all hope of fame. I doubt whether he feels that there is a God above him. I doubt whether he does not think that he is his own divinity while he lives, and that when he dies his dust will mingle with that of the beasts that perish. He has labored with industry and success to acquire the contempt and abhorrence of all whom it was possible for him to esteem.³¹

The controversy between the *Gazette* and the *Tree of Liberty* is not surprising since they represented opposing political creeds, but somewhat astonishing and even more bitter was the clash between Israel's journal, whose former violence had been supplanted by "moderation," and the Pittsburgh *Commonwealth*, which had been founded to voice the opinions of the radical wing of the Jeffersonian party. The election of 1805 clearly revealed the rift in the Republican ranks. McKean, who was rounding out his second term as governor, was the candidate of the conservative elements in the party who called themselves "Constitutionalists" and who were supported by the *Tree of Liberty*. The members of the left-wing division, choosing to call themselves "Friends of the People," put forward Simon Snyder and with the backing of the *Commonwealth* entered into the campaign. McKean and the *Tree of Liberty* were violently attacked by Pentland, the editor of the *Commonwealth*. Israel also came in for violent personal abuse and Pentland accused him of being ignorant. "Let a beardless boy instruct you, old goat!" he coarsely commented, and designating Israel as "the man with the long beard, but no brains," he concluded the article with the crude thrust, "Let a goslin' instruct you, old goose."³² McKean won the election with the assistance of the Federalists, who looked on in amusement at the internecine strife among the Republicans. Pentland, although chagrined by defeat, could not be silenced and continued his tirade against the *Tree of Liberty*, even though it had changed hands, and vented his spleen on the supposed owners, Walter Forward and Henry Baldwin, and on Tarleton Bates, whom Pentland believed to be the editor. On Christmas Day, in 1805, Pentland wrote an inflammatory editorial describing Bates and Baldwin as "two of the most abandoned political miscreants that ever disgraced the state." He trucu-

³¹ *Pittsburgh Gazette*, February 6, 13, 1801, quoted in Dahlinger, *Pittsburgh*, 133.

³² *Commonwealth* (Pittsburgh), August 28, 1805, quoted in Dahlinger, *Pittsburgh*, 141.

lently queried: "To what party do they belong?—to no party; to all parties—they have been '*whigs or tories, high or low republicans, democrats or anti-democrats, jacobins or anti-jacobins, constitutionalists or republicans*, 'according to existing circumstances.' " This incendiary diatribe led to the public cowhiding of Pentland by Bates and was followed by Pentland's challenge to a duel. Bates refused to accept on the ground that Pentland was beneath his notice and in his reply spoke slightly of Pentland's second, Thomas Stewart, an Irish merchant. Stewart then challenged Bates to meet him on the field of honor. Bates accepted but fell in the encounter. The *Tree of Liberty* appeared in mourning after the disgraceful fray but the removal of Bates did not silence Pentland, for he made one more slanderous charge in his columns against the personal character of the man who could no longer defend himself.

Less sensational than the rivalries already mentioned were the frequent skirmishes between the *Erie Mirror* and the *Crawford Weekly Democrat* (Meadville) caused by the political situation.

Editorial comment, however, was not wholly confined to politics, and the readers often found observations upon matters of local interest, such as the establishment of a new brewery in Pittsburgh, the need of a bridge over Turtle Creek, the launching of a steamboat at the forks of the Ohio, and complaints about the crowded court docket in Allegheny County. Many other subjects commanded editorial attention, such as "The Comet" of 1811, the "Origin of . . . Merino Sheep," a "Critique" of Brackenridge's "Address to Walter Scott," and a defense of American "Philology."

The publishers of those days did not know a great deal about the art of advertising. They did, it is true, use various devices to catch the eye of the reader—very large lettering, italics, and crude cuts representing horses, eagles, ploughs, or runaway slaves. The advertisements were usually very dull, mere announcements put together without thought of appealing to popular fancy and more similar to modern English advertisements than to those of the United States. There was little cleverness in the placing of advertisements; instead of sandwiching them between bits of news, the publishers usually grouped them together on pages three and four. Although not attractively worded or well placed, the advertise-

ments are indispensable if one is to gain any real insight into the social, economic, and political life of western Pennsylvania at that time. There is no other printed source that gives so many intimate details about the everyday life of the people—the types of houses that were used, the crops that were raised, the transportation of goods overland or by river or lake, the merchandise on display in the stores, entertainment, education, the books that were read, labor conditions, manufacturing enterprises, and the kinds of clothes worn are all reflected through the advertisements. They also include notices of articles that have been lost or found or stolen, notices that horses or cattle or dogs have strayed from their owners, that men will not pay debts created by their wives who have eloped from their bed and board, that letters are unclaimed in the post offices, and that claims against estates must be filed. The Pittsburgh papers, with the exception of the *Mercury*, were the largest advertising mediums and they frequently issued supplements containing nothing but advertising.

The period from 1786 to 1812 was an epoch in the history of western Pennsylvania journalism. A gradual modification of frontier conditions was reflected in the press. It is possible to date a newspaper by its physical appearance; as the years passed many crudities in make-up and style disappeared, variations in size were not so pronounced, and by 1812 there were evidences of standardization. No longer were the papers in western Pennsylvania looked upon as “voices in the wilderness,” for population had increased, towns had multiplied, business had expanded, and a “broadening culture” was already touching the lives of the people. The period of national expansion was on; the “era of good feelings” had begun. European news, as has been pointed out, was given much less space than was news of various phases of American life such as the westward movement, urban and industrial development, internal improvements, the bank, the tariff, and slavery—all subjects that had come to occupy a large place in the public mind and that were inextricably woven into the future of Pittsburgh and western Pennsylvania.