

NOTES AND DOCUMENTS

A NOTED AUTHOR'S VIEW OF THE POINT PARK PROJECT

TO THE chorus of approval from leading citizens and organizations of Pittsburgh and western Pennsylvania in support of the movement sponsored by the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania for the creation of a national park at the historic Point at the junction of the Allegheny and Monongahela rivers is added the voice of Mr. Neil H. Swanson, who has long been a student of western Pennsylvania history and is the author of *The Judas Tree*, *The First Rebel*, and other widely read books based in whole or in part on the early history of this region. In response to an inquiry from Mr. T. Clifton Jenkins, a member of the historical society, Mr. Swanson expressed himself on the merits of the project as follows:

BALTIMORE, MARYLAND

September 28, 1937

Dear Mr. Jenkins:

The project for the creation of a national park at the Point is great news. It should be carried out. I sincerely hope it will be.

For a long time I have thought it shameful that this spot, one of the richest and most important in all America in historical background, should be so neglected. If the restoration of old Williamsburg has been useful—and I think no one questions it—the Pittsburgh project is even more worth while. The significance of "The Forks of the Ohio" in the making of this country is infinitely greater than that of Williamsburg. I have devoted nearly seven years, now, to research into Pennsylvania colonial history; and the more I read, the more firmly am I convinced that events and conditions in the frontier settlements tributary to Pittsburgh had much more to do with the making of America than those east of the Alleghenies. There is a woeful lack of popular understanding of those early events and conditions, and the result is a general misunderstanding of the American Revolution and the development of the United States.

The George Washington Park project appeals to me most strongly because it would tend to awaken national interest in that neglected phase of our national development.

All this, of course, may be regarded as mere sentimentality. The success or

failure of your project probably will rest on its practicality. Businessmen will ask whether it will be of value. The answer, I believe, is an emphatic *yes*.

No one who visits New England in the tourist season can doubt that the historic places there draw thousands of visitors every year. You undoubtedly have noticed that New England carried on an extensive advertising campaign this summer, and that its appeal was centered on the sentimental interest attached to Lexington and Concord, Saratoga, Bennington and Boston. Having been born and brought up in the midwest, I know how strongly the historic shrines in the east appeal to people there. Pittsburgh heretofore has had no such attraction to offer; it has the history, but no one has known anything about it. I think it is the richest historical field in America; if you take a look at the October issue of Scribner's, you will see that I have found it so rich that I am planning *thirty* books about it.

Aside from the visitors who would be attracted by the proposed restoration and bring additional money to Pittsburgh, there is a less tangible but even more important value in this project. Focusing attention on a little known phase of our national history, it would, in time, greatly broaden popular knowledge of some of the most difficult and dangerous times this country has ever known. I feel very strongly that as people come to understand how and under what circumstances America was made, they will be less likely to be taken in by "isms", they will have greater faith in the normal processes of our democracy. Whatever contributes to that end adds to the security of the country and its business men.

The clipping which you sent me refers to the restoration of Fort Pitt. The map, however, shows only a restored Fort Duquesne. It seems to me that in a project so large and costly, it would be a grave mistake not to include the restoration of Fort Pitt. Pitt was the greatest inland fortress in America, and went through one of the most dramatic sieges in our history. It played its leading role in frontier affairs for years after Duquesne disappeared. It would be even more interesting to visitors than the much cruder Duquesne would be; and because only its landward wall was faced with brick while the rest were earth, the cost should not be prohibitive as a part of this elaborate project.

I do not know how I can be of help, except in so far as my books may serve to arouse interest in old Pitt's Town, but I shall be happy to do anything possible to further this enterprise. My forthcoming book, a sequel to *The Judas Tree*, centers around Pittsburgh in the years between the end of the Pontiac War and the outbreak of the Revolution; to this, *The Temporary Gentleman*, there will be several other sequels, all with Pitt's Town as their background. I can think of no better repository for the original manuscripts of these Pittsburgh books than one of the barrack-rooms in a restored Fort Pitt.

Sincerely yours,

NEIL H. SWANSON