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TABLE OF CONTENTS

TRIUMPH FROM TRAGEDY: CHARLES ELLET JR. AND THE COLLAPSE OF THE WHEELING SUSPENSION BRIDGE
By Rev. Clifford M. Lewis, S.J.
Assistant to the President, Wheeling College ...................... 2

ONCE IN A LIFETIME WHEELING CELEBRATES THE UNITED STATES CENTENNIAL: 1876
By Dennis E. Lawther, M.A.
Assistant Professor of History
West Liberty State College ........................................... 16

"THE GREAT MOUND" AT MOUNDSVILLE IS GETTING ITS PROPER SETTING
By Sam Shaw, Publisher,
Moundsville Daily Echo ................................................ 21

VAN METRE'S FORT: FURTHER NOTES ON THE HISTORY AND A PROGRESS REPORT ON THE EXCAVATION
By Alan H. Cooper, M.A.
Instructor in Latin and Archaeology
Linsly Military Institute .............................................. 24

BOOK REVIEWS:
Pioneers of Black Sport by Ocania Chalk and
Voices from the Great Black Baseball Leagues by John Holway.
Reviewed by Dr. Arthur E. Barbeau, Chairman, Department of History, West Liberty State College ....................... 29

A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT: John A. Hazlett .................. 30
TRIUMPH FROM TRAGEDY

Charles Ellet Jr. and the Collapse of the Wheeling Suspension Bridge

By Clifford M. Lewis, S.J.

(Editor's Note: We are honored to have an article by Father Lewis who edited the first issue of this journal in 1968. Rev. Lewis is the "Dean" of local historians with numerous publications on the history of this region. He is well remembered for his work as research analyst to the West Virginia Antiquities Commission. Welcome back!)

In our country's bicentennial year Wheeling can boast of preserving two of the country's architectural treasures: Independence Hall, the birthplace of the only State made from another State, and the Wheeling Suspension Bridge, National Historic Civil Engineering Landmark.

With these two structures were associated two great men: Francis Pierpont, loyalist Governor of Virginia while West Virginia was being incubated from 1861 to 1863 and then Governor of Virginia from 1863 to 1866, first from Alexandria and then in Richmond—and Charles Ellet, Jr., builder of the Wheeling Suspension Bridge, at 1010 feet the longest suspension bridge in the history of the world up to that time.

All too infrequently we have to make our judgments of great men on the basis of their official correspondence, in which it has been customary for them to mask their emotions behind stiff statements of facts or issues. Fortunately Ellet, whom most of his contemporaries knew as a man almost too interested in just the hard facts, encouraged his wife and family to preserve his letters to them; at the same time he retained many of their messages. From them we cannot help but sketch the profile of a man of tender compassion who reassured his family at the same time he was being strengthened by them during the greatest crisis of his life—the collapse of the Wheeling Suspension Bridge during a severe wind on the afternoon of May 17, 1854. This article will consist largely of quotations from his letters which tell of the man more than of the engineer.

On May 18th, when Ellet received news of the collapse, he wrote no fewer than three letters to his wife, Ellie, from Philadelphia, where he was staying on business. By the time he came to write the third letter, he had calmed himself down to the point of underestimating the gravity of the collapse. There follows his first letter of May 18:

My dearest Ellie

I have just reached the Hotel, hastening to start for Richmond, and have received a despatch, announcing the most sad intelligence that the Suspension Bridge at Wheeling has been blown down, and is all in the river.

You can judge of my sorrow, dearest Ellie, and you, at least, will sympathize with me. They ask me to come immediately. I cannot hesitate, but must go.

The despatch is from Dr. Baker. I am well dearest, but sick at this moment at heart. I will endeavor to take care of my health.

Oh! I do regret to be robbed of my anticipated visiting. Keep well and keep the children well dearest Ellie. I must expect to have my share of business losses. The winds of fortune have all been favorable of late.
But do you keep well. Trust to me for a calm and deliberate course.
My love to the dear children. Write to me at Wheeling.

Ever yours,
Charles Ellet Jr.

Take care of your health. Ride out much and be cheerful.

Failing to catch the 2 o'clock train, Ellet was forced to wait for the
10 p.m. accommodation. The disturbed state of his mind is evidenced by his
writing two more letters to his wife while waiting. In the second however, he
predicted that if things are as "I hope to find them, six weeks will enable me
to ... put it up." Affection for his family is again revealed in the succeeding
paragraphs:

As soon as I can make the needful arrangements, and get the work
properly started, I will come on and see you and embrace you all once more.
I feel the necessity of continued separation from my family I think
more than anything else. If I had you with me at Wheeling I could go
about the work cheerfully. It is very possible that I may be compelled
to bring you out, in order to be with you at the time of your confinement.
You must let me know in your first letter when as near as you can tell,
you expect it to take place. I am uncertain whether it is the beginning
of August or September...

Whether this accident will be a misfortune to me or not time must
show. Sometimes events the most untoward prove not to be the greatest
misfortunes in the long run. Perhaps remote good may grow out of this
present soil.

As he did so often, Ellet closed this letter by drawing kisses, with the
instructions "For Nina," his nickname for Cornelia. She had been born October 2,
1849, at a "country house" five and one-half miles east of Wheeling, quite probably
Mrs. Gooding's tavern at Elm Grove.9

In his third letter, written just before boarding the night train for Balti-
more, Ellet reached the height of wishful thinking in this message to Ellie: "I
have a hope that the cables are still in place and sound, and if so—and the floor-
ing only is blown off—the damage can be repaired in two or three weeks."

Ellet arrived in Wheeling on the morning of May 20. During the day he wrote
the following information to Ellie that reveals his own identification with the
bridge, the sympathetic reaction of leading townspeople, and the sorrow of school
children. Written at a critical time of Ellet's life, this letter is quoted in
its entirety:

I reached Wheeling this morning before breakfast. I have been
travelling now without interruption, 36 hours, and two nights in the
cars. To-day I attended a meeting of the Board, and have examined the
wreck of my noble bridge thoroughly. My health is good, and I feel
quite strong, though jaded.

I bear this shock exceedingly well in all respects. It has not
depressed my spirits more than I think it ought to, and I am ready to
commence rebuilding as soon as the Board gives me the requisite authority.
There is to be another meeting at 7 o'clock this evening, when they will
take some definite [sic] action on the subject.

It is a happiness to me in this misfortune to find that I do not
mistake in the selection of my friends. That my confidence is usually
reposed in the right places. All whom I trusted before I find as firm
now as ever. Mrs. Baker told her husband that the bridge was always a pet thing with her; but she grieved more on Mr. Ellet's account than for anything else.10 Dr. Houston was sorriest on Mrs. Ellet's account.

The little children at the female school all wept when they heard of the fall of the bridge.12

In short, this melancholy thing has cast a gloom over Wheeling. People cannot yet realize it, though the broken fragments of the bridge are visible in the river.

The damage is much worse than I had feared. The hopes which I expressed to you, on leaving Philadelphia, have not been realized. The destruction is very great. It will take four or five months to restore the damaged work, though I can put it in a condition to pass the travel in less than two months.

My present purpose is to give things a fair start, and then leave the work in the hands of superintendents while I pay you a visit. The question on my mind, and on which I am not yet fully decided is, whether I had not better bring you out with me, and shut up our house, even if we return to Richmond after your confinement. My mind rather favors that plan. I think I can start matters here, so that I can venture to leave, in about a week. In the mean time, I shall hear from the Central Board,13 or from Col. Fontaine, and learn what they will expect from me.

I know how this misfortune will distress you my dearest Ellie. But is it not light compared with some misfortunes we can easily think of to ourselves or to our children.

Write to me daily, my dear Ellie, and let the children write also. Tell Nina that I had to come back to Wheeling, but that I will take good care of the little doll.

I am glad to repeat that I am very well though much jaded.

My love to Charlie and Mary.

Ever yours
Charles Ellet Jr.

P.S. Tell me what you think of coming out to Wheeling and remaining at Mrs. Godding's during your confinement.

Ellet's wife suffered the shock of reading about the destruction of the bridge in the Baltimore Sun and the Philadelphia North American, which she received on May 19. That same day she read her husband's second letter, with its story of the collapse, the second letter having arrived before the first. Ellie's letter tells the story of a crushed and devoted wife:

Richmond, May 20th 1854

My dearest Charles,

I did not receive the first letter you wrote to me after hearing of the destruction of the bridge, and suppose it must have been lost. I got the intelligence from the newspapers yesterday morning and passed a day of excessive and painful excitement, expecting every moment to get some message from you, as there was no letter, and I felt confident you would go instantly to Wheeling. Last night I got your second letter, too late to answer it in time for the mail, but it had an immediate and comforting effect on my feelings and spirits, and this morning I can look at the whole matter much more calmly. I do feel most thankful that no lives were lost. That is a great comfort—and I trust you may find that the cables are not so entirely injured as the account represents. On that I presume will turn much of the delay and expense in reconstructing the bridge. You
will understand my intense anxiety to hear from you as soon as possible after reaching Wheeling, and let me know the worst at once—how it affects you in every respect and what you propose doing. I shall try to keep as cheerful as possible, and take as good care of the children and of my own health as I can, for I know where you are most vulnerable, and I do not want you to be harassed or drawn aside by any anxiety about us—It is needless to dwell on the pain of being so much separated from you. I wish you to make just such arrangements as your own judgement and convenience suggest. I do not doubt that my confinement will take place within a day or two of the 1st of August. I find it somewhat difficult to avoid repining at my present condition, at this moment, but who knows, but that it may be a blessing and comfort for some future day. Certainly you ought to have nothing but comfort and blessings in store for you...Both Mary and Charles show much feeling about the loss of the bridge—though in a different way. Charlie's intense vexation at the thought of the pleasure it will afford to Pittsburg overmasters his regret at the actual loss—especially as he sees no difficulty in the way of its speedy recon-struction. Nina is sadly disappointed that her dear Papa does not come home to see her. She had just learned all her big letters to give you a pleasant surprise.

Of course you have written to your Mother—I am afraid she will be very much excited and distressed by this untoward event, and nothing will do her so much good as a letter from you—I intend to write to her also in the course of the day.14

I shall be very restless till I hear from you. I am going out now to take my letter to the office, and will carry the bundles of estimates and letters on the business of the Company to Col. Fontaine—make an appointment for Mary at the Dentist, and also for myself as my own teeth need attention, but I have been postponing it until you were with me.

Write whenever you can find time, as that is my chief [sic] comfort when I cannot see you.

Your devoted wife —

When people are under great stress, they are quite likely to write letters as a means of relieving it. Ellie was no exception, for the next day after hearing from her husband she gave release to her worries by writing him not only once, but twice. In her Sunday morning letter she relates that "I have seen in the Sun and North American the particulars of the destruction of the Bridge which seems so disastrous that I fear its restoration will be no light undertaking." Her next sentence reveals her intelligent sharing in every problem related to the bridge: "Is there not a danger of a renewal of the Pittsburg difficulties, and of some legal obstruction?" She would have been aware of the Pittsburgh lawsuits during her previous stay in Wheeling while the bridge was under construction. She again discusses the time of her "confinement," which her husband also referred to as the time of her "sickness," and the time of her "trouble." The terminology reflects the then current philosophy about pregnancy, but it was particularly applicable to Ellie, who although she had been an attractive girl had suffered poor health from about the age of thirteen.15

Like her husband, Ellie was too responsible to neglect business because of tragedy. She informed Charles on May 21 that she had "carried all the estimates and letters connected with the Central Road to Mr. Garrett."16 One can easily
imagine her playing a role similar to that of the wife of the injured Washington Roebling, son of John, who supervised work on the Brooklyn Bridge from his wheelchair and sent down construction orders by his wife. Following the information on Garrett, Ellie goes on to say:

I presume the cost of repairing the Bridge will be very heavy, and the time much prolonged if many new cables are needed. It has occurred to me as possible, that with so many railroads meeting at Wheeling, it may be reconstructed as a Railroad Bridge. I want to know what to say to others, as well as for myself....

I observed in the Phil[a] paper this morning a notice of the Hempfield Road[17] which seems to have been introduced for the purpose of pushing the efficiency and merit of Judge Conrad,[18] and suggesting the propriety of his uniting both offices (Mayor and President).[19] How does this matter stand.

Let me know if you hear from your Mother—I have not had a letter from her for a long time.20

Ellie—

I want to know how the Wheeling people take this misfortune. And above all, never fail to mention how you are whenever you write. I cannot escape from the apprehension that you will break yourself down in this hot weather by too much exertion, or be hurt in some way in examining the wreck, and attempting to have the cables raised—Just a line every day—the mere sight of your handwriting, would be an inexpressible comfort to me.

This letter was addressed simply to 'Wheeling Virginia,' for Ellie was doubtless sure that any postal worker would know where the letter might reach her famous husband.

Her afternoon letter reveals the distressed condition of her mind, her conclusion that repair of the bridge will involve time, work, labor, and expense, her utter dependence on her husband, her desire to be with him, and finally fear of leaving the children. She adds some philosophy of comfort: "You have been so successful my dearest Charles—we ought to be willing to take our share of the misfortunes of life." She summons all her power to soothe in her closing paragraph: "I long too much to feel your dear head once more on my breast, and fancy that I am some comfort to you.

Your devoted wife—

Charles was still without word from Ellie on the 21st, but not yet expecting any. His next letter is quite lengthy but worth quoting almost entirely, for it shows the dispatch with which the Wheeling bridge board could operate, in contrast with Ellet's experience with the Niagara Falls board, with whom he broke off relations after suspending the first working cables and crossing above the Gorge in an iron basket attached to the cables by pulleys.21 His philosophy of life is also reflected here.

Elm Grove
May 21, 1854

My dearest Ellie,

I am in our old quarters at Mrs. Goodings, where the family is as kind as ever, and glad to welcome me back.

This is Sunday evening and I shall go into town to the Post Office, though I scarcely expect to receive any letter from you until the day after tomorrow.

I dislike to think of the pain which the loss of the bridge will cause you,—and the children too. But it is a part of my share of the untoward part of life's fortune. It would not be well if the sun beamed brightly always—if the sky was never clouded—people were never sick and
misfortune never came. The man so favored would become presumptuous.

I do not grieve over this loss. The shock to my reputation may be greater or less, I know not how much, but I do not deserve to suffer on account of mismanagement. I did what was right, and I will stand the account.

The board met last night and I explained my plan and they authorized me to go to work at once. I will recommence in the morning. This is Sunday, or I would have begun today.

The probability is that we shall soon enlarge the plan and convert the structure into a rail road bridge. The first object will be to get the structure into a condition to accommodate this travel immediately. This, I tell them, will consume about two months. That is about the shortest period in which I can put up this bridge, if I give it my personal attention constantly.

My wish is to leave here for Richmond at the end of the present week, if I can get the work so started that it will go on properly in my absence.

I have written to Judge Conrad today to know whether he wishes the rooms for his family, or what his plan is. They partly expect him, but have no certain information of his intention. I do not think he will come if he is elected Mayor. At any rate, I am sure he will tell me to take the rooms.

The family hardly knows what to say to me about our coming. Miss Mary was very unexpectedly married to Andrew P. Woods, a very independent widower, well advanced in years, on Wednesday. She was their mainstay after Jenney's (?) death.

But I hope that we can make out. If I bring you, I will purchase my horse again from the Company and bring out the carriage and buggy, so that we may have that comfort while here.

Mrs. Quigley says that Miss Mary observed last week that I had returned, looking unusually well, and in reply to the question How I left you, I said, "My wife and four children are well."

This account was in reply to my intimation of your condition—which I considered it proper to give Mrs. Quigley.

I am in haste to reach town before the office closes.

Ever yours,
Charles Ellet Jr.

Kisses * * * For Nina

Judging from Ellet's letter to his wife on May 22, he was emotionally getting back to normal following the bridge disaster.

My dearest Ellie

I am happy to have received your first letter written since the fall of the Bridge and am happy too to tell you that I do not think that the calamity here has injured me professionally. Indeed, people receive me with more kindness, and trust me with all the confidence they ever manifested.

I wrote to Judge Conrad yesterday about the rooms at Mrs. Gooding's, but will do nothing decided until I see you, further than to keep them at my disposal.

I have a letter from Col. Fontaine, very illegible, but to the effect that he has no idea that the Board will be willing for me to leave their service. . .

I hope that this accident will not injure my professional standing. My aim will be to put it up so quick that the distraught public, astonished at the destruction, shall be more astonished at the celerity of the repairs.
... I think it was a whirlwind that occasioned the final overthrow of the bridge.\textsuperscript{26} Be of good cheer. I will try to leave here Saturday night. But I am not reliable.

My love to the children.

Ever yours

Charles Ellet Jr.

On May 23 Ellie received Charles' first letter from Wheeling, and on the 24th his first from Elm Grove. His report from the scene, although its realism was chilling, nevertheless gave her reassurance to the point of injecting some humor into her reply; this, too, in spite of the fact that Nina and Charlie had both suffered fever and dysentery from eating a friend's French candy. With reference to her "sickness", if it were decided that she should be in Wheeling, she would not be able to leave there before October 1st. She realized that if she had unusual difficulties Charles would want to be with her and she could foresee that eventuality as interfering with his work if she were not in Wheeling. Ellie then reviewed a series of complicated possibilities concerning which servants to bring and which to send away, for she contemplated locking up their Richmond house. On the lighter side, she said her brother had been writing to his wife and holding her (Ellie) up as a pattern of proper confidence in her husband. This led Ellie to observe "My friends somehow labour under the delusion that I am mightily devoted to you. How easy it is to impose on folks in this world."\textsuperscript{27} She goes on to make her real feelings manifest by quoting Nina, her youngest: "When Nina was sick in the night and I got up with her, without any reference to you, she exclaimed 'don't we love Father, Mother---' She is as sweet as sugar, and very affectionate." Ellie as usual shared her husband's professional preoccupations as well as family problems. "This is the time for Pittsburg, and those who have any secret jealousy or dislike, to make an effort to annoy you." Her next statement is hard to believe when applied to either Ellie or Charles: "It is a comfort that neither of us depend much for our happiness on the opinion of other people."

The correspondence at this period reveals an unusual rapport between Ellie and her mother-in-law, Mary Israel Ellet, at that time living in Illinois in close proximity to her sons Edward and Alfred, whose lives became entwined with Charles' activities during the Civil War. Charles' mother is rightly given credit for encouraging him in his engineering aspirations. She might have done the same for his younger brothers Edward and Alfred, whose letters will be quoted here, except perhaps for the fact that she had invested own and others' ready capital in Charles' trip to France for engineering training. The two younger Ellets write letters that are almost carbon copies of Charles' in handwriting style, grammar, and expression.\textsuperscript{28} None of the boys received this style from their mother, who in spite of a finishing school education, wrote letters literally devoid of periods, although their content is commendable. Perhaps they had the same advantage as Charles—two or three years of formal education in Philadelphia at a time when they could best benefit from it. The handwriting resemblance between Charles and his brothers suggests he may have guided them in some of the learning process. Of course Edward, as a medical practitioner, must have had extra education.

Charles' mother and her two Illinois sons collaborated in writing letters on the same day, May 24, as soon as they got Charles' letter of May 18 confirming what they had read in the papers. Mrs. Ellet's style of address impresses this writer as a bit patronizing: "My Dear Dear Charles," but the sympathy was undoubtedly sincere. She falls into others' routine in consoling Charles, in excusing him of fault in an act of God, yet if Roebling had built the bridge, as we know, it would have been tied down to the earth and would never have fallen. The elder Mrs. Ellet gallantly offered, "should Ellie be obliged to leave Richmond," to put Elvira and the dear
children in charge of some good and competent person whom you can trust and let them all come to me. . ."

Ellet's mother complimented him in the choice of a companion and friend. 
". . . dear good Elvira how I love her, as well for her worth as for her love for you faithful through every difficulty, such a wife is a treasure, then let us not grieve too much for the Bridge. . ."

Alfred's letter is full of sympathy, assures Charles that the bridge "has become identified with family pride. But we will hope soon to see it rearing its proud head again above the beautiful Ohio, not one whit less elegant, but even better able to resist the floods and tempests than before." He begs Charles "to think no more" of his and Edward's request for the loan of $2,500.

Edward's letter is even more consoling:

You have fought hard and manfully and victoriously for that glorious structure but then your enemies were mortal like ourselves and of course not invulnerable. But when God blows the breath of his nostrils who can resist? Napoleon's defeat in Russia was wholly due to the Elements. But you are not defeated only checked for a time, that you may exhibit fresh power to excite the admiration of both friends and foes. I know you will soon have the bridge in situ again and with additional precautions for its perpetual preservation.

In a postscript written after a restless night Edward suggested the possibility of rebuilding the bridge for railroad traffic as well as horse-drawn vehicles. Inasmuch as this program for rebuilding would take a long time, he offered going to Richmond and transporting the family to Wheeling thinking "you would wish to have your family with you immediately and every arrangement concluded for Elvira's approaching illness without loss of time."

As if mental telepathy were at work, on the same day that the three were writing from Bunker Hill and suggesting among other things the railroad, Charles wrote to Ellie:

My purpose is to have the bridge adapted now to railroad purposes if the companies can be induced to co-operate. The chief difficulty in the way is their want of means. They are all in difficulty.

When I return I shall bring my saddle, and save myself by keeping a horse constantly saddled at the door of my office. The walks are not long, but frequent, and I have not sufficient strength for them.

In the same communication, Ellet asked his wife--"Keep my letters now until I return. But continue to write, as I may possibly still be delayed." Apparently Ellie was in the habit of returning his mail for filing.

That Ellet soon returned to see his wife is suggested from his letter to Mr. Thomas Williamson, written with a Richmond date line on May 31. The letter does not mention receiving the May 24 letters from his brothers; even if he had he nevertheless acted on their earlier request for financial aid. He mentions their building a store and house and being worth between $10,000 and $12,000 each. "My brothers are plain and prudent business men, strictly correct, economical and moderately prosperous." Charles offered to endorse their request, though he explained why he could not make them the loan himself at that time.
More than two weeks after this, June 17, Charles wrote his wife of a visit by Benjamin H. Latrobe, chief engineer of the Baltimore and Ohio. 29

I am just about to go out to Mrs. Gooding's--taking Mr. Latrobe with me to spend a night out there. . . . Quite a plot was laid here and attempted to be carried out in my absence, with a view to break me down in the bridge Company. It was defeated, however, and mainly by Dr. Baker. . . . There is, and has been for several years, a considerable party here opposed to, and anxious to overthrow me.

Benjamin Latrobe played an important role in Ellet's life in the early 50's, especially in the routing of the B and O according to Ellet's preference so as to enter Moundsville and then Wheeling on a more northern route than originally discussed. Latrobe agreed to back Ellet's request for a contribution from the B and O Railroad facilities for the restored bridge, according to an agreed-upon letter from Ellet to Latrobe. Ellet's total cost estimate was $80,000, which included additional tracks on Market Street and the Island, change of grade and embankment on the Island, and enlargement of the bridge, which itself would be at a cost of $60,000. He proposed to divide the $80,000 total cost among five railroads using the bridge: The Hempfield, the Marietta and Cincinnati, the Cleveland and Wellsville, the Baltimore and Ohio, and the Central Ohio. He acknowledged that the Central Ohio might not come into the arrangement, leaving the cost at $20,000 per railroad. The $80,000 arrangement would permit cars drawn by horses, the engine crossing by itself. At some future date, he said, the bridge could be further strengthened to provide for engines pulling cars.

Modern citizens of Wheeling are doubtless glad that the railroad proposals brought no fruit, for Ellet's plan called for laying track on Market Street, with a branch leading to the B and O and another to the Hempfield station.

Ellet's interests were amazingly varied. An example is the information contained in letters to his wife and daughter Mary V. Ellet, concerning an archeological find six miles up the river from Wheeling, on the West Virginia side. In the grave containing the partly decomposed bones of a supposed aborigine, he writes Mary on June 20:

. . . I saw yesterday or day before, an inscription which I should have been glad to have shown you. It was two lines scratched, perhaps by means of a piece of flint, upon a piece of mica (isinglass) which was found in the grave of an Indian, on the Wheeling side of the Ohio, about 6 miles above here. The mica was in the position where the breast of the Indian lay--for the body, with the exception of the skull, teeth and a part of the jaw bone--was decomposed, and gone to its Mother, Earth.

In this piece of Mica were these words, distinctly written, in a round, legible but not practiced hand:

"Tremilbo thou who did die for me and my son Jerio and my wife Peto. William Welsh 1587."

Where did this Englishman--William Welsh--come from, to have here an Indian wife and son, in 1587--or 267 years ago--and before the foot of the White man is known to have (????) the Alleghany mountains? I wish you would study that out, and account for the existence of this man--an Englishman of some education--on the banks of the Ohio.

I intend to drive up and look at the grave where this truehearted savage was buried. He ought to have a monument reared to his memory on that spot, with William Welsh's acknowledgment of his services. Can you not devise a short and appropriate inscription for it? 30
Charles was preoccupied with his daughter's plans to leave home for an extended visit at a time when her mother might need her. His letter is quite reminiscent and philosophical, and can be summed up in his key sentence: "It is a belief of mine, founded on some experience, that one never regrets the sacrifices made in discharge of visible duty." At the very time he was composing this letter, he had reason to apply his philosophy:

But, one can never hope to be out of the reach of trouble. All a man can do is to render his troubles as light or as profitable as possible. Even yesterday, the anniversary of your expedition, a new attempt was made against me. A notice was served against the Bridge Company to appear before one of the judges of the Supreme Court, in Philadelphia, to defend themselves against a new bridge suit.

This suit was settled favorably for the bridge. Pittsburgh had renewed its attempt to have the bridge dismantled on the ground that it was not high enough to permit the vessels with highest stacks to go under it at high water.

The California Gold Rush, which had been a major distraction of Ellet during the first building of the bridge, becomes the chief topic of his letter to Ellie on June 23. His oldest brother, John, had gone to California. Charles at that time was writing and planning railroads to and from California enthusiastically. Now John's son, John Jr. and another boy, perhaps the latter's brother, had reached California and had written their uncles Alfred and Edward in Bunker Hill. Edward himself had stopped there permanently on his earlier trip to join the gold seekers. John Jr.'s letter to Bunker Hill had been forwarded to Wheeling, and Charles commented to Ellie, June 23: "You will be gratified to hear of the safe arrival of the boys in California, as well as to notice the very sensible and straightforward letters of this one." Charles, however, considered his brother John as headstrong and unreasonable and bound to exercise a bad influence on his son of the same name.

Charles in this letter to his wife reveals his plans for getting miniatures made of the whole family. "I shall enclose Mary's to her in a letter. Nina's I will bring with me . . ." If his next suggestion had been carried out, we might have had a very early history of Wheeling written by a woman:

I have been thinking of suggesting to Mary a work for her occupation, instruction, and amusement, and wish your opinion about it. It is the "History of Wheeling." Such a work, as the history of any other western city, would afford an abundant field for drawing in the early adventures and history of the pioneers of the Mississippi Valley and brought down to the present time would connect my works with the prosperity of the place. It would be highly improving to her, and published—if successful—without her name, would be read in the West with a great deal of interest.

I am of the opinion that a literary career is the best suited to her character, and will most promote her happiness and accord with her ambition.

Ellet was not known as a drinking man, but suspicion could have been aroused over the foregoing proposition to summon his 15-year-old daughter to the challenge of an historical task intended, we are afraid, for the promotion of his own interests. Charles frequently chided this daughter over the infrequency of her correspondance, but she made up for her defects after his death by continually reminding the world of her father's accomplishments until she died at the age of 91. Mary's grandmother took up the same task until her death at 90.

On July 20 Ellet had to attend a meeting of the Hempfield Board in Washington, because the Board was afraid of reported cholera in Wheeling. This was the second time, at least, Ellet had survived cholera scares in Wheeling.
Ellet met his prediction of being able to put up the bridge in two months after his arrival on May 20. On July 26 a 14-foot, one-way restoration was completed, initiated the day before when Ellet and his assistant, Captain William C. McComas, made a ceremonial crossing in a horse-drawn carriage.

Poor financial conditions, including the Panic of 1857, prevented the enlarging of the bridge until 1859-60, when the work was done under the supervision of McComas on plans drawn up by Ellet. Washington Roebling came down to watch McComas at work and years later wrote in praise of both him and Ellet.

Space prevents us from summarizing the heroism of Charles, Alfred, and Edward Ellet in naval engagements for the North on the Ohio and Mississippi, engagements in which Charles' son of the same name played an important part.

Charles the father was wounded in the leg at Memphis. His old enemy now turned friend, Secretary of War Stanton, carried the sad news to Ellie where she was living in Washington. She got to her husband's side before he died of infection from his wound, on June 21, 1862. Identified with her husband in life, she followed him in death by only two weeks and was buried in the same grave, at Laurel Hill.

Before his interment, Ellet lay in state under the Liberty Bell in Independence Hall, Philadelphia. Probably few men deserved the honor more.

Footnotes

1. The author of this research had an article, Wheeling Suspension Bridge, in West Virginia History for April, 1972. Dr. Emory Kemp, head of the Civil Engineering Department of West Virginia University, was technical collaborator.

2. "Independence Hall," on the north corner of Market and 16th Streets, is a National Landmark as defined by the National Register of Historic Places. Restoration is well advanced on this building, originally a customs house when built in 1859 and from 1861 to 1863 the temporary seat of the government of West Virginia.

3. The Suspension Bridge was declared a Civil Engineering Landmark in ceremonies at Wheeling in 1969.

4. We assume that Ellet made copies of some of his letters, especially those of a legal nature. All three of his letters to his wife of May 18 are in existence. Both Ellet and his wife early gained a sense of Ellet's historical importance and the value of retaining correspondence. The 18,000 items preserved in the University of Michigan, a great deal of them correspondence, are ample evidence of the saving habit.

5. The Wheeling Intelligencer has an excellent eye-witness account of the destruction. Probably using this account, John Roebling several months later came up with the classic explanation of the bouncing effect in suspension bridges that are not heavy enough to halt the beginnings of such a motion. The lesson of tying suspension bridges down still had not been learned in 1940 when the Tacoma, Washington, bridge fell from having caused by only a 42-mile-an-hour wind. Ellet in 1854, at least, did not grasp the complete explanation. Writing to Ellie on May 22, he says "I think it was a whirlwind that occasioned the final overthrow of the bridge." By this statement he admits that wind caused the heaving of the bridge, but he was grasping for a reason to explain the twisting as it fell.
6. "Ellie" was the name Ellet consistently gave his wife, who had been Elvira Daniel, daughter of Judge William Daniel, General Court judge and member of the Virginia legislature. His home was in Lynchburg. A pretty bride, Ellie declined in health, hence the frequency with which Ellet cautions her to care for herself, especially as an expectant mother. As her letters indicate, she virtually lived for her husband and came to share his joys and sorrows and anticipations.

7. Dr. James Baker was a druggist and apothecary, with offices at the corner of Main and Monroe. He resided at 109 4th Street, according to the Wheeling Directory, 1851.

8. An example of Ellet's preoccupation with the health of his family is seen here.

9. This tavern was a stone house which stood near U.S. 40 about a quarter mile west of the Moses Shepherd mansion. The tavern was torn down in the Fall of 1956, and a drive-in bank now occupies the property.

10. Dr. Baker's wife is the one mentioned here.

11. Dr. M. H. Houston had his office and residence at 179 Fourth Street, according to the 1851 city directory.

12. The female school of which he speaks was probably the academy founded in 1848 at 14th and Eoff, which later became Mt. de Chantal Academy at its present location off Washington Avenue.

13. Ellet had dealings with both the Virginia Central and the Central Ohio, but we presume the former is indicated here.

14. Ellet's mother, Mary, daughter of Israel Israel, one-time sheriff of Philadelphia County, was the product of a Philadelphia finishing school, a very strong woman responsible for the beginning of Charles Ellet Jr.'s., career as an engineer. Ellet's father was a descendant of Samuel Carpenter, a Governor of colonial Pennsylvania. Actually, Charles Ellet Jr. was the third consecutive Charles Ellet.

15. Gene D. Lewis, in Charles Ellet, Jr., (Urbana, 1968), p. 166, giving references chiefly to letters of her husband, attributes Ellie's poor health to the mismanagement of her diet and poor medical advice, in which we feel he must share some complicity, especially during her Wheeling days.

16. The Garrett referred to here is probably John W. Garrett, war-time president of the B and O. Another possibility is Robert Garrett, forceful in the early efforts to bring the B and O to Wheeling.

17. Ellet became chief engineer of the Hempfield Road in 1850. As G. Lewis says (p. 153), "The construction of the Hempfield Railroad was an attempt by the citizens of Wheeling to attract the trade from the west and south to their city and to direct it from there to Philadelphia." Dr. Baker thought it might be necessary to elect Ellet president of the Hempfield Railroad. When Ellet left the employ of the company in 1855, only about half the intended length of road had been laid toward Greensburg, Pa., where the equivalent of the Hempfield road was ultimately united with the Pennsylvania Railroad and this in turn united Philadelphia with Wheeling at the investment of very much Philadelphia capital, largely solicited by Ellet.
18. Judge Robert Taylor Conrad (1810-1858), son of a Philadelphia publisher, was a lawyer, playwright, and politician. When Philadelphia was enlarged to the boundaries of Philadelphia County, Conrad succeeded in the 1854 election and became the first mayor of the newly defined city.

19. Note Ellet’s letter of May 22, in which he reserves rooms for Conrad and his family at Mrs. Gooding’s tavern, but predicts that he will not come if successful in the election.

20. See Note 14. The elder Mrs. Ellet was living with sons Alfred and Edward in Illinois, giving her address as Clay Cottage, Bunker Hill.


22. Miss Mary was Mary Gooding and the Andrew Pogue Woods she married was the great-grandfather of Charles Woods Jr., of 4 Woods Drive, Wheeling.

23. We have not been able to identify the Jenney or Kenney referred to here.

24. Charles is cutely including the unborn child in his tabulation.

25. Ellet was finding it impossible to juggle three projects in the air at once: the bridge, Humpfield, and Central. His value to the railroads was proved repeatedly by the officials' insistence that he remain in a position of control, which guaranteed action.

26. Ellet had intended to make the cable strength equal on both sides and sought for an explanation of the unequal pull that turned the bridge over.

27. Both Ellie and Charlie were capable of light humor, but we know of it only from their letters to each other.

28. It is impossible to say whether Charles' influence on the much younger boys' style was conscious or unconscious. Their mother's handwriting is entirely different.

29. Benjamin Henry Latrobe Jr. is the best known of the remarkable Latrobe family. The father, born in England of French Protestant lineage, had a distinguished career as an architect in America, building the Roman Catholic cathedral in Baltimore and doing major portions of the United States Capitol before and after its burning in 1814. Both he and his son Henry died of yellow fever in Louisiana while consecutively working on the New Orleans waterworks. His sons Benjamin and John attended Georgetown College in Washington. John, a lawyer, was counsel for the B and O, an inventor, an historian, and one of the founders of Liberia in Africa for freed American Blacks.

30. Ellet to Mary, June 20, 1854.

31. McComas was a very competent all-around supervisor of bridge-building and erection of public buildings. Latrobe recommended him unsuccessfully for the building of the Wheeling Custom House ("Independence Hall"), but this left him more free to enlarge and repair the Suspension Bridge.

32. Ellet's beloved children Nina and Willie (the burden of much of the correspondence from May to August while he lay in his mother's womb) disappear from Mary's correspondence before the 1880's and were presumably dead. Charles performed nobly on
the main rivers after his father's death but died in his sleep at Bunker Hill in October, 1863. G. Lewis, p. 213.

33. See Note 79 in G. Lewis, art. cit.

34. G. Lewis, p. 207.
ONCE IN A LIFETIME
WHEELING CELEBRATES THE UNITED STATES CENTENNIAL: 1876
by
Dennis E. Lawther

On December 31, 1875, the thermometer at Silvey’s Drug Store in downtown Wheeling registered daytime temperatures in the mid-sixties. But more than balmy temperatures had aroused Wheeling citizens. For weeks they had prepared to usher in the New Year amid a gala celebration. This year, 1876, would mark the beginning of the nation’s centennial celebration, the first one-hundred years of American independence. The residents of Wheeling and the surrounding towns promised to play a significant role in a "once-in-a-lifetime" celebration.

January 1, 1876 arrived in the Upper Ohio Valley amid considerable noise and pompous celebration. When the Wheeling town clock tolled the arrival of the new year, all quarters of the city came alive. Bells rang and horns blew. Occasionally, the sound of explosives reverberated across the valley. On crowded city streets, people competed with each other in the intensity of their celebrations. Captain Edward Weisgerber, Superintendent of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, decorated an engine and several gondolas; then he drove the train from South Wheeling to the Hempfield Tunnel, shooting off rockets and firing a cannon, much to the delight of the townspeople. Crowds gathered on Market Street from the Post Office to the McLure House Hotel. The jewelry store of Oxtoby and Duffield, 1103 Main Street, displayed seventy-five candles indicating the dates "1776" and "1876".1

A state capital of 28,000, Wheeling became the official headquarters for organizing the West Virginia display at the United States Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia. The State Centennial offices were located at 1320 Market Street opposite the Hamilton Opera House.2 The West Virginia State Centennial Commissioners usually conducted their meetings at the McLure House. Governor John J. Jacob appointed A.R. Boteler of Shepherdstown, Chairman, and the following persons as Centennial Commissioners: Dr. J.P. Hale of Charlestown; C.H. Beall of Bethany; and Andrew J. Sweeney, O.C. Dewey, and George W. Franzheim, of Wheeling.3

The Centennial Commissioners created the Ohio County Local Board composed of Dr. A.S. Todd, Chairman; C.E. Dwight, Secretary; and C.H. Hubbard. These men supervised the collecting and organizing of specimens for portraying the accomplishments of Wheeling and Ohio County.4

The West Virginia Legislature appropriated $20,000 to construct the State exhibit buildings and collect and transport exhibits to Philadelphia.5 Wheeling architect C.C. Hembie designed the State Centennial buildings. The Main Building contained a lower floor for meetings and promenading, and an upper floor used as a ladies sitting room, with a balcony overlooking the lower floor. The Exhibition Building, measuring 60 by 40 feet, provided ample space for the many exhibits of the State. West Virginia supplied all the lumber used for the construction of these buildings.6 Contractor H.S. White of Bellton, Marshall County, completed the work at an estimated cost of $6,000.7 Situated between the exhibits of Canada and Great Britain with a Japanese village in front and a Spanish display to the rear, West Virginia enjoyed a very favorable exhibition location.8

The United States Centennial Commission established seven categories for the various state exhibits: mining and metallurgy, manufactured products, education and science, art, machinery, agriculture, and horticulture.9 The State Centennial Commissioners appointed Professor Matthew F. Maury of Fairmont Normal School as director of the West Virginia activities in Philadelphia. On May 1, the Commissioners shipped 585 articles from the Wheeling offices to the State Centennial Buildings in Philadelphia.10 Specimens ranged from examples of West Virginia’s vast natural resources to expertly manufactured products.
Among the many display exhibits sent to Philadelphia, private citizens and Wheeling merchants provided the following:

1. Henry Seamon, 1150 Water Street, a collection of Wheeling stogies, tips, and long "nines".\(^{11}\)

2. Robert H. Browne, a lumber businessman at Grape Island Creek, 52 varieties of timber.\(^{12}\)

3. C.H. Beall and Ninian Beall of Brooke County and John Ingram of Marshall County, fine specimens of wool.\(^{13}\)

4. The Boggs Run Mining Company, specimens of coal, limestone, cement, and building stones.\(^{14}\)

5. Mendel's Furniture Company and the Wheeling Hinge Company, a finely ornamented, carved walnut stand for the display of hinges. The stand measured 8 feet high by 3 feet wide with gilt lettering, "Wheeling Hinge Company, Wheeling, West Va.", inscribed in the center.\(^{15}\)

6. G. Mendel, Booth and Company, an elegant walnut "Centennial Showcase" for J.H. Hobbs, Brockunier and Company, glassware manufacturers located at 36th and McCulloch Streets. The showcase measured approximately 35 feet long, 16 feet high, and 6 feet wide with a plate glass front and a mirror backing. W.H. Robinson, 1223 Main Street provided the plate glass for the showcase.\(^{16}\)

Wheeling School Superintendent John C. Hervey proposed a Centennial educational display depicting the schools of Wheeling and Ohio County. Hervey's plan called for an exhibit composed of samples of penmanship and writing, textbooks, and a map indicating the location of Wheeling and Ohio County schools. Hervey's proposal was implemented with each of the Ward schools contributing an exhibit. A collage entitled "Public School Buildings of Wheeling, West Va." contained eight photographs of Wheeling's public schools.\(^{17}\) The National Centennial Commissioners commended Wheeling for its outstanding educational display. Work samples from Union Public School, St. Joseph's, Mont de Chantal Academy, Wheeling Business College, and Wheeling Female Seminary attracted many interested visitors.\(^{18}\)

George B. Crawford of Wellsburg designed a unique piece of woodwork – a Centennial Memorial Bracket. Utilizing wood from Brooke County, Mr. Crawford represented many patriotic symbols within an ornamental bracket approximately six feet high and three feet wide. One author described the bracket as follows: \(^{19}\)

An elaborate design containing the American eagle, the flag, stars representing the thirteen original states, 'Liberty, Union, and Independence; In God We Trust', opening sentence of the Declaration of Independence, names of the signers of the Declaration of Independence, Philadelphia, July 4, 1876, names of the Presidents thru Grant, and the figures '100,' 'Esto Perpetua.'

The United States Centennial Commissioners gave special recognition to J.H. Hobbs, Brockunier and Company of Wheeling for exhibiting beauty and originality in lime glass tableware.\(^{20}\) Upon the closing of the Centennial Exhibition, the Commissioners awarded the West Virginia display second place among the twenty-four participating States. The display included (1) an excellent exhibit of building stones;\(^{21}\) (2) a geological collection depicting the State's natural resources;\(^{22}\) (3) the State Centennial Building constructed from wood indigenous to West Virginia; and (4) an exhibition of bituminous coal.\(^{23}\)

Wheeling residents wishing to attend the Centennial celebration in Philadelphia could purchase a round trip ticket on the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad for $19.50.\(^{24}\) Once in Philadelphia, the traveler could choose from a vast selection of hotels and boarding houses. Ads frequently appeared in the Wheeling Daily Intelligencer calling attention to furnished rooms with gas heat and bath, costing $12 to $15 per week.
Board costing $5 to $10 per week could be secured at most fine hotels and rooming establishments. 26

Although the national centennial celebration attracted most of the attention, many fine celebrations took place on the local level. Across the country, towns and communities prepared their version of the centennial. Patriotism was certainly the expression of the times.

As Wheeling approached the end of 1875, citizens began expressing interest in a local centennial celebration. The city council indicated its approval by calling for suggestions from the citizenry. The Turner Society, representing more than twenty German societies, proposed a rousing July 4, 1876 celebration, second to none in the Upper Ohio Valley. 27

In meetings held at Turner Hall and Beethoven Hall, the German Local Centennial Association appointed Charles A. Schaeffer as President, Charles Hirsch as Secretary, and August Rolf as Treasurer to coordinate the celebration. 28 Six committees — finance, decorations, grounds, procession, music, and orators and invitations — assisted these officers. 29 Plans called for the firing of a cannon to open the gala event, a two-day concert, a gigantic picnic on the Island, and an exciting fireworks display to climax the day's events. All benefits would help finance the Wheeling Children's Home, St. Joseph's Catholic Orphans Asylum, and the German-American Seminary Fund. 30

By April of 1876, German centennial plans took a more definite form. The Committees on Decoration and Procession proposed a torch-light parade through Wheeling on the evening of July 3rd. In addition, three ornate arches would be constructed at key points within the city. Plans called for one arch at the east end of the Suspension Bridge between 10th and 11th Streets, a second arch to be located at the Island picnic grounds, and the main arch to be positioned at either the McClure House or the Court House where State and city officials could review the parade. 31 Among the officials invited were Governor John J. Jacob and Mayor Andrew J. Sweeney. The Concert Committee arranged to have the five German Singing Societies—Harmonie, Germania, Maennerchor, Beethoven, and Concordia — sing the "Star-Spangled Banner" and "Hail Columbia." 32

Mayor Sweeney proposed decorating the city in a style similar to that of Philadelphia and the national centennial. Mayor Sweeney also followed President Grant's suggestion of having essays about local history presented to the citizens. 33 The city council appropriated $1500 to help defray expenses. 34

Through the combined efforts of the Wheeling Centennial Celebration Committee and the German Centennial Executive Committee, final arrangements were concluded. The procession would organize at 7 A.M. at the State capital grounds. Short addresses and band music would be provided. At 8:30, the main procession would begin with Mayor Sweeney as "Chief Marshall." 35 The parade route gave all Wheeling residents the opportunity to view the colorful event. The parade would form at Chapline and 16th, move to North Wheeling, turn and travel to South Wheeling as far as 37th Street, and then conclude by crossing the Suspension Bridge to the Island picnic grounds. 36 Amusement would consist of pole-climbing, target shooting, dancing, sack racing, and gymnastics. 37

On the day of July 3rd, Wheeling citizens made final preparations for the grand event. The "Red, White, and Blue" flew briskly in the wind from balconies, businesses and residences. National flags honoring forty-one nations decorated the windows of the City Building. City workers placed 506 Chinese lanterns on the Suspension Bridge for illumination during the night hours.

During the early evening hours, residents quietly awaited the arrival of the 4th of July. At 12:00 A.M., a "100-gun" salute by West Virginia University Cadets echoed across the hills announcing that Independence Day had arrived. Quickly Wheeling came alive. On the surrounding hills, people ignited bonfires which lit up the
night sky. Bells rang from all sections of the city. People continued to celebrate through the night. At 5:30, a national 38-gun salute startled many early risers.

At 7 o'clock, the tedious task of organizing the various floats, wagons, organizations, and marchers began on Market Street between 12th and 16th Streets. At 7:30, Kramer's Band and Vaas' Wheeling City Band treated early arrivals to spirited marching music. Governor Jacob and Judge G.I. Cranmer delivered short historical addresses at the Capital grounds. Approximately 5,000 people had gathered along the parade route by 8:30. The order of procession was as follows:

1. Wheeling City Marshall and Police Force
2. Chief Marshall Andrew Sweeney and Assistants
3. Display of Flags
4. Music: Kramer's Band
5. West Virginia University Cadets
6. Washington Guards of 1840
7. Catholic Beneficiary Society
8. Harmonie Singing Society
9. Order of Red Men
10. Beethoven Singing Society
11. Concord Lodge
12. King William Lodge
13. St. Alphonsus Society
14. Germania Lodge
15. Order of Harugarie
16. Eastern Tea House
17. Knights of Pythias
18. Turner Society
19. Maennerchor Singing Society
20. Orangemen
21. Music: Wheeling City Band
22. Carriages Carrying the Governor and State Officers
23. The Centennial Committees
24. Veteran Soldiers of the Blue and Gray
25. Citizens of Wheeling and Fulton
26. Wheeling Butcher's Association
27. Nail City Boat Club
28. Hegner Boat Club
29. Black Citizens and Summer Band
30. Wagons Representing Commercial and Manufacturing Interests

Once on the Island, band music provided picnickers with a soothing form of entertainment. At 11:00, the German Singing Societies sang the Star-Spangled Banner, followed by an address by Governor Jacob. Later, Alfred B. Caldwell read the Declaration of Independence to the people, and Dr. Meyer and Judge G.I. Cranmer delivered short addresses.

As the day continued, the Island became crowded with over 3,000 people, while several hundred could be seen crossing the bridge. At mid-afternoon, food, fun, and frolic came to a temporary halt as a violent thunderstorm swept through the valley, leaving the picnic grounds a sea of mud. After a two-hour pause, music and dancing brought people into the pavilions. Contests such as greased pole climbing, egg racing, stilt racing, and sack racing revived the dampened spirits of the picnickers.

In the early evening hours, people began to move toward their homes in anticipation of a gigantic fireworks display. Crowds gathered along the river bank and on the Suspension Bridge. The display was less than spectacular, however, since
most of the fireworks had been destroyed during the afternoon storm.40

As the town clock moved toward midnight, centennial celebrations continued across the country in hundreds of American towns. The long awaited day slowly departed and would not return for another century. Yet in Wheeling, a patriotic feeling could be sensed in the night air. Slowly, calm returned to the Wheeling area as citizens ended that "once-in-a-lifetime" celebration.

Footnotes

1. Wheeling Daily Intelligencer, January 1, 1876, p. 4
2. Ibid., October 30, 1875, p. 1
3. Ibid., January 11, 1876, p. 4
4. Ibid., October 30, 1875, p. 1
5. Ibid., November 20, 1875, p. 1
6. Ibid., January 27, 1876, p. 4
7. Wheeling Daily Register, February 15, 1876, p. 4
8. Daily Intelligencer, January 24, 1876, p. 4
9. Ibid., November 22, 1875, p. 2
10. Ibid., May 1, 1876, p. 4
11. Ibid., April 12, 1876, p. 4
12. Ibid., January 13, 1876, p. 4
13. Ibid., June 8, 1876, p. 2
14. Ibid., March 25, 1876, p. 4
15. Daily Register, January 6, 1876, p. 4
16. Ibid., March 30, 1876, p. 4
17. Daily Intelligencer, April 5, 1876, p. 4
18. Ibid., April 21, 1876, p. 4
22. Ibid., p. 417
23. Ibid., p. 405
24. Ibid., Volume VIII, p. 616
25. Daily Intelligencer, April 3, 1876, p. 4
26. Ibid., May 3, 1876, p. 3
27. Ibid., October 29, 1876, p. 4
28. Ibid., December 14, 1875, p. 4
29. Ibid., February 14, 1876, p. 4
30. Ibid., November 22, 1875, p. 4
31. Ibid., March 30, 1876, p. 4
32. Ibid., May 15, 1876, p. 4
33. Ibid., May 30, 1876, p. 4
34. Ibid., June 6, 1876, p. 1
35. Ibid., June 9, 1876, p. 4
36. Ibid., June 28, 1876, p. 4
37. Ibid., June 29, 1876, p. 4
38. Ibid., July 6, 1876, p. 4
39. Daily Register, July 6, 1876, p. 4
40. Daily Intelligencer, July 6, 1876, p. 4
The Great Mound’ at Moundsville is Getting its Proper Setting

The Grave Creek Mound at Moundsville, W. Va., has much more room on its east (to left) and north sides, now that the neighboring houses have been removed. It is still slightly sliced off on its west side by Tomlinson avenue (at right). Present Museum is on far (south) side of the Mound; new Museum will be to left, on northeast corner of lot.

Written and Typeset for
Upper Ohio Valley Historical Review
By Sam Shaw,
Publisher, Moundsville Daily Echo

The Grave Creek Mound State Park at Moundsville is now a reality after many years of campaigning for it; and soon, construction will begin. In the past couple of years, houses have been removed from the east and north sides, all the way east to Jefferson avenue and north to Eighth street; and the city has abandoned Morton avenue and Jane streets that ran thru this area.

About a million dollars is being devoted to this project, sufficient to make these enlargements of the area, and to build a new museum, parking lots, etc.

Architect E. A. Glendening of Cincinnati has been engaged to design the new facilities— and he turns out to be a most sympathetic man for this job. Governor Moore convened personally a group of representative citizens of the community, and introduced Mr. Glendening to them. He said he wants to keep any unrelated structures away from the immediate vicinity of the Mound; he doesn’t even want to use mercury vapor lights because although more efficient, they seem too harsh for this; he hopes there will be no neon signs too close; and part of the museum building will probably be underground so it won’t dominate the Mound scene. He made a number of trips to other Mound Builder sites, and to archeological museums to get background for his project.

The impression around the Park now, is that they are getting close to letting contracts.

Meanwhile, people come from all over and from foreign countries, to visit the Mound and the older Museum. It is open from April to December, seven days a week, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m., with a fee of 50 cents to go inside the Museum. It is not advertised as being open in winter — but the Park staff does keep it open then, when not occupied with other duties. To call them on the phone, it is 845-9511 (the number is listed under “Grave Creek Mound” and not with the West Virginia offices listings.)

Tom Murdoch is park superintendent. He is assisted by Charles Blake who has been working with the previous Mound management eight years; they also have Ron Lucas on the CETA program, plus a couple of women keeping the museum open in summertime.

FINDINGS
When the expansion of the Mound area was proposed, this writer urged and moved a resolution on the floor of the Archeological Society meeting, that before any construction would be undertaken, they ought
to conduct a scientific study of the area. Especially to be looked for, would be any sign of the "moat" that early writers said ran around the Mound. I was hoping the tract would reach out far enough to include at least a bit of it.

The studies were done by several teams. They were not too fruitful; but three discoveries were made:

1—Digging on the north, showed that the Mound was built "down" as well as "up." It stood on a low ridge running to the northeast; and the builders scooped earth off the top of that ridge, thus creating a base, and dumped that dirt on top of the base, to end up with what is deemed the highest such mound these people created.

2—They found the moat. A team led by Dr. Thomas Hemmings from the state Geological Survey, Archeology Section, ran trenches out from the base, to discover that there had been a broad shallow ditch, extending about forty feet out from the base, and not over four feet deep. It had been, remarkably, entirely buried by later accumulations of earth, partly as that area was planted in corn by early settlers. They established that it ran all the way around the Mound, except that they could not examine the west side where Tomlinson avenue abuts the base of the Mound. It was not a water-filled moat in the European castle sense, but rather an ornamental or ceremonial border, with at least one gateway opening. (This is a reason many of us would like the see the Mound Park extended westward at least fifty feet, by diverting Tomlinson avenue westward.)

3—Another Geological Survey party led by James Addington and Betty Broyles, dug into the north face of the Mound, and had just found the brick entrance of the tunnel that was driven into the Mound a century and a quarter ago, so tourists could go into the middle and peer into where a burial vault had been. But public fears that this meant the digging down of the Mound itself, caused Governor Moore to call a halt, and the earth was restored.

As this is written, Dr. Hemmings has just completed a series of nine core drillings from the top down thru the Mound to its bottom, and has taken the 2-inch diameter samples back to Morgantown for study. They came out surprisingly variegated in color, indicating the Mound was built up of basketfuls of earths from several places.

I have personally urged that any building near the Mound should take the form of the family houses of the Mound Builders: a circular structure about 50 feet across, with walls of pairs of posts woven thru with branches, and a conical roof. But some feel that would not afford enough security for precious artifacts inside.

Future Extension Westward?

The present expansion of the old 1/2-block Mound square to now the equivalent of four blocks (actually two double-length blocks) and the forthcoming construction, will use up the money available now.

That is creating a park with the Mound near one corner, and the Museum in the other corner:

![Diagram of future expansion](image)

Many of us had long dreamed of a park extending all the way west to Lafayette, which is now W. Va. State Highway 2. That means acquiring the equivalent of four more blocks (actually two more double-length blocks). Since the Mound Builders built the Mound somewhat south of the extended line of Ninth street, the most urgent part of this future extension (after a minor expansion to divert Tomlinson westward to clear the base of the Mound) would be to open up a strip which is the north half of the long block between 9th and 10th streets. This would give highway travellers a view of the Mound in passing.

Furthermore, early writers mention a pair of low walls that ran from the Mound down toward the river. That might be in this south-of-Ninth-street strip area, and if archeologists could somehow uncover a bit of them, it might be possible to restore them.

The state is now in process of widening Lafayette to a divided highway, with all the expansion at this point to come off the same side as the Mound. With this reaching east, and a diversion of Tomlinson reaching west, that would leave only about 375 feet of land to be acquired to connect the Mound Park of Lafayette.

As this is written, there are two projects for public buildings that would have some "campus" area, being discussed. It is possible those projects could be put into this area in such a way as to help finance the cost of clearing out and opening up a westward outlook for the Mound.

Who Built the Mound?

At the time of Christ in the Old World, in
this hemisphere a center of civilization was in Moundsville and Cresap Bottom.

A tribe of Indians, whom we call Adena from the name of the farm where their culture was first identified, built many mounds to honor their dead. They were certainly not the earliest men here; but apparently the first to plant any crops, as their predecessors were only hunters and gatherers of foods they found. They did not yet have corn, or they had acquired it just prior to the birth of Christ.

They made spears with points (the “beavertail” style of point is characteristic of Adena culture).

They did not have the bow, and launched their spears from an atlatl or throwing stick, which served as an extension of the human arm for greater leverage. I have tried to throw spears with an atlatl, and it is extremely difficult to get good aim.

The ancients had traffic, and the Warrior Trail Association of Waynesburg, Pa., has marked an apparent trail of theirs from Cresap on the Ohio river, south of Moundsville, to Greensboro on the Monongahela, which is open to hikers. Maps are available.

In the last few years, our knowledge of these people has been greatly enlarged, especially by excavation of the Cresap and other mounds in Marshall county. When this writer was growing up, people speculated that the Mound was probably of the same age as the Pyramids of Egypt, about 40 centuries (twice the actual age) and that it must have been taken by a well organized society to command all those workers to do all that work.

We now know that many of these mounds were as much as 500 years in their building. I was told by a staff of two people at a time working steadily could have put up this Mound in that time; but the experts at Morgantown are skeptical of this estimate.

Some mounds started as one small mound, then another built alongside it; then enough earth heaped over to consolidate them into one.

**Catching Up**

Some years back, some of us complained that the state of Ohio was supporting a full-time archeological staff, while West Virginia did nothing.

Then the late Delf Norona, dedicated historian who lived in Moundsville, prevailed on the Rotary club to sponsor construction of a museum at the Mound, which then was simply a place administered by the warden of the nearby penitentiary.

A small museum was built, and filled with what items could be gleaned (the artifacts taken out of this Mound when it was dug into a century and a quarter ago had all been taken away.).

This sparked greater interest in the Mound; and soon a state Archeological Society was operating. This put pressure on the state and secured funding for professional archeological services. The register book in the Museum began to fill with signatures from visitors from surprisingly distant places.

The Museum was put under control of the Archeological Society, and particularly Curator Delf Norona. Soon, revenues from admissions and sales of souvenirs began to pay for explorations around the state, and for scientific publications. Carnegie Museum with its splendid work in the field of Early Man, came in and helped.

The Archeological Society welcomes interested members. Send S$5 annual dues to Secretary-Treasurer Paul Dietrich, 1914 Woodside Circle, Charleston WV 25314. Current president is Earl R. Walter, also of Charleston.

**Other Sites**

**MAP**

[Cockayne Mound] [Grand Vue Park]

[Cockayne Mound] [Moundsville]

[Watch Tower] [Great Mound]

[Great Mound] [Prison Farm Village]

[Watch Tower] [Watch Tower]

[Recent Hilltop Excavation] [Moundsville]

[Watch Tower] [Watch Tower]

[Watch Tower] [Watch Tower]

[Watch Tower] [Watch Tower]

We hope that today’s development at the Mound site, will be followed by development and preservation of the Twin Mound site at the junction of Route 2 and the Fish creek road in Cresap (where a roadside park ought to be), and the Cockayne Mound in Glendale, with the marking of other mound sites in Moundsville, and perhaps of the three “watchtower” sites on hilltops overlooking this town—then people can come here and fill a day with observations.
Further notes on the history and a progress report on the excavation.

Alan H. Cooper with Richard S. Klein

The excavation of Van Metre's Fort began on September 21, 1976, and continued, on Sundays until November 30. Work will resume in the Spring.¹

Although the history of the site was outlined in the previous issue of this journal, several new pieces of evidence, corrections, and additional facts must be included here to complete the information on which the excavation proceeded. A major indication that two Van Metre's Forts existed was the fact that there were two commanders for these forts at the same time. While this remains unchanged, the previous article gave the name of Storough Leet as one commander, the other being Samuel McColloch. An inspection of the receipt upon which Leet's name was determined produced an error. With the calligraphy of the late eighteenth century being as it was, the name of Comm. Storough Leet was read instead of Comm. Stroop, Lent. The "Comm." refers to Stroop's position as commander, the "Lent." to his rank of lieutenant. Stroop was appointed a captain following his recruitment of thirty men. In the papers of Colonel David Shepherd is this:

"This is to certify that Conrad Stroop is appointed Capt. in the New Regiment to be raised for the protection and entitled to a commission and pay of Capt. in the service of the United States from this date provided he secures and produces 30 men by appointment at Fort Pitt. July 19, 1778

Col. David Shepherd."²

Captain Conrad Stroop was the other commander of a Van Metre's Fort, not the non-existent Storough Leet.

Another indication of the site of Van Metre's Fort is the burial place of Samuel McColloch. However, the location of the marker on the site, placed by the D.A.R. in 1933, was not based on conclusive evidence.³ Indeed, there is no evidence at all as to where McColloch was buried. The tradition has been that his remains were brought back and buried in the fort, but as early as 1847, the location of his grave was unknown.⁴

Also, there is no evidence concerning who commanded which fort. But, the evidence now points to the conclusion that Samuel McColloch commanded the Court House Fort, and Conrad Stroop, Van Metre's Fort.⁵ Whatever the case, Van Metre's Fort is the closer to the site of McColloch's death, Girty's Point, and the place to which John McColloch ran for help after he and his brother was ambushed on July 30, 1782, and the fort to which McColloch's remains were returned.⁶

In summary, Major Samuel McColloch and Captain Conrad Stroop commanded the two Van Metre's Forts, with McColloch probably stationed at the Court House Fort. The site of McColloch's burial is unknown, but the earliest accounts place it in Van Metre's Fort.

The fort itself is scantily described in the works of historians. Narcissa Doddridge states,

"It was a square building, built of rough hewn logs and occupied the center of a space which was enclosed with pickets about twelve feet in length, and was ample in its accommodations to shelter all who might be expected to avail themselves of its protection."⁷

The blockhouse was built around 1774, and the picket in 1776.⁸ Doddridge continues:

"This fort was situated on the south side of Short Creek a few miles above its junction with the Ohio river, in Ohio County, Virginia. The land on which it was located belonged to the widow and heirs of Mr. Joseph Van Metre, and was subsequently owned by his eldest son, Morgan Van Metre."⁹
Despite all of this information which is so full of conflicting evidence and upon which an excavation could hardly be based, the author determined that a trial dig should be made in the event that some parts of the histories were correct. The importance of this site to the history of the Panhandle lent further support to the undertaking.

The excavation was conducted under standard procedures for locating remains within a specific area. Exploratory trenches were laid out to the cardinal points, each eleven meters by one meter, in the hope of intersecting part of a feature or a section of the picket wall. Likewise, several two meter squares were excavated at various points around the site. The logic here is that simultaneous excavation over a wide area will produce something evincing the presence of the fort in as short a time as possible. Because of the trial nature of the excavation, the author wanted to determine whether continued work would be profitable, and this could only be accomplished by large scale excavation.

The matter of continuation was resolved in the fourth week of the dig, when one of the squares revealed a fireplace, complete with charred logs, feature one. The next week, another square produced a large post mold, feature two. During the ninth week, feature three emerged. Although enigmatic in its function, this feature alone would prompt further work. Feature three consists of a three-meter-square area of disturbance, bordered on the south by a heavy concentration of charcoal and at least two post molds. These features will be described in detail below.

The three features cannot be coordinated into a coherent pattern as yet. But, the mere presence of these features in an area where no structures are known to existed, with the exception of the fort, lends credence to the tradition of the fort's existence there.

Description of features:

Feature one; This is a fireplace in a generally circular pit, 1.25m in diameter, 6-10cm in depth. The irregular floor indicates that sticks were used for digging. Charred logs were still in place, some up to .50m in length. These were removed for further study. Above the logs were limestone blocks, some fire-cracked, ranging in size from chips to .20m in diameter. Above these were sandstone slabs. One remained vertical, probably to ward off limestone which explodes when heated.

The date of the feature, or its association with the fort, is not certain. Limestone was, and is, used as fertilizer, and our feature shows the way by which blocks were diminished in size. The inception of this method is likewise obscure, but its use is recorded before 1790.

Feature two; A post mold, not associated with a trench line, was found. Its measurements are .28m across the top, .57m long, and tapering its entire length to a width of .045m at the bottom. The post was bolstered by natural limestone blocks placed against the west side. The use of this post is not certain. We may speculate on it as a flagpole or part of a structure.

Feature three; The excavation of this feature is not complete, since weather forced the closing of the excavation. At that time, we had located a 3m square deposit disturbed by charcoal and decayed vegetal matter. The top of the deposit is located .29m below the surface and is .31m thick. Work was hampered by the presence of a large tree located precisely in the center of the square. This will be removed. At the southeast corner of the square, a post mold was uncovered, at the same level below the surface. It is .19m wide at the top; .32m long; and tapers to .05m at the bottom.

It is impossible to speculate on the identity of this feature. However, we may postulate that this was a shed or other small structure located near the south wall. This is further indicated by a heavy charcoal deposit on the south side of the square.

In the Spring, work will resume here.
Footnotes

1. According to all the testimony available, which is sparse, and to oral tradition about the site, the only structure built upon this hill was the fort.

There may have been a previous excavation there. Peter Boyd, The History of Northwestern Virginia and the Panhandle (Topeka, 1927), p. 110, states that a search was made in 1890 to find McCulloch's grave. No mention was made whether anything was found.

Several individuals have excavated at the site, with no record being kept of anything located. The one exception is the horseshoe located by Richard Klein. It was found in the plow zone, and is dated, by Mr. Klein, to the second half of the eighteenth century. Through the newspaper article (Wheeling News-Register, June 20, 1975, p. 13), the author became acquainted with Mr. Klein, and excavation commenced in the fall.

2. West Virginia, Ohio County, Public Library, Drapper Mss., ISS, p. 63.


Mrs. Mozena stated that the cemetery contained about twelve unmarked graves, and that the chapter, trying to honor McCulloch, placed a marker with some old letters, guess work, and tradition as the guides. The marker is placed on an unmarked grave near George Matthews'.

4. Narcissa Doddridge interviewed the Matthews family in 1847, three years after George Matthews had died and was buried on his farm, at the traditional site of the old fort. A clearly legible stone still marks his grave. However, Doddridge makes no mention that Matthews was buried near Samuel McCulloch, prompting the conclusion that, sixty-two years after McCulloch's death, the location of his grave was obscure.


5. The History of the Panhandle (Wheeling, 1879), pp. 134-135, says that McCulloch commanded the Court House Fort from 1777-1782.

A further cause of confusion is the location of McCulloch's grave (see infra, n.6, and supra, n.4). He was not buried in the fort he commanded.

Among early historians, there seems to be an attempt to call the Court House Fort, Van Metre's Fort, and our site, Fort Van Metre. This process only further obscured the actuality.
cf. History of the Upper Ohio Valley (Pittsburgh, 1896), p. 183, and History of the Panhandle, p. 101 and p. 303. Our fort is in Richland District, the other in Liberty District.

As pointed out in the previous issue of this journal (Richard S. Klein, "The Two Van Metre's Forts", Upper Ohio Valley Historical Review, IV. 1 (Winter, 1975) pp. 6-9.), the situation can be resolved by finding the forts, and by documenting where Samuel McColloch commanded.

6. John McColloch escaped from the Indians who had killed his brother by descending into Short Creek. Once at the forks of the creek, he was 1½ miles from Van Metre's Fort and three miles from West Liberty. John went to the closer fort and led the rescue party back to recover Samuel's body. That ambush marked the end of the Indian raids, since, on the night of July 30, 1782, one hundred Indians were observed crossing the Ohio river.

History of the Panhandle, p. 135-137, and p. 124.
West Virginia, Department of Archives and History, West Virginia Archives and Library, ch. 62, "Fort Van Meter".


"[The blockhouse] was erected in 1774, at the beginning of Lord Dunmore's War."

West Virginia, Harrison County, Clarksburg Public Library, Personal Documents File, Case 3, Section 1.
"They now have a picket around Van Metre's Fort." Letter to Captain Powers from a scout.

There is always the possibility that this refers to the other fort. Excavation may clarify the point.

9. supra, n. 7.


Six trenches which, when excavated, revealed nothing, were helpful in determining the stratigraphy of the site. The standard composition is a six-inch disturbed plow zone footed by a dense, sterile clay with limestone blocks. The presence of the clay is an advantage, since the excavators know quite rapidly whether any disturbance had occurred in a specific area.
12. The southwest corner of the D.A.R. marker serves as the datum point. This is the point from which all measurements are taken. From the datum, trenches and squares may be surveyed accurately and drawn on a plan of the site. Elevations of features are likewise taken from the datum.


"It is said that the first Somerset farmer who gave heart to the use of lime as fertilizer was Dr. John Reeve."

This occurred prior to 1790.

*History of the Panhandle*, p. 185.

A Mr. Church, prior to 1815, burned lime on Market Street, Wheeling, and sold it on National Road.

14. A continual problem is the top-soil layer. In effect, the plowing has destroyed about one foot of all features found. This makes identification of features difficult.

Two items were found in the plow zone. One is a piece of unworked flint, .09m x .015m x .020m, and the other is a hammerstone. Neither of these can be associated with the fort.

The author would like to express his gratitude to the people who have contributed their time and talents to this excavation. To Richard Klein, whose research led to the dig, and without whose work the excavation would never have started. And, to Harold and Ethel Mozena for their excavation experience and constant help and advice, Harold Coast, Doug Angeloni of West Liberty, Tony Giustini of Linsly, our photographer, and the many others who have contributed in their various ways.
Ocania Chalk, *Pioneers of Black Sport* (New York, 1974) and John Holway, *Voices from the Great Black Baseball Leagues*

Reviewed by Dr. Arthur E. Barbeau, Chairman, Department of History
West Liberty State College

The most recent meeting of the American Historical Association in Atlanta marked a turning point in the profession when a session was held on sport history. Hitherto, athletics was considered beyond the pale of serious historical study. If the new respectability of the subject is realized, we should expect the appearance of solid research into the history of sport. In fact, if past trends are any indication, a flood of materials is in the offing.

This does not mean that there have been no harbingers of things to come. Attempts have been made. Yet, works such as Carl Betts posthumously-published *America's Sporting Heritage* (Addison-Wesley, Reading, Mass., 1974) have been rare glades in the forest. Fortunately for the interested reader, amateurs have rushed in where professional historians have refused to tread.

Two of the best such works deal with the athletic experiences of black Americans. In *Pioneers of Black Sport* (Dodd, Mead, and Co., New York, 1974), Ocania Chalk tells of the struggles of Afro-Americans to break the color bars in boxing, baseball, football and basketball. He traces the careers of such players as the Walker brothers of Ohio who played major league baseball before strict segregation was established. He recounts the stories of Oscar Charleston, Josh Gibson, "Cool Papa" Bell and a host of others who played out their years in the half-light of the segregated leagues. Competing against the big leaguers before and after the regular season, they won accolades. But, because of segregation and a blackout in the white media, these players remain unknown to most Americans.

Chalk develops the game of football from Duke Slater and Paul Robeson to Marion Motley and Jimmy Brown. Here, the few outstanding names are those whose abilities permitted them to play for the major white colleges. Black schools were uniformly ignored. Black basketball teams were also segregated. On rare occasions, games were scheduled with such white aggregations as the Original Celtics; in these, black players could demonstrate their real ability.

Boxing, of course, is a more individual sport. Team comraderie and fan identification do not have the vital importance that they have in team athletics. Still, the difficulties of scheduling fights because of discrimination existed; it was often harder to get into the ring with a white opponent than it was to beat him. Chalk does seem to spend too much time in attempting to justify the out-of-ring activities of Jack Johnson and other black fighters.

John Holway, in *Voices from the Great Black Baseball Leagues* (Dodd, Mead, and Company, New York, 1975), sets himself an easier task. With a minimum of background information, he allows some of the players of black baseball to tell their own stories. Holway makes no attempt to verify these reports, or to editorialize, beyond adding a few statistics to buttress the claim that such players were not inferior to the standards of the major leagues.

Both books are fascinating; yet each suffers from the same lack of scholarly training in the methods of the historian. Chalk jumps around from person to person and from time to time in such a manner as to confuse his purpose. Neither he nor Holway use footnotes; they seldom identify their sources. Both omit bibliographies. Thus, while each has an interesting tale to tell, neither makes it possible for others to examine their sources, or to use these otherwise informative works as the starting point for additional research.

In the end, then, these are story books. Their material is interesting, informative, and worth telling. Yet, each could have profited from a more scholarly manner of presentation.

——— Arthur E. Barbeau
This Bicentennial year uniquely emphasizes those facets of our experience as a nation and community which add dimension, perspective, and complexity to our existence. This dimension, perspective, and complexity give the life of an individual and community the interest or atmosphere that makes a special place special.

We feel that the Wheeling Area is indeed special, and we are attempting to add to that awareness of its particular character and continuum to brighten all our lives. Whether through collection of historic material, written analysis and record-making, meeting together to discuss the past and its future, or highlighting a person, place, or pastime in the development of our home here, we try to add to the lives of citizens of all ages in the Wheeling Area.

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