

Parkinson's Ferry, "Whiskey Point" and Monongahela

At the same time that Maj. William Lea and his wife Dorothy chose a tract of land where Old St. Luke's Church sits today, another pioneer named William Parkinson, with his wife Margaret and their five sons, settled in 1769 beside the Monongahela River where the city of Monongahela is situated today. The Parkinsons became operators of an inn, a mill and a farm. One of the Parkinson sons, Joseph, ran the inn and would be the key developer of the area. Benjamin was a principal rebel in the 1794 Whiskey Rebellion.

These Monongahela pioneers faced several problems, one being that until the Mason and Dixon boundary line was completed in 1784, residents did not know if they lived in Virginia or Pennsylvania. They felt the government did not give them enough protection against the warring Indians. This was the basis for the idea to form a new state, to be the 14th, and named either Westsylvania or Vandalia. Four counties met at Parkinsons Ferry to discuss the plan, which, however after many meetings, was never approved..

A second interesting problem came from the competition between two business men. Joseph Devore operated a ferry, which was used by George Washington in 1770 as he searched for property, and again in 1784 when he returned to evict squatters from his acreage. Joseph Parkinson also operated a ferry. They divided the business between them, whereby travelers going west used Devore's ferry, and those going east used Parkinson's ferry. When a post office was established in 1782, the village was officially named Parkinson's Ferry. Like Pittsburgh's activity, commerce, merchants and settlers going east, west, north and south did so through the town of Parkinson's Ferry.

A third and mammoth problem came out of the national government in 1791. Both the elite land owners and the struggling farmers were dismayed by the initiation of a federal excise tax on their Monongahela Rye Whiskey, authored by Alexander Hamilton, the Secretary of the Treasury. Violence broke out as the famers accused the government of interfering in their lives.

During three days in July, 1794 Gen. John Neville, the Inspector of Revenue for this district, was the target for the farmer's anger over the tax and the role of the government. They demanded Neville's resignation. If he had complied, the mob might have simply dispersed without any bloodshed. On July 17, Neville again refused, blood was spilled and his mansion was destroyed..

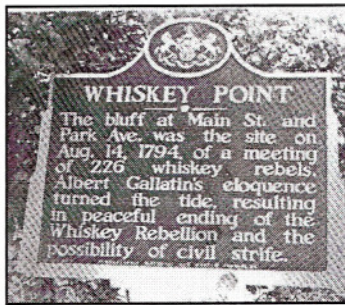
The rebels then on July 26 robbed the U. S. Mail, to learn what the local famers were thinking. The mail was taken to Benjamin Parkinson, then to the rebel lawyer David Bradford, who called for a mass demonstration march on Pittsburgh and to raid the armory at Fort Fayette. Albert Gallatin was chosen to be one of three leaders. Hugh

leaders. Hugh Brackenridge discouraged the move. The raid was partly to show anger over the tax and partly to show the resentment of rebellious farmers against Pittsburgh's elites and the new national government. Through conciliation, the raid actually became simply a parade, and no violence occurred.

What would Washington do next? The President sent three commissioners to centrally located Parkinson's Ferry on August 14 to negotiate peace. An impressive total of 226 citizens of mixed attitudes attended. The rebellious farmers there declared "Equal Taxation and No Excise, No Asylum for Traitors and Cowards." The angry David Bradford said "Submission or Opposition." Wavering farmers were intimidated. Peace was not assured. Another meeting was held in Brownsville on September 2, without settlement.. On October 2, again at Parkinson's Ferry, the moderates, but not the radicals, expressed loyalty to the federal government by confirming the peace resolutions. This declaration came too late. Washington at the very same time called forth some 13,000 militia and federal troops from the east coast to enforce federal law. A third meeting at Parkinsons Ferry was held October 24 by the moderates, to hear a report about the approach of the army. When Gen. Lighthouse Harry Lee arrived with the

troops, he was entertained at Joseph Parkinson's Inn. Simply stated, the rebellion ended without added bloodshed and war and only two men were convicted of treason, and then pardoned.

After being known as Parkinson's Ferry and Williamsport (in memory of William Parkinson), on March 24, 1873 a city charter was granted to Monongahela City.



References:

The Whiskey Rebellion—Frontier Epilogue to the American Revolution by Thomas P. Slaughter, Oxford University Press, 1986.

"The Whiskey Rebels" by Leland Baldwin,, University of Pittsburgh Press, 1967.

Monongahela's 200th Anniversary Book 1969

The plaque was mounted on a 1914 building in Monongahela., Pennsylvania.

Key Words:
DURING THE WHISKEY INSURRECTION, THE "WHISKEY BOYS" COMMITTEE MET HERE AUG. 14 & OCT. 2, 1794 ALBERT GALLATIN WAS PRESENT

