

June 1, 1895 – CHESTER TIMES

OLD MARKET STREET – Interesting Facts about the First Screw Propeller – The State of Maine – Landing of Sick and Wounded Union Soldiers at Market Street Wharf

The War of 1812 was followed by great commercial activity, although the fictitious values that it had stimulated in the adjustment that ensued produced a period of protracted business depression. AS the commerce of Philadelphia at that time largely exceeded that of any port in the United States, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania on March 11, 1816, made an appropriation for the erection of piers at Chester, to afford a safe harbor to vessels in the winter season, when drifting ice rendered navigation of the Delaware exceedingly dangerous. The owners of the then existing wharves, David Bevan that at Market Street and Ephraim Pearson that at Edgmont Avenue, conveyed their titles to the State. During the year 1817 the Commonwealth built new piers at the points designated, but the cost of keeping them in repair became so onerous that the State rued the acceptance of the gifts. Finally it was so desirous of being relieved from the expense for the maintenance of these white elephants that it succeeded through the influence of its senators and Representatives in inducing the National government to accept the piers at Chester, the only condition made being that they should keep them in good repair. The United States acceded to the proposition, and on April 11, 1825, the Commonwealth formally ceded the wharves here to the general government. The latter, as had the State, soon regretted its bargain, for yearly a goodly sum was required to be expended in keeping the piers in a serviceable condition and it was not until an interval of sixty-two years had elapsed when, on May 9, 1887, Wm. E. Endicott, Secretary of War, under the provisions of the Act of Congress of August 6, 1886, conveyed the title of the United States to the wharves here to the City of Chester.

A NEW NAVAL TYPE – It was in the summer of 1845, that the Princeton, the first screw propeller in the American service, and the first vessel of war of that character in the history of the navies of the world, sailed from Philadelphia to take part in the Mexican war. The steamship was designated by Commodore Richard F. Stockton, and was a marvel at that time, although when compared with the man-of-war of the present she dwarves into insignificance. Her total length was 165 feet, breadth 30 feet and her original cost \$212,000. She was pierced for 30 guns and carried in addition a large swivel on the main deck. She was ship-rigged, and her maximum speed 10 knots an hour. She was launched at the Philadelphia navy yard in the fall of 1843. After the bursting of the "Peacemaker," the big swivel gun, at Washington, D. C., on February 28, 1844, an accident by which many distinguished men lost their lives, spreading gloom over the whole country, she was refitted at the Philadelphia navy yard in the fall of 1843. After the bursting of the "Peacemaker," the big swivel gun, at Washington, D.C., on February 28, 1844, an accident by which many distinguished men lost their lives, spreading gloom over the whole country, she was refitted at the Philadelphia navy yard.

I have particularized these facts because the Princeton revolutionized the system of naval architecture just as nineteen years thereafter the Monitor brought about a similar radical change in the same science throughout the world... My first distinct boyhood recollections are connected with the sailing of that vessel in 1845. All Chester was anxious to catch a glimpse of the marine wonder, for one of her birthright citizens, Commander, afterwards Rear Admiral, Frederick Engle, was its captain and along the wharves the people of the town gathered to be eye witnesses of the scene. Doubtless, the commander, as the vessel steamed by, was

complimented by the interest the inhabitants of his natal place exhibited that day. The Princeton under his command was conspicuous in the bombardment of Vera Cruz and the castle of San Juan d'Ullos, March 22, 1847, and a shot from this vessel made the first breach in the walls of that fortress.

A distinguished naval officer who had taken part in that action told me that early one morning in the summer of 1845 the Princeton for the first time steamed into the port of Vera Cruz, her sails nicely furled, her yards squared and the Stars and Stripes at the peak. As she burned anthracite coal no smoke was discernible from her stack, which was so short that it was only a trifle above her bulwarks, and as a strong wind was blowing it caused her to veer slightly, giving to her the appearance of having struck on a reef. Several French and Spanish men-of-war were at anchor in the harbor as was also the English frigate, Eurivoc. Captain Elliott, the commander of the latter, observing what he supposed was the critical condition of the vessel, dispatched an officer to acquaint Captain McClung, commanding the United States sloop-of-war John Adams that an American sailing ship had struck on a reef. Before the boat could return, much to his surprise and that of the other foreign naval officers, the ship, still careening and without apparent cause rapidly drew near and they discovered that it was the famous steamship Princeton approaching them. The foreign naval vessels as the marine wonder glided by greeted her with hearty cheers.

WOUNDED WARRIORS – It was Tuesday, July 17, 1862, that the steamship State of Maine made fast to the wharf, having on board 233 sick and wounded Union soldiers, who had been captured by the Confederates in the seven days of battle before Richmond and had recently been exchanged. The men presented a most pitiable sight. Some had strength barely sufficient to walk ashore; others were unable to stand without assistance and many had to be brought on stretchers. The pallid features, the emaciated forms and extreme weakness present in every instance, aroused the heartfelt sympathy of all beholders. It was an object lesson for it was a realistic picture of war, bereft of the gilt and glitter that past a glamour over the career of the soldier; conspicuously lacking in the pride, pomp and circumstance of battle, which is wont to stir the blood of youth; nothing was present but sorrow, suffering and the shadow of death. The instance is noticeable in that it was the first time the people of Chester in recent years, had witnessed such a scene, and because it was the initial consignment of patients to the Crozer Hospital where, during the following three years, thousands of men, Union and Confederate alike, were received and tenderly nursed, many to be restored to health and many never more to emerge therefrom in life. On the deck of a steamship under the torrid sky of the gulf; while journeying amid the everlasting snows of the Rockies, and beneath the cloudless heavens of the State of Utah, I have met men who have told me of the hours they, as wounded soldiers, had passed at the Crozer Hospital at Chester, and of the kindness, while convalescents, that had been extended to them by the people of the town, and these cherished recollections welled up from their memories in unfeigned emotions of gratitude.

GRANT'S JOURNEY – On Tuesday afternoon, April 17th, 1877, Chester was gay with bunting. Over the City Hall, school houses, mills, work hops and numerous private dwellings, "old glory" floated proudly in the air, while on the piers at the foot of Market Street and Edgmont Avenue, on the docks along the river front, at every available place, on roof tops and on the decks of the vessels on the stocks and lying at the piers at Roach's yard, the people of the town came together in a mass, for ex-President Grant that day set out on his memorable

tour around the world. It had been arranged by the Committee in Philadelphia that he should board the Indiana down the river below New Castle, and to carry out this purpose the Twilight had been chartered. The illustrious soldier was accompanied on the steamboat by a great number of prominent men, conspicuous among whom were General Sherman, Senators Zachariah Chandler and Simon Cameron and ex-Secretary of the Navy George M. Robeson. The flotilla of yachts, steamboats and launches as well as the mammoth steamship itself that was to bear him to the old world, where he was to be accorded a welcome from princes and potentates such as had not been extended to any other man in modern times, as it moved down the Delaware mass of flags presented a scene of marvelous animation and inspiration.

When the pageant neared the wharf at Market Street, the steam whistles of the city screamed out the universal expression of public approval the artillery served by the cadets of the Pennsylvania Military College stationed at Roach's yard, shook the air with their discharges, the cheers of men rose in a mighty swell and the flutter of handkerchiefs and scarfs by thousands of women combined in producing a picture of popular enthusiasm such as has rarely been accorded to man. The Twilight drew close to the shore that the General could be seen by our people, and as the steamboat moved slowly by, a continuous ovation was extended to the citizen who had held two of the most exalted offices in a great nation, and had in accordance with its system of popular government, laid them both aside to resume that of private station. In that aspect alone it was an incident that will never be wholly blotted from the records of time.

Our ramble is ended. The story of the main street of Chester-on-Delaware has merely been outlined in these papers. The subject covering nearly two centuries, with no continuity of events, necessarily required its presentation in a paragraph form, but if I have succeeded in demonstrating that our city is not devoid of historic interest, my purpose has been attained. A people without history is a people without patriotism, stagnating in arrested, civilization which in the beginning of disintegration.

Keith Lockhart Collection