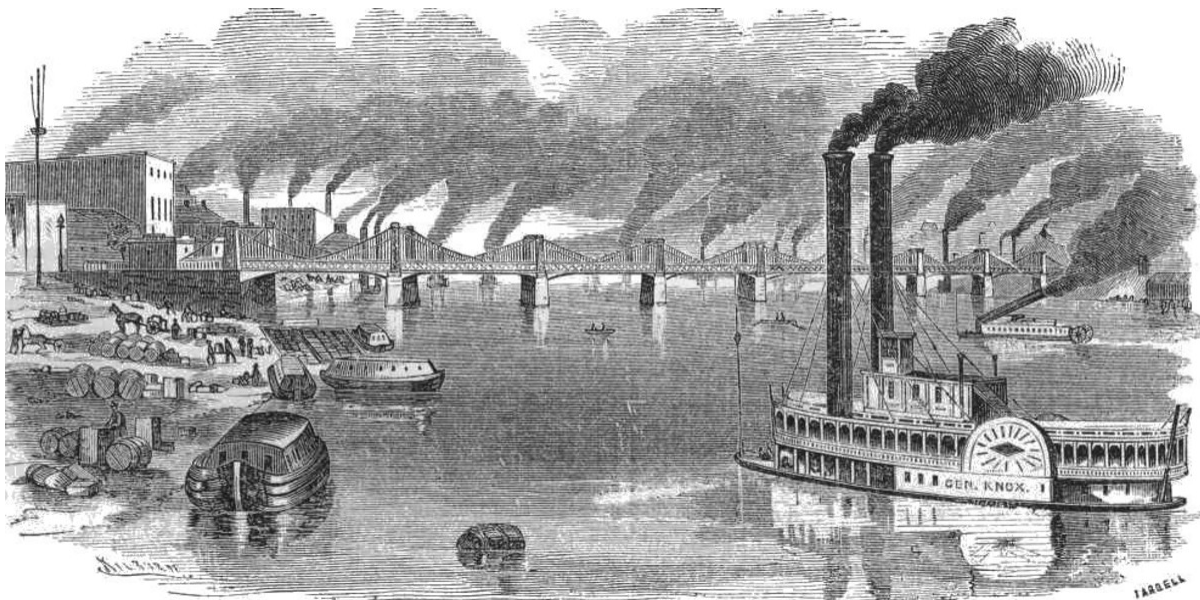




Eve of War: Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Bert Dunkely, May 7, 2021
blueandgrayeducation.org



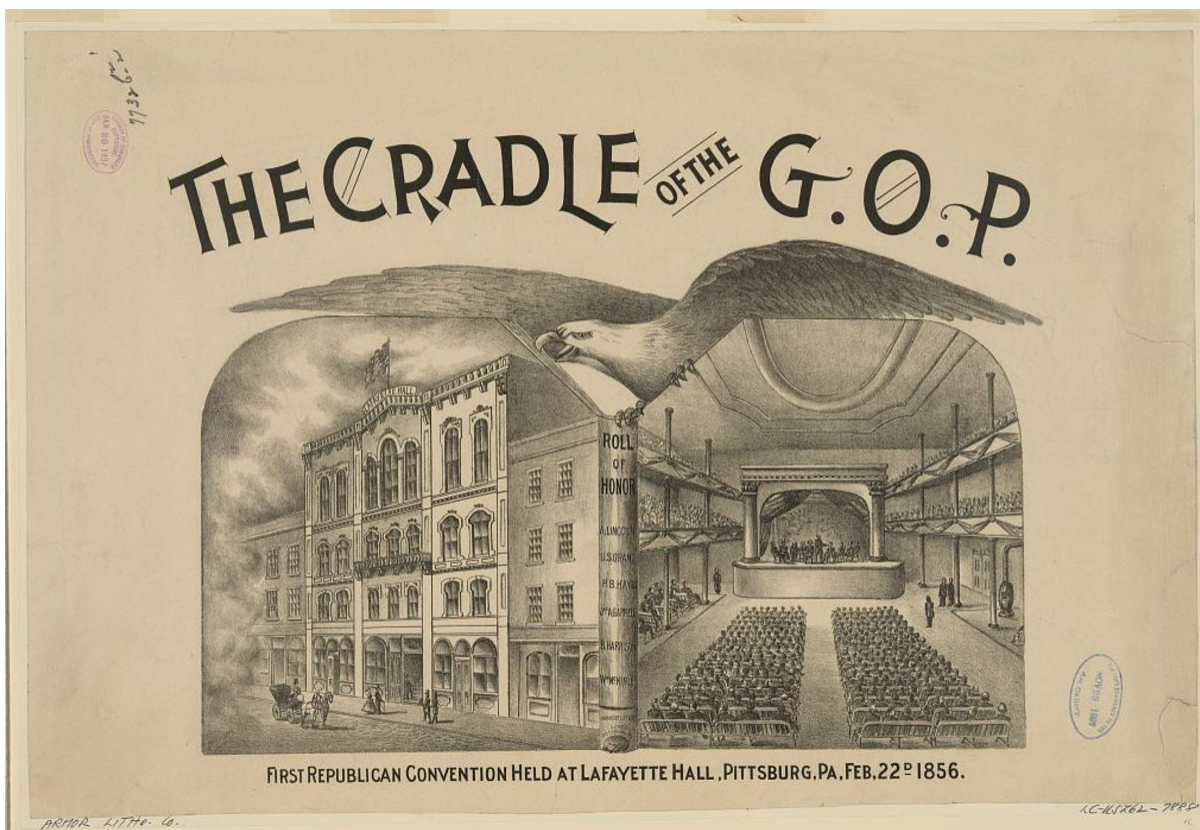
A Monongahela River scene in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, shows the steamship *General Knox*, wharf operations, a steel superstructure bridge, and numerous smoke stacks, from the Feb. 21, 1857, edition of "Ballou's Pictorial" | public domain

Before it was the Steel City, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, was known as the Gateway to the West. The hilly city perched above three swift rivers had a population of 50,000 just before the Civil War, making it then, as now, the second largest city in the state. Just west of Pittsburgh was Allegheny City, a separate but contiguous urban area later annexed in 1907 (it included the modern neighborhoods of East Allegheny, Perry Hilltop, Woods Run, and Brighton Heights). This separate city included 28,000 residents, giving the whole metropolitan area a population of nearly 80,000 in 1860.

The Gateway to the West was a strategic place even from its earliest beginnings. George Washington visited in 1753, before the town existed, and noted the important junction of the Monongahela and Allegheny Rivers, which form the Ohio. Founded in 1758, the settlement grew steadily in the 19th century. Lewis and Clark began their westward journey here in 1803, where local carpenters built their riverboats. River traffic grew rapidly in the 19th century, and the town was a center for boat and barge construction. Goods and people flowed through the area, accelerated by the arrival of railroads in the 1850s.

Abundant natural resources fueled growing industry, but it wasn't yet the industrial powerhouse you might think of today. Several iron foundries sprang up along the waterfront, and it became a center for iron production. Steel, which required a more complex process to produce, was a few decades away. Before it was the Steel City, it was known as the Iron City.

The surrounding hills and valleys of the region had rich deposits of coal, natural gas, and timber that supported mining, transportation, and manufacturing. Local sand helped fuel glass production. Although settled early on by English, Welsh, and Scotch-Irish, by the mid-19th century, like in many northern cities, large numbers of Irish and German immigrants were arriving.



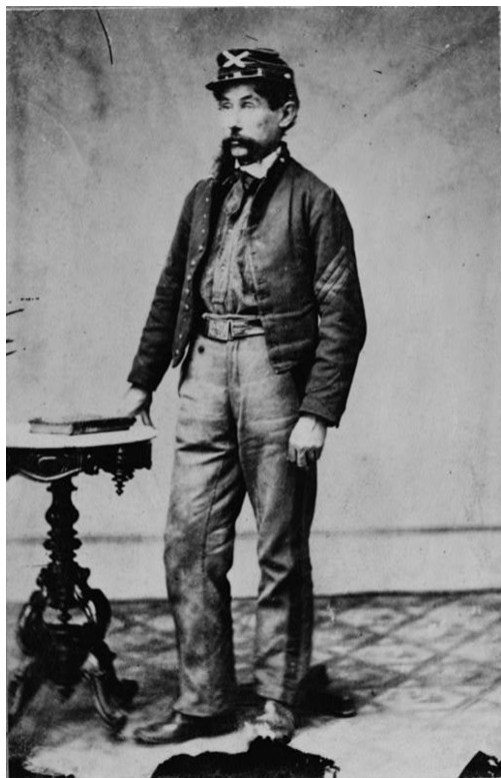
A print showing LaFayette Hall in Pittsburgh at the time of the first Republican convention, in 1856 | LOC

The Republican Party had grown strongly in the city during the preceding decade, and on the eve of the war it was firmly Republican territory. A branch of the Underground Railroad ran through the city, moving escaped African-Americans north to points in Ohio and Lake Erie, which took them on to Canada.

Its location made it strategically important. One of only two railroads in Union territory connecting East and West ran through the city. Thus Pittsburgh was a vital link between the Eastern and the Midwestern states. Almost all of the troops from the Midwest who joined the Army of the Potomac in Virginia had to pass through here.

The Pittsburgh Brewing Company would be established in 1861, and remains today one of the region's local breweries. A few years later the H.J. Heinz corporation, perhaps the city's most famous brand, began its operation.

The Allegheny Arsenal, established for the War of 1812, produced artillery and all sorts of ammunition for the military at a facility along the Allegheny River. Other foundries along the waterfront also cast cannons, and together the city's industry would produce over 1,000 for the Union's war effort, 15 percent of the total.



Robert H. Kelly of Pittsburgh, in 1860, one of many who answered the call to fight for the Union | LOC

In December 1860, with several southern states already having left the Union, the pro-southern Secretary of War John Floyd ordered the Allegheny Arsenal to transfer several cannons to the South, but the Arsenal refused, and later federal authorities supported the decision. It was Pittsburgh's first action of the war.

As elsewhere, there was a patriotic outpouring of support when war came in the spring of 1861. The city's quota was for 3,277 men, but 11,000 volunteers came forward. Several regiments were organized here during the war, and the city fortified the high ground outside its limits in case of Confederate attack. About 4,000 Pittsburgh men would perish in the coming conflict.

As the winter of 1860 turned into the spring of 1861, Pittsburgh was a vibrant, growing city with growing economic potential. The city stood ready to support the Union with industry and manpower.



This Civil War Dispatch has been brought to you by the Blue and Gray Education Society, a non-profit 501-3C educational organization. Please visit us at www.blueandgrayeducation.org.

Share this email:



[Manage](#) your preferences | [Opt out](#) using TrueRemove®
Got this as a forward? [Sign up](#) to receive our future emails.
View this email [online](#).

P.O. Box 1176
Chatham, VA | 24531 US

This email was sent to .
To continue receiving our emails, add us to your address book.



[Subscribe](#) to our email list.