

THE POINT SINCE EUROPEAN SETTLEMENT

Sources of information

In order to reconstruct the changes in the Point since the settlement of Europeans, multiple sources of information were consulted. These included: recent books; contemporary maps, paintings and drawings; written descriptions, including eyewitness accounts and official documents; modern artist's renditions; and archeological studies. Most of the information is available to the general public at the Western Pennsylvania Historical Society library, the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh, and the University of Pittsburgh Hillman Library.

Fort Duquesne Time Period

Some of the earliest descriptions and contemporary drawings of the point area are from the time of Fort Duquesne which was built on the site in 1754. [Figure 4](#) shows a drawing done during or soon after the fort was built, presumably by Capitan François Le Mercier, who was the engineer in charge of construction (Stotz, 1985). This plan shows a sharp point of land at the Point with erosional bluffs along the river banks. The river banks are not straight, but have a concave erosional pattern. A later drawing ([Figure 5](#)) by Joseph Gaspard Chaussegros de Léry, King Louis XV's chief engineer in Canada, also shows the bluffs, but the river banks appear straighter than in the earlier map. In 1758, J.C. Pleydell, an engineer with the British army, made a plan of the fort ([Figure 6](#)) that shows the morphology of the Point quite well, especially the steep bluffs along the banks. The height of the bluffs is not known precisely, but Stotz (1985) mentions that they were "15 to 20 feet high and were rutted by erosion, exposing glacial clay, sand and gravel that composed the soil." John McKinney, an English prisoner at Fort Duquesne described the area immediately east of the fort in these words:

"There is no bogs or morasses near the fort, but good dry ground, which is cleared for some distance from the fort, and the stumps cut close to the ground; a little without musket shot of the fort in the fork is a thick wood of some bigness full of large timber" (Stotz, 1985).

Although occasionally flooded, the Point was not a marsh, but high dry land. From these drawings and descriptions, Stotz (1985) prepared an artist's rendering of the Point during Fort Duquesne time ([Figure 7](#)). Using these descriptions and maps, as well as later maps, Laurent (1980) provided an artist's rendering of an even earlier, pre-Fort Duquesne view of the Point ([Figure 8](#)).

In 1819, Riddle and Murray (1819) described the Pittsburgh area as follows:

"The ground upon which Pittsburgh is built is nearly level and about forty feet (on an average) higher than the surface of the river at low water... Besides the tableland, which constitutes the principle part of the city, there were, in the year 1780, two parallel flats upon the Allegheny shore, each about 300 yards broad, extending half a mile from the Pittsburgh Point. The lowest of these, that is, the

one next to the river, has been entirely washed away, together with a considerable portion of the second. At the same time (1780) there stood near the shore of the outer flat a row of handsome buildings which were erected for the reception of Indian traders. One portion of the row had been demolished as it was supposed to stand in an inconvenient position with regard to the fort, and the other part was presently precipitated into the Allegheny."