Global Perspectives

History of Pittsburgh

Office of International Services
Long before Colonel George Washington’s arrival in 1755 on a surveying mission, Native Americans such as the Shawnee, Seneca, and Lenape were thriving in the region. Recognizing the advantages the area held, both the French and British coveted the land. While on his mission, Washington saw fit to install a small band of men at the site where the rivers merged. These men built Fort George for the crown. The French soon overwhelmed them and established their own encampment, Fort Duquesne. In 1758, after a treaty was signed that ended the French and Indian War, the British built Fort Pitt on the former site of Fort Duquesne, naming it in honor of William Pitt, their Prime Minister. With the land now securely held by the British, settlers moved to the area. They were mostly farmers, and since travel over the Allegheny Mountains was difficult, these first inhabitants of Pittsburgh became self-sufficient, learning to make their own goods rather than waiting for them to be shipped over the mountains. By the 1790s, 300 inhabitants occupied the area. Among them were blacksmiths, shoemakers, tanners, brewers, cabinet-makers, tinsmiths and other craftsmen. The industrious residents became so successful, they experienced an over abundance of grain, which they turned into whiskey. When Alexander Hamilton, the nation’s Secretary of Treasury, urged a tax on those who sold whiskey in order to pay off the national debt, locals protested. In 1794, now President Washington sent nearly 13,000 militia men to quell the uprising, which became known as the Whiskey Rebellion.
19th Century

Gateway to the West
By the beginning of the 1800s, Pittsburgh had become known as the ‘Gateway to the West,’ because it was a debarkation point for those heading westward. In 1811, Robert Fulton launched the first steamboat, the New Orleans. Built in Pittsburgh, it navigated the waters between New Orleans and Natchez.

In addition to its navigable rivers, Pittsburgh has been blessed with a wealth of natural resources such as coal, oil, limestone, and natural gas. During the War of 1812, the demand for iron skyrocketed. Foundries, mills, and forges dotted the land along the rivers, and workers flocked to the area to work in them. In 1816, Pittsburgh incorporated as a city. In 1854, the Pennsylvania Railroad opened, making travel to the area more convenient.

Manufacturing and Industrialization in Pittsburgh
By the late 1800s, Pittsburgh had become a manufacturing mecca. The Civil War and the growth of the railroads spurred industrialization. This economic expansion was fueled by the area’s abundant supply of coal. Near the end of the century, 70 glass factories were in operation in Birmingham on Pittsburgh’s South Side. So much coal was burned to provide energy for these factories that the area became known as the ‘Smoky City.’
Industrialist Andrew Carnegie opened the Edgar Thompson Works in 1875, where inexpensive, mass-produced steel was made. He teamed with self-made millionaire Henry Clay Frick, a major supplier of the coke used when making steel. When the partnership soured, it spawned the Homestead Steel Strike, a lockout that resulted in 10 deaths and the summoning of The Pennsylvania National Guard to quell the unrest. Other well-know industrialists such as George Westinghouse, H. J. Heinz, Andrew Mellon, and Charles M. Schwab made their fortunes in Pittsburgh. These men left a legacy of parks, libraries, cultural centers, and universities behind that still bear their names.

**The 20th Century**

**Immigrants Arrive to Work in the Mills**

During the late 1800s and early 1900s, the area’s rivers continued to attract people. The region’s population exploded. Immigrants flooded the region to obtain employment in the mills and factories. Ethnic enclaves formed throughout the hillsides and valleys, preserving the traditions, cuisine, and languages of the ‘Old Country.’ Large numbers of African-Americans migrated to Pittsburgh in the early 1900s. The Hill District became a jazz hot-spot, featuring legends like Duke Ellington. The Homestead Grays and the Pittsburgh Crawfords of the Negro League dominated play in the 1930s & 40s.
Steel City

Steel is essential for fighting and winning wars. During World War II, Pittsburgh supplied millions of tons for the war effort. After the war, Pittsburgh experienced a renaissance. Smoke controls were implemented to clean up the air and old buildings were razed to make way for a newer, cleaner, more modern city. In 1961, the Civic Arena, the world’s first civic auditorium with a retractable roof, opened. Point State Park added a fountain to the tip of the Golden Triangle, and Three Rivers Stadium opened in 1970.

Pittsburgh Revitalized

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the steel industry collapsed, but Pittsburgh managed to adapt to the changing economy, reinventing itself and shifting to a service-based one instead. Medicine, education, technology, and banking now drive Pittsburgh’s economy.
5 Cafes to try in Pittsburgh

• **Everyday Café (Homewood):**
  
  *Everyday Café* is a cozy coffee shop. They serve specialty drinks and made to order sandwiches and salads using fresh quality ingredients. It is a Black-owned business. Their dream is to provide a beautiful and peaceful space in their community to celebrate art and culture, create jobs, and encourage the growth of the Homewood Avenue business district.

• **Commonplace (Multiple Locations)**
  
  *Commonplace* was born out of a desire to love coffee and love people. They roast and brew specialty coffee and offer wholesale coffee equipment and consultation services.

• **Dobra Tea Pittsburgh (Squirrel Hill)**
  
  A Bohemian-style tearoom specializing in hot *tea*, cold *tea*, loose leaf *tea*, retail pottery, and light vegetarian fare. They believe drinking tea is a part of a healthy lifestyle. They serve tea in traditional ways, which is without sugar or cream. It is a place for relaxation and community.

• **Caffe Mona (Bloomfield)**
  
  Comfortable Euro-style cafe serving breakfast, sweet/savory crepes & other light fare. The décor is full of artwork by local artist.

• **Adda Coffee & Tea (NorthSide & Shadyside)**
  
  Uses coffee and tea as way to bring people together and create meaningful conversations and connections. Serve internationally sourced coffees, organic teas, and pastries.