

DICKENS IN PENNSYLVANIA

Good day everyone...it's a beautiful day in Pennsylvania.

In his travels in America, Charles Dickens enjoyed his visit to Pennsylvania as much if not more than any other place--the greatest writer of his day thoroughly enjoyed Pennsylvania. He thought Philadelphia was a more provincial city than either Boston or New York; called it a handsome city, but found its streets distractingly regular. He longed for a crooked street, like those in inner London's city. Philadelphians he said had good taste and enjoyed genteel discussions. Of his trip over the famous Camel Back Bridge crossing the Susquehanna at Harrisburg, he said: "We crossed this river by a wooden bridge, roofed and covered on all sides, and nearly a mile in length. It was profoundly dark; with great beams crossing and recrossing it at every possible angle, and through the broad chinks and crevices of the floor the rapid river gleamed. As the horses stumbled and floundered through this place, towards the distant speck of dying light, it seemed interminable". Going west, he rode the canals and the portage to Pittsburgh. He enjoyed the canal life. Listen: "There was much I heartily enjoyed, and look back with great pleasure. Even the running up, bare-necked at 5 o'clock in the morning from the cabin, scooping up the icy water, plunging one's hand into it, and drawing it out, all fresh and glowing with the cold, was a good thing. The fast brisk walk upon the towing-path, when every vein and artery seemed to tingle with health; the exquisite beauty of the opening day,

when light came gleaming off from everything; the lazy motion of the boat, when one lay idly on deck". He described the frowning hills with their dark trees, the beauty of the bright-starred night, the sound of rippling water; those, were pure delight in Pennsylvania. Pittsburgh, he called the Birmingham of America; its muscle and sinew; and he enjoyed his crossing of the Alleghenies on ten inclined planes. "It was very pretty travelling at a rapid pace along the heights of the mountains in a keen wind", he wrote, "to look down into a valley full of light and softness". In this manner, Dickens described Pennsylvania in his "American Notes"-- it is not too different today when you drive it in your cars-- our highways, like the canals and portages are the best and latest; our streams are icy cold in the morning when the hunters dip their heads in; the beauteous light shimmers off everything; the covered bridges are still dark in the early twilight; Pittsburgh still exhibits muscle and Philadelphia is a town of many wonders. If, like Charles Dickens you travel Pennsylvania, you'll appreciate it as much.

This is Pete Wambach. It's a beautiful day in Pennsylvania.