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# The Allegheny City Society

## REPORTER DISPATCH

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The Journal of Old Allegheny History and Lore

Spring, 2007

### Mary Robert Rinehart – A Woman for All Seasons

by Doug Lucas

The year was 1876 – the Centennial of the United States. U.S. Grant was President, Custer made his last stand, and the telephone had just been invented. On August 12, Cornelia and Tom Roberts announced the birth of their daughter, Mary Ella Roberts, at their home on Diamond Street in Allegheny City.

A family of modest means, financial reversals necessitated their relocation to Poplar Street in 1880. Young Mary was forced to give up her room so that the family could take in borders – a shame which she never forgot.

In high school she excelled in “the English course” which emphasized literature and writing. By 1892, she had a piece published in a Pittsburgh newspaper and she was bitten by the writing bug. But as a proper Victorian lady, she chose the nursing profession for a career. It was at that time she met Dr. Stanley Marshall Rinehart, and in 1896 they were married. However, the suicide of her father the year before left a lasting emotional scar that haunted her for the rest of her life.

The newly-weds settled on Western Avenue in Allegheny City where the doctor had his office. At this time, Mary started to write stories that would be published in popular magazines of the day. The stock market panic of 1903-04 wiped out their savings and forced her to write for a living – not an acceptable profession for a “lady”, but then there were their three sons to care for.

In 1905 she was off and running, writing poems, comic stories, tragedies, and plays – the whole literary gamut. By 1906, her modest success allowed the family, which now included three boys, to rent a fine house on prestigious Beech Street, and her first mystery novel,

*The Circular Staircase*, guaranteed her reputation and success as a writer. But she was torn between her career as a writer and that of a wife and mother. Blessed with an understanding husband and servants to attend to the family’s needs, she devoted the day to writing and the evening to family. Soon, they relocated to a large country house in Sewickley. In 1912, Mary was engaged by the *Saturday Evening Post* to serialize her novels, and thus began a long a prosperous relationship.



In 1915, she went to Europe as a war correspondent and saw first-hand the horrors of war and endured many hardships. But she also met the King of Belgium and the Queen of England and dined with General Pershing. Back in the States, she toured the West on horseback, befriended the Indians, and championed their cause. She then became involved in the issues of social inequity and injustice,

and her novels reflected this, albeit with a certain amount of restraint. But the 1920’s were a new era and her writing reflected a new morality very different from the world into which she was born. Soon Hollywood beckoned and she was working with Samuel Goldwyn on screenplays for a number of cinematic productions,

In 1923, the Rineharts relocated to Washington, DC and Mary received an honorary degree from George Washington University. Her fame and wealth continued to grow, in spite of numerous health problems. In 1936, she announced that she had breast cancer – a previously taboo subject. Her willingness to publicly discuss this issue after undergoing a radical mastectomy undoubtedly saved many lives. Mary was a guest at the coronation of King George VI, but decried the idea that Prince Edward had to abdicate because of his love of a divorcee.

She eventually published her autobiography, *My Story*, revealing herself as a three dimensional woman capable of a full range of emotions. World-wise,

caring, and sympathetic, readers warmed to her and wrote for advice. She became the Dr. Phil of her day.

Her writing formula was simple: create a buried story under the surface story and keep the reader in suspense until the very end. Popular themes such as marital problems and crossing class lines endeared her to the public and ensured her continued success.

Mary wanted to return to the front lines during World War II, but health problems prevented her from doing so. Post-war America saw her as being out of touch with modern times, and perhaps she was. Her final humiliation came when she was to appear on Edwin R. Morrow's "Person to Person" TV program and was interviewed instead by guest host Jerry Lewis who had no idea of who she was. It did not go well; the first lady of American literature was trivialized as irrelevant and antiquated.

Tired and broken of spirit, she succumbed to a heart attack on September 22, 1958. But Mary's was a true American success story. From working in the slums, to keeping company with kings, queens, presidents, and celebrities, she never forgot her roots in Allegheny City.

### **Civil War Seminar "Lincoln the Presidential Years"**

La Roche College in the North Hills will be the host for the Civil War Seminar this year on April 14. The Chief Justice of Rhode Island, Frank Williams, a Lincoln scholar, will be the keynote speaker. Justice Williams will speak on "Lincoln as Commander and Chief". Professor Jean Baker author of *Mary Todd Lincoln* will discuss the First Lady. James Getty the premier Lincoln reenactor will join us once again. The cost is \$55.00 which includes the all day seminar and lunch. Watch the mail for your Lincoln Seminar flyer.

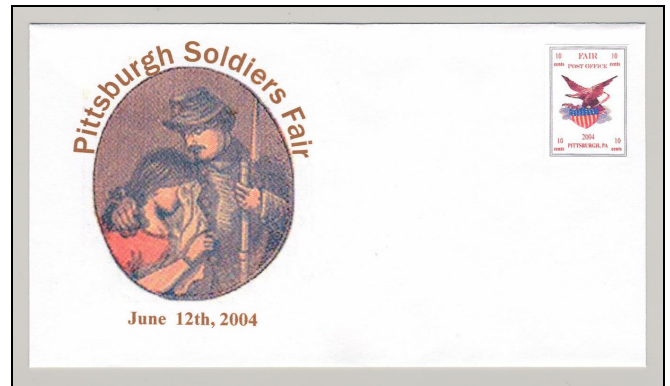
### **Loss of a Friend**

*by Ruth McCartan*

It is with great regret that I have to inform you of the death of Charles Gray on Dec. 17, 2006. I met Charles during our first Civil War Soldiers Fair in 1998. He and his faithful wife Dorothy sold original sets of stamped envelopes with a Civil War theme at the Fair and donated all the proceeds to the restoration of the Civil War Soldier's Monument in the Commons. They came to every fair and could always be counted on to help. When we started to hold the April Civil War

Seminar, once again the Gray's attended and helped monetarily.

Charles Gray was a pharmacist and in his retirement renewed his long time interest in the Civil war, stamp collecting and postal history. The imaginative stamp cachet he created is so authentic that they have become real collector items within the local Civil War community. The wonderful restoration of our monument could not have been done without Charles Gray's help. He will be greatly missed. Rest in peace, friend.



### **Allegheny City Historical Markers The Second of a Series**

#### **Who was James Hay Reed?**

*By Ruth McCartan*

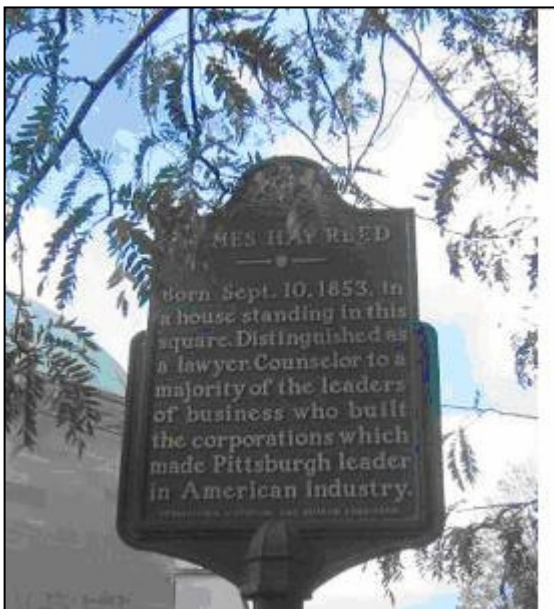
A marker honoring Mr. Reed can be found across from the entrance to the Allegheny Regional Library. Many of our historical markers, the people and events depicted relate to significant incidents in local history, but with the name James Hay Reed, the historical recognition doesn't seem to be so obvious. When you "google" him nothing seems to connect with Allegheny or Pittsburgh history. He is not listed in the index of Stephan Lorant's book on Pittsburgh. If you use the website <http://digital.library.pitt.edu>, you get 29 listings all associated with Mr. Reed. Does the major international law firm headquartered in Pittsburgh, Reed, Smith connect with Mr. Reed? The answer is yes; he was one of the founding partners.

As the marker states, Mr. Reed was born in 1853 at or near this location. This quiet spot was once on the main thoroughfare of Federal Street, on the town square of the City of Allegheny. Upon graduating from Western University of Pennsylvania, now the

University of Pittsburgh, Reed studied law with his uncle David Reed and was admitted to the bar 1875.

The law firm Knox and Reed was formed soon after. Philander C. Knox, the senior partner of the firm, would later become attorney general of the United States, Secretary of State and closed out his career as a U.S. Senator from Pennsylvania. The firm was successful almost from the start (both attorneys being corporate lawyers) with many of the largest manufacturing and commercial concerns in the city as clients. The firm of Knox and Reed was dissolved 1901.

Reed's new firm was entitled Reed, Smith, Shaw and Beal. He was for many years general counsel and vice president of the Pittsburgh and Lake Erie Railroad Company. Later, his firm became general counsel for the Carnegie Steel Company. Reed was legal counsel during the sale of Carnegie Steel forming United States Steel Corporation, the worlds' first billion-dollar corporation. When the sale was complete he became a member of the board of directors of the new corporation.



Reed was connected with many of the major business interests of the area. In banking, he was the Director of the Farmers Deposit Savings Bank. In insurance he was the Chairman of the Board of the Reliance Life Insurance. Reed was the President of the Pittsburgh, Bessemer and Lake Erie Railroad and in utilities the Director of the Gulf Oil Company. At the time of his death in 1927, he was senior partner of the law firm Reed, Smith, Shaw and McClay. Mr. Reed was very

involved with local, state and national Republican political interests. He was a member of the Duquesne Club and Allegheny Country Club and was a member and Trustee of Shadyside Presbyterian Church.

The Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission marker honoring James Hay Reed was erected in 1957, one of the first to be erected in Allegheny City.

## Votes for Women

April 13, 2007 at 7:00 p.m., Allegheny City Society is sponsoring a talk by Jean Baker, Professor at Goucher College and author of "*Sisters: the Lives of America's Suffragists*". The title of her talk is "Civil Rights for Women: Sisters of the Suffrage Movement", She will give some background of the suffrage battle and specifically discuss Lucy Stone and Alice Paul. The host for the talk is the Community College of Allegheny County, North Campus. Join us for this FREE talk at the third floor conference room of CCAC North Friday night.



**On May 2, 1914 courageous women and men paraded through downtown Pittsburgh in support of the controversial topic of women's right to vote.**  
(Photo courtesy of the Heinz History Center)

## Allegheny City Society Annual Meeting

The annual meeting of the Society will be held late in April. You will be receiving an invitation with the time and place when all of our plans are firmed up. Note that December 7<sup>th</sup> is the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary for the annexation of Allegheny City by the City of Pittsburgh. At our meeting, we will be discussing plans for the commemoration of this event.





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