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# The Allegheny City Society

## REPORTER DISPATCH

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### Acorn Hill and Thomas M. Marshall

by David R. Grinnell

Evidence of the past is all around us. Often the names of buildings, streets, municipalities, and parks reflect the leading individual and family names of people connected with a particular location.

For example, the area of Acorn Hill is identified in several ways: neighbors refer to it as part of Observatory Hill and the City of Pittsburgh recognizes the neighborhood as part of Perry North. The boundary lines of Acorn Hill are Perrysville Avenue, Marshall Avenue and Marshall Road and lies within the 10<sup>th</sup> Ward of Old Allegheny. Other roadways in Acorn Hill include: Glenridge Way, Harrow Way, Mt. Alister Road (formerly Mt. Airy), Newland Way, Norwood Avenue, and Oak Park Road (formerly Forest Hill Road). Two lot plans are evident in the neighborhood, Watson Place and Marshall Fields.

The consistent name that appears in this small area of the North Side is Marshall. In fact, just to the south of the intersection of Perrysville and Marshall Avenues is East Marshall Avenue. The name Marshall clearly has some significance to this neighborhood. It was Thomas Mercer Marshall who occupied a large tract of land which includes what are today Acorn Hill, portions of Riverview Park and Highwood Cemetery, and a small plan of lots along Route 19 and Kennedy Avenue.

The residence of Thomas M. Marshall is still standing at 222 Marshall Avenue. Built in 1862, its architecture would be classified as a mixture of Italianate and Second Empire, which gives little doubt that it is the oldest residential structure in the neighborhood. It is surrounded by American Foursquare, Craftsman, and a few Queen Anne style homes, which dominated



American home styles from the 1870's to the 1930's. At the time of its construction the street name was Back Lane. On an 1876 map the street is labeled as Woodland Avenue and by 1890 the street name had been changed to Marshall Avenue. Marshall's children continued to reside in this family homestead until their own deaths.

Thomas M. Marshall was a prominent attorney in Western Pennsylvania during the last half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In December, 1846 he was admitted to the bar and thus began an illustrious career that would continue thru the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. His reputation grew throughout Pennsylvania and the Tri-state region as a

great orator and a passionate defense attorney. Several of the biographical sketches of him that have appeared in county and legal histories recall that he represented defendants in more that two hundred twenty murder cases.

During 1863 Marshall represented citizens from a portion of Franklin Township in their efforts to become an independent municipality. Upon the success of the case, the newly formed township was named in honor of their attorney. Marshall Township is a reminder of the honor that citizens held for him.

Thomas Marshall was born in November 20, 1819 in Ireland, the youngest child of James and Jean (Peebles) Marshall. Within a few short years of Thomas' birth the entire Marshall family immigrated to the United States and settled for a while in Pittsburgh before finally locating the family in 1824 in Butler County. Marshall's older siblings included: Archibald M. Marshall, who lived on Ridge Avenue, James Marshall, who operated a wholesale grocery in Pittsburgh, Mary Brown, who was the mother of Major Adam M. Brown, and Samuel Marshall, who was a judge in Butler County.

When Thomas Marshall was ready for formal education, his parents sent him to live in Pittsburgh with his older brother James. He attended a private school and worked as a bookkeeper for his brother's mercantile business. He became a partner in the business but soon found an interest in law and resigned from his position in 1843.

In 1847 Marshall married Ellen Algoe of Pittsburgh. Who passed away in 1856. In the summer of 1858, he married Mary M. Patterson, the daughter of Allegheny County Sheriff Rody Patterson. Within a few years of this marriage, the Marshalls would build their new home in the 10<sup>th</sup> Ward of Allegheny where they would also build a life for a growing family. Eventually the family would consist of five children—four sons: Thomas, Jr., Rody Patterson (named for his paternal grandfather), Meredith Read, Mark W.; and one daughter: Jean Peebles (named for her maternal grandmother).

Interestingly, Thomas, Jr., Meredith and Rody also became practicing attorneys in Pittsburgh.

Thomas M. Marshall, Sr. died at his residence on October 25, 1898. Mary (Patterson) Marshall died in 1880. They were interred at Allegheny Cemetery in Lawrenceville.

Thomas M. Marshall, Jr. remained in the vicinity of his parent's home for many years after his marriage to Nancy Herron. He built a large home facing Perrysville Avenue. This house stands today behind the Evangelistic Temple Assembly of God Church building. Meredith R. Marshall also remained in the neighborhood, living on Perrysville Avenue. The remaining children lived at the home their parents had built. It was not until after Jean's death in 1944 that the family homestead was sold. A May 21, 1944 article in the *Pittsburgh Press*, indicates that the furnishing and other contents of the house were auctioned off in the front yard. This sale of the furniture and the house marked the end of eight decades of the family's residency at 222 Marshall Avenue.

It is difficult to imagine what the area must have been like during their time here on Acorn – few houses dotted the hillside. The family members were known for their love of equestrian activities which might have influenced the creation of the many paths in and around Riverview Park. Thomas Marshall was also

fond of dogs. At one time he had as many as thirteen dogs. In the rural environment that existed here during his lifetime, the dogs would not have bothered any of his neighbors.

#### **Sources:**

“Auction Recalls History of Illustrious Legal Family,” *The Pittsburgh Press*, Sunday, May 21, 1944.

*The Biographical Encyclopedia of Pennsylvania of the Nineteenth Century*. (Philadelphia: Galaxy Publishing Company), 1874, pages 657-658.

Eastman, Frank M. *Courts and Lawyers of Pennsylvania A History 1623-1923*. Volume IV.(New York: The American Historical Society, Inc.) 1922, pages 210, 351-355.

*The Twentieth Century Bench and Bar of Pennsylvania*. Volume II. (Chicago: H. C. Cooper, Jr., Brothers and Company), 1903, pages 861-862.

## **Allegheny City 1840-1907 a “Best Seller”**

We have been informed by Arcadia Publishing that that over 1,900 copies of *Allegheny City 1840 –1907* have been sold. Two hundred of these were sold by members of the ACS. Books are still available and can be ordered through our web site at [www.alleghenycity.org](http://www.alleghenycity.org) or send orders (with check) to our mailing address.

## **ACS Annual Meeting**

Due to construction delays at Watson Chapel, the location of our annual meeting will be at the Community House at 801 Union Place (just behind the Christian Missionary Church). It is scheduled for Thursday, April 24, 7 p.m. at the Community House, Union Place. The prestigious Rimmel Award will be presented and Christine Davis give a presentation on Riverview Park and the Allegheny Commons. There will be no charge for this event and in addition, free copies of the DVD shown at the ACS Annex Commemoration Dinner in December, 2007 will be distributed to all attendees.

## Historical Markers Approved

We have been informed that historical markers for both Fort Brunot (Fort McKeever) and the Pittsburgh Sanitary Fair were approved by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission.

## Coffee House Discussions Underway

The second of our “Coffee House Discussions”, dealing with Deutschtown, will be held at the Amani Coffee House at 7:00PM on April 9<sup>th</sup>.

## Historic Designation of Workingmen Savings Bank Moves Towards Final Approval

The Pittsburgh City Council has scheduled a public hearing for Tuesday, May 20, 2008 at 1:30 P.M at the fifth floor of the City-County Building on Grant Street.

Re: Bill No. 2008-0196 - Resolution providing for the designation as a Historic Structure under Title 11 of the code of Ordinances that certain structure known as the former Workingmen Savings Bank, located at 800 E. Ohio Street, block and lot number 24-N-142, in the 23rd Ward, City of Pittsburgh.

There has been some opposition to this nomination so support is needed from the public. Without this designation, demolition of this important piece of Allegheny City History is threatened.

## Destruction of Another Allegheny City Structure

The first of two 1840s “Canal Houses” that were located at a site that



originally overlooked the Pennsylvania canal has been demolished and the second one will soon follow. These buildings were occupied by the lock-keepers who collected the tolls from canal traffic. These structures had been vacant for many years without any attempts to save them. These may have been the oldest buildings in the lower Northside.

## Fame's Face Facing Repair

Reconstruction of the statue of Fame that stands atop the Allegheny County Soldiers Monument has begun. Fame had been struck by lightning in August of 2007. Reconstruction of the statue of Fame that stands atop

## **New Signage**

The first of new signage for the Commons has been installed as part of the pilot project in East Commons. Sponsored by the Allegheny Commons Steering Committee, each entrance to the commons will have a sign and each of the monuments and historical sites will have an interpretive sign.

\*Photos by Ruth MccCartan



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**Annual ACS Meeting April 24th -- Free DVD!**