

REPORTER DISPATCH

— *Journal of Old Allegheny History and Lore* —

OUR YEAR IN REVIEW

Remembering the many highlights of the past year

by Ruth McCartan

As the end of 2011 approaches and we start thinking of the future it is good to remember the many highlights of the past year. We are a small group of volunteers but when you look at the work we produce you can't help being amazed at what we have accomplished.

The first event on our calendar was the Lincoln Bus Tour on February 12 which was the 150th anniversary of the 16th President's visit to Allegheny and Pittsburgh. We had two sold out tours that day.

In conjunction with The Greater Pittsburgh Civil War Roundtable, the Society conducted a tour of the Meadville Pennsylvania area on April 16. The high point of the event was a visit to the tannery once owned by John Brown of Harpers Ferry fame. Even in a spring downpour, history lovers will come out to tour!

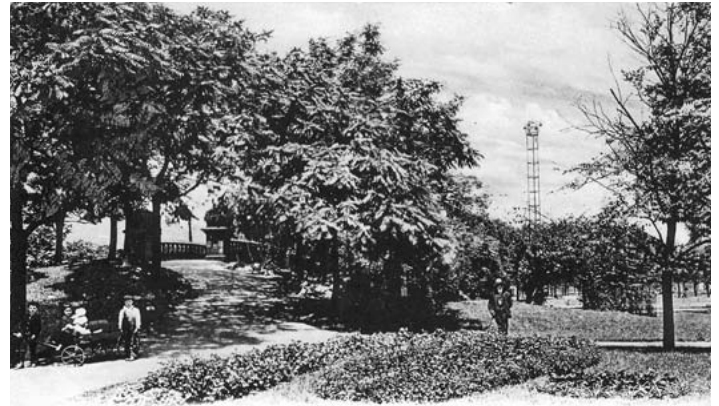
Our Annual Meeting was held April 27, at Bistro Soul with the awarding of the Rimmell Award to Stanley Lowe, and a talk on Manchester by John Canning.

The summer brought four *Walks in the Commons* covering West, North, East and South Common areas. These evening tours were to benefit the Allegheny Commons Initiative in their work to restore the Commons. This was the Society's first endeavor to conduct evening programs during the summer and it was a success.

To close out our tour year on October 15, the Society conducted a tour of Franklin and the Oil City area. This was our first attempt with renting a motor coach for a trip. Our worries were for not as we covered all our expenses and even made a little. The extraordinary Tiffany windows at St. John's Episcopal Church was well worth the trip and then some.

But the Society is not just tours and programs. We had informational tables at *Doo Dah Days* in Lawrenceville and the Mexican War Streets and Allegheny West House Tours. Two Mary Cassatt art scholarships were awarded to students in the Pittsburgh Public Schools. *Local History Local Pride* grant-funded programming was completed this spring with the program engaging students from Manchester School.

Continuing work was done on the archiving of World War Two letters to the 23th Ward Social Club and the documenta-



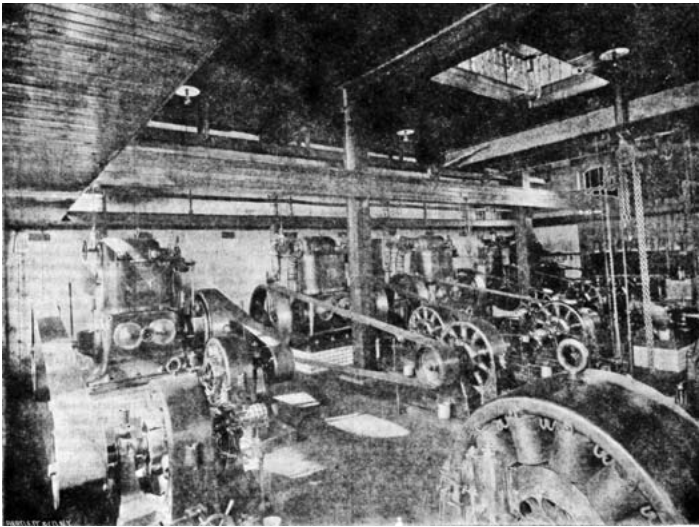
ORIGINAL WESTERN APPROACH to the pedestrian bridge over the railroad in the West Commons

tion of the names contained on the various Veteran memorials found on the North Side of Pittsburgh.

Many of the Board of Directors of the Allegheny City Society are involved in other North Side volunteer organizations such as the North Side Leadership Conference, The Allegheny Commons Initiative, the West Ohio Bridge Project, the City of Pittsburgh War Memorial and Monuments Project, Friends of Allegheny Library plus local neighborhood citizens councils.

With monthly Board meetings, the production of quarterly newsletters and treasurer reports, the continue maintenance of the Cassatt garden and the ACS web site, I am astonished at what of few hard working people are doing to keep Allegheny City history alive. We added a new board member this year Dr. Jean Binstock and a welcome back to Emilia Boehm from a board member sabbatical.

A few plans for 2012 are: a Civil War related tour of Washington, Pennsylvania and the surrounding area in April, a talk and tour of the Bridges of Allegheny, a motor coach tour to Hagerstown, Maryland and Antietam Battlefield in the fall plus a commemoration of the 123 Pennsylvania Infantry, *Allegheny's Best*. If this is not enough to renew your membership we are planning a behind the scenes tour of the University of Pittsburgh Archives conducted by David Grinnell, a tour of the Art Work contained in Allegheny General Hospital, a boat tour of the neighborhoods along the Allegheny River with other local historical groups, we are even thinking about a musical event in the Commons. Watch your newsletter for dates and times. See you in the New year!



THE MODEL ELECTRIC LIGHTING STATION AT ALLEGHENY CITY, PA
It is seldom that a central electric lighting station is so complete in its appointments that there is nothing to criticize or suggest.
The Industrial World and Iron Worker, September 24, 1891

THE ALLEGHENY CITY ELECTRIC LIGHT PLANT

Allegheny's advanced municipal lighting system
by Michael Shealey

For more than 18 years from July 17, 1890 until the annexation of Allegheny City by Pittsburgh in 1907, the Allegheny City municipal government owned and operated one of the most cost efficient and, for a brief period, one of the most technologically advanced municipal lighting systems in the country. The electric light plant buildings, still existing and located on Riversea Road, provided electric power for street lights and electric lighting for Allegheny City schools, fire houses, City Hall, the Market House, Carnegie Library, pump stations, and additional buildings. During this period, through 1906 the Allegheny City government converted almost all city street lighting from natural gas and gasoline to electric lights. In early 1890, Allegheny City streets were lit by 1,339 gas lamps and 385 gasoline lamps. By 1906, only 12 gas lights remained in Allegheny.

The provision of electric power in Allegheny City and Pittsburgh did not begin with the construction of the Allegheny City Electric Light Plant in 1889. Prior to this, beginning in about 1882, a number of small electric companies vied to provide electrical service within Allegheny City and Pittsburgh. In 1886, Allegheny City contracted with one of these small electric companies, the Allegheny County Electric Light Company to install and provide power to 10 electric arc lights in public parks (Allegheny Commons)

and to provide the City Hall and Market House with incandescent lights. (Generally, arc lights were used for street lighting and incandescent lights were used to light building interiors.) Surprisingly, after this initial contract, Allegheny City, (as opposed to Pittsburgh) chose not to pursue further long-term contracts with private power companies to provide public lighting. Instead, Allegheny City, in an ongoing effort to expand city electric lighting and to reduce costs per light chose to eventually own and operate its own municipal electric light plant.

This was accomplished in 1889, by advertising for proposals to build and to operate for six months a municipal light plant capable of providing power to a set number of street lights (52 tower lights with multiple lamps and 100 mast-arm lights with single lamps or, as an alternative, only 450 mast-arm lights). Under the proposed contract, the city, after a successful initial six-month operating period had the option to purchase the plant in 5 years at the contracted price and to begin operating the plant immediately after the initial trial period. The city also reserved the right to provide commercial lighting in obvious direct competition with private power companies. (This right was never exercised given the city's continuing focus to meet rapidly increasing public lighting needs.)

Five bidders submitted proposals: The Allegheny County Light Company; Brilliant Electric Light Company; Westinghouse Electric Company, Fort Wayne and Indianapolis Jenney Electric Light Company; and the Brush Electric Light Company. The Westinghouse Electric Light Company was selected. (Westinghouse would later go on in 1893 to provide lighting to the World Columbian Exposition.) Land was purchased immediately adjacent to railroad tracks on what was then Braddock Avenue (later to be renamed Riversea Road). Proximity to railroad tracks was necessary to provide coal to the plant's boilers. (Natural gas was considered as fuel and rejected due to an inadequate supply.) Construction began on September 30, 1889. Prominent local architect, Joseph M. Anglin, was selected to design the building with construction beginning on September 30, 1889. Anglin's completed building was described as a "substantial and handsome one built of brick and stone trimmings." The plant began service on July 17, 1890. The 1889 building is still standing and houses the W. W. Patterson Company, an electric winch manufacturer.

The single-lamp mast-arm lights provided as part of the initial street light contract would not seem particularly out of place on a street today. The lights were mounted on painted cedar poles 12 to 26 feet in height. The multiple lamp tower lights, however, were star-shaped iron columns either 125 or 150 feet high with foundations 5 feet deep and supported by



1889 ELECTRIC PLANT (now W. W. Patterson Co.) in the foreground, and the 1895 Electric Plant Addition (now Duquesne Light Substation) in the background, on Riversea Road. Joseph M. Anglin, Architect (1889) and David Hunter, Jr. (1895) Designer

multiple guy wires. Tower lights were generally installed at prominent intersections and mast-arm lights were installed along streets.

By 1892, only two years after completion of the 1889 building, demands put on the plant by the need for additional street lighting and incandescent lighting in city buildings, indicated that the building and its equipment would only be adequate for public lighting needs for a few more years. In that year, David Hunter, Jr then Superintendent of the Bureau of Public Lighting, began design for an additional light plant building immediately adjacent to the 1889 building. As designed, new engines and dynamos would be placed in the new building and the 1889 building would house larger boilers to power the generating equipment in the new building. The new building was completed in 1895 and has been in use as a Duquesne Light electric substation since 1922.

In 1893, Allegheny City, despite a strained capacity, boasted a municipal light plant second only to the Chicago municipal plant in the number of arc lamps in service (1,110 in Chicago versus 565 In Allegheny). Allegheny City, however, provided lamps at annual operating cost of \$59.65 versus \$96.65 for Chicago. Allegheny City was also reported in 1902 as having more street lights per square mile than any other city in the country.

Despite continuous improvements made to the plant throughout its then 14 years of service to Allegheny City, by 1904, then Superintendent of the Bureau of Public Lighting, Alexander Gray, reported that his new administration “found the plant in a deplorable condition. In that condition it was a menace in the respect that we might expect the

whole electric installation to break down as it was terribly overloaded and a number of the machines were unfit for service.” Gray also expressed concern for the limited room for continued expansion of the plant within one of the best residential neighborhoods in Allegheny.

Still, by 1906, the light plant successfully powered 1,522 arc lamps (as street lights) and served 49 municipal buildings providing service to 9,842 individual incandescent lights. The operating cost per light was still one of the lowest in the country. By February 1906, only 12 municipal gas lights remained in the city. It is likely that these 12 remaining gas lights were eliminated by the annexation of Allegheny City by Pittsburgh on December 7, 1907.

The former Allegheny City Electric Light Plant is located across the parking lot from Keystone Plumbing on Brighton Road. Neither of the buildings is currently designated a city historic structure. Surprisingly, the buildings do not appear to have been previously identified as surviving Allegheny City municipal buildings unlike the nearby Allegheny City Stables building on North Avenue.

MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL UPDATE

Membership Co-chairs, David Grinnell and Thomas Wilson report on improvements

We are trying something new this year! In the past, membership renewal forms were sent out on the anniversary of your initial membership date. Currently, we are updating our membership database and in an effort to streamline our renewal process we have decided that the membership year will begin in May and end at the Annual Meeting in April of each year. So, we hope that you will renew your membership for the 2011–2012 year and join us as we celebrate the history of Allegheny City.

If you have not received a membership renewal form in the mail you can print one from the web site alleghenycity.org type *membership form* in the search box. Your membership in the Allegheny City Society is vital to keeping the memory of what once was the City of Allegheny ALIVE!

Membership Types

- Individual \$10.00
- Family \$15.00
- Student and Senior \$5.00
- Individual Life \$100.00
- Corporate Sponsor \$50.00
- Business Member \$25.00
- School or Non Profit Group \$20.00



A CIVIL WAR MOMENT IN ALLEGHENY CITY

General Nathaniel Lyon honored on the way to his final resting place

by Ruth McCartan

During the 1860s, the old Fort Wayne Railroad station located on Federal Street was visited by politicians such as Edwin Stanton and newly elected President Abraham Lincoln, by preachers such as John. B. Clark and Matthew Simpson, and even by military heroes General George B. McClelland and General Nathaniel Lyon. The only one to have arrived dead was General Lyon. The General had been killed in the Battle of Wilson's Creek in Missouri on the 10th of August 1861. The body of this fallen hero had been lost for a few days but it was finally making its way home.

So who was this General Nathaniel Lyon? A native of Connecticut, Lyon was born into an old New England family and attended The United States Military Academy at West Point. He served as an infantry officer during the Seminole and Mexican wars and in 1861 was assigned to the U. S. arsenal at St Louis. An ardent Unionist and a strong supporter of President Lincoln and the Republican Party, Lyon worked to prevent the state of Missouri from leaving the Union. While leading a charge, at the Battle of Wilson's Creek, Lyon at the age of 43 would become the first Union general to be killed in action during the Civil War.

The general's aide placed the body of the fallen hero under an oak tree and later the body would be placed in an ambulance. The guard detailed to watch the body had fled and a sergeant transporting the wounded off the battlefield re-

moved the General's body and once again placed it under a tree. The General's body was forgotten in the retreat of the Union forces. The Confederates later discovered the body and sent it to a Union field hospital. Lyon's body was then taken to Springfield, doctors there were ordered to embalm the General. The body was so damaged the embalming process wasn't successful. So the remains were placed in a walnut coffin and tentatively buried in the Phelps family graveyard. Again the General was forgotten as the troops fled from Springfield.

"While in this temporary grave the North learned of the lost of its first general officer at a place no one had ever heard of and a period of national mourning began," wrote Vincent Tyndall in his article contained in the Official Commemorative Booklet on the Battle of Wilson's Creek.

Two members of the Lyon family travelled to Missouri to bring their kinsman home. The casket was exhumed and placed in a 300-pound iron vault for transport east. The Adams' Express Company waved the cost of shipping the remains home for burial. The funeral entourage included army officers and soldiers from the General's regiment. Crowds gathered at each stop and on August 29, 1861 in Cincinnati the body lay in state for thousands of mourners to pay their respects. The terrible consequences of a civil war were slowly being revealed to a young nation.

A committee of political leaders from Pittsburgh and Allegheny travelled down the line to ask if the body of the hero would be permitted to remain any length of time in the cities. *The Pittsburgh Evening Chronicle* newspaper on August 29th tells of the failure of the officials, "the Express Company stated the body will go right to Philadelphia so our citizens will have no opportunity of testifying by a fitting demonstration their respect for the memory of the decease."

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THE OLD FORT WAYNE RAILROAD STATION on Federal Street where the remains of General Nathaniel Lyon arrived on 30 August 1861



GENERAL NATHANIEL LYON GRAVESITE with monument and cannon at Eastford, Connecticut. Photo by Morrow Long (Creative Commons)

The body arrived in late afternoon August 30 at the Federal Street Station in Allegheny City. The Duquesne Central Guard acted as the military honor guard with a Committee composed of General William Robinson, the Honorable J. K. Moorhead and Thomas M. Howe in attendance. The procession stepped off for the Pennsylvania Station in Pittsburgh. An immense crowd had gathered at the depot and as the flag draped coffin was being transferred, looked on in solemn silence. *The Pittsburgh Post* in their reporting stated that those “in attendance, were eager to pay the last tribute of respect to one who had met an early fate in the battles for the Union.”

Philadelphia received the funeral train with honor guards, solemn ceremonies and patriotic music. In New York City General Lyon’s body lay in state for three days, with buildings and the ships in the harbor draped in black. Thousands walked pass the coffin decked with laurel wreaths. On September 5, the solemn party arrived in Phoenixville, Connecticut and after days of travel, countless miles and thousands of mourners the mortal remains of General Nathaniel Lyon were placed at last in their final resting place.

The expression of grief displayed during the Lyon’s funeral train journey would be repeated many times over in the next four years of the Civil War. Allegheny’s Federal Street Station would be the scene of many a soldiers farewell. Only a few of the thousands killed would get the luxury of coming home, as many were buried in a shallow or unmarked graves with no attendant mourners.

Sources

Nathaniel Lyon: Harbinger from Kansas by Captain Richard Scott Price
The Battle of Wilson’s Creek, Year 2000 Reenactment Official Commemorative Booklet

FALL EXCURSION TO OIL COUNTRY

Tour sponsored to Franklin, Oil City, and Titusville

by John Canning

Over the past few years the Society has organized all-day trips to Johnstown, Altoona, as well as to significant historical and architectural sites on the North Side. This October, 35 adventurous ACS members and friends headed north to Franklin, Oil City, and Titusville.

In Franklin, the lovely county seat of Venango County, we marveled at the magnificent collection of Tiffany windows in St. John’s Episcopal Church. We took shelter from a brief morning shower at Uptown Bistro, our lunch site, and were given a brief history of the impact of the the mid-19th century oil boom on that region, thus the wealth to outfit an entire church with Tiffany windows. Ruth McCartan spoke to the group about the Civil War monument at the town park adjacent to the stately Victorian-era County Courthouse. This fine monument—sculpted in Allegheny City—was awarded to Venango County for their sizable contribution to the Soldier’s Sanitary Fair held in Allegheny City in 1864.

Before heading up the Oil Creek valley to Titusville and the Drake Well Historic site, we made a stop at the imposing state hospital at Polk. Allegheny City architect Frederick Osterling was given the commission by the state to design and oversee the construction of this elaborate facility. We were indeed fortunate to be given a tour of the main administrative building located at the center of a unique collection of residential houses. We all learned much about the history of Polk from Mary Sauer, a very knowledgeable and sensitive employee at Polk, and resident of Franklin.

As the showers ended, we drove to the Drake Well site via Oil City. After touring the several components there we boarded the Oil City-Titusville RR for a 10-mile journey through Oil Creek State Park. Our day ended with a excellent dinner at *The Commons at Franklin* followed by a long drive back to Allegheny.

It was a great day trip. The ACS Program Committee is looking at several options for other one-day historical adventures for 2012 and beyond. Announcements of such events as well as other programs will be placed in forthcoming ACS newsletters and mailings.



ALLEGHENY CITY FILM SERIES

A program of films with Allegheny City roots

Over the next few months, the Society is sponsoring a program of several films. The schedule is as follows:

Wednesday, 15 February we will learn about the life and work of Mary Roberts Rinehart from the Rinehart Archives housed at Pitt's Archival Center in Point Breeze (6PM).

Tuesday, 21 February the silent (1926) and sound (1930) versions of Rinehart's mystery, *The Bat* will be screened at Allegheny Unitarian Universalist Church at corner of West North Avenue and Resaca Place.

Tuesday, 20 March two early films of Lois Weber will be screened at Allegheny UU Church.

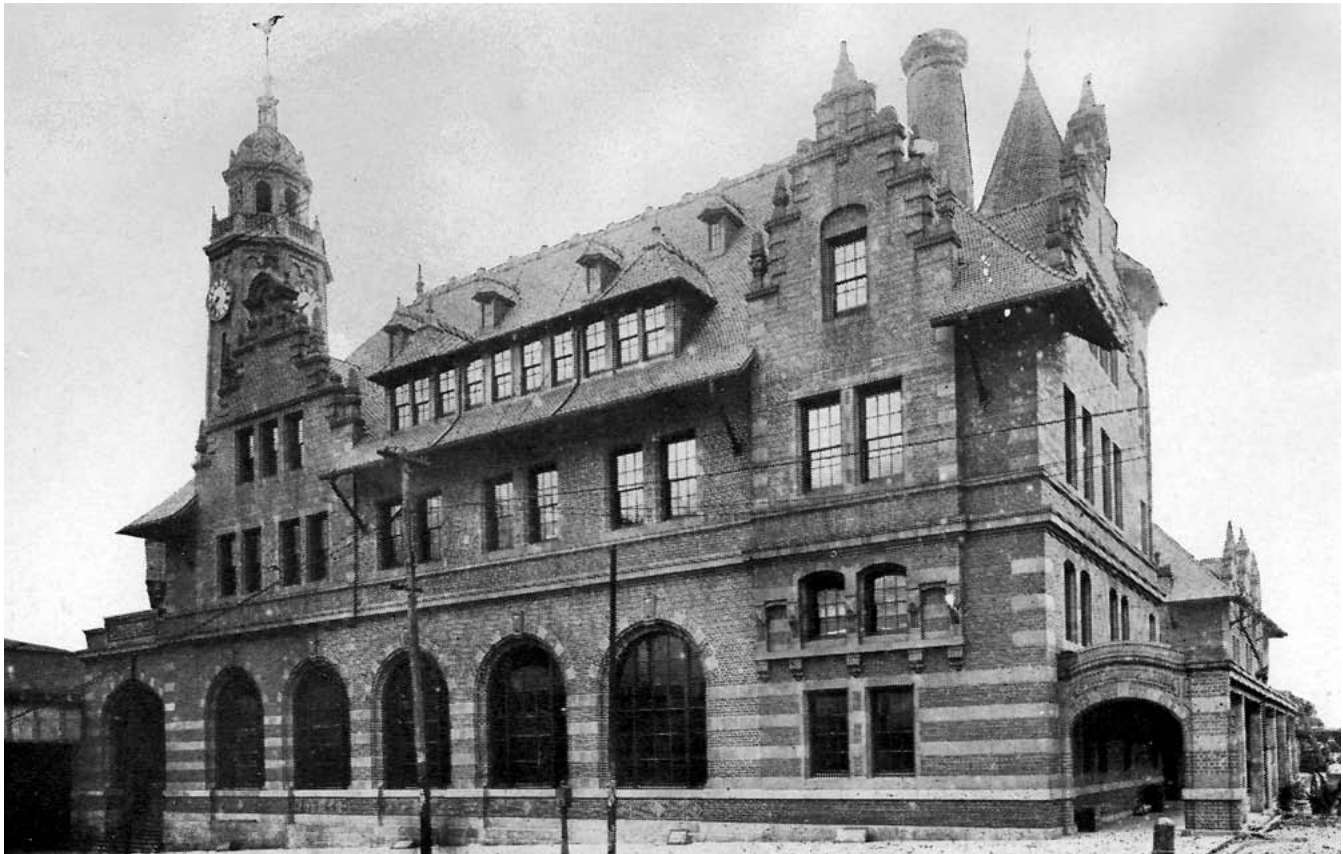
Tuesday, 4 April, *The Valley of Decision* based on Marcia Davenport's novel and released 70 years ago in 1942, will be screened at Allegheny UU Church.

Film programs will begin at 7PM. A brief overview of the work and the author will be presented prior to the screening. A free-will donation to the Society will help defray the costs of this series.

Additional information available on the Society website (alleghenycity.org) or by calling Ruth McCartan (412.364.6132), Amelia Gehron (412.766.5670), or John Canning (412.322.3974)



MARY ROBERTS RINEHART



THE NEW FORT WAYNE RAILROAD STATION on Federal Street, built 1906 in the Dutch Renaissance Style by architects Price and McLanahan (demolished 1953)