

# REPORTER DISPATCH

Journal of Old Allegheny History and Lore

## MYSTERY SOLVED

Identifying the Architect of the first North Presbyterian Church building of 1868

by Michael Shealey

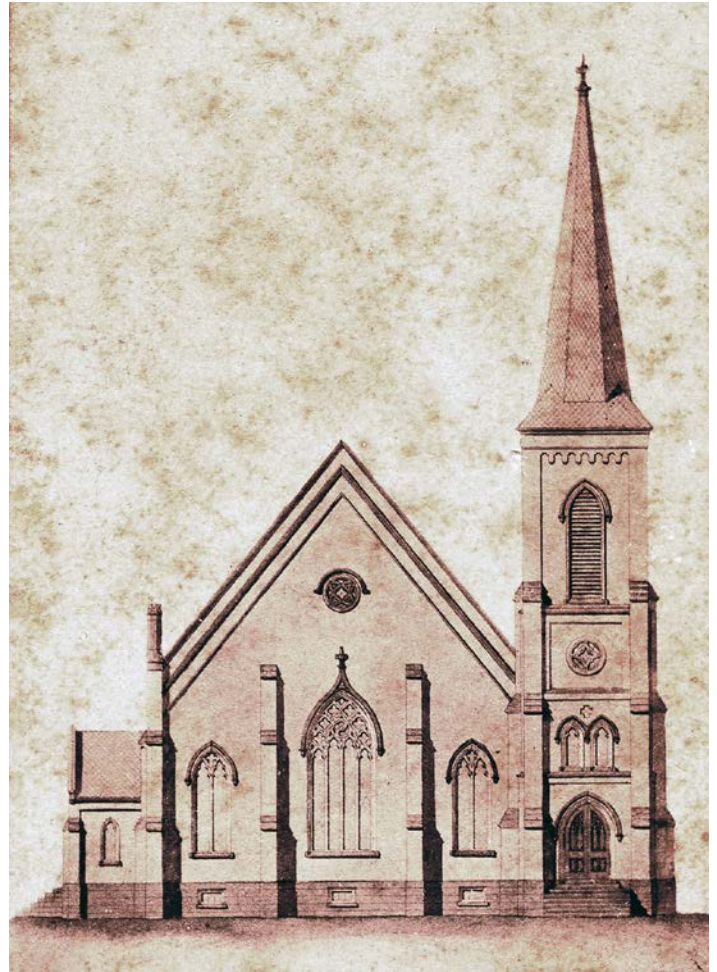
The image at right is a photograph of an architect's front elevation drawing of the first North Presbyterian Church of Allegheny. The church was completed in 1868 and demolished in 1897, to be replaced by a larger church on the same site at the corner of what is now Galveston and North Lincoln Avenue.

The drawing is identified as a "Front Elevation" of the "North Presbyterian Church Central Street Allegheny." No further information is provided. Central Street is one of the former names of North Lincoln Avenue. The architect is not identified and the drawing is not dated.

A brief history of the congregation of the church begins with Dr. William Swan Plumer, pastor of the Central Presbyterian Church of Allegheny during the early years of the Civil War. From the beginning of the war, Dr. Plumer refused to lead his congregation in either prayer for Union troops in the field or in giving thanks for Union victories. From Dr. Plumer's statements at the time and subsequently, it is apparent that he was not a southern sympathizer. Instead, he was a man of rigid principle opposed to all war and to any intrusion of political life into the operations of his church.

A substantial portion of Dr. Plumer's congregation was unable to reconcile their very active support of the Union cause with Dr. Plumer's pacifism. Dissent within the congregation reached a peak in the summer of 1862. Reconciliation proved impossible and dissenting congregants formed the North Presbyterian Church of Allegheny in April 1863. Dr. Plumer was subsequently forced to resign his position and he left Allegheny.

The North Presbyterian Church was named for its congregants' vehement support of the North in the Civil War and not for its geographic location. Beginning in 1863, the new congregation worked to raise funds to erect a church. After considering building lots in two other locations, the church purchased a lot at the corner of Central and Tremont Streets in Allegheny (North Lincoln and Galveston Avenue)



FRONT ELEVATION of the North Presbyterian Church, Central Street, Allegheny, photograph of the architect's drawing from a CDV c1866

in February 1866. Construction began on the church building in the summer of 1866.

Dating the drawing of the front of the church is made easier by the position of the church tower. Traditionally, churches were placed in prominent locations, often on street corners, with the tower and steeple at the corner. Previous corner lots considered for the church would have required the tower to be placed to the left of the main church building. Only the N. Lincoln Avenue lot required that the tower be placed to the right to be properly located at the street corner. This provides a probable date of the drawing as subsequent to the purchase of the North Lincoln lot in February 1866.

*continued*

## A CASSATT GARDEN UPDATE

### Major work accomplished in both garden sections

The cornerstone for the church was laid on September 11, 1866. No publication describing the cornerstone laying ceremony found to date identifies the architect. This was typical of 1860s' Pittsburgh newspaper coverage of both building cornerstone and dedication ceremonies.

Fortunately, newspapers did publish, apparently randomly, short articles on buildings under construction. The Tuesday, July 31, 1866 edition of the *Pittsburgh Evening Chronicle* contained a brief article describing the design of the church then in the early stages of construction. The article is quoted here in full as the only known description of the 1868 North Presbyterian Church:

*The building has already been commenced and stone work nearly completed. The site is on the corner of Central and Tremont Streets, First Ward, Allegheny, and is a most desirable location. The building will be one story in height and gothic in style of architecture, with a steep roof. It will have a front of fifty feet and a depth of eighty feet. On the north-west corner a tower will be erected, which will be surmounted by a handsome spire, one hundred twenty feet in height. There will be a porch on the south-west corner, and the entrances to the audience room will be through this porch and the corner on the other corner. The audience room will be thirty-three feet in height in the centre, and will seat comfortably six hundred persons. The interior will be finished in a neat and handsome manner throughout. The ceiling will be grained arches, finished with stucco moldings, bosses, etc. The pews, ninety-four in number, will be accessible by three aisles, running the entire length of the building, a vestibule being unnecessary from the location of the entrances. There will be a gallery extending across the front part of the church. The building will be constructed of brick, with stone trimmings, and will be roofed with variegated slate. The entire cost when completed, it is estimated, will reach \$35,000. The contractors for the stone work are Messrs. Alexander and Whitfield; and for the carpenter work, Mr. James Leech. The other portions have not been awarded. Mr. J. M. Balph is the architect.*

The architect, James Madison Balph, was one of only a handful of architects practicing in Allegheny in the late 1860s. He did regularly advertise his services in the *Pittsburgh Evening Chronicle* and this, perhaps, was the impetus for the publication of an article on one his buildings. This article is the only known documentation linking Balph to the design of this church.

The completed church was dedicated on February 16, 1868.

Special thanks to Ms. Lois Yoedt, congregant of the North Presbyterian Church and Allegheny City Society Board member, for her patient and timely assistance with this article.

The Cassatt Garden came alive on May 15 with some 20 Alcoa employees arriving to help with the general clean-up of the area. ACS Board members and volunteers helped plant over 60 cannas. The cannas have various Allegheny hybrid names and are grown in Washington County. The Cassatt Garden is divided into two areas, the upper and lower lots.

The Society has been working on the upper lot for over 10 years – since the dedication of the Pennsylvania Historical marker to Mary Cassatt. This is the first time any serious work has been done on the lower lot which is near Heinz field and the new T-station. The Alcoa volunteers spent three hours planting, mulching, weeding and removing litter. The volunteers came via an arrangement with G-Tech, which is a Pittsburgh-based, non-profit social enterprise dedicated to growing new opportunities to fuel sustainable community development. ACS Board member, Dr. Jean Binstock, has been working with G-Tech all spring with a plan for the location. The agency has assumed financial responsibility for the purchase of the cannas, summer mowing and the general cleanup of the upper lot.

Check out the work the volunteers performed the next time you are in the area. A great big THANK YOU goes out to Alcoa, G-Tech and various Allegheny City Board members who worked in the garden. Barbara is watching the progress of her special garden. Can you believe trees will be coming soon!

Learn more about G-Tech at <[gtechstrategies.org](http://gtechstrategies.org)>



GARDEN VOLUNTEERS from Alcoa and the ACS Board



# SPRING TOUR A SUCCESS

Washington County Civil War history road trip

by Ruth McCartan

Instead of singing we are *Coming Father Abraham* the better music for the day would have been *Raindrops keep falling on my head*. Yes, it was another wet local area civil war trip.

The Washington County area was our destination for most of the day. The site of Jefferson College, in Canonsburg was our first stop. The college recruited a company of student soldiers which became Company G of the 140th Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry in 1862. The company fought at Chancellorsville, Gettysburg and Cold Harbor. The war reduced its ranks to 23 out of 103. Jefferson College was never the same after the war with the lost of so many students and alumni in 1865 it was forced to merge with Washington College. But we will get to that.

Jonathan Letterman, medical director of the Army of the Potomac was born in a house near the college. Letterman's family remained in the area but after medical school in Philadelphia Jonathan joined the army and headed out west. 1862 found him trying to organize the treatment of injured soldiers on the battlefield. Letterman's ideas were the foundation of modern battlefield medicine. After a very brief stop at Sarris Candies for a hit of chocolate we were off to Chartiers Hill Cemetery to visit the grave of Rev. James McMillan, who brought the Presbyterian church to the frontier of Pennsylvania. McMillan was one of the clergy who helped established Western Theological Seminary in Allegheny City. An army, it is said, travels on its stomach and so does a tour group. Our mid day repast was taken at the Springhouse on Route 136. Having prepared our bodies for the continuation of the tour, it was off to Washington and Jefferson College or as most people know as W and J.

We began our tour of the campus with "Old Main" erected in 1836, with twin towers added in 1865 to symbolize the union of Jefferson College and Washington College. This building is the face of the college it is featured in most of the promotional literature relating to the school. The campus has an array of Victorian buildings with new construction tastefully interspersed. A unique feature of the campus is a Soldiers and Sailors Memorial listing all the graduates and students who served in the various wars fought by our nation. The names of Union veterans are listed along with Confederate soldiers. This is rarely found in the north, but some students at Jefferson College hailed from Virginia (present day West Virginia) and fought for their state. After talking about a few of the names featured on the memorial we walked to the Washington County Historical Society headquarters at the



OLD MAIN on the campus of Washington and Jefferson College. The two towers, added in 1865, symbolize the union of separate Colleges.

LeMoyne House. The house is Pennsylvania's first National Historic Landmark of the Underground Railroad, while touring the house with the educational director we learned about the LeMoyne family and their work with helping runaway slaves reach Canada and freedom. Another highlight of the House is the civil war room displaying local artifacts with a Washington County theme. Before heading to the last stop on the tour a pamphlet containing the Medal of Honor winners from the county was given out.

Captain Hugh Boon, born in Washington County received the highest award at the Battle of Saylor's Creek in April 1865 for capturing a rebel flag. Boon is buried in Washington Cemetery.

Washington Cemetery overlooks the city and was incorporated in 1853. The GAR Plot could use some attention. The gravestones have all been laid flat to the ground. It's



GAR PLOT and monument

only a matter of time before grass covers them and the inscription is lost. The cemetery's jewel is the Civil War Soldiers Monument. It looks like a scaled-down version of the original Soldiers Monument in Allegheny City. Both were built in the

same year, 1874, designed by the same person, Morganroth, and constructed with the same material, sandstone.

The rain drops kept falling as we call it a day and headed for dinner at the Century Inn in Scenery Hill to get warm and discuss the day.

## STRIKING UP THE BAND

### Summer Music Series in new Buhl Community Park

by John Canning

There was a gala opening on June 23 of a wonderful new park on the North Side, named the *Buhl Community Park in Allegheny Square*. The Children's Museum took the lead in funding for the park's design and construction. The park is on the site of one of the four public squares set aside in the 1788 survey of Allegheny Town. In those early years, the square was used as the Town's haymarket, where hay, lumber, coal and salt were officially weighed and measured. In the late 19th century the Haymarket Square was transformed into a very formal park known as Ober Park. It was a gift to the people of Allegheny from civic-minded John Ober, one of Allegheny City's most successful brewers.

In the 1930s the park was redesigned. It connected the newly constructed Buhl Planetarium with the Boggs and Buhl department store. This Buhl Park, was leveled along with most of the surrounding structures in the 1960s. Always public parkland, a new award-winning park design was fitted into the plans for Allegheny Center. That park, in a style often referred to as "Brutalist," fell into disuse and deterioration after the failure of the Allegheny Center Mall in the 1980s.

Today's park, which complements the Children's Museum, is larger than all of its antecedents, adaptable to many uses and has a wonderful *Cloud Arbor* designed by world-famous sculptor, Ned Kahn. It is indeed a park for all ages.

This summer, the Allegheny City Society is sponsoring four music programs in the new park. Hopefully it is the first "annual" program encouraging folks to once again enjoy the atmosphere of Allegheny's public square. The schedule for these concerts is: July 3rd—The Allegheny Brass Band; July 17—Roberts-Ortner Duo with guest artists; August 7—Roberts-Ortner Duo with Aqui Tango; and August 21—Allegheny Brass Band.

Programs begin at 7PM. All are welcome to enjoy super music in a perfect setting.

A grant from the Buhl Foundation and the support of our good neighbors at the Children's Museum and the New Hazlett Theater has enabled the Society to sponsor this series in the heart of Old Allegheny.



AERIAL RENDERING of the new Buhl Community Park

## ANNUAL MEETING RECAP

### Gus and Stella Kalaris honored with Rimmell Award

by David McMunn

The Allegheny City Society held its Annual Meeting on Wednesday, April 25, 2012 at the Magovern Conference Center of the Allegheny General Hospital. Following a delicious buffet dinner provided by the hospital catering kitchen, the Annual Meeting was convened. The Treasurer presented the financial statements for the year. The secretary recognized the renewing and new board members. The president recognized the recipients of the 2012 William Rimmell

Award, Gus and Stella (Yia Yia) Kalaris. ACS board member, Tom Wilson created an audiovisual presentation capturing the life and commitment of Gus and Stella to all of the North Side through the shaved ice stand that they have operated since the 1940s, "when your dad was a lad." Earlier, Pittsburgh City Council issued a proclamation congratulating them on their years of service and declared April 25 to be "Gus and Yia Yia Day."

Everyone enjoyed the evening to spend a few cherished hours with fellow North Siders and with folks who are North Siders "at heart." Mark your calendar now for the next Annual Meeting on Wednesday, April 24, 2013!





## ALLEGHENY CITIZENS

Samuel M. Willock, founder of the Waverly Oil Works  
by Michael Shealey

Samuel M. Willock, Allegheny citizen and founder of the Waverly Oil Works, is known better in business history for what he didn't do rather than what he did do. From his founding of the Waverly Oil Works in 1880 through his death



S.M. Willock from an 1890s tintype

in 1908, Willock owned and maintained Waverly as an independent oil refinery. He was not driven out of business by the Standard Oil Company trust.

By 1908, S.M. Willock was the only sole proprietor of an oil refinery in the United States and the Waverly Oil Works was the last independent oil refinery in Pittsburgh. In the 1880s, at the time of the founding of Waverly, Pittsburgh was a center of smaller, independent oil refineries in the United States. As the oil business developed through

the last two decades of the 19th century and into the 20th century, the Standard Oil Company (founded in Ohio in 1870) came to dominate oil production in the northeastern United States. Independent refineries in Pittsburgh, with the exception of Waverly, were driven out of business or absorbed by the Standard Oil. By negotiating exclusive bulk transport discounts from railroads, Standard Oil was

able to significantly undercut the shipped oil prices of competitors. Waverly Oil was able to survive by offering a superior product at moderately increased cost. Waverly Oil's retail operations were finally acquired in 1930, long after Willock's death, by Standard Oil of Pennsylvania.

S. M. Willock's house in Allegheny City (1889–1906), at 414 W. North Avenue, is still standing. In the early 20th century, a Willock family descendant opened the Wickersham Music School at the home and continued to live there until the early 1960s. Mrs. Lois Dietrich then occupied the house and continued to operate the music school until the early 1990s.



ENTRANCE HALL at the former Willock House c1990

## CASSATT SCHOLARSHIP AWARDS

Given at the student art exhibition award reception

Congratulations to Audrey Stygar and Samantha McGeehan, recipients of the Allegheny City Society Mary Cassatt Award! We were delighted to grant the award to these two very talented young ladies at the Manchester Craftsmen's



Audrey Stygar

Guild Invitational Art Exhibition Awards Reception on May 10th. The ACS Award commemorates Mary Cassatt, that talented daughter of Allegheny who made her mark among the French Impressionists. We hope that Audrey and Samantha can use their awards to purchase art supplies and create more award-winning art!



Samantha McGeehan

## NATIONAL CASKET COMPANY INFORMATION REQUESTED

The Allegheny City Society is currently working to produce a history of the National Casket Company building, now the Cardello Building, on the North Side near the West End Bridge.

Information on the company and building is requested from anyone who was an employee of National Casket, has knowledge of the building, or may know somebody who did work there. Photographs, artifacts and information will be appreciated.

Contact Michael Shealey at:  
<michael\_shealey@hotmail.com>  
or Rich Cardello at 412 897-5600.

## SOCIETY'S ANNUAL FALL TRIP

Visiting Hagerstown and Antietam Battlefield

by John Canning

The Allegheny City Society annual Fall trip is scheduled for Saturday, September 29, 2012 to Hagerstown and the Antietam National Battlefield site.

At Hagerstown, Maryland, we will visit the Washington County Museum of Art, a gift of Mr. and Mrs. William Singer Jr.

Singer, born and raised in Allegheny City, was an accomplished artist. He was the son of William Singer Sr., one of the great steel magnates of late 19th century Allegheny, and Hester Harton Singer. The Singer home was at 934 Western Avenue. Two Singer homes also remain in Sewickley Heights. William Singer, Jr. spent many years painting and collecting pieces of art in Europe, particularly in Norway and Holland. When returning to Hagerstown, Mrs. Singer's birthplace, the couple donated funds for an art museum there. One of the major galleries features their own collection and another is filled with many of Singer's works. We will visit both galleries.

Following a box lunch in the park adjacent to the museum, we will drive a few miles south of Hagerstown to

the Antietam National Battlefield site. Here, 150 years ago, in September of 1862, one of the bloodiest battles of the Civil War took place. Whittier's *Ballad of Barbara Frietchie* recounts the story of Barbara Frietchie who flew the Union Stars and Stipes in defiance of the Rebel troops marching through Frederick en route to meet the Union forces at Antietam Creek.



At Antietam we will watch the highly regarded video program of the battle and then our bus will be taken on a guided tour of the battlefield.

On our way home, back to Pittsburgh, we will have a scrumptious dinner at the famous Jean Bonnet Tavern in Bedford County.

We leave the North Side at 7:30 AM and return 9:00PM. The cost of the trip (including lunch, dinner, entrance fees and tour guides) is \$110.

Make your reservations (deadline Sept 15) by calling Amy Gehron at 412 766-5670 or John Canning at 412 322-3974.

