

The Allegheny City Society REPORTER DISPATCH

The Quarterly Journal of Old Allegheny History and Lore - Volume 1 No. 3

The Allegheny Commons - A Short History

When the town of Allegheny was laid out in 1878 surrounding the central area were 102 acres called the East, West, North and South Commons. The area was reserved as "common land" for the pasture of cattle owned by the town's residents.

For the next 40 years the commons remained just that - common ground. However, in 1818 the state legislature appropriated approximately 10 acres for a penitentiary (the present site of the National Aviary).

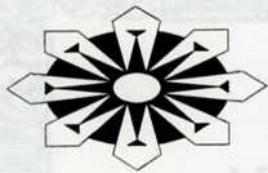
The next attempted raid was in 1819, when the legislature tried to set 40 acres aside for the new home of Western University of Pennsylvania. This assault was thwarted by the protests of the residents of Allegheny who claimed their right to the land as their common pasture. The case went to the supreme court under the title "Trustees of the Western University of



The Humbolt Monument - now gone will be one of the stops on the upcoming tour of the Commons to be held by the Allegheny City Society on Sept. 14.

Pennsylvania against Robinson and Others." In 1824, the university's title to the lands was declared defective. In 1822, the general assembly of the Presbyterian Church sought to locate a theological seminary on the commons. This time, however, the

Continued on Page 4 ..



TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE OF ALLEGHENY CITY WITH THESE TRIVIA QUESTIONS

BUILDINGS AND PLACES

1. What is the first public publicly supported Carnegie Library in the United States?
2. In the 1920's Pittsburgh had 27 department stores. What famous local department store was located in Allegheny City?
3. Henry Phipps donated money to set up a conservatory in West Park. The building was rebuilt in the 1950's. What is it called today.
4. It used to be a way stop for Benedictine priests and nuns and was the City of Pittsburgh's first bed and breakfast inn. What is it's name?
5. What building has the largest collection of holy relics in the United States?
6. What hospital had it's first building on Stockton Avenue?
7. What was the name of the building that now is a features children's programs and play areas?
8. What sports venue is near the site of old Exposition Park?
9. What neighborhood of the North Side is named for a war that was fought in the 1840's?
10. There was a "mall type" building on the present site of Allegheny Center. What was it's name?
11. What was the name of the building that now houses the Pittsburgh Public Theater?

12. Before its annexation a number of Allegheny City streets had other names. What was the former name of Brighton Road? Galveston Avenue?
13. What area of the North Side was know for its slaughterhouses and meat processing plants? What is the name of that area today?

FAMOUS PEOPLE

1. What person made horseradish and turned it into a multi-million dollar usiness?
2. What famous composer's father was a Mayor of Allegheny City?
3. What famous woman painter lived in Allegheny City?
4. Who was the first white child born on the Northern side of the Allegheny River?
5. What famous mystery writer lived in Allegheny City?
6. This Allegheny City resident invented one of the most popular amusements for the World's Fair in Chicago? Who was he and what was his invention?
7. This writer was born in the Allegheny West neighborhood. She and her family moved away about 6 months later. What is her name?
8. This man's jealous rage caused him to shoot and kill a man in New York City. At the trial he pleaded insanity and was acquitted. What was his name?

STUMPED BY SOME OF THESE QUESTIONS?
SEE PAGE 8 FOR THE ANSWERS.

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Society Notes

Ms. Jane C. Kirker sent the Society a copy of "The Chronological History of Old Allegheny City" in her letter she said "I was given this pamphlet at a meeting of the Society". It contains a listing of dates with a statement of what happened in Allegheny City on that date. The last entry states: 1907 "end of the wrangling that started back in 1846. Pittsburgh, the larger city, annexed itself to Allegheny by outvoting the smaller city, and retained its own name."

Following are a few of the entries contained in the booklet:

1851- The first Allegheny County Fair was held in Allegheny. In addition to the usual home and farm products, such as fruits, fancy work, vegetables and farm implements, a number of odd items were exhibited to wit; patent leather, beaver hats, chimes, batting, parlor stoves, omnibuses, metal coffins, congealed water, burr smut machine, oil cups, and smoothing irons. Truly a versatile people and most of these items were made in Allegheny.

1874- the first organ donated by Andrew Carnegie was given to the Church of the New Jerusalem (Swedenborgian) which he attended as a boy and was at one time the librarian. The church is located on Sandusky and Parkhurst. (A 1990's update: the building is still located on Sandusky and Parkhurst but is no longer a church. It was renovated by Allegheny General Hospital and contains hospital offices. The renovation retains the exterior look of a church building.)

1895- Allegheny Country Club was organized. It occupied most of the area now bounded by

Benton, California, Wyndhurst, Cambronne, and Brighton Road. The Club moved in 1902 to Watson Road, Sewickley.

Thank You Ms. Kirker

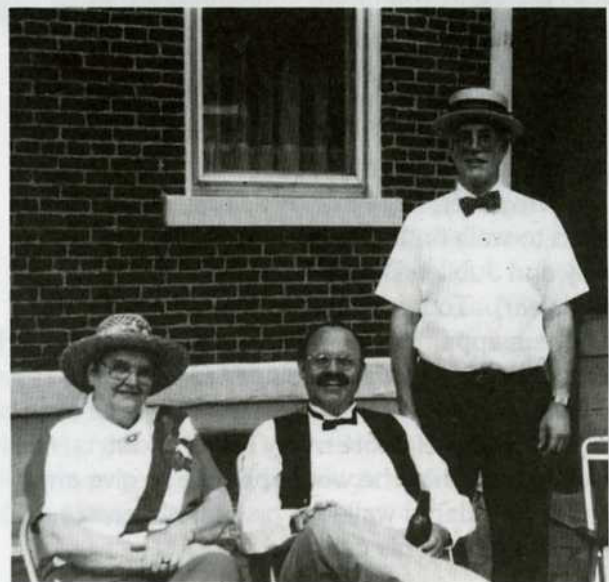
Board Members In The News

■ Congratulations to **Dr. and Mrs. Thomas Uhler** on receiving the good neighbor award from the North Side Leadership Conference.

The Uhler's are very active in their community of Observatory Hill. One of the few projects the Uhlers are involved in is the beautiful flower beds along Venture St.

■ During the Allegheny West Garden Tour, July 27, 28, 1996 **Craig Bennett, Steve Pitzak and Ruth McCartan** manned the Society's informational booth on the corner of Beech and Galveston. Many people stopped and were very interested in the Society and its mission. The traffic stopper was the display board designed by **Lois Yoedt** on John Brashear. Many new names were added to the newsletter mailing list and even a few books were sold. Steve and Craig dressed in period clothing of the Victorian age.

Pictured below (right to left) Board members Michael Coleman, Steve Pitzak and Society friend Ruth McCartan at the information booth at the Garden Tour



Continued from page 1....

residents of Allegheny released their rights to the commons so the seminary could be built. (Note: this area is now occupied by Community College of Allegheny County and called Monument Hill).

By the 1840's the this common land was becoming a problem. In addition to cattle, some residents insisted on letting their pigs roam free on the land upsetting those citizen's who said that only cattle were to graze on the land. A range war or sorts insued. In addition to the battle over grazing rights, residents began to dump garbage on the land.

The city fathers decided something had to be done about the deplorable conditions of the common ground that sat squarely in the middle of a growing Allegheny City. In 1856 they appointed trustees to raise funds for the improvement of the South and East Commons.

However, it wasn't until 1867 that the work of improvement of the Commons was begun. On March 26, 1867 the State Legislature passed the Common Ground Improvement Act. This act permitted the City of Allegheny to develop the commons as public park.

Grant and Mitchel of New York City were hired to design the new park. They completed their work in October 1867 and on December 28, 1876 the park commission turned over the completed parks to the City of Allegheny.

Both East and West Park contained formal flower beds, fountains, secluded glens and a lake (made to look as a natural one in West Park). A stroll through the parks would afford a pleasant respite from the day's problems or provide a refreshing spot for family outing.

However, residents or visitors were not allowed to walk on the grass except on the Fourth of July and Jubilee Day (held at the end of the school year). To insure this rule was followed the city fathers appointed a one-armed Civil War veteran, "Major" George Geisinger as the park custodian.

William Rimmel wrote many times about Geiseinger and how he would be sure to give any offender who dared walk on "his park's" grass a whack or two with his cane.

After the dedication of the parks, it wasn't long before monuments and statues began to appear. By the mid 1920's over eight monuments or statues had been placed in either East or West Park.

Over the years, the park continued to evolve. The formal plantings began to disapper. Some of the monuments were altered or removed. All of the fountains were replaced by flower beds. Lake Elizabeth was filled in with dirt covered for twenty years during the 1940's-60's to make way for ballfields.

However, East and West Park made a comeback. The lake was restored in 1968. Through the efforts of Christina Schmidlapp, a resident of Allegheny West, all of the trees in both parks will have been pruned and fertilized by 1997. The National Aviary has been talking about restoring some of the adjacent park land to its original splendor. A new playground graces West Park's edge.

More and more residents are discovering and using both East and West Park for recreation or just plain relaxing - the legacy and vision of the City Fathers of Allegheny City.

**Written by John Lyon,
Editor of the Reporter Dispatch.**

Explore both East and West Park on the Allegheny City Society's Walking Tour of the Parks on September 14, 1996. The tour will start near the corner of Brighton Road and Western Avenue at 1:00 pm. We will examine the history of the monuments, talk about the trees and discover how this area progressed from a grazing land to city park. The cost is \$10 per person. Call 322-8807 for information or tickets.



From the president -- Lois Henderson Yoedt

Summer greetings! It was gratifying to see so many of you at the Annual Meeting in April. Exciting events are planned for the fall season--Talks and Walks. Join us for on or all of the six talks at CCAC on Ridge Avenue and come along on the Walk and exciting tour of the Commons.

Report of the Annual Meeting

The annual meeting of the membership of the Allegheny City Society held at the Community College of Allegheny County on April 25, 1996.

The business portion of the meeting was chaired by R. Craig Bennett. The following issues were voted upon:

Issue #1. Election of directors and officers, received twenty (20) "FOR" votes and was accepted as presented by unanimous ballot with zero (0) "AGAINST" votes and zero (0) abstentions.

Issue #2. Replacement, revocation, and nullification of any and all previous Bylaws, received twenty (20) "FOR" votes and was accepted as presented by unanimous ballot with zero (0) "AGAINST" votes and zero (0) abstentions.

Issue #3. Adoption of proposed Bylaws received twenty (20) "FOR" votes and was accepted as presented by unanimous ballot with zero (0) "AGAINST" votes and zero (0) abstentions.

John Lyon presented the special recognition award in the form of a certificate mounted on a presentation plaque to Christina Schmidlapp. For the past several years Ms Schmidlapp has been a tireless volunteer raising money to prune, fertilize, spray, and catalogue the approximated 800 trees in East and West Park. Through her efforts the task will be accomplished in 1997.

Micheal Coleman introduced the speaker, Eliza Smith Brown. Ms. Brown is a principal of

Brown Carlisle & Associates a professional consulting firm that provides services in the areas of historic preservation planning and cultural resources management. She has spent seventeen years providing documentation and assessments on historic properties ranging from individual structures to entire communities. Her topic was "The Commons" the development of this area from 1860 through 1930.

THE 1996-1997

DIRECTORS OF THE SOCIETY

Lois Yoedt, President; Terry Mowrey, Vice President; R. Craig Bennett, Secretary; Ruth McCartan, Treasurer; John Canning, Eleanor Coleman, Michael Coleman, C. A. Eubanks, John Lyon, Peter Stearns, Stephen D. Pietzak, Maureen Uhler, Thomas Uhler

Pictured below:(l. to r.) President Lois Yoedt, Christina Schmidlapp, Eliza Smith Brown after the annual meeting



The Smith Sisters Of Old Allegheny

By Ruth McCartan

Dr. John Brashear, writing in the *Pittsburgh Gazette* in 1909 on the death of Matilda Hudson Smith said, "In the death of this good woman, Pittsburgh, and the world has lost one of its noblest philanthropists, for if the giving of one's self as well as one's means is the highest type of philanthropy, then will the memory of this

great soul be as sweet incense to the hundreds of those who have been the recipients of her kindly help in their time of need".

This statement could also apply to Matilda's sister Jane McGrew Smith. What did these women do to earn such praise from Brashear? To gain some insight about these two women you



MISS JANE SMITH

have to look into their family history.

Jane born in 1832 was the oldest daughter of Hugh and Charlotte Smith, her sister Matilda was born 1837. Their father was a coal merchant and part owner of the steam boat Niagara. Their uncle Joseph was a steamboat captain who when in town lived at the Monongahela House. Both Joseph and Hugh were born in Scotland and arrived in America in the 1820's.

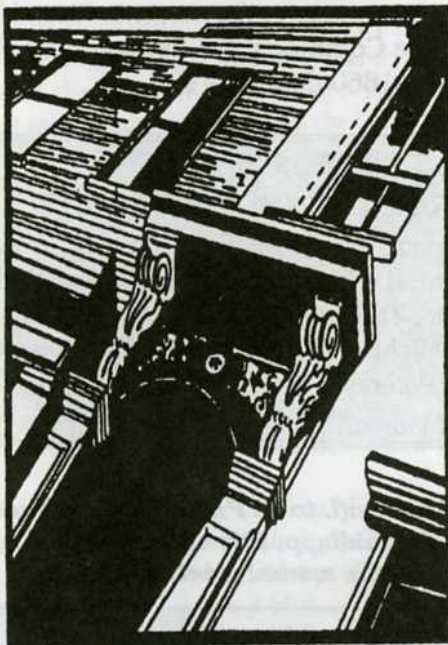
Charlotte Darsie was Jane and Matilda's mother. Her father, George, was one of the incorporators of the Western Insurance Co., the first fire insurance company in Western Pennsylvania. According to the 1850 Census, the Darsies lived with the Smiths at the Smith home on lower Robinson Street.

Hugh and Charlotte had 8 children who reached adulthood and 6 children who never saw their teens. Jane being the oldest daughter was expected to help her mother with the child rearing.

Not much is known about Jane's education but it probably followed the custom of the time for young women: tutoring at home until they reached their early teen years. This education provided a limited knowledge of math and english.

During this era needle pointing and the ability to run a home were considered all the

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MISS MATHILDA SMITH

knowledge a women needed. However, Jane must have learned more, because in 1856 a Miss Jane Smith was listed in the City Directory as an officer and the teacher at the Allegheny Orphan Asylum on West Commons near Webster.

Maybe she had been allowed to sit in on the private lessons given to her younger brothers William and David.

Jane and Matilda's mother must have required help in her last years because Hugh wrote in his will he would pay them each \$100 a year if they remained unmarried and lived with their mother "doing services in taking care of their said mother." Hugh also provided them each 10 shares in a financial institution for the services they had already rendered.

Their mother only lasted a few years after the death of husband in 1860 . Charlotte's middle son William died the same year and her youngest son Alexander died in the early years of the Civil War.

With the death of their mother the family home Greenwood in Manchester was sold and all the assets of Hugh Smith were converted to cash and divided among the living children.

In 1863 Jane, Matilda, and younger David moved in with their oldest brother Andrew D.Smith at Park and Tremont called Park Hill in Allegheny City. Once again all the Smith's were under one roof. Andrew had just lost his wife and the sisters arrived just in time to help out with the child rearing.

At this time Jane and David were in their 30's with Matilda in her late 20's. Andrew and David were in business together as coal merchants with A. D. Smith and Brothers at Park and Rebecca St. The brothers also were involved

in the company Park and Bros. an iron foundry located near the Allegheny River.

In the mid-1860's the Smith sisters become involved with the philanthropic institutions of Allegheny. Jane was on the executive committee of the Allegheny Widows Home Association. The mission of the Association was to "furnish a tenement or home at a nominal cost to widows with small children and aged persons as an incentive and encouragement to their efforts of self support".

In 1878 Jane became one of the directors of the Home for the Friendless located on Washington St. near the East Commons. The purpose of this home was to "receive and provide for every child in distress and to receive children whose mothers depending upon their daily labor

Continued on Page 9



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ALLEGHENY CITY TRIVIA QUIZ ANSWERS

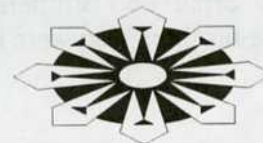
BUILDINGS AND PLACES

1. Both the **Allegheny Regional Branch** located in the Allegheny Center Complex and the Carnegie Library in Braddock claim to be the oldest. However, some claim the Braddock Library was built for the steelworks and not the general public. So it would seem the first public library title belongs to the Allegheny Regional
2. The North Side department store everyone remembers is **Boggs and Buhl** that was located on Federal Street - 1 block from the Market House. The first store opened in 1869 with barely enough merchandise to cover 18 sq. ft. of space.
3. The first conservatory built by Henry Phipps in 1887 at a cost of \$35,000. The building was in West Park on the site of the Western Penitentiary. After falling into disrepair and an explosion and fire, the City of Pittsburgh built a new conservatory. The then current director of Parks and Recreation suggested put some birds in it (the building) thus the **Pittsburgh Aviary** was born.
4. The German immigrants built the **St. Mary's Church** and adjoining **Priory**. Both buildings were slated to be demolished to make room for the East Street Expressway but were not used. PennDot offered the buildings for sale and Tom and Mary Ann Graf bought them. They restored the Priory and turned it into a bed and breakfast. The church has been reborn as the Grand Hall at the Priory.
5. **Father Molinger** came to Troy Hill in 1868. As the founder and pastor of **St. Anthony's Chapel**, he was an avid collector of holy relics. Many of these are now on display at the Chapel in Troy Hill.
6. **Allegheny General Hospital** first opened their doors in 1888. They built a new hospital building on Stockton Street (located near the Pittsburgh side of the present Allegheny Center) 1904. The present building was constructed between 1930 and 1936.
7. The building that now houses the Pittsburgh Children's Museum is the **Post Office Building**.
8. **Three Rivers Stadium** sits near the site of Exposition Park. Exposition Park was the site of the first modern World Series in 1903. (The Pirates lost to the Boston Red Sox)
9. The **Mexican War Streets** were laid out after the Spanish American War and feature the names of generals and battles of that war.
10. Ask most Northsiders what they consider the most missed landmark of the area and they will tell you about the **Market House** on the corner of East Ohio and Federal Streets.

11. The Pittsburgh Public Theater occupies the old **Carnegie Hall**. The hall was the scene of many musical events. Katherine Kulhman would hold revival and healing services in the same hall.
12. After the annexation of Allegheny City by the City of Pittsburgh, some street names had to be changed. **Irwin Avenue**, named after the Irwin Rope Works located between Western Avenue and N. Lincoln, was changed to **Brighton Road**; **Grant Street** was changed to **Galveston Avenue**.
13. Actually there were two: **Herr's Island** (now Washington's Landing) and the **Spring Garden** area. The Spring Garden area was know as "Butcher's Run."

FAMOUS PEOPLE

1. **Henry Heinz** sold homemade horseradish door-to-door as a child. From these beginnings he formed the H. J. Heinz Company.
2. **Stephen Foster's** father served as the mayor of Allegheny City in 1842 and 1843. They lived near the apartment complex next to Allegheny Center. A plaque marks the spot in the area of their home.
3. **Mary Cassatt** was born in Allegheny City in 1844. In 1849 the family moved to Philadelphia.
4. **William Robinson Jr.** was the first white child born on the Northern side of the Allegheny River. Mr. Robinson would become the first mayor of the City of Allegheny.
5. **Mary Roberts Reinhart** lived in Allegheny West while her husband was the City Doctor for Allegheny City. It has been speculated that The Circular Staircase was written while she lived at 954 Beech Avenue.
6. **George Ferris** invented the **Ferris Wheel** that was first seen at the World's Columbian Exposition, the Chicago World's Fair in 1893. He never realized any profit from his invention, and died broke and in debt in 1896.
7. **Gertrude Stein** was born while her parents lived on Beech Street.
8. **Harry Thaw** was so jealous of his wife, Helen Nesbitt's former lover, architect Sanford White he shot him to death. This story was told in the movie The Girl in the Red Velvet Swing.



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for support are unable to extend to their children that care which their tender years require"

In 1872 Matilda served on the board of managers of the Pittsburgh and Allegheny Protestant Orphan Asylum, located at the intersection of Grant St. (now Galveston) and Ridge Ave.

The Smith sisters through their benevolent work became associated with the influential families of Allegheny: the Brunot's, Park's, Holmes's and the Nimick's.

Their nephew Frank Biddle Smith graduated from Western University of Pennsylvania in 1877. He began work with his father's firm now called Smith, Sutton and Co., proprietors of the La Belle Steel works located near the Allegheny River at Rebecca and Ridge Avenues.

Matilda and Jane had lived with Frank at Park Hill and it seems they treated him as the son they never had.

When the University moved to Allegheny City from Pittsburgh in 1882, it leased both the United Presbyterian Theological Seminary building on West North Ave. and the Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary located near the corner of North Ave and Federal St.

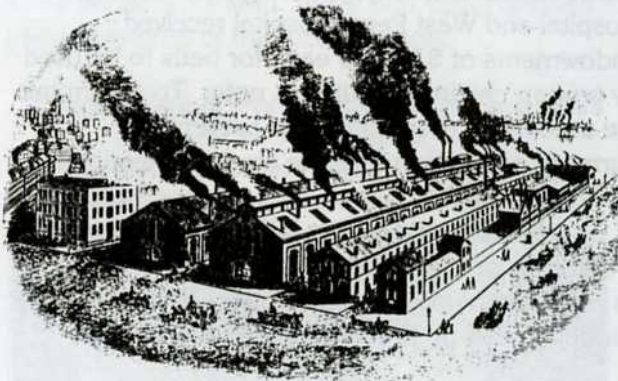
The Smith sisters became involved with the faculty and students of their new neighbor. They attended many opening day and commencement exercises as honored friends of the University. According to a story in a biography of John Brashear by Gaul and Eiseman, during a senior class day the undergraduates barricaded themselves in the balcony of the chapel and threw everything they could lay their hands on at the upper class men on the stage. "Sitting on the stage with the seniors were the Misses Smith, gentlewomen of Allegheny. They were not stuck by the barrage, although their 'waterfall' curls shook with excitement."

In 1888 their brother David M. died and in his honor the women gave the University the Smith Geological collection. It included over 800 geological specimens some very rare. Agnes Starrett relates in her history of the University of

Pittsburgh, "Through One Hundred and Fifty Years," how the sisters would come at intervals to dust the collection with their own hands and tell the students about the far away places where the specimens had been found.

The women gave money throughout all the remaining years of their lives and included a bequest in their will of \$ 10,000 dollars to maintain and increase the collection. The Smith Rock Collection is still at the University in the Old Engineering Hall. The endowment to this day still helps maintain the collection and the Geological Department.

The Geology Department was not the only University of Pittsburgh recipient of the generosity of the Smiths. They purchased reference books and wall maps, had pictures framed and even decorated the chancellor's office. They gave \$10,000 to the new observatory in Riverview Park for a sidereal clock, for electrical fixtures, and for marble wainscoting in the hall and vestibule. In addition another \$10,000 was given by them to help maintain the institution.



The La Belle Steel Works from the Pittsburgh and Allegheny Illustrated Review

Andrew Smith, their brother died in 1898. He was president of La Belle Steel, a specialty steel firm which produced among other items wagon springs. La Belle's vice president and secretary was Hugh D. Smith with Frank Biddle Smith as treasurer. Both Hugh and Frank were

Continued on Page 10...



Continued from Page 9...

Jane and Matilda's nephews. During this time negotiations between 13 specialty steel firms had begun which would form the Crucible Steel Company. La Belle would be one of the major partners in this corporation.

The Smith women were now the last of their generation and in 1897 they wrote their last will and testament. They wrote a joint will stating that their personal assets upon their death would be given to the surviving sister. Because they traveled together a great deal they informed their executors how they would like their assets divided if they both died at the same time. Their stated their net worth at \$165,800.00.

The majority of their estate included La Belle shares and stock in Commercial National Bank of Pittsburgh. The philanthropic institutions with whom they were involved all received money. The Home for the Friendless \$10,000; Pittsburgh and Allegheny Protestant Orphan Asylum \$10,000; Pittsburgh and Allegheny Home for Aged Protestant Women \$10,000; The Widow's Home Association \$5,000; Allegheny General Hospital and West Penn Hospital received endowments of \$10,000 each for beds to be used by orphan children. (Author's note: To determine the amount of the bequests in present day currency one has to take the amount mentioned and multiply by 10.)

Matilda died in Oct. 1909 at their home on Watson Blvd. Frank, her nephew who was named as executor started to probate the will and died suddenly early in 1910. Jane was in California

when her sister died. Fidelity Title and Trust began the inventory of assets and discovered missing stocks. Upon Jane's return Commonwealth Trust took over the legal work and discovered the stocks in the safe deposit box of Frank in the Union Trust Building. He had hypothecated the stocks, which means he pledged them as his own with out transferring the title. Frank had used them as security to obtain loans for La Belle Steel. The matter was solved by the trust company after suing Franks estate a few years after Jane's death in 1911.

Matilda and Jane are buried in Uniondale cemetery with their brothers and parents in the Smith Family plot.

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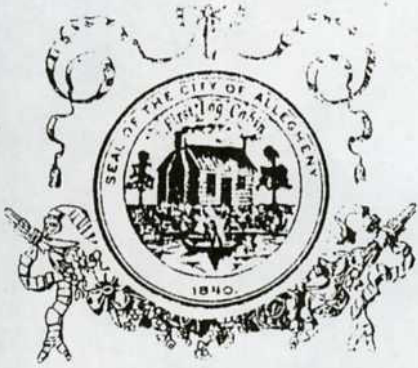
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ALLEGHENY

EXPLORE THE MYSTERY AND INTRIGUE OF THE LOST CITY OF ALLEGHENY

DATES

September 15, 1996
America's Premier City

September 22, 1996
**Cotton Mill Riot of 1848 &
Railroad Worker's Uprising of 1877**

October 6, 1996
Horse Cars, Trolleys, and Inclines

October 20, 1996
**Monuments: Lost, Prevailing
and Altered**

October 27, 1996
Women of Allegheny

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The Community College of Allegheny County in cooperation with the Allegheny City Society has designed this unique series. Spend a Sunday afternoon in Victorian Style and learn about the Heritage of the City of Old Allegheny.

Allegheny Town, located on the North Shore of the Allegheny River was settled as early as 1760 and grew into one of America's premier cities. Allegheny City was incorporated in 1840 and continued its golden age until 1907 when it was annexed by the City of Pittsburgh.

America's Premier City 1840 -1907

Dr. R. Craig Bennett, Historian

From the survey of the Reserve Tract to City Beautiful. Follow the Iroquois, Seneca, and Delaware Trails to the Millionaire Mansions onRidge, Irvin, Stockton, and Western Avenues.

XAH136-71 Sunday
1 Session September 15, 1996
1:00-4:00pm Student Services Center

Women of Allegheny

Ruth McCartan, Historian

Rich, famous, and infamous: sisters, mothers, daughters, wives. Women of Allegheny whose legacy still exists in architecture, art, science and social service.

XJD002-71 Sunday
1 Session October 27, 1996
1:00-4:00pm Student Services Center

Allegheny Cotton Mill Riot of 1848 & Railroad Uprising of 1877

Dr. Charles McColester,

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

Brothers and sisters unite for jobs and justice. The saga of Allegheny City worker's rights begins here in the Cotton Mill tragedy of the 1800's. It continues with the "Great Uprising" among Railroad workers.

XAZ715-71 Sunday
1 Session September 22, 1996
1:00-4:00pm Student Services Center

Horse Cars, Trolleys, and Inclines

Scott R. Becker, PA Trolley Museum

Relive the exciting and sometimes perilous history of the early passenger transportation lines: Allegheny and Manchester, Pleasant Valley and Federal Street, and the inclines of Troy Hill, Nunnery Hill, Ridgewood, and Clifton.

XAH137-71 Sunday
1 Session October 6, 1996
1:00-4:00pm Student Services Center

Monuments: Lost, Prevailing, and Altered

Marilyn Evert, Author:

Discovering Pittsburgh's Sculpture

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