



# The Allegheny City Society REPORTER DISPATCH

*The Quarterly Journal of Old Allegheny History and Lore - Volume 2 No. 2*

**Upcoming Events March.....** The Allegheny City Society will sponsor a discussion by author Barry Paris, *Pittsburgh Post Gazette* movie critic, on author Marcia Davenport's image of Allegheny City in *The Valley of Decision*. Following the talk, the movie version of the novel will be screened. The talk and screening will take place at Victoria House, Bed and Breakfast Hotel, located at 939 Western Avenue. The discussion will begin at 2:00 PM and the screening will be at 4:00 PM on Sunday, March 29, 1998.

*The Valley of Decision* is one of the few books written and one of the only movies about the people of Allegheny City and the North Side. Written by Marcia Davenport in 1943, it was made into a movie in 1945 starring Greer Garson and Gregory Peck. The story traces the history of a Pittsburgh family, the Scotts, and their steel mills from 1873 to 1941.

Marcia Davenport was born in 1903 in New York State and moved to Pittsburgh in the 1920's. She became fascinated with the social and cultural history of Pittsburgh. The result of this fascination was the book, *The Valley of Decision*.

Barry Paris interviewed Ms. Davenport for an article that appeared in *The New Yorker* in 1992. In addition, Mr. Paris has written biographies of Greta Garbo and Audrey Hepburn.

The Victoria House is the former Rhodes Mansion, now a bed and breakfast. "We are fortunate to be able to hold this event in one of the mansions along Western Avenue," said event organizer, John Canning. "Some of the scenes in the novel take place in a mansion along this street," he continued. "So in effect the story and movie are coming home."

Ironically, the film version of *The Valley of Decision* was not shot in Pittsburgh. However, after the world premiere at the Warner Theater a party was held at the Henry B. Oliver mansion on Ridge Avenue.

The event is free and open to the public, however you are asked to preregister. For more information or to register call the Allegheny City Society at 322-8807.

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**Annual Meeting - April....** The anti-slavery forces in Pennsylvania and their historic contributions to the pre-Civil War Freedom Trail will be the topic of discussion of a special presentation at The Allegheny City Society's annual meeting on Thursday,

April 23, 1998 at 7:30 PM. The meeting will be held at historic Calvary United Methodist Church at the corner of Allegheny and Beech Avenues.

John Burt, Esq, a Commonwealth Speaker of the Pennsylvania Humanities Council will speak on The Freedom Trail in Western Pennsylvania. To help slaves reach freedom, abolitionists in pre-Civil War America set up routes for escape known as the Underground Railroad. Much of the Underground Railroad passed through Western Pennsylvania, particularly the cities and towns of Pittsburgh, Meadville, Erie and Washington.

Mr. Burt comes to the Allegheny City Society thanks to the Pennsylvania Humanities Council which has been supported by a grant from the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission. The Pennsylvania Humanities Council (PHC) joins with local organizations to create learning through reflection and discussion, responding to community needs for educated citizenship and quality of life. The PHC strengthens communities by fostering lifelong learning in our cultural traditions through public programs that renew our memories and ideals. The PHC represents Pennsylvania in the Federal-State Partnership of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

The program is free and open to the public. Please call 322-8807 to register.

### ***The Beloved Physician - By Ruth McCartan***

*For Allegheny City's first woman physician's story to be explored correctly requires more space than is normally contained in this newsletter. The editorial staff has decided to divide this history into two installments. The balance will be published in the Spring 1998 newsletter.*

The granite obelisk marking the Vincent family plot in Division 2 of Uniondale Cemetery is not the only tangible memorial to this family. An orphan's home, college and part of a major health center would not be in existence today without the labors of the Vincent family. These present day institutions are a far better memorial to their existence than a piece of stone among a field of stones.

The quarter of the family burial plot devoted to Dr. C. Jane Vincent, is inscribed *The Beloved Physician*. This monograph attempts to explain this emotional epithet.

### **The Vincent Annals**

For a better understanding of Dr. C. Jane Vincent you must first look at her family and more directly, her father the Rev. Dr. George C. Vincent. George Vincent was a Presbyterian pastor most of his adult life. However, you would have to believe upon reflecting on his life, the title of educator would please Vincent more.

A colleague, Dr. Ferguson, president of Westminster College wrote, "Dr. Vincent was a pioneer in education and seems never to have lost his interest in this line of Christian effort."

George Vincent was born in 1813, the youngest member of a farm family of 10, homesteading in Butler County Pennsylvania. School was only held during the winter months and because his family's home was so remote, George was forced to board with accommodating families to attend classes.

After graduation from public school he attended Franklin College, a Presbyterian institution in New Athens, Ohio. Vincent graduated from Franklin in 1836. He then attended the Theological Seminary of the Associate Presbyterian Church in Canonsburg, Pa. where he received a theological degree in 1840 and licensure soon followed.

Vincent's began missionary work in the 1840's in the mid-west, in the present day states of Indiana and Iowa. This work would have a profound effect on the Vincent family. The young Rev. Vincent helped grow the faith but at a terrible price - the loss of his wife (Margaret C. Walker whom he had married in 1838) from a fever, leaving with him with the responsibility of caring for three young sons, John, Alvan and Robert. Vincent wrote of the experience of caring for his family, "I lifted and laid them, cooked and washed for them... when I reflect on these things afterwards, I thought them pretty severe..." But he realized that all "The people were all poor and then there was so much sickness. Every family sick: sometimes one not able



**Dr. C. Jane Vincent**

to help another."

The devastated Vincent family returned to New Athens, Ohio in 1844. The following year Vincent met and married Mary Hanna, the niece of the Rev. Thomas Hanna. Rev. Hanna was the pastor of a Presbyterian congregation in Washington Pa. and affiliated with the Ladies Seminary there. He gave the economic means to establish a permanent location for the Presbyterian Theological Seminary in 1855 on West North Ave. at Buena Vista Street in Allegheny City. *(In 1895 when Dr. Jane Vincent moved to North Avenue it was only a few blocks from the seminary.)*

George's marriage to Mary helped the family's prospects. He became pastor of two churches in Mercer County and reestablished the Mercer Academy that had been closed for a few years.

Later Mercer Academy and a second in Greenville Pa. were combined to establish a college "for the education of the youth of both sexes, but with special reference to preparing young men for the Christian ministry." The site for the new college was New Wilmington, Pa.

Pastor Vincent was appointed chair of the Greek Department and later Vice-president. By 1869 the demands of the academic life became too great and Vincent resigned as pastor from all his churches to accept full-time employment with the new college. A fellow founder of Westminster College in New Wilmington Pa. wrote, "As an agent, had he been willing to undertake it, he could have stirred up the people to educate their sons and daughters and drawn in more pupils and raised more funds for the College than any man we could have selected."

With his wife Mary, Vincent had 6 children. They were James Hanna, born in 1846 and died two years later; William Hanna, 1858; Mary Margaret, 1851; Charity Jane, 1853; James Rankin, 1855; and Anna Martha, 1857. The last three children were born when George was in his 40's.

Astonishingly, all the Vincent children, even the females, received advanced education during a time when most children received only a basic understanding of reading and math. *(Note: most females in the 1850's were not even sent to school after completing the primary grades.)*

Charity Jane's brother William Hanna graduated from Westminster College and after completing his studies at the Allegheny Theological Seminary in 1873 he became a pastor. He served for many years in the Home Missions division of the Presbyterian Church. In 1907 he moved to Allegheny City and became Pastor of the North End Presbyterian Church on Perrysville Ave.

Charity Jane's youngest brother James Rankin Vincent attended Franklin College and received a medical degree in 1884 from the Medical College of Ohio. He established a medical practice in the East End of Pittsburgh and was one of the founders of Pittsburgh Hospital. James was on the Filtration Committee that introduced the Pure Milk Bill in 1901.

Mary Margaret Vincent worked as a teacher until she married in 1886. Ann Martha, the youngest of the Vincent children, moved to Allegheny City upon graduation in 1882 and taught in the Allegheny City School System until her sudden death in 1894. Anna never married and died while sharing a house with her sister and mother on Arch Street. *(Teaching was one of the few professions to which a respectable woman in the 1880's could aspire. The social climate of that time demanded that a woman should not pursue a profession but should be married. Author's note)*

Samuel Kerr, wrote of George Vincent, "No sooner did he enter the ministry than he planted himself squarely on the side of the great reforms of the day. In matters of this kind he always moved in the vanguard, and did not await developments with a view to his gliding with the popular current." It is a reflection of this thinking by Vincent that Jane and her two sisters were sent to Franklin College.



**Women physicians were not taken seriously. This drawing shows a man watching suspiciously as a female doctor takes the pulse of a patient**

### C. Jane Vincent M.D.

Jane graduated from Franklin College in 1879 when she was 26 years old. She had attended Westminster College studying in the Classical Department while her father taught there. When he accepted a call to a church in Brookville Pa. in 1871, Jane's education stopped. It resumed in 1877 when Rev. Vincent was asked to become the President of his alma mater Franklin College.

Jane Vincent has left us no explanation for why she wanted to become a physician and one can only surmise her reasons. However, reflecting on her lifetime of benevolent directed volunteer activities, the religious life of selfless service to her fellows would have appealed to her. But the formal religious life of her father and older brother was barred to her. The preeminent profession then available that had some of the attributes of the religious life was that of physician, a career field just expanding to include women.

*(Author's note: The doors of the medical profession in America for women had been unlocked by Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell who graduated from medical school in 1847. Finding no hospital that would give her physician privileges she founded her own hospital, The New York Infirmary for Women and Children.)*

There was a strong sentiment against female physicians. An early pioneer of women in the medical field, Dr. Elizabeth Garrett, was told by her father at the beginning of her studies, "A women would have to be a freak to be a doctor".

Jane, however, did not have to face a family closed to the idea of a medical career for a woman.

The secretary of the United Presbyterian Memorial Hospital, Mrs George Sands wrote, "She (Dr. Vincent) told me of her childhood, describing herself as a delicate, nervous, timid little girl, afraid to go alone into a dark room, and feeling sick at the sight of blood."

Jane Vincent conquered these fears and upon her graduation from Franklin in 1879 applied to and was accepted by one of the premier medical schools then open to women, The Women's Medical College in Philadelphia.

Jane's father, it can be assumed, encouraged her and loaned her the money to attend the Women's Medical College of Pennsylvania. The cost of the medical education at the Women's Medical College in 1881 was \$265.00 for "whole cost of two or more courses of Lectures and Graduation". This fee did not cover laboratory fees and other incidental expenses.

The Women's Medical College in Philadelphia where Jane attended in 1880, was founded in 1850 and largely supported by the Society of Friends. With the help of male Philadelphian physicians, who believed in the mission of the institution and recent female graduates, medical lectures were given, laboratory work preformed and women students became licensed physicians.

The few medical colleges of the day who would admit women refused to let them attend the anatomy lectures or enter the dissecting rooms. Female students would have to hire private tutors to gain this required knowledge. This was not the case at the Women's Medical College. Anatomy was taught by a woman, Dr. Emilie Du Bois, with the dissecting rooms open day or evening.

Throughout their education students were required to attend clinics at the Women's Hospital. Each student had to have the money for the graduation fee of \$30.00 and to finish their thesis, a review of a certain disease before graduation. Dr C. Jane Vincent's dissertation was on alcoholism.

The newly licensed Dr. Vincent was selected for a hospital appointment at the Nursery and Child's Hospital of Staten Island. It had a large lying-in department and afforded special opportunities for the study of children's diseases.

When her appointment at the Staten Island Hospital was completed in 1882 Jane came to Allegheny City. Her sister Ann lived here and was employed as a teacher. One-hundred-and-two physicians with Allegheny City addresses were listed in the City directory of 1884 and of this number only 1 was female, Dr. C. Jane Vincent on East Diamond St.

*(Nothing is written that indicates why Vincent hung out her shingle in Allegheny City. Could she have felt the conditions prevailing in a growing larger city were more conducive to a newly graduated "female doctor"? We do know that Jane never used the common tactic of the day of only using her initials in*

*advertising to disguise her sex. She was always listed in the directories as C. Jane Vincent, Physician)*

Allegheny City at this time was the third largest city in the state with immigrants arriving daily. The need for health care was great. The poor could not afford preventive medical care but when life threatening event occurred, such as an industrial accident, deadly sick child or a woman having complicated birth, any doctor, even a woman, would be called in. Most times the family of the sick or injured waited too long to send for the doctor for any medical help to be effective. Patients would arrive at all hours of the day and night. Either the doctor treated the patient in the office if the patient could get there or the physician travelled to the patient on the streetcar or by carriage.

Families who could pay for medical care were treated at home. They never wanted to go to the hospital. Complex surgical procedures, childbirth and treatment of contagious diseases were performed in the home. Hospitals in the 1880's were considered institutions for the destitute, deadly sick, or those without family and death was frequent. The sick and injured who were poor were in impaired health even before coming to the hospital; no wonder they died there.

Surgical conditions of the day included sterilized instruments but doctors did not wear rubber gloves or a face mask while operating. Many times older doctors would forget to even wear a white coat over their street clothes while operating.

For a girl who became sick at the sight of blood to become a woman surgeon under the conditions that prevailed in the operating rooms of the last century took a lot of will power and desire. A biography written by Charlotte Macleod about Mary Roberts Rhinehart (Allegheny City resident, author and wife of a physician) described the long-obsolete wet method of surgery practiced at the close of the century, "Glass bottles filled with antiseptic solution hung above the table with rubber tubes descending from them to irrigate the wound and keep washing away the gore so that the surgeon could see what he was doing. To clamp off a blood vessel, he must watch to find out just where the blood was spurting from. Heavy black rubber sheets were spread to catch the assorted liquids and direct them into pails set on the floor beside the table."

The Vincent sisters shared a house at 48 East Diamond St. Later they moved to 71 Arch St. when their mother came to live with them after the death of their father in 1889. During this period Jane's office was in her house as with most physicians of the day, "she lived above the store".

It was hard for Dr. Vincent to establish a practice with the many obstacles and prejudices she faced but she did not abandon her struggle. Mrs. George Sands wrote in 1902, "Dr. C. Jane Vincent who not only overcame a naturally timid disposition, but rose superior to opposition and prejudice in order to fit herself to that devoted little band of pioneer women physicians of a score of years ago."

During the 1880's, Dr Vincent could not get staff privileges at any of the hospitals in Pittsburgh or Allegheny City. This was not an uncommon occurrence for women physicians.

Physicians did not specialize as they do now in a certain area of treatment but most female doctors of this age worked in the areas of pediatrics and woman's health care, Dr. Vincent was no exception. Treatment of women was considered by earlier medical authorities as involving only routine acts of nature. Midwives for ages had been performing childbirth duties. The established medical thought was evolving and it was believed the licensed physical could be more effective. This transition opened up the field of obstetrics and gynecology to all doctors including females. Who better to know about women than women.

Dr. Vincent who was not from a wealthy family had to support herself and mother with a private practice along with all her charity work. Production of a yearly income of a few thousand dollars required many house calls at \$2.00 a visit and \$10.00 a child birth.

William Passavant, the great patriarch of Lutheran benevolent institutions in 1894, was reestablishing the Pittsburgh Infirmary, the precursor of the

**Watch the next newsletter for the  
annoucement of an upcoming  
program on Victorian Baseball  
that will be held at Three Rivers  
Stadium on May 2**

present day Passavant Hospital. All physicians who referred patients to the Infirmary had to recognize the rules of the Sisterhood of Deaconesses and recognize the Sister in Charge as the executive head of the hospital.

The original hospital charter would have appealed to Dr. Vincent: "In order that the sick and the suffering might be cared for in a becoming and Christian manner without distinction of color, creed or county". Dr. C. Jane Vincent was asked by Passavant to be one of the hospital's two surgical physicians. The first full year of the Infirmary 1895, of the 65 patients it was reported that 35 were medical and 25 surgical most of them relating to female medical problems.

As the first woman doctor on the Infirmary staff Vincent had finally after years of quiet struggle been accepted by the medical community of Pittsburgh and Allegheny. Dr. Vincent served on the Infirmary staff until her death in 1902.

Mary Roberts Rhinehart, the noted Allegheny City mystery author wrote in her biography of the profound influence Dr. C. Jane Vincent had on her as a young girl, "No one in the neighborhood had ever seen a women doctor, she was neither young or beautiful with a somewhat forbidding manner." But she fired Rhinehart's imagination that a medical career was possible. Rhinehart was determined to attend medical school after high school graduation but as with young women of many ages she became a nurse instead.

On January 7, 1902 Dr Vincent was at home at 402 North Ave., a three story brick building with office, examination room and operating chair on the first floor. She was preparing a report to be given at a meeting of The Woman's Association. Her housekeeper later related that Dr. Vincent retired after nightly devotions and within a hour arose from bed complaining of severe stomach pains. A doctor was summoned but when he arrived Dr. Vincent had already passed to her reward. The death certificate stated cause of death acute indigestion but it was later determined a spasm of the heart ended her life. Her funeral was well attended being held at Fourth Church with interment in the family plot in Union Dale cemetery.

Reviewing the 49 years of Dr. Vincent's life one can imagine the stress under which she lived and worked that may have been a contributing factor in her early death. Living in Allegheny City for only 19 years the tangible examples of her humanitarian work were known to the people of the early 1900's. Dr. Vincent left no will and her estate was not sufficient to cover her personal debts she left. The house on North Ave. was sold at sheriff sale to pay off mortgage and promissory notes. The house inventory completed at her death valued her worldly possessions at \$542.50 the most valuable item being a Hardman Piano at \$50.00. Accounts receivable outstanding for medical services performed as of Jan. 1902 were \$6,479.00 of that amount only \$688.10 was ever collected.

Selfless service to the sick would best describe the life of Dr. C. Jane Vincent of Allegheny City. Current women physicians owe a debt of honor to this local woman medical pioneer.

The continuing saga of the good deeds of Dr. Vincent will be contained in the Spring issue of the *Allegheny City Reporter Dispatch*. Featured will be Dr. Vincent's role in the founding of the United Presbyterian Orphanage and Memorial Hospital.

*The author would like to thank Dr. Steve Peitzman, University Historian of Allegheny University of the Health Sciences and Dr. H. Dewey DeWitt, College Archivist of Westminster College for help in research relating to Dr. C. Jane Vincent.*

**Watch your mail  
Coming on June 13, 1998  
Tour of  
Union Dale Cemetery**

### ***Allegheny City Remembered....***

In celebration of National Library Week, the Allegheny Regional Branch Library presents a narrated slide program, *What Once Was in Allegheny City*, on Wednesday, April 22, 1998 at 6:30 PM. Mary Wohleber, resident historian, will lead the program. Seating is limited. Call the library 237-1890 for information on purchasing tickets. A donation of \$5.00 is requested, but larger donations will be appreciated. The event is sponsored by the Friends of the Allegheny Regional Branch Library.

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