

The Allegheny City Society **REPORTER DISPATCH**

The Journal of Old Allegheny History and Lore - February 2003

Russell H. Boggs - Evans City to Allegheny City by Ruth McCartan

Most historically minded people today only know him in reference to his department store, Boggs and Buhl, but Russell H. Boggs, was more than a successful retailer. Financial institutions, utility companies and even real estate development associations included Boggs as a member of their board of directors.

His most ambitious business adventure, one that was the most important to the development and growth of the northern suburbs, has all but faded from our collective memory. A few pole bases and scattered right- a-ways in various northern townships are all that remain of The Pittsburgh, Harmony, Butler, and New Castle Railway Company. This electric trolley line commonly called the Harmony Route was financed and built by retailer Russell H. Boggs.



Who is this little remembered 1900's business tycoon, Russell H. Boggs? Born in Evans City, Pa. February 28, 1844, he worked in his father's mercantile business in Butler County. Country life became restrictive for the young and enterprising Boggs, so after the Civil War he moved with his wife Marie C. Buhl to Allegheny City. Henry Buhl, a friend from Zeliempole and later Russell's brother in law became partners in 1869 and started a dry goods and notions business at 512 Federal Street. Using money advanced from his father-in-law, an 18 ft. store room was stocked with \$ 3,500 worth of merchandise purchased the week before.

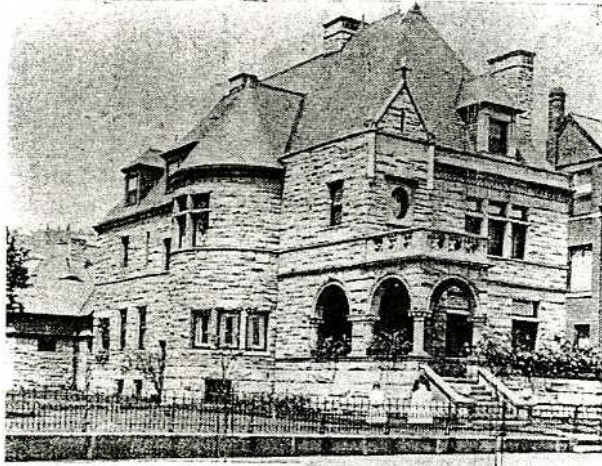
Driving energy, (a 7 day work week was not uncommon), hands- on management, character and customer service built the business to be the equal to Wanamaker's in Philadelphia and Marshall Field's in Chicago. By the turn of the century, with dedication to the concept of only "selling the best" Boggs and Buhl became the retailer for the carriage trade of Allegheny City and it's southern neighbor Pittsburgh.

Boggs and Buhl in 1885 had a telephone in their office, a freight and passage elevator along with a cash carrier railway. One can only surmise, that the Boggs and Buhl store having it's own electric dynamo with a distributive capacity for 300 incandescent lights, Mr. Boggs must have known of the potential of electricity. Electrified trolley cars were replacing the horse drawn streetcars in the cities of America. Plank and dirt roads were the norm in the northern parts of Allegheny and southern Butler Countries, but not for long. Soon the clanging of the trolley bell would be heard.

Boggs and Buhl never had satellite stores in the surrounding country side. Both men knew of the customers that awaited them in the developing northern counties. An electrified trolleys line would bring the customers to the store and bring farm products to the consumers of the city.

By 1906 Mr. Boggs had formed and incorporated the Pittsburgh, Harmony, Butler and New Castle Railway Company. The route north was planned, land was purchased for the trolley tracks and bridges built. Harry Etheridge, an English engineer was hired as the general manager. In only 2 years the first part of the line was completed New Castle to Ellwood City. The first Harmony trolley car entered Pittsburgh Nov. 12 1908.

In May 1919 Marie Boggs died. June 1919, the father of the Harmony Route sold the trolley line, the power station and the North Pittsburgh Realty company to a corporate lawyer named David I. McCahill for 4 million.



The Boggs Mansion on West North Avenue
Photo Courtesy of the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh

Up until 1931 the Harmony Route served the residents of the northern townships until the automobile and better roads sounded the death knell for the trolleys.

Neither Boggs nor Buhl had children to carry on their traditions as great retailers or keep the family name alive. Russell Boggs was the first of the partners to pass on. He never recovered from a fall that happened two weeks before this death in 1922. His will was generous to his family and various charities. All employees with more than 5 years of service received a monetary reward. Boggs had also

recently remarried at 76 a Mrs. Mary Walker Nichols of Philadelphia. He generously provided for her support.

Henry Buhl, had time to study the best way for a giving back to the Cities that made him a millionaire. With the probating of his will the Buhl Foundation was born. This foundation was the money behind the Buhl Planetarium and many other worth while philanthropic and educational causes in the city.

The only tangible remnants of Boggs's life remaining are his home on West North Ave. and the overgrown grass covered right of way of the Harmony Route.

THE R.H. Boggs Townhouse -604 West North Avenue

by David McMunn

This is the Mexican War Streets neighborhood's only example of a free-standing Richardson Romanesque house. It was built in 1888 to the design specifications of Longfellow, Alden and Harlow, architects. The massive, understated style of the architects' Pontefract and McClelland houses in Allegheny West and in Shadyside, respectively, soon yielded to decorative applications of varying success.

The oval window above the doorway of the house, and the decorative gable above that, demonstrates no compelling reason to exist. The round tower, arches over the porch, carved column capitals, and gable in the parapet are all typical of this style. The porch, originally, was only one bay wide.

Be sure to peek around the back at the stable/carriage house. The owner, Russell H. Boggs, was a partner with Henry Buhl, Jr. in the famed Allegheny institution, The Boggs and Buhl Department Store, founded in 1869 and once located on the block bordered by Federal, West Diamond, South Diamond Streets and West Park Way.

The Inn on the Mexican War Streets now operates as a neighborhood bed and breakfast in this space. The recently restored carriage house is now the elegant Acanthus Restaurant, offering fine dining replete with crystal, china and silverplate tableware and white-gloved livery.



Allegheny City Fire Department Slide Show

On a snowy night in the northern suburbs of Allegheny City (Northland Public Library) Mary Wohleber, (pictured at right with several people who attended the talk) discussed the history of the Allegheny City Fire Department and the brave firefighters who staffed it. Using her book as a reference, Mrs. Wohleber, related the general history of the department.

After viewing the striking architecture of the long lost firehouses, the present day locations were shown. What a striking difference.

Mrs. Wohleber will be giving here slide presentation again on March 20th at the Cranberry Township Library at 7:00 p.m. Hope to see you there.

Grant Received

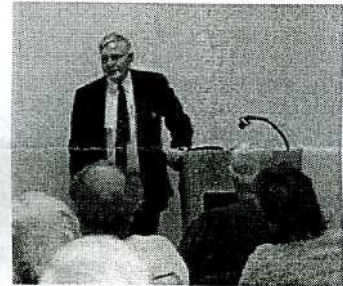
The Soldier's Monument project received a great new Year's gift. It took almost one year but it was worth it. Robert Boulware, Director of Communications from Columbia Gas called with the news. A \$10,000 grant was approved and coming to continue with the restoration. With the help of this grant and donations from caring Society members, this project will keep moving ahead. Thank you Columbia Gas and everyone who has helped.

Allegheny Town Hall featured in John Heinz History Center

Featured in the *Points of Time* exhibit at the Heinz History Center is a painting of the old City Hall of Allegheny City c. 1864. The painter was Leander McCandless, a little known artist born in 1825 in Pennsylvania. The 1850 census lists him as a painter but his technique reveals that he didn't have much formal training. By 1870, the City Directory lists McCandless as the superintendent of the fire alarm telegraph of Allegheny. Maybe McCandless was worked in City Hall at one time.

Harmony Route Topic of Discussion

On February 6th the Allegheny City Society in affiliation with the North Hills Genealogists presented a lecture on the Pittsburgh, Harmony, Butler and New Castle Railway by noted trolley historian William Fronczek. Historic photos and postcards were part of the talk. Built in 1908 the Harmony Line provided transportation from Butler County to Pittsburgh in 60 minutes. Parts of the old line are still visible along the route and Mr. Fronczek had photos of these locations and were shown as part of the presentation. In addition to transporting people, the Line also carried dairy produce and freight.



Upcoming Western Pennsylvania Genealogical Society Program

Ricard Sayre, MA will present a *Urban Maps - A Pittsburgh Case History* at the next Western Pa. Genealogical Society Meeting on Saturday, March 8, 2003 at the Carnegie Lecture Hall in Oakland. The presentation begins at 10:00 a.m. Using the vehicle of a case study involving a German immigrant family, Mr. Sayre will show the useful genealogical data and social history available from plat maps displayed on the Historic Pittsburgh web site combined with the use of online Sanborn Maps. He will discuss the availability of maps by years and locality as well as present techniques to combine traditional sources such as city directories and censuses with web-based sources to discover an ancestor's residence, occupation, familial relationships and church affiliations. The program is free and open to the public. For more information call (412)-687-6811 or visit www.wpgs.org.

UPCOMING SOCIETY EVENTS

2003 Call the Society (412) 322-8807 for information

- March 20** **Informal Talk Mary Wohleber**, History of Allegheny City Fire Department
Cranberry Library 7:00
- April 3** **Lecture - "Heimat in Allegheny"**, (History of Troy Hill and the E. Northside
area) by John Canning at the Center for Lifetime Learning University of

Pittsburgh 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. Lecture and tour \$36.00 call (412) 648-2560 followed by a Tour "Heimat in Allegheny" April 5

- April 5** **Civil War Seminar**, History Center and The Babcock all day with Greater Pittsburgh Civil War Roundtable (412) 322-8807 for information
- April 30** **Allegheny City Society Annual Meeting Dinner** at Allegheny General Hospital featuring the William Rimmel Slides with commentary by Mary Wohleber
- May 8** **Informal Talk - John Lyon**, Civil War Railroads, Cranberry Library 7:00 p.m.
- May 20** **Talk - John Canning**, Churches of Allegheny City for the North Hills Genealogists - Open program Northland Library (412) 322-8807
- June** **Dedication of First World Series Plaque PNC Park**
- June 14-15** **Pittsburgh Civil War Soldier's Fair West Park** events include dedication of Mary Cassatt Historical Plaque in West Park
- June 28** **Tour Pittsburgh Civil War Sites** with John Heinz History Center and Greater Pittsburgh Civil War Roundtable
- Sept. 13** **Tour Pittsburgh Civil War Sites** with John Heinz History Center and Greater Pittsburgh Civil War Roundtable
- Sept. 18** **Talk - "Lost North Side"** 1963 photo's before Allegheny Center Allegheny - location and time TBA

The Allegheny City Society needs volunteers to work at our events talks and tours. If you are interested please call Ruth McCartan at (412) 322-8807.

His name was George Ellsworth Smith. He is buried in Union Dale Cemetery. Find out the story of this unique Allegheny City resident in the next newsletter.

Plan to attend the Third Annual Pittsburgh Civil War Seminar:

Pittsburgh Civil War-athon

Saturday, April 5, 2003

This day-long event will begin at the John Heinz History Center and then move to The Babcock in North Hills for an afternoon session followed by an evening speaker.

Tickets for Allegheny City Society, Greater Pittsburgh CWRT or Heinz History Center are \$60.00 until March 15, 2003
Call (412) 231-1847 for more information