

The Allegheny City Society REPORTER DISPATCH

The Journal of Old Allegheny History and Lore - Winter 2003

Fall Tours a Success by Ruth McCartan

After many months of planning the fall tours exploring the moving of Allegheny families to Sewickley reached completion.

Allegheny City Society Board member John Canning, got the project started with a talk at the Sewickley Valley Historical Center. John explored the various reasons why many of the prominent Allegheny families left Allegheny City for the hills of Sewickley. When the Allegheny Country Club members, after years of summering in the rural farm land of Sewickley moved permanently, the Club, their social gathering place relocated also. With the ability to get to the country life using first the train and later the automobile the migration picked up momentum.

Joe Zemba and Peggy Dury next showed us the houses and estates of the transplanted Allegheny City residents. On a beautiful fall day the tour explored the valley and the hills of Sewickley. We got to view the secluded home sites of many of the families that originally lived on Ridge and Lincoln Avenues: the summer cottages such as "As You Like It", the great estate conceived and built by Elizabeth Dohrman Thaw; "Franklin Farm"; and "Fairacres" both with connections to the B.F. Jones family.

The high point of the tour was to view the last remaining estate, "Wilpen Hall", the family home of the William Penn Snyder family from the grounds of the Sewickley Heights

History Center. The History Center was opened for a private tour and while snacking on punch and cookies Whitney Snyder told of his father's love of the Heights.

Looking at the estate and listening to Mr. Snyder's stories it was not hard to envision the social life of the various families that called these hills home.

The final segment of the fall tour series was the walking and trolley tour of the mansions of the Allegheny families who moved to the Sewickley area.

Two of the mansions of the Allegheny families have been adaptively reused by the Community College of Allegheny County. Their administrative buildings Jones Hall, the family home of B.F. Jones Jr. and Byers-Lyon Hall, the home of A.M. Byers was open for us to tour. What a wonderful job the college did to save and reuse these magnificent architectural pieces of a by-gone era.



ACS tour organizer John Canning with Peggy Dury and Joe Zemba at the Sewickley Tour

The Thaw home on Lincoln is another example of the reuse of large family mansions, it's now a home of a graphic arts business with apartments on the second and third floors. One building we viewed only from the outside at the corner of Ridge and Galveston is now an insurance company, it was the home of William Penn Snyder.

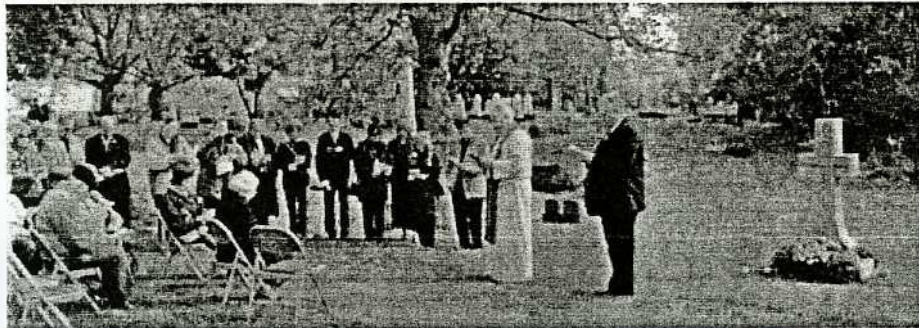
Thanks to Board member David McMunn's hard research work a photographic display was presented at Jones Hall showing the Allegheny homes and Sewickley homes of the various families mentioned in the different tours.

Thanks also to the Sewickley Heights History Center for lending as a video of old home movies of the Jones family that was running in the Jones family parlor at the end of the tour.

Two houses of prominent Allegheny families we visited are in the process of being restored after decades of neglect. Let's give them a year or two and we will be back to visit and check on their progress.

Memorial In Troy Hill

It was a short and simple one-half hour ceremony at the grave of 727 "Saints of Voegtly Church at Troy Hill's Voegtly Cemetery. The remains had been uncovered during excavation for the



feeder roads onto I-279 in June, 1987. By the end of September that year the remains of 727 graves were documented. More than half of the bodies were children. The bodies were taken to the GAI Consultants archeology

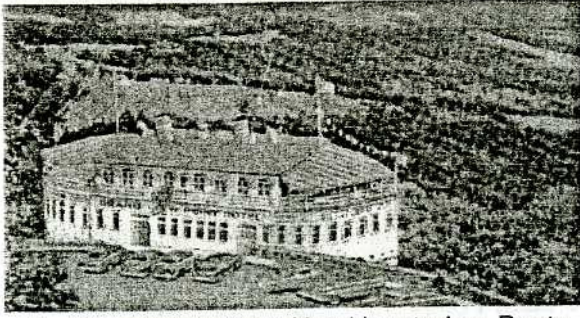
lab in Monroeville and then to the Smithsonian Institution in Washington DC. Now the remains have found their way back to the North Side.

In our last newsletter, Mary Wohleber wrote: "Just last month I did see some trucks back at the cemetery by the Fireman's Memorial - just thought they were getting ready for the Troy Hill Memorial Celebration so I paid no attention. When I went to the service, I gasped with surprise - there was a granite cross in a plot in the back of the Fireman's Memorial stating that here were the remains of the bodies removed from the Voegtly Church Cemetery."

Leading the ceremony on October 28th as Rev. Douglas Patterson, Senior Minister of Smithfield United Church which evolved from the original Voegtly Church. The service included a blessing and German prayers by Reader Phillip Injeian, a master violin maker. The CAPA Trombone Choir provided the music.

Carnegie Science Center Unveils 2003 Miniature Railroad and Village

More that 300,000 people visit the Carnegie Science Center's Miniature Railroad and Village each year. This year making its debut this year is the S.S. Grand View Ship Hotel, circa 1928 - 1932, once located on Route 30 (Lincoln Highway). This is the second model built for the Miniature Railroad and Village by Pittsburgh Mayor Tom Murphy.



The Grand View Point Hotel located on Route 30 - from an old postcard

S.S. Grand View Ship Hotel, affectionately known as 'The Ship,' was built by Herbert "Captain" Paulson and sat perched on the side of the Allegheny Mountains ... 17 miles west of Bedford, Pennsylvania ... along side the Lincoln Highway. Dutch immigrant, Herbert Paulson purchased the 13-acre site in 1923 for \$3,200 and opened his first roadside stand, but this was not an ordinary roadside stop. At an elevation of 2,464 feet one could view three states and seven counties from the site.

The next year Paulson built a 4-story building on the site. Not yet satisfied he hired two men who happened to be hunting nearby, Emilo Rosso and Louis Franci, and together they started constructing the Ship Hotel over top of the Castle. Contractors were brought in from Turtle Creek to set 63.5 tons of steel in place for the base. The cost of this ambitious endeavor was \$125,000. Paulson also added a fifth floor for fourteen 'first class' hotel rooms; the lower floors were called 'second class' and 'steerage'.

The Ship quickly became famous – a landmark along the nation's first highway. Her guest log boasted famous celebrities who stayed there like Clara Bow, George Burns, Joan Crawford, Thomas Edison, Henry Ford, Greta Garbo, Lillian Gish, Tom Mix, J.P. Morgan, George Raft and Mary Pickford, along with visitors from every state and 72 foreign countries. For locals it was the "Fancy" place to go for dinner, proms and other important celebrations.

Unfortunately more trucks and cars began to use the Pennsylvania Turnpike and when Paulson died the "Ship" was sold. Various attempts were made to attract tourists but they failed. In October 2001, the building caught on fire and burned to the ground.

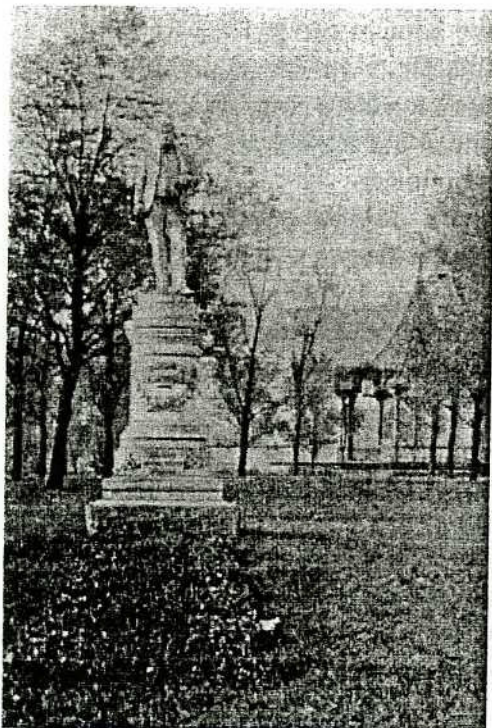
The Miniature Railroad & Village™ exhibition was born in Brookville, Pennsylvania on Christmas Eve of 1920 in the home of Charles Bowdish. The exhibit became a Brookville tradition until 1953, when a flood damaged the Bowdish home. The Miniature Railroad & Village™ then traveled to Pittsburgh and was rebuilt in 1954 by Bowdish and staff at the Buhl Planetarium and Institute of Popular Science. It moved to Carnegie Science Center in 1992 and will celebrate the 50th anniversary of its arrival in Pittsburgh in 2004.

The display includes many notable symbols of the Western Pennsylvania region. Miniature replicas of a steel mill from Sharon, PA; the old courthouse from Indiana, PA; the old Pittsburgh Courier building, once located in the Hill district; the Neill log house from Schenley Park; the 'Leap the Dips' rollercoaster from Lakemont Park in Altoona; the old Fort Pitt Blockhouse, and the Frank Conrad house from Wilkesburg (birthplace of radio broadcasting) are just some examples of recent efforts.

The City of Pittsburgh, surrounding towns and communities are invited to participate in these efforts. Science Center staff work with local historical societies to research and showcase symbols of their community. "We prefer not to limit the exhibit to one rail line and its scenery, instead, we have a broader vision to cover the richness and wealth of western Pennsylvania heritage," says Mr. Orban, one of the Railroad's exhibit managers.

"The Miniature Railroad & Village™ is proud to continue the tradition while approaching the 50th anniversary of the first display at the Buhl Planetarium ... a year that promises to be full of special anniversary surprises, said Orban.

Forgotten Allegheny City Residents by John Lyon



The Armstrong Monument in West Park, 1910 (note the old bandstand in the background) from an old postcard

Quick ... name some famous people who called Allegheny City home. Right off the top of your head should come Andrew Carnegie, Henry J. Heinz, Art Rooney, Stephen Foster, and Mary Roberts Rinehart are probably the most famous. However, I'm going to talk about another famous Allegheny City resident, Thomas A. Armstrong (wait a second who??)

Let's go back to 1889, November 28th to be exact. It was Thanksgiving Day in Allegheny City. A hard rain was falling at 2:00 p.m. over 2,500 people were on hand to attend the formal dedication of a monument to a man who Miles S. Richards calls, "The Forgotten Advocate of Labor." Why would such a large a group forgo a Thanksgiving Dinner with all the trimmings to attend a ceremony in a driving rainstorm? To find out let's go back to August 15, 1840. In Stuebenville Ohio on that date Thomas Aaron Armstrong was born, the third son of John and Mary Thomas Armstrong. When he was fourteen years old to help out with the family finances, Armstrong became an apprentice to a prominent Stuebenville printer. When he completed his apprenticeship he relocated to Allegheny City and in 1857 was hired by the *Pittsburgh Chronicle Telegraph*. A year

later his immediate family moved to Allegheny City at 212 Lacock Street.

By 1859 Armstrong was a member of the National Typographical Union Local No. 7.

On August 11, 1862 Armstrong enlisted in 139th Pennsylvania Volunteer Regiment. His performance on the field of battle and his positive attitude earned him a field promotion to sergeant. During the battle of Cedar Creek (October 19, 1864) he received a severe chest wound which permanently damaged his health. He was mustered out of the service in August 1864 and returned to Allegheny City.

Armstrong resumed his position at the *Chronicle Telegraph* and soon began to become involved with local labor activities. In 1867 he was appointed to Local No. 7's executive committee. Armstrong also worked with national labor movement. In 1866 he represented Allegheny City Trades Assembly in Baltimore, Maryland and for the next three years was one of that organization's three regional organizers.

During a particularly long and bitter strike in 1872 Armstrong and other associates formed an independent newspaper, the *National Labor Tribune*. Within six months the other associates sold their shares to the Armstrong family.

Armstrong was active in the National Typographical Union and was a member of the Knights of Labor, the major mass labor organizer in North America. Due to Armstrong's "consistent editorial support, in 1877 the *National Labor Tribune* became the official organ of the Miner's National Association."

In July 1877 a national labor strike spread into Western Pennsylvania resulting in the railroad riots against the Pennsylvania Railroad. Armstrong was asked to serve on a committee of safety organized by Mayor William C. McCarthy of Pittsburgh. The suppression of the strike convinced Armstrong that independent political action by labor was necessary and he switched his support to a new political organization, the Greenback Labor Party.

Eventually Armstrong's support and his newspaper became the Greenback Labor's official newspaper. At the state convention in 1878 trade unionists attempted to nominate Armstrong for the party's gubernatorial candidate. The nomination failed because the majority of the delegates felt Armstrong's strong labor support would not be accepted by many voters.

Four years later after Armstrong's supporters had worked unendingly and he was nominated on the first ballot. Unfortunately though he campaigned vigorously he only received 33,978 votes of the more than 700,000 cast. But more important the hard campaign severely affected his health and he withdrew from the leadership of the Greenback Labor Party.

Armstrong was also active with the local chapter of the GAR (Grand Army of the Republic), the nation's primary Federal veterans group. On September 10, 1887, Armstrong carried the war colors of the 139th Pennsylvania Veteran Volunteers for two miles in a parade in Braddock. Two days later he suffered a severe heart attack while at work. He was taken to his home on Lacock Street. Three weeks later he died after experiencing another coronary. His partner, Thomas Telford, attributed Armstrong's death to "fatigue and the lingering effects of his war wounds."

His funeral was held on October 6th at the First Methodist Episcopal Church on Smithfield Street. Following the service his body was returned to Stuebenville Ohio for internment.

Within two years enough money was raised to erect the statue and bring those 2,500 people out on a cold and rainy Thanksgiving Day.

In his essay *The Forgotten Advocate of Labor*, Miles Richards wrote: "Armstrong's place as a key figure within the Western Pennsylvania labor movement is assured. Through his *National Labor Tribune* editorials, he fought hard for the worker's general interests. His unsuccessful bids for electoral office should not overshadow his devotion to labor reform, which brought him neither lasting fame nor personal fortune. He should be recalled as a loyal organizer and propagandist who defined a practical framework for labor during its crucial, formative period in the late nineteenth century."

You can still visit the statue of Thomas Armstrong. It stands on West Ohio Street in front of the National Aviary, a permanent reminder of Allegheny City's "Forgotten Advocate of Labor"

Much of the material for this article was taken from The Forgotten Advocate of Labor by Miles S. Richards who is on the history faculty of the University of South Carolina in Columbus, South Carolina

Upcoming: Watch for our Spring events centered around the prominent impressionists artist Mary Cassatt. Born in Allegheny City 1844.