

# The Allegheny City Society

## REPORTER DISPATCH

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### Gertrude Stein Forgotten or Unknown in North Side Area Where She Was Born

From Pittsburgh Press, 15 April 1934.

[Note from the ACS editor: This article is essentially re-printed exactly as it appeared in the *Pittsburgh Press* in 1934. All grammatical and factual errors are their fault.]

A dozen members of Pittsburgh's oldest aristocracy have cemented a lurking notion that Gertrude Stein, world's foremost female exponent of "What's It All About" literature, is the daughter Pittsburgh forgot. Maybe you, too, are unacquainted with the lyricist of the latest American opera, dubbed "Four Saints in Three Acts," which was a bust when the Friends and Enemies of Modern Music sponsored it at the Hartford Athenium, but which is now rolling'em in the aisles at Broadway's "Empire" and threatens to come to Pittsburgh before long.

She was born on Beech Avenue, North Side, an even 60 years ago [1894 - Ed]. Little was it suspected at that remote date, that Pittsburgh's own Gertrude would some day slay the world with sentences like: "And after that what changes what changes after that, and after that what changes and what changes after that..."

#### But She 'Slayed the World.'

But slay the world she did, and rose to such fame that her Paris house has for years been the rendezvous of the art world's top-rung giants. An inmate of the same literary reformatory with James Joyce of "Ulysses" fame and T. S. Eliot, Miss Stein turned out reams of work before she finally came out, last year, with a book somebody could understand.

It was "The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas," in which Miss Stein stood in her secretary Alice's boots, so to speak, and wrote about herself. But all her work has been read around the world, and while some high critics have acclaimed it the acme of futuristic greatness, others have complained they didn't know what she was talking about and neither did Gertrude.

The old house where she lived has since been torn down and the family who now inhabit the site, yesterday were unaware that the great Gertrude Stein had once lived there. In fact they didn't even know who the great Gertrude was.

But Gertrude is very well known. In fact she and Edward Stein [sic] and Mr. Einstein were once linked together in the same poem, no small honor to each. Here it is:

I don't like the family Stein,  
There is Gert, there is Ed, there is Eim:  
Gert's poems are bunk.  
Ed's statues are punk.  
And nobody understands Ein.

#### Family Here 12 Years.

Despite the fact that Gertrude's father Daniel and her Uncle Solomon lived 12 years in Pittsburgh, mostly in the "bon-ton" section around Western Avenue, the bluebloods consulted upon the matter mostly failed to remember them, and certainly didn't know that Gertrude, the famed writer had been born no farther from their back yards than you can throw an apple.



Said Mrs. John Penny, whose family has lived in the old colonial house at 1116 Western Avenue, for an even century: "Gertrude Stein? Oh yes. I accidentally tuned in when they were broadcasting her opera. It was the most terrible drivel. No, I certainly didn't know she was born in this vicinity. I don't remember any such name."

Mrs. Penney is not alone in her opinion of Miss Stein's work. William Lyon Phelps of Yale is on

the same side of the fence, and many others.

Down through the list of the old aristocrats, the answer was always the same: "No, I didn't know anybody named Stein."

Mrs. Enoch Rauh, Mrs. Minnie Affelder, Ella Wetheimer, all of whose families lived in the Steins' neighborhood when Western Avenue was the most high-hat street in town, said they knew nothing of the family Stein.

### Recalled by Mrs Dupuy.

One person only recalled them. That was Mrs. Herbert Dupuy of Morewood Avenue.

"I remember the Steins," she said. "Two brothers. They built two houses on Western Avenue."

The houses were at 181 and 183, by the old system of numbers. [*These were west of Allegheny Avenue - Ed.*]

Mrs. Dupuy also remembered that the brothers, who together conducted a clothing business at Fourth Avenue and Wood Street, quarreled over some difference and went different ways. "There were two little Stein girls in the family," Mrs. Dupuy remembered further. "One of them might have been Gertrude."

It is true that the Stein brothers split up, after being business partners and sharing the same houses for years, and left Pittsburgh in 1874, the same year Gertrude was born. Daniel took his family to Vienna, then Paris, and then back to Oakland, California. Gertrude was about six months old when she left Pittsburgh and there is no evidence that she ever came back. She has been living at 27 Rue de Fleurus, Paris, for many years.

When little Gertrude and her family left Pittsburgh, they were, it appears, promptly forgotten. Gertrude remembers Pittsburgh, however, to the extent of mentioning it three or four times in "The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas."

### Queer Climb to Fame.

Miss Stein's climb to fame has been a queer one. Sticking through thick and thin to the text that conventions are hampering, she has risen to fame and fortune on the wings of such sentences as: "Any who will live to peel nuts and even not mean to leave any one or rather in the autumn seeing nuts lie will stoop and get them or else not may be said to be resembling to George Washington in respect to their birthday being in the month of February."

As Gertrude herself has coyly said: "My sentences do get under their skin."

Her opera, "Four Saints in Three Acts," was done in collaboration with Virgil Thomson, who did the music. It is replete with such lissome verses as the following:

"Pigeons on the grass, alas; pigeons on the grass, alas;

"Short longer grass short longer short longer shorter yellow grass. Pigeons large pigeons on the shorter longer yellow grass alas pigeons on the grass. If they were not pigeons what were they?"

The answer is not known. The opera has an all-Negro cast. Maybe she was thinking of the squawking birdies around the old North Side jailhouse. But then again no.

A Letter from Gertrude Stein  
Biligin, Par Belley, Ain  
France  
7<sup>th</sup> June 1935

My dear Mr. Jansen,

Miss Gertrude Stein has written the following paragraph in answer to your request of the twenty-fifth of May to contribute a word or two [sic] the symposium you are gathering for publication in a newspaper on "What the World Thins [sic] of Pittsburgh";

I only saw it from the air so what can I say except that I was born in Alleghany [sic].

I am very sincerely yours,

Secty.  
[Signed]  
A. B. Toklas

## John Brashear: The Man Who Loved the Stars

By Michael Shealey

Even though the night of Friday, January 16, 2008 was particularly cold, about 25 people (Allegheny City Society members and others) braved the cold to hear the Art Glaser, Allegheny Observatory Historian, lecture: "John Brashear: The Man Who Loved the Stars". His lecture was preceded by refreshments and followed by a very cold, but nevertheless fascinating, tour of the working observatory. (For those of you who don't know, telescope observation facilities are unheated to keep the telescopes at outdoor temperatures to avoid movement and distortion in the telescope that would be caused by a temperature differential.)

John Brashear, born in Brownsville in 1840, was a self-taught lens and telescope maker who rose from humble beginnings as a machinist in Pittsburgh steel mills to become a world-renowned maker of astronomical instruments. His association with Allegheny City is through a partnership with William Thaw, Pittsburgh industrialist, which resulted in Brashear building his home and adjacent factory in Allegheny City on Perrysville Avenue. Brashear's company went on to build telescopes for many leading observatories worldwide and many of these telescopes remain in use today. Brashear eventually served as acting director of the Allegheny Observatory.

He and his wife, Phoebe, are buried at the observatory in a crypt beneath the Keeler Memorial Telescope, a telescope built by John Brashear & Company.



Photo by Eleanor Coleman

For those of you who missed this tour because of the weather, the ACS is trying to arrange another tour especially targeted to our members. We'll keep you posted

For those of you interested in attending the Friday lecture series, reservations are required and available seats often fill quickly. To make reservations, it is best to call early in the work week immediately after a lecture. The number to call is (412) 321-2400 between 1:00 and 5:00 P.M. Also, if you are on Perrysville Ave, near the intersection with Buena Vista Street, you can see the John Brashear house at 1954 Perrysville and the factory at 2016 Perrysville Avenue. These buildings are currently privately owned, but retain much of the original exterior appearance from the time of John Brashear.

## Aeberli Building Restored

After decades of neglect, the formerly Aeberli funeral home (located at the corner of North Avenue and Sandusky) has been restored and ready for occupancy. The North Side Leadership Conference, Allegheny General Hospital (the current owner), Central Northside Citizens' Council, the Mexican War Streets Society, and Pittsburgh History and Landmarks Foundation cooperated to turn a community eyesore into a perfect example of what structures in our neighborhoods can become. The Allegheny City Society applauds these efforts.



Photo by Robert Baunmlach.

## ACS Phone Out-of-Service

In order to economize on our expenses, the ACS Board has decided to cancel our phone service. To get in touch with us, use our email through our web site at [www.alleghenycity.org](http://www.alleghenycity.org) and click on "Contact" or drop us a note at P.O. Box 100255, Pittsburgh, PA 15233.

## Annual Meeting of the ACS

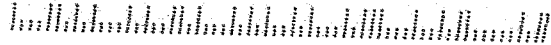
Mark your calendars to save Thursday, April 23<sup>rd</sup> at 6:00 for the Allegheny City Society's Annual meeting. Tentative plans include dinner and a talk about Allegheny City parks by noted historian, John Canning and presentation of the prestigious Rimmel award. More information will sent to our members as the event is finalized.



**Allegheny City Society**  
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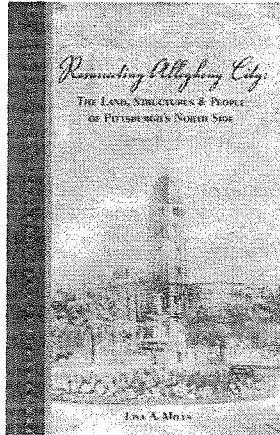
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## Allegheny City History Class Offered at CCAC

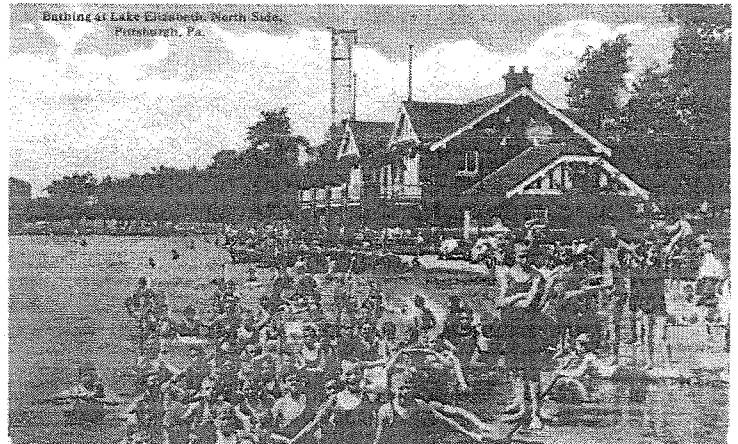
Lisa Miles, author of *Resurrecting Allegheny City: The Land, Structures & People of Pittsburgh's North Side* will be presenting a class at the Community College of Allegheny County titled "Allegheny City's Legacy – the North Side's Transformation". This course will consist of four two-hour sessions and will be held at the Allegheny Campus starting on Thursday, March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2009 at 6:30. Check the college's web site at [www.ccac.edu](http://www.ccac.edu) for more information



## Lake Elizabeth

Lake Elizabeth was conceived in an 1868 design for Allegheny Commons by Mitchell Grant Company. Its origin as a scenic picturesque lake and collection pool

expanded over the years to accommodate community activities including swimming, boating, and skating. Over utilized and poorly maintained, the lake was drained in 1930. During World War II during it was used as a storage area for scrap metal.



In the 1960s, Pittsburgh's Urban Redevelopment Authority re-designed the lake in a modern motif.