

The Allegheny City Society REPORTER DISPATCH

Winter, 2010

The Journal of Old Allegheny History and Lore

Number 48

Common Home and Fireside Allegheny Unitarian Universalist Church Building Dedicated 100 Years Ago

By Donald Zeilman

The 100th anniversary of the dedication of the congregation's historic church will occur in February 2010. It is one of a few Allegheny congregations that has reached both the century mark and continued to serve the community from its original building.

The story of how that "common home and fireside" came to be built begins with English-born Congregationalist minister, Thomas Clayton. Reverend Clayton arrived in Allegheny City to take up the pastorate of the First (Pilgrim) Congregational Church of Allegheny on August 4, 1901. The church was located at the southeast corner of Manhattan and Franklin Streets in the Manchester district.

Thomas Clayton was born in London in 1854. He attended Wesleyan College and Richmond College Seminary, where he studied for the Methodist Episcopal ministry. Shortly after completing his studies in 1885, Mr. Clayton came to the United States. He was ordained a minister in September of that year by the Methodist Episcopal Conference in Berea, Ohio, but resigned in 1886 to enter the Congregational ministry. He served several Congregational churches in the Northeast before accepting the call to First Congregational Church in Allegheny.

By the winter of 1904, after eighteen years in Congregational ministry, Rev. Clayton's theological views had modified to the extent that he decided to seek ministerial fellowship in the American Unitarian Association. In the spring of 1904, Rev. Clayton corresponded with the Unitarians concerning fellowship. The First Congregational Church released

him from his pastorate in March, and he submitted an application for fellowship in April. Rev. Clayton also began talking with Rev. L. Walter Mason, minister at Pittsburgh's First Unitarian Church in Shadyside.

Rev. Clayton preached at First Unitarian in May, and made a favorable impression—even though it was observed by Rev. Mason that he retained "the tenderness...of the old faith" for the Bible. His application for fellowship was approved in June by the Middle States Committee to take full effect six months later in accordance with the vote of the National Conference (from a notice in the Unitarian journal, the *Christian Register*, June 23, 1904). Rather than seek a pulpit elsewhere, Reverend Clayton decided to stay in Allegheny. He obtained a position in a local business to support his family, but he clearly intended to return to the work of ministry.

In 1905, Rev. Clayton began the planning necessary to organize a Unitarian society in Allegheny City. Working with Rev. Mason, a first meeting was arranged for the evening of Sunday, December 5. A group of Allegheny residents sympathetic to liberal religion was invited and they were joined by Rev. Mason and members of the First Church congregation. The meeting was held in Allegheny's Carnegie Hall on East Ohio Street. At that first gathering, tentative plans were discussed, several names were added to a covenant book and services were scheduled for subsequent Sunday evenings.

At the meeting on January 21, 1906, the group formed a temporary organization to comply with an Allegheny City ordinance requiring

that the auditorium be rented only to organized religious bodies. Reverend Clayton was appointed Treasurer, and Elizabeth Hampson, M.D., Secretary. The name *Second Unitarian Church* was chosen. The meeting was continued three days later at Dr. Hampson's residence on Monterey Street, where a temporary Board of Trustees was elected, including Dr. Robert H. Gilliford as President.

We started to go to the Unitarian Church



THOMAS CLAYTON, MINISTER
SERVICE EVERY SUNDAY EVENING AT 7.45

SUBJECTS THAT MAY INTEREST YOU.
Dec. 22—The Cave-born King. (A Christmas Study).
Dec. 29—The Monuments of the Passing Years.
Jan. 5—The True Values of Life. (New Year Sermon).
Jan. 12—The Decline and Fall of Judas. (A character study).
Jan. 19—An Ancient Religious Drama—Book of Job.

VALUABLE LITERATURE, FREE AT EACH SERVICE
KEEP THIS CARD FOR REFERENCE

REMEMBER AFTER TRUTH ARE CONSIDERABLY INVITED TO
KEEP NOTHING BACK YOU know to be true, from fear of the doing harm.—Phillips Brooks

Dr. Gilliford was born in Fawn Township, Pennsylvania, and came to Allegheny City to set up his practice in 1874 after receiving his degree from the Medical College at Charleston, South Carolina. For seven years he was on the surgical staff at Allegheny General Hospital, and for three years was the Poor Physician for the western district of Allegheny City. Dr. Gilliford served as a member of the Common Council from the Sixth Ward for two years, and was a member of the Select Council from the same ward for nine years. During his time in government he enjoyed a great reputation as a municipal reformer, and was a prominent figure in local politics.



Dr. Robert H. Gilliford

On May 6, 1906, Dr. Gilliford called the meeting of the Second Unitarian Church to order and Rev. Charles E. St. John, Secretary of the American Unitarian Association, made a brief address in which he assured the group that the AUA and its officers would support their efforts. A motion was made by Rev. Clayton and seconded by founding member, W. R. Negley, to make the temporary organization "regular and permanent." Forty-three charter members were enrolled.

The Sunday evening Services continued to be held in the Carnegie Hall, with members of the First Unitarian Church attending and lending their support and their organist. Carnegie Music Hall, though, could not serve the congregation indefinitely, so in December 1906 a

lot was secured at the corner of West North Avenue and Resaca Street for the purpose of erecting a church building. Dr. Gilliford paid \$10,000 for this desirable lot fronting the Commons, agreeing to hold it until the congregation could raise funds to purchase it.

In the spring of 1907, the congregation incorporated in the Commonwealth as the North Side Unitarian Church, and secured the services of architect Robert Maurice Trimble. For Trimble, whose family was active in Allegheny City politics and business, this would be the first of a series of important local commissions.



Robert M. Trimble

Trimble was born in the Sixth Ward of Allegheny City in 1871, son of businessman John H. Trimble (1841-1908). The Trimble ancestors had originally settled in Butler County but moved to Allegheny City shortly before the Civil War. Trimble graduated from Allegheny High School in 1887, and studied at the Western University of Pennsylvania in 1888. He then associated with his father in the general contracting business until 1892, when he began the study of architecture with Frederick J. Osterling. He worked with Osterling as a draughtsman until 1898, when he opened his own architectural office.

Trimble's one previous church commission, St. Thomas Episcopal Church (Oakmont), was a study in the west-tower form of the English parish church. For the North Side Unitarian Church Trimble again drew

upon late medieval precedents, but developed an architectural expression appropriate for its time and place. The drawings were presented to, and approved by the congregation in September 1907.

The congregation was able to purchase the lot from Dr. Gilliford for \$10,500. Ground was broken for the new church on July 8, 1909. The building permit, issued in Pittsburgh (Allegheny City having been annexed), was recorded July 22nd. The permit indicated that there would be built a stone church with slate roof, sized 41 feet wide by 73 feet deep, one story in height, J. M. Poorbaugh as builder, and all at a cost of \$15,000 (bringing the total, with property, to \$25,500).

The Services dedicating the new church building took place on a cold Sunday, February 6, 1910. The dedication included these words: "May it be our common home and fireside, ministering to all our higher needs..."

The North Side Unitarian Church building was not completely finished by the time of the dedication in February 1910. Oral history tells of one founding member's children bringing food from their house on Pennsylvania Avenue in pull-wagons for a church dinner because the lower-level kitchen was not ready.

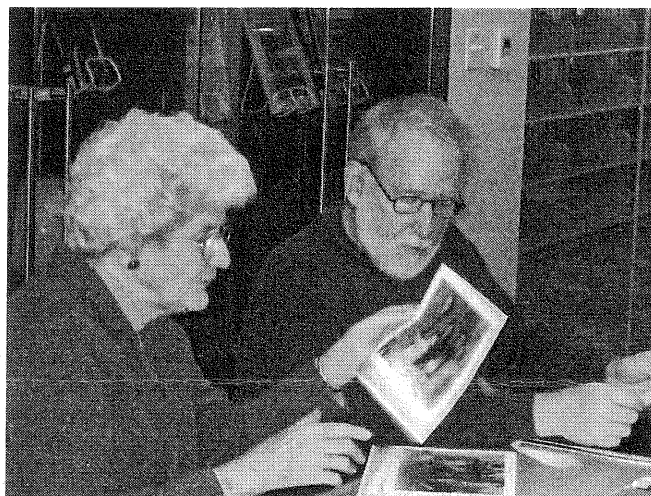
Within days of the building dedication, Rev. Clayton tendered his resignation, evidently feeling that this phase of his work was complete. During the time that the church sought a new minister, church organizations did much to keep the congregation vital. The newly formed Women's Alliance engaged in active fund raising, including bake sales in the Allegheny Market House at Federal and Ohio Streets. By year's end, Reverend Charles E. Snyder was called to be minister, and was installed in January 1911, initiating a period of growth that would often see the new sanctuary packed to the doors.

Over the course of the last one hundred years, the church has continued to be well used—not only for services of religion, but also for community service. It has always been the congregation's belief that they are stewards of a sacred space that is common home and fireside for all of their North Side neighbors. May it continue to be so for another one hundred years.

"We are all Soldiers" and "Yours till Victory": World War II Letters

By Ruth McCartan

For a Veterans Day event the Allegheny City Society met November 7th in the Society's room in the new Carnegie Library on Federal Street. Members and guests gathered to discuss and view a few of the World War II letters saved from the attic of the former Weigands Café (later, the James Street Tavern).. (See more on the discovery of these letters in the Fall, 2007 Reporter-Dispatch.)



John Canning gave an overview of the 23rd Ward Service Club, a democratic social-political organization which met in the upstairs of Weigands Café. Many North Siders attended the regular Sunday evening "Parties of Bingo Games" for the benefit of the "boys of the ward in military service". Each week as many as fifteen names of service men and women were selected by a random drawing to receive a money order of three to five dollars. The sending out of the winnings was the responsibility of the capable secretary of the organization, Josephine Marohnic.

Miss Marohnic was the private secretary for county commissioner John Kane and her administrative abilities helped the society organize and catalogue the WWII letters. Many of the letters she sent out were personalized in some way. They began with the heading "We are all Soldiers" and always closed with the saying "Yours Till Victory".

Most of the thank you letters received back from the lucky winners are literally straight pinned to their money order receipt and a copy of the letter or envelope she sent out to the winner. (Collecting the letters in this way has helped us with the correct spellings of the winner's names.)

Jean Pascarella, niece of Miss Marohnic told us of her aunt, the daughter of Joseph Marohnic, bookstore owner, newspaper editor, and an early leader in the Croatian Federal Union. Tall, dignified and reserved were adjectives Jean used in reference to her aunt. She never married and lived with her sisters above the bookstore at 605 East Ohio Street.

Ruth McCartan Sr., who has been arranging the hundreds of letters, brought a few copies of the originals. The World War II letter collection has thank you notes from every part of the world, some typed, many hand written, with a few V-mails. Along with a glimpse of the life of service members, the World War II letters give us a small picture of the work done by those who served on the Home Front.

The Society's on-going project is to place all the names and letters on the web site so interested parties can access them.

A.C.S. Travels on "The Pennsylvania" to Johnstown

By John Canning

The idea for a train trip to Johnstown was suggested by A.C.S. member Rich Lerach last January after a rather successful excursion to the Westmoreland Museum of American Art in Greensburg. There, many of us learned a great deal about Alleghenian George Hetzel and the "Scalp Level" artists. Rich's idea came to reality on Saturday, November 14th. Over thirty folks joined in an all-day excursion to Johnstown. The day was perfect as we headed east from Pittsburgh's Amtrack station. En route, A.C.S. member Marcella Miller (Eleanor Coleman's sister) waved us on as we passed through the Greenburg station.

In Johnstown, we visited three remarkable sites:

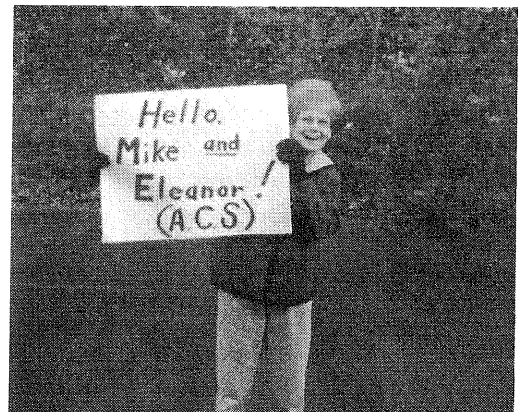
- (1) the Johnstown Flood Museum located in the heart of Johnstown;
- (2) the Johnstown Heritage Center located in the restored Germania Brewery in the Cambria City neighborhood;

- (3) the Johnstown Flood National Monument, located on the grounds of the infamous South Fork Fishing Club.

It seemed that our group of history buffs absorbed all the information at these sites about the history of Johnstown, the horrible events of the Great Flood, the story of the massive Cambria Iron Works (later the Bethlehem Steel Works of Johnstown), and Johnstown's immigrant heritage.



Clearly, one of the highlights of the day was when the ranger in charge of the National Flood Monument took our group to the recently acquired clubhouse of the South Fork Fishing Club. He explained the history and significance of the clubhouse as well as the historical archeology beginning to take place at this site. (For a complete listing of the club members from 1889, see our web site at www.alleghenycity.org.)



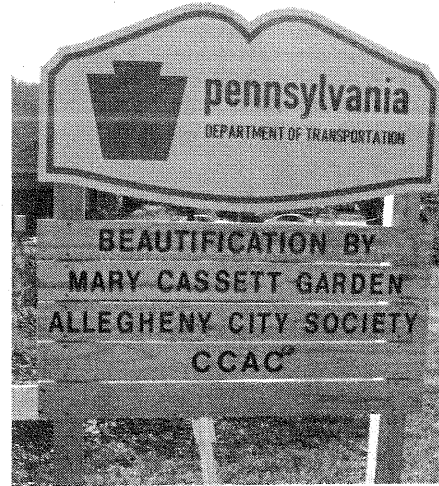
After a whirlwind trip to the cemetery, where many of the unknown flood victims were buried, and to the observation deck of the famous Johnstown Incline our group had a relaxing dinner at Harrigan's Cafe in the local Holiday Inn. Following dinner we all walked the half mile trek to the Amtrack station. The train was right on time and delivered a group of happy history lovers back to "the Burgh" across the river from Allegheny City. (See below for a picture of our tour group in front of the South Fork Fishing Club.)

Plans are underway for a similar A.C.S. sponsored railroad excursion to Altoona and perhaps one to the historical sites near Hagerstown Maryland where Allegheny-born artist William Singer, Jr. funded the building of the Washington County Museum of Art. This museum houses many of Singer's works as well as of other artists that were part of the Singer collection.

Upcoming Events

March 27, 2010 - A computer informational seminar at the Federal Street Library showing how to use Ancestry.Com. (Access to this site is free at this library.) Seminar leader will be David Grinnell, Chief Archivist of the Heinz History Center. If interest, call Ruth McCartan at 412-364-6132 for exact time.

April, 2010 – Annual meeting of the Allegheny City Society. Plans for the program and date and time will be announce in the Spring Reporter Dispatch which will be out in early April.



Penn Dot's new sign at the Mary Cassatt Garden

Apparently they don't know the correct spelling of one of America's premier impressionist painter who was born in Allegheny City. Hopefully, this will be corrected in the near future.





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