

## REPORTER DISPATCH

Journal of Old Allegheny History and Lore

## OUR YEAR IN REVIEW

Remembering the many highlights of the past year

by Ruth McCartan

2014 was another banner year for the Society. Once again I am amazed at what we accomplish with our small board of directors. The winter was busy with a tour of the Fairmont Hotel with archeologist Christine Davis. We saw so many artifacts with an Allegheny Town and City connection in their PNC Legacy Collection. If you want more information on their *Art and Industry, Past and Present* the hotel supports a cell phone tour just call 412 235-6288. Winter weather didn't stop our trip to Clayton, the home of industrialists Henry Clay Frick, and a guided tour of the "Civil War Era Drawings from the Becker Collection."

The Winter Film Series was a great success featuring four films starring the good-looking and suave William Powell. Who knew he was from Allegheny City? Series director, Tom Wilson brought society detectives Nick (William Powell) and Nora (Myra Loy) Charles back to the North Side by featuring two of their signature films. Nick Charles sure could drink and smoke while solving murders. Tom gave an introduction to each film with an insider's view of 1930s' Hollywood. The final film in the series was the 1940s movie *Life with Father*. Powell played the patriarch of a New York family with a young Elizabeth Taylor as the ingénue. Our thanks to the Unitarian church for the use of their facilities. A classic film and a glass of wine sure helped in driving away the winter blues. The Society will be hosting the 4th Winter Film Series with a change in venue. See Film Series article in this newsletter for details.

Once again the Society worked with the Greater Pittsburgh Civil War Roundtable on a tour of local Pennsylvania and Ohio sites this March. We visited Mount Jackson, Pennsylvania and learned about Cooper's Battery B the 1st Pennsylvania Light Artillery and their unit history stressing their involvement in the Battle of Gettysburg. The returning battery members erected a stone monument to their comrades just outside of town. Poland, Ohio was our last stop where a future President William McKinley attended school before his service in the Civil War. The tour was held during one of the worst winter days snow, freezing temperatures so this year's event will be moved to May. We will visit Niles and

Warren Ohio this year on the search for local Civil War and Allegheny history.

Our Annual Meeting for 2014 was at the Bistro-to-Go with a lot of old friends in attendance—and a few new faces. The William Rimmel award was given to (former Ambassador to Ireland) Dan Rooney and Carol Peterson for their book entitled *Allegheny City: A History of Pittsburgh's North Side*. The book was well received by the public with talk of a second printing. If you missed purchasing the book check it out at your local library, it is a good read. This year's dinner will be held at the Rivers Casino on April 23.

Summer brought the 150th anniversary of the Pittsburgh Sanitary Fair. The great fair was held in the Commons of Allegheny to raise money for the soldiers and their families during the Civil War. To commemorate the event, the Society wrote, produced and some board members even acted in a series of "first person" accounts of citizens of Pittsburgh and Allegheny and how their lives were affected during this terrible period of our history. The lack of attendees for this one-day event was the only disappointment. But it is hard to fight a beautiful sunny June day. Thanks to Society Treasurer Amelia Gehron for her expert grilling and serving of hot dogs and chips down by the Allegheny Civil War Soldiers Monument. Councilperson Darlene Harris helped with the underwriting for this event.

The final tour of the 2014 season featured the architect R. Maurice Trimble, a resident of Allegheny and an apprentice of Frederick Osterling, produced with the help of the Ben Avon Historical Society. Attendees visited institutions and churches designed by this local architect both in Allegheny City and the North Side. Part 2 of this tour will be in the fall of 2015.

The Society was not only hosting tours this year but helped give talks and tours of Allegheny City to other local area historical groups. This newsletter could not be produced without the help of the dedicated volunteers who write the articles and our newsletter layout editor Donald Zeilman.

Plans for the New Year 2015 include not only the Winter Film Series but a Summer Music Series featuring local talent. Board members are now in process of planning for two tours of neighborhoods that don't get the attention they deserve for the summer and the fall entitled *Neighborhoods in the*

*Shadows.* If we don't get sidetracked we hope to finally finish our tour on the Butler Short Line, trolley line from Pittsburgh through Allegheny, Millvale, Etna and off to its final stop in Butler. Watch your newsletter and our web-site for details. See you in Allegheny.

## 726-728 CEDAR AVENUE

Early houses in East Allegheny date from the 1840s

The pair of red brick houses facing Allegheny Commons on the southeastern corner of Cedar Avenue and Foreland Street, built by anonymous craftsmen in the 1840s, are among very few structures now on Cedar that predate the creation of the Commons. Two stories plus attic, sharing one gabled roof, these houses were built frugally in the dominant Greek Revival style. Twenty years later, fashionable Italianate details including window hoods, door surrounds, and eve brackets were grafted on. Then, circa 1892, two-story, clapboard extension with plumbing was added, overlapping and inadvertently preserving a portion of the houses' original cedar-shingled roof. It may be the only remaining example of a shingle roof from that period in the Deutschtown Historic District.

Ownership of the house before the 1920s cannot be traced through deed records because the land was kept in leasehold by Pittsburgh heiress Mary Schenley. The first known occupants, identified in the census rolls of 1857, were Robert and Eleanor Phillips, who ran a grocery out of 728 Cedar while renting 726 Cedar to tenants. On the Foreland facade, one can still see the doublewide lintel of the shop's window, now partly bricked-filled. (During recent renovation, when anchored rods were used to pull that wall in by five inches, the 170-year old lintel was found to be the sole support of several dislodged floor joists. In short, it had for years saved the houses from collapse.)

In 1884, the grocer's daughter Nellie Phillips married Elmer E. Herman, whose family had been undertakers in Pittsburgh since the Civil War. Herman's work included providing services to indigents for Allegheny City's Department of Charities. The mortuary ran its business from 728 Cedar likely in buildings demolished long ago on Moravian Way. The undertakers later known as Herman and Son, would cease doing business by the 1940s.

Census records from 1870 shows that 726 Cedar was then a boarding house to a dozen African-American labors, cooks, and barbers. Blacks were a significant early population in Deutschtown. One draw was nearly Avery College, which from 1849 was providing education from African-Americans. Also, rents in the neighborhood were low, because landlords leasing Schenley land had little incentive to improve their properties.

726 Cedar would have many tenants and lodgers through the next century, while the two houses passed on as one property. The Alexiades family, owner today of numerous buildings in the neighborhood purchased 726-728 Cedar in 1985.

In 2007, Duquesne Light launched an effort to construct a cooling substation in or alongside Allegheny Commons. As local organizations fought those plans, Duquesne—through a third party—acquired this property in 2010. After partitioning the rear third of the lot, Duquesne demolished a garage and built its cooling station, designed by architect Bob Baumbach to resemble a carriage house. Duquesne then gave the East Allegheny Community Council the derelict houses, plus funds to preserve either them or other buildings in East Allegheny. In 2012 the Community Council listed and sold 726-728 Cedar to a couple from New York who are restoring the property to its original, shingled Greek Revival style.

*This article was taken from the East Allegheny News Jan-Feb 2015 edition. This house history was researched and written by Carol Peterson, architectural historian. Ms. Peterson was one of our Rimmell awardees in 2014. You can reach her at «cpeterson155@yahoo.com».*

## TRIMBLE TOUR—PART II

Tour of Trimble's work moves to the north suburbs

by John Canning

On a stunning Fall day last October when the Society sponsored a tour focused on the works of Allegheny-born architect R. Maurice Trimble. Trimble grew up in Manchester, studied with his neighbor and mentor Frederick Osterling, and designed a significant number of works that are still functioning on the North Side. Among these are: The Allegheny Unitarian Universalist Church, The Sarah Heinz House, the Allegheny YMCA, Perry High School, and the Fire Station on Orchlee Street in Brighton Heights.

Trimble and his brother Francis, moved their families to Brighton Road in Ben Avon early in the 20th century. Working with the folks at the Ben Avon Historical Society, we are in the planning stage to organize a Trimble Tour Part II that will focus on the architect's works in Ben Avon and beyond. Watch for announcements of this program in a future *Reporter Dispatch*.



## ALLEGHENY MALL MEMORIES

Remains alive in the memories of a generation

by John Canning

Bill and “Swiss Miss” Gandy are deeply involved in creating a gallery of Allegheny City/North Side history. The energy of the Gandy family in this project is exciting to whomever they talk. “Luddite” as I am, I marvel at the cyber-wizardry the Gandy’s use to bring to our part of town various pieces of our social history that are often lost in time. As they post images of North Side street scenes, families, and communities, I have begun to realize that what we folks on Medicare have forgotten is that there is a lot of North Side history to be told by those in Gandy’s generation who, as young folks, grew up in rapidly changing North Side of the last decades of the 20th century.

This was so evident to me, by the many responses to the images that Gandy posted on his website of the “glory days” of the Allegheny Center Mall. So many folks, now entering those middle years, described their shopping “at our mall.” Remember now, this was one of the first indoor shopping malls, long before those out on McKnight.

Holiday shopping memories of the older generation might include the big department stores in downtown Pittsburgh, but by the late ‘70s, Rosenbaums, Frank and Sedars, and even Boggs and Buhl’s were history. North Side youngsters, now in their 30s and 40s shopped at the Allegheny Center Mall. And those memories still remain as vivid as some of us recall the Market House.

It was all happening at “the Mall.” As I read the on-line comments about the mall shops and decorations and food courts, and even the Flower Show that was brought over from the Phipps by Mayor Flaherty, I came to realize that the Allegheny Center Mall, as dead as the Allegheny Market, remains alive in the memories of that generation who came of age before the dawn of the present century.

Fortunately, the technology that has emerged in more recent years allows folks like Bill Gandy to not only capture the images of the Allegheny Center Mall, but allows other North Siders to respond to those static images with vivid, colorful and personal recollections. Here is North Side history being crafted on monitors and keyboards. A joy to see and a joy to read.

Folks who might be interested in the Gandy’s project, your support for the Allegheny City Gallery, your recollections of times past, and your images of the “old north side” are welcome at «blackgeminis5@netscape.net».



Garden Theater September 1971, West North Avenue near Federal Street

## WHEN THE MOVIES PLAYED HERE

More than 20 successful palaces of entertainment

by David McMunn

The Allegheny City–North Side neighborhoods were no strangers to arts and entertainment. Despite our being known as a bastion for Presbyterianism with its disregard for “profane” in the arts, by the time of World War II, the North Side had witnessed the rise of more than 20 successful palaces of entertainment—Vaudeville, Silent Film and the Talkies—especially along its main business corridors of Federal Street, East Ohio Street, and Beaver Avenue. We even boasted a Drive-In theater, one of only two in the city limits!

The Allegheny City Society, in celebration of this rich history in film and entertainment, is beginning its fourth year of calling out major accomplishments in the movie industry as it affected the North Side. Discussion and screening of films for our educational use are again being offered this winter over the next three months.

In addition, one of our native sons James W. Kastner, who resides today in Murrysville, is writing in this newsletter and lecturing about these theatres in a newly-formed Allegheny Lecture Series at the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh—Allegheny Branch. For the record, Jim will describe exactly where these theatres were located and offer anecdotal information about the movies that played here.

Jim has been an avid researcher and historian on the movie theatres of the North Side and the Downtown Pittsburgh. He is an active member of the Theatre Historical Society of America that held its annual conference here in Pittsburgh last summer. In addition, Jim has self-published a book *Where the Movies Played in Downtown Pittsburgh(h)* which thoroughly documents our movie theatres and offers his first-hand recollections of the movies and personalities that played here (see the article following).



# WHATEVER HAPPENED TO THOSE NORTH SIDE THEATRES?

The theatres of Federal and East Ohio Streets

by James W. Kastner

The New Casino Theatre was located—Just Across the 6th Street Bridge—and opened on October 18, 1966, ushering in adult films to the North Side. In January 1967 it became Pittsburgh's new (and final) "Home of Burlesque" with its mix of action on both the stage and screen. Opening in 1918 as the Novelty Theatre and located at 217–219 Federal Street, it was one of three theatres that sat on Federal, south of what is today Allegheny Center. Diagonally across the street from the Novelty, stood the Wm. Penn Theatre, opening during WWI and closing as the Harris North Side Theatre. When they opened, both the Novelty and Wm. Penn showed silent films and the bill of fare changed daily with the exception of a two-day run as the week ended. Mrs. Charles Chaplin (Mildred Harris) in *Forbidden* on a Thursday followed by Charles Chaplin in *Sunnyside* on Friday and Saturday. Due to Pennsylvania Blue Laws, movie theatres were not opened on Sunday. Where the Wm. Penn Theatre once sat is today a First National Bank, across the street from PNC Park. When the old Novelty Theatre was demolished, the space became a parking lot and today, the site of the Marriott Spring Hill Suites.

In the northwest block of Federal & Lacock Streets, sitting below the Pittsburgh, Ft. Wayne & Chicago Railroad Bridge was the Elite Theatre at 309 Federal. This nickelodeon featured silent films such as 1921's *The Bridal Night* starring Alice Brady. As a boy, I recall walking to Downtown Pittsburgh via Federal Street from my home on the Spring Hill and passing by Elite Furniture with its "We Buy Anything" slogan painted on the worn façade. The Elite and its neighboring buildings were demolished and today, traffic passes overhead on the I-279 Parkway North.



Wm. Penn Theatre on Federal Street looking south toward the river

At the corner of Federal & Erie Streets, today the site of Eight Allegheny Center and a portion of North Commons, sat the Kenyon Theatre. As early as 1911, the Kenyon was advertised as: "The Only Vaudeville Theatre in Allegheny." Not to be confused with the New Kenyon Opera House on Penn Avenue in Downtown Pittsburgh which opened in 1912, the Kenyon Theatre on Federal Street offered "High-Class Vaudeville at the Lowest Rates in America!" In 1919 it began screening motion pictures. The first was the silent film *Mickey* with Mabel Normand. Over the decades the Kenyon was operated by the Enterprise Amusement Co., Warner Bros., and finally the Stanley-Warner Corporation. The Kenyon closed on December 1, 1963, after 52 years of entertaining on the North Side with *McLintock* starring John Wayne and a seldom remembered 1962 version of *Beauty and the Beast*.

There were once four theatres located on East Ohio Street and the 1943 *Film Daily Yearbook* states that the Ohio Theatre at 528 East Ohio, had a seating capacity of 275. Opening in 1916 as the Keystone Theatre, this building today houses Priory Fine Pastries.

Today, where the Century-Family Theatre once stood at 701 East Ohio Street, is an empty lot with a "Welcome to Deutschtown" sign planted on it. Often referred to as the "Boom-Boom," the Century-Family was known for its double-feature bills such as Harry James, The Andrew Sisters, and Shemp Howard in *Private Buckaroo & Pioneers of the West*, a Republic Studios western. Opening in 1916, the theatre was owned by William & Samuel Richman and managed by George J. Schweitzer. In the 1940s the Century-Family was part of the Allied Motion Picture Theatre Owners of Western Pa. The "Naborhood" theatres in this organization were independently owned and operated. On shopping trips to East Ohio Street with my family in the 1950s, prior to its closing, I was drawn to the colorful, brightly-lit marquee over the theatre's entrance. When it closed, the building was converted into a Thrift Drug at the corner of East Ohio & Nash Streets.

The Gould Theatre (719–723 East Ohio Street) and the Arcadia Theatre (823 East Ohio Street) were the members of Gould Amusements founded by Squirrel Hill resident Samuel Gould. Both silent film theatres opened in 1916. *Isobel* with Jane Novak and House Peters, *The Little Clown* with Mary Miles Minter, and *The Home Stretch* with Douglas MacLean were once part of the Gould's daily-change policy. After the Gould closed in 1930, the theatre was razed and in its place a G.C. Murphy 5 & 10¢ Store was built on East Ohio near its intersection with East Street.

The first proprietor of the Arcadia Theatre was Clarence Overend, who eventually sold the theatre to Samuel Gould of Gould Amusements. The Arcadia sat on the same side



The Gould Theatre at 719–723 East Ohio Street

of East Ohio Street as the Gould, but closer to the intersection of East Ohio & Chestnut Streets. During the 1940s, the Arcadia was another of the home-owned & home-operated independent Naborhood theatres. *Rodan! The Flying Monster & Rally 'Round the Flag, Boys!* starring Paul Newman and Joanne Woodward were amongst the strange double features that played at the Arcadia in its declining years. The theatre closed in the late 1950s.

The G. C. Murphy's that replaced the Gould along with its neighbors, the Arcadia and Century-Family, became victims of the East Street Valley redevelopment. The concrete and steel of I-579 and the Veteran's Bridge along with littered grassy knolls now stand in their place along East Ohio Street. Redevelopment in the East Ohio/Federal Street corridor and the construction of Allegheny Center in the 1960s dimmed the projectors there also. Only the façade and outer lobby of the North Side's most famous/infamous theatre, the Garden, still remain. Sad to say, but going to the movies on the North Side of Pittsburgh is truly ... gone with the wind.



The Arcadia Theatre at 823 East Ohio Street

## 4TH ANNUAL ALLEGHENY WINTER FILM SERIES

Please mark your calendars and join us for dinner and a movie at Bistro to Go, 415 East Ohio Street. The series features films shot on or about the North Side. Start with comfort food at the Bistro any time before 6:45, and stay for the free program at 6:45 and the film at 7:00.

» **February 17** – *Mrs. Soffel* (1984)

Directed by Gillian Armstrong, starring Diane Keaton and Mel Gibson

» **March 11** – *I Was a Communist for the FBI* (1951)

Based on a series of stories written by Matt Cvetic who infiltrated a Pittsburgh Communist Party cell

» **April 7** – *Lady Beware* (1987)

Horne's window dresser becomes the obsession of a handsome and married psychopath

## THE ALLEGHENY LECTURE SERIES

Topics from the rich history of Allegheny City

Join us at the Allegheny Branch of the Carnegie Library as we explore interesting topics from the rich history of Allegheny City and from Pittsburgh's North Side. There are so many stories to tell of the great place many of us call home. The North Side and the former Allegheny City was home to great thinkers, writers, artists, and political and social heroes and advocates. Not to mention some wonderfully diverse architecture. This ongoing program is sure to trigger great memories and great conversations.

Be a part of it! The fourth Monday in March, June and September, from 6:30 to 8:00 pm.

**March 23** — James Kastner

*When the Movies Played Here*

**June 22** — Steve Mellon

*The Great Gas Tank Explosion of 1927*

**September 28** — David McMunn

*The Presbyterian Churches of Allegheny & North Side*

Parking is available in the Medical Building garage on Federal Street, and metered parking is available along Federal Street and North Avenue. See the Allegheny City Society website for more details.



## ACS & THE ALLEGHENY COMMONS

Partnership with the Allegheny Commons Initiative

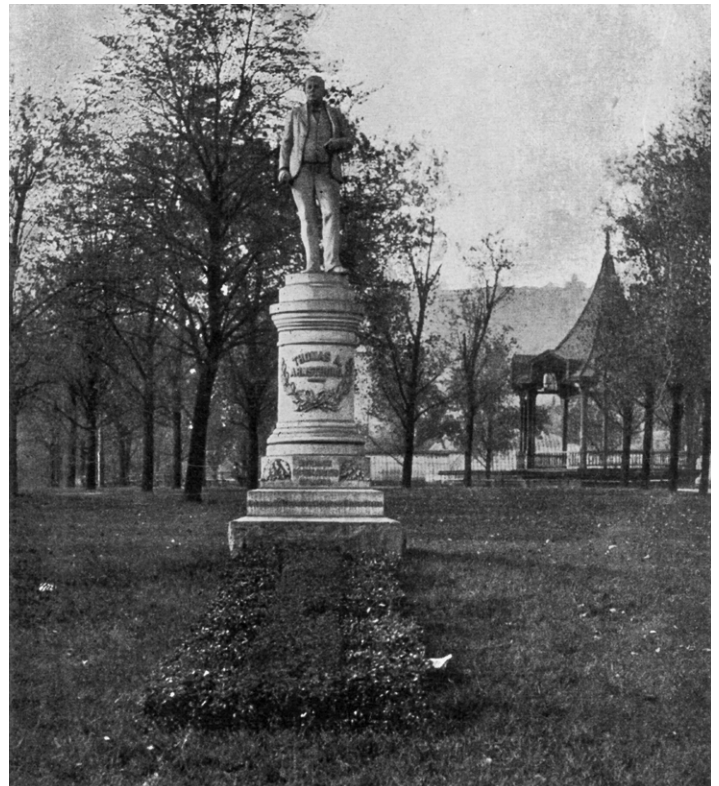
by John Canning

Most of our members as well as many other North side residents know of the major works undertaken to restore the Allegheny Commons as a park for all seasons and all peoples, just as it was when the land was set aside for common use in David Reddick's 1788 plan for the town of Allegheny. From the get-go Allegheny City Society has taken an active part in this exciting preservation effort.

Over the past year the leaders of the Allegheny Commons Initiative initiated a program by which folks who were supportive of efforts to restore the Commons could do so by becoming *Friends of the Commons–Grove Tenders*.

These “Grove Tenders” have become members of the Allegheny City Society for 2015. We welcome them, and we join with them in supporting the goals of the Initiative.

During the past year the Allegheny Commons Initiative will become part of the partnership with the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy. We all look forward to the continued investment in improving the magnificent gem of an inner city park.



Armstrong Monument in West Park near West Ohio Street and (then) Sherman Avenue, with the Bandstand in the background

