

# REPORTER DISPATCH

Journal of Old Allegheny History and Lore

## A WOODS RUN CHRISTMAS

Settlement House center of holiday celebrations

by John Canning

Along the banks of the Ohio at the northernmost section of the North Side was a working class community known as “Woods Run.” More than a century ago many factories and industrial plants, along with the Western Penitentiary, lined the river bank and the rail lines of the floodplain. Within walking distance of these centers of employment were the homes, businesses, schools, and churches of Woods Run. At the heart of the neighborhood was the Woods Run Settlement House.

The director of the Settlement House in the early years of the 20th century was Samuel Ely Eliot. Sam Eliot came to Woods Run from his experiences as one of the world’s first Rhodes Scholars. Coming from a long established line of New England scholars and Unitarian ministers, Eliot’s grandfather had helped to found Washington University in St. Louis and his father was one of the founders of Reed College in Portland.

As a Rhodes Scholar, Eliot had been greatly influenced by the Settlement House movement at Toynbee House in London. He came to Woods Run to transfer the “settlement” concept in this industrial working class community. To many Woods Run residents, the WRSH was indeed, as its reports noted, a “Bright Spot in the Smoky City.”

In those years the Woods Run community was composed of many immigrant families from eastern and southern Europe. They provide the workforce for the industries along the river Eliot and his wife, Elsa, a classically trained pianist, had a strong



commitment to validate the ethnic heritage of these Russian, Ukrainian, Slovak, Czech, and Polish families.

This was most evident during the holiday event celebrated at the Settlement House in 1911.

In the 1912 report of Settlement House activities, Eliot wrote about the Christmas celebration in the following terms: there was music, holiday readings, gifts and goodies, but the main event, presented to a packed house of family members, was *The Bird's Christmas Carol* by the WRSH Little Dramatic Club.

Indeed, the celebration of the Christmas season was a bright spot for the Woods Run neighborhood.



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## ENGINE COMPANY NO. 15

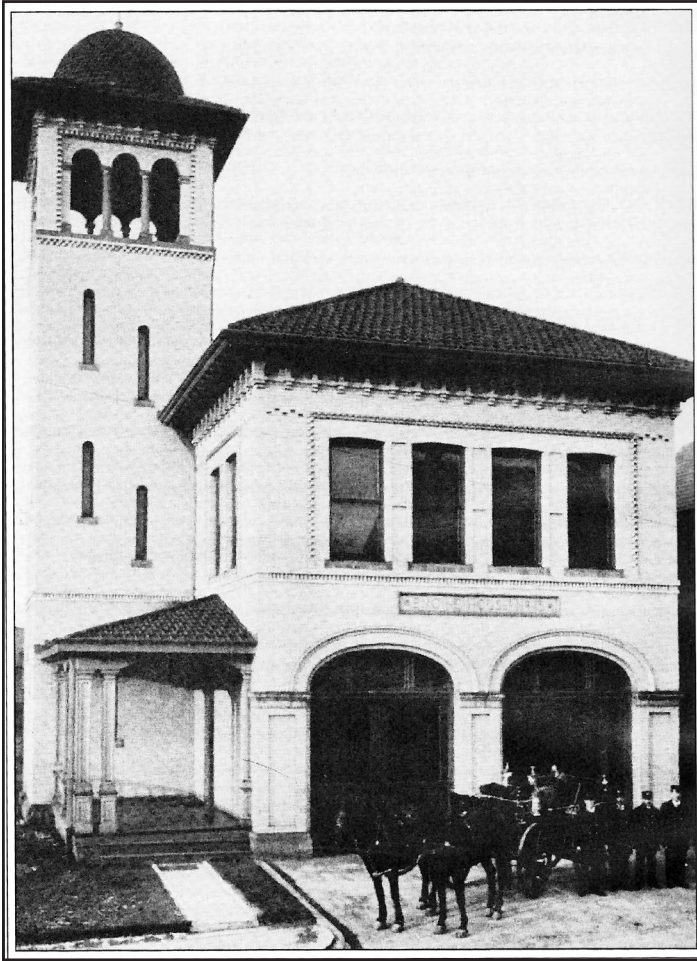
Exploring Trimble's early work for Allegheny City  
by Donald G Zeilman

At the very beginning of his architectural career, R. Maurice Trimble received a number of commissions from the City of Allegheny. Among them were two firehouses, the first in Brighton Heights (Ward 11) and the second on Preeble Avenue near the Western Penitentiary (Ward 9).

Engine Company No. 15 was commissioned in 1899 to serve the developing northern section of Allegheny City (Ward 11). The site was a large lot near the intersection of Fleming Avenue and Arthur Avenue (now Orchlee Street). Throughout his career, Trimble kept abreast of the prevailing architectural styles, and for this commission the young architect chose to work in the Renaissance Revival style, largely in a Northern Italian mode (see Stanford White's 1890 Madison Square Garden of white terracotta and buff brick).

The firehouse accomplished its stylistic expression with an economy suited to its scale. It's executed in buff color brick and trimmed with moulded shapes that form the decorative features. The hipped roof has deep overhangs with simple brackets. The original roofing was machine-made clay tile supplied by J. C. Ewart & Co. ("Akron" roofing tiles).

Most of the design effort, though, was expended on the drying tower topped with an elaborate loggia and domed roof form. Alas, the whole loggia and roof were lost in later renovations.





## MEMORIALS UNDERGO CLEANUP

Students “give back” to commemorate September 11  
by Ruth McCartan

Twenty students from the University of Pittsburgh Students for Civil Engagement Council spent a sunny fall day commemorating the lives lost from the September 11 attacks by “giving back” to the North Side Veteran monuments. Several North Side monuments were selected for a cleanup project as a way to honor all that veterans have done in service to this country.

The students arrived early and started right in. The first site was in Manchester at the 21st Ward World War II memorial, where the grass growing up through the steps was pulled and stones and loose pavement collected for disposal. After bagging the trash and debris it was off to the Commons. Thanks goes out to Molly’s Trolleys for donating the use of a trolley and driver for the day so we could get to the various locations.

In the Commons, the Maine Memorial received some tender loving debris-and-leaf pick up. These college students really knew their country’s military history and were excited to learn that a real piece of the Battleship Maine was right here in Allegheny City. The Thomas Armstrong monument was next to receive the students blitz weeding attack. Armstrong,



who had his nose finally repaired this summer, had the out-of-control weeds growing around its base removed, giving a better look to the old labor leader and Civil War veteran. After a morning of hard work the volunteers were treated to a catered meal from Bistro to Go served at the Allegheny Elks Hall on Cedar Avenue. Fortified, it was off to the 23rd Ward Veterans Memorial across from the old Allegheny Center for a trimming of the ornamental grasses growing at the site.

The Allegheny City Society hopes to have the Pitt Civil Engagement Council working soon on a new project collecting and documenting all the thousands of North Side veteran names contained on this memorial. Some of the names are becoming hard to decipher.

The last stop was the 26th Ward memorial farther up Spring Garden Avenue. The neighbors do a wonderful job decorating and maintaining it all year. This summer they got a boost by having the last of the summer weeds removed and some trees trimmed. It was a rewarding day for everyone and you could see right away that their work had made a difference. The students were wonderful to work with – so engaging, ready to work, interested and full of ideas for other projects in the future. Thanks to all involved, especially Sarah Fullerton from Pitt, Bistro to Go, the Elks and Molly’s trolleys.

## REDEDICATION CEREMONY

Event marks completion of monument restoration  
by Ruth McCartan

The sound of a drum keeping cadence for the honor guard got everyone’s attention, the ceremony was beginning. City dignitaries were there, Mayor William Peduto and Council person Darlene Harris, to help with the rededication of the Allegheny County Civil War Soldiers Monument. After a summer of repair work and a real face lift to Fame, the 137-year-old monument looked better than it ever did. Many parties were involved the City of Pittsburgh, Graciano Construction, and the McGinley Family Foundation with completing the restoration.

The McGinley Family Foundation was represented by Marie Elash and her family. The foundation came to the rescue when there was a shortfall in the money needed for a complete repair. Since the 1990s, the Allegheny City Society has had the Civil



War Soldier’s monument as part of its mission. I was honored to be able to tell the crowd about the history of the monument and the Society’s long involvement with it.

*continued*



The Ladies Monument Society, which was responsible for the building of the monument in 1897, would be proud that the citizens of today are still honoring the brave men of Allegheny County who died fighting to keep the nation together.

The Northside Leadership Conference coordinated the October 14 event, that featured a very moving patriotic reading by both the Mayor and LaShawn Burton-Faulk to end the ceremony.



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