

# REPORTER DISPATCH

Journal of Old Allegheny History and Lore

## NICK PARRENDO & HUNT STUDIOS

by Amelia Gehron

Henry Hunt (1867-1951) was born in England in and trained with his father as a stained glass apprentice. He came to Boston in the late 19th century and began working as the stained glass artist for Leake & Greene. After moving between Boston and Pittsburgh, Leake & Greene settled at Pittsburgh in 1893. Hunt's best work for Leake & Greene was the Thaw Memorial reredos (1898) created for Emmanuel Episcopal Church at North and Allegheny Avenues.

In 1906, Hunt opened his own Pittsburgh stained glass studio. Hunt's sons, George and James apprenticed under their father and helped make the studio a premier provider of stained glass during the church building boom of the early 20th century.

Nicholas Parrendo was born in 1928. By 1949, while still in school, he fell in love with his future wife, Luella. He wanted to leave school to find employment so that they could be married. He went to see Father Edward Farina, the neighborhood priest from Our Lady of Perpetual Help in Woods Run. Father Eddie came to his rescue. "Go see Hunt, he wants to get young blood in the business." George Hunt told Nicholas to "finish school and then come back and see me."

Nicholas started as an apprentice with the Hunts in 1950, earning 75 cents an hour doing whatever he was told ... cementing windows, painting glass, firing the kiln. The studio had 24 employees, and two were designers who made window drawings that were then sent out for enlargement. When the enlargements came back, they were distorted, so the features had to be redrawn. This is where Nick made his mark: hand drawing.

During this time, the firm officially became *Hunt Stained Glass Studios*. George acquired Aurora Art Glass Company, merged with Hunt's, and relocated the studios to the current West End location in 1951. George and Margaret Lally purchased Hunt Stained Glass Studios in 1966, after George Hunt retired. The Lally's expanded the business to include repair and conservation. When Lally died in 1987, the studio went up for sale again. Nick, who had lost his wife in 1981, mortgaged his house to buy Hunt Studios, which the family still owns today. When Nick started at Hunt, the job number was around 1800. That number is in the 8000s today.

Hunt Studios continues to repair, restore and design stained glass, as well as sculpting religious figures. When asked about his favorite work, Nick often mentioned the 70-foot-high



Hunt Studios' Nativity window in the former Brighton Road Presbyterian Church at Benton Avenue

window wall at St. Thomas More in Bethel Park, work at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Squirrel Hill and work at the first Presbyterian Church in Greenville. The *Pittsburgh Catholic* put it this way: his work is everywhere.

"Nick was a very multitalented person and absolutely humble, unpretentious and very able and interested in working for others," said Rev. Eric Diskin, at the Diocese of Pittsburgh. One of Nick's projects was the processional cross for former Bishop Donald Wuerl.

Nick continued to live in the North Side up until his death at 87 in 2016. Until a few months before he died, he still worked six days a week. His passion for both art and faith intersected in his career as a stained glass artist, designing thousands of contemporary stained glass windows in the Pittsburgh area.

## TREES & TRAINS & ORANGES TOO

North Side Christmases over the Decades

by John Canning

The holiday seasons are often filled with many kinds of memories, some are ethnic, others religious, and others are a definite product of the times. Evergreen trees (Tannenbaum), while originally a religious symbol of pre-Christian times, were woven into the traditions of the peoples of Central Europe and transferred to Allegheny City by thousands of immigrants, and spread throughout all parts of the community. From tabletop



Christmas tree placed in Ober Park by the North Side Chamber of Commerce, Christmas 1927, looking toward the Allegheny Post Office

spruces to massive pines and firs they have become one of the holiday symbols uniting neighbors of all persuasions and all ages. Clearly the community tree placed in Ober Park, the very heart of the North Side in the 1920s was a great endorsement to extend “Season’s Greetings” to all. Just across West Ohio Street from the 1927 Ober Park Tree, the Buhl Planetarium was being built on the site of the former Allegheny City Hall. It was in this new institute for popular science that other holiday traditions would emerge. One was the telling of the Christmas story using the magnificent setting of the great planetarium and another was the emergence of the Holiday Christmas train exhibit.

Railroading, from its introduction to Allegheny City in the years before the Civil War, was part of the very fabric of life. The great rail yards in western Manchester and along the Allegheny River waterfront at the foot of Troy Hill provided hundreds of jobs to residents of nearby neighborhoods. Regardless of where you lived, the sound of the steam-powered trains moving through Allegheny (and then the North Side) was evident at all hours, every day of the year. No wonder that in addition to the Christmas tree, the under-the-tree railroad “set-ups” became part of many families’ holiday tradition. Whether they were the early wind-up trains or whole electric powered sets from Marx, Lionel, or American Flyer and then later HO gauge and German-made LGBs, they captured the interest of generations of North Side folks. The major department stores, 5 & 10s and neighborhood hardware stores sold train and “under-the-tree-village”-related supplies. In the early years, these came from Germany and the United States, later from “Occupied Japan,” and then from China. (“Plasticville” products entered the market from a Philadelphia-based company in the late ‘40s, but all production went to China in 1984).

With this deep connection to railroads in all shapes and sizes, it is not surprising that in 1954 the Buhl Institute began assembling what has become a massive train display. Drawing folks from the North Side and far beyond, the Buhl’s RR exhibit is in a constant process of adding local features to its multi-seasonal, multi-cultural, and multi-era exhibit. Definitely worth an annual visit or two! This North Side treasure always captivates the attention of all ages. Then there is “the orange.”

In the pre-twentieth-century days of Allegheny City, holiday gifts and celebrations, while no less appreciated and happy than today, were much more limited. Recollections of a bright, sweet and juicy orange on Christmas Day was a gift to which many looked forward. In those years the apples and pears stored away in the root cellars of many homes in the last days of summer, were past their prime – a bit mealy to say the least. But, a nice orange tucked away in the toe of the stocking hung by the fireplace on Christmas Eve was quite a prize contributing to a happy Christmas indeed. Simple pleasures – trees, trains, and oranges – and many others too, are at the root of North Side holiday memories.

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# UNITY CORNER GATEWAY

by Ruth McCartan

In the fall of 2016, Robin Alexander, a member of the Perryhilltop Citizens Council, asked the Society for a little history help. The Citizens Council had been awarded a Sprout Fund grant to create a mosaic-mural entrance exhibit for both the neighborhoods of Perryhilltop and Fineview. The location for the original art work would be a vacant lot that would be first turned into a parklet by the city, located at the corner of Perrysville Avenue and Federal Street extension.

Local history help was needed to enlighten the students from the after-school program at The Pittsburgh Project who would be designing and creating the work. Board members John Canning and Ruth McCartan met with the students to ascertain their knowledge about the history of their part of the North Side. After these meeting the students took a van history tour of selected historical sites of both Perryhilltop and Fineview. The students also met with long term residents, family members and friends to get even greater perspective. Art educator Sandy Kessler Kaminski helped with the conception process and artist Linda Wallen helped the students create the mosaic panels. The City of Pittsburgh cleaned up the site and laid the base for the students' creation. Some of the landmarks featured are old Lucas Market, which was at the corner of Wilson and Burgers



Streets, the first observatory building that was off of Perrysville Avenue, and the great connector of the two neighborhoods both in the past and today, the streetcar.

The dedication of the new gateway sign took place on a Sunday in late August with the two neighborhoods celebrating a new beginning of working together. This student-created work of art is a solid symbol of their shared history and future.

## From one of our members ...

The arrival of the Summer 2017 *Report Dispatch* reminded me that I had intended to write you since receiving the Spring, 2017 issue. I was most intrigued by the article about St. John's Hospital because it explains the changes in its organization from Lutheran to Catholic. I was born there in 1926, and thought you might be interested in a little story about that event.

I grew up on Woessner Avenue on Spring Hill, attended Latimer, Allegheny High, and Carnegie Tech, graduating in 1948. My maternal Grandfather was Gottlieb Haisch, perhaps the first butcher on Spring Hill, who had a shop on Overbeck Street on the first floor of his home. The shop was managed most of the time by my grandmother or my mother, while Gottlieb worked at a meat packing firm on Spring Garden Avenue, and was sold around 1902-03 when the house on Woessner was purchased.

My mother and father met in the early 1920s at dances at different parts of the city where different groups mingled.

They were both excellent dancers and they fell in love, my father a Jewish man and my mother, a Protestant gentile, and were married in 1925, a very unusual situation for the times. On the 8th day after my birth, with the full interest and cooperation of the hospital administration, my father arranged for ten of his Jewish friends to come to the hospital to form a Minyan (panel), and a Mohel (person trained to perform a circumcision) to preside. From stories I've been told, all of the Catholic nuns, indeed the entire medical staff of the hospital were excited and in disarray, everyone wanting to witness any possible aspect of the ceremony that was the first, and quite possibly the only time, that such a ceremony took place in that hospital. Wine and cookies were served to all on the occasion.

We were delighted that this member wrote to share this wonderful and personal story in response to an article in the Society's newsletter. It is our hope that through the years, each of you are touched by one of our pieces that will spark a personal memory or thoughts of events in your family history.



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## DOORS OPEN PITTSBURGH 2017

by David Grinnell

October 7th & 8th were delightfully beautiful fall days this year. Both days witnessed a large gathering of people participating in the 2nd Annual Doors Open Pittsburgh weekend. This year participants were able to explore sites in Downtown, the Strip District, and the North Side. Members of the Allegheny City Society led two walking tours of the North Shore that built on the neighborhood walking tour from earlier in the summer season. About 30 individuals came from all over the region and gathered at the Allegheny Landing for the opportunity to learn

a bit of history and culture of the North Side. In addition to our tour, some of the buildings on the North Side that were available for the public to explore included: Allegheny General Hospital, Alphabet City, Blacksmith Studio, Boggs Mansion, Byers Hall, Calvary U. Methodist Church, NOVA Place, The Elks, Teutonia Maennerchor, and several more. It was an enjoyable time to interact with people, some of whom knew much about the North Side and those who were eager to know something new. We hope we will be asked to participate in this event which highlights the city in such a positive light next year.