

REPORTER DISPATCH

Journal of Old Allegheny History and Lore

The Year in Review 2017

» Ruth McCartan, President

While sitting writing this article I am once again amazed what our small group of board members has done again this year. David Grinnell planned and conducted – during winter and early spring – various small local history conversational group meetings. Using Facebook and Meet-up, people new to the Allegheny City Society were brought together to discuss local social history at various coffee and tea shops on the North Side. We hope to continue David's good work in the future.

Our By-laws state that the Society should have an annual meeting of the members every April. This past year we met at the Community House Church for a wonderful meal of and a talk by teacher and author, Christopher George. The Allegheny City Civil War unit the 123 Pa. Infantry, the topic of his current book, was the subject of his talk. His presentation was informative and Christopher has a family connection to this brave, local unit, which was felt by the audience.

With a small grant from the Spout Fund funded by the Buhl Foundation, the largest summer tour schedule ever attempted was begun. Four different neighborhoods were featured. The first in June was along the trail on Washington's Landing. The large group learned of the history of Herr's Island which was reinvented into a location for commercial businesses, dock and marina, restaurant and high-end town houses. The story was told by former Mayor Tom Murphy, an Allegheny City Society member who was instrumental in the island transformation in the 1990s. The second tour of the summer was in the Fineview neighborhood, and the citizens who call this hill-top home came out and helped us give a powerful tour. After Fineview came Woods Run. Both were July events. The goal of the summer tours was to visit places that are not featured on any house tours. Woods Run has so much history from the former Saint John's hospital site to the neglected history of Polish-language speakers from the neighborhood Polish club being recruited for service in Europe during World War II. The final tour of the summer season was a walk along the Allegheny River from PNC Park to the Heinz lofts. Snapshots of the Cotton Mill strike of the 1840s to the location where the waters of the Pennsylvania Canal entered into the City of Pittsburgh were featured. The Society highlighted this tour again for Pittsburgh Open Streets. These summer tours using our Meet-Up site introduced the Society to a new group of history loving friends.

For years, the Society has wanted to do a walking tour of the historic churches that were built around the Commons. This year we did it. Once again a Spout Fund grant gave us the ability to bring this history to the present. John Canning, with this extensive knowledge, created a map of the area with all the churches and their former location marked. Something that had never been done and will be used by interested historians in the future. The weather was beautiful and sunny for the last tour of the 2017 year. These tours take time and many hours of research to create. I would like to thank all who helped make this year for the Society really *historic*.

It is with a sad heart that I tell you of the resignation of two very hard-working board members. David McMunn, a long time board member and Dennis Bell: With your help you have kept the history of Allegheny City alive. You will be truly missed.

Watch your newsletter, our website, Facebook and Meet-up for some very interesting plans we have for 2018. Did I hear someone talking about another road trip?



Allegheny City Society Directors at the annual Board retreat included Janet Gunter, Ruth McCartan, Tom Wilson, Amelia Gehron, John Canning, Donald Zeilman and David Grinnell.

Sister Frances Rooney, CSJ: Growing Up in the Annunciation Neighborhood

» Kathleen M. Washy

It was a dreary Monday morning. An infant was fast asleep in a crib near a window in her family's house on Linwood Avenue. All of a sudden, there was an explosion, shattering the window with the glass falling into the crib. According to family lore, that baby suffered no scratches or injuries. This was the famous November 14, 1927, Equitable Gas Company explosion in the Manchester section of Pittsburgh's North Side, over three miles from this house. That baby, Jean Rooney, was the youngest of four children born to Frank and Mary, and she spent her entire youth growing up in the neighborhood around Annunciation Church, in what is today part of Perry South.

The year following the explosion, the family moved from living in essentially one room in a shared house to a nearby single-family dwelling on Leland Street, which featured two bedrooms and an attic. Although there was no furnace or bath, the house boasted a "Pittsburgh potty" in the basement and a coal stove in the kitchen. The kitchen was the heart of the home, the center of activity: laundry was hung to dry, children did their homework, stories of the day were swapped.

Houses were constructed in such a way that Jean and her family felt the presence of community as the walls between the houses were called "party walls." For instance, the Rooneys knew when their neighbors, the McNamaras, were having mashed potatoes for dinner because through the walls, they could hear potatoes being chopped on the sink board in the neighboring house. Around 1940, the Rooney family rented a larger house located on Norwood Avenue, moving into a place that not only had a refrigerator but also a second floor bathroom – no longer would they have to trek to the basement for



Sisters of St. Joseph, Annunciation, 1940
Photo courtesy of Sisters of St. Joseph of Baden Archives

the Pittsburgh potty! By the time Jean graduated from high school, she was living in an even better house on West Burgess.

During her entire youth, Jean lived within walking distance of Annunciation Church. Beginning with a foundation of families from the Pleasant Valley district, Annunciation was established in 1893 in a temporary facility until a new church, designed by Edward Stotz, was built, with its dedication occurring in 1905. In the following year, when the accompanying elementary school started in the church basement, the Sisters of St. Joseph were asked to staff the school, signaling the beginning of the sisters' presence in the Annunciation neighborhood.

Within a few years after the school's establishment, an unused two-room frame schoolhouse from the 10th Ward was purchased and relocated to the church property. Over the next decade, in order to accommodate more students, rooms were added to this structure. Eventually, additional space was used in Norwood Hall, a building that had initially served as the temporary church before being converted into a church hall in 1905.

In response to the growing student population and the corresponding increase in number of sister teachers, the church built a new school building, which was designed by Benno Janssen and Edward J. Hergenroeder, and a new convent, which was designed by Hergenroeder; the first was completed in 1926, the latter in 1928. Additionally, in 1930, an all-girl high school was established, which remained open until 1959. In 1944, the church purchased the closed Linwood School as a solution to handling the ever-increasing school population, as the initial student enrollment of 173 in 1906 had risen to 702 in 1944.

As a young girl, Jean Rooney attended both Annunciation elementary and high schools. Over the course of her twelve



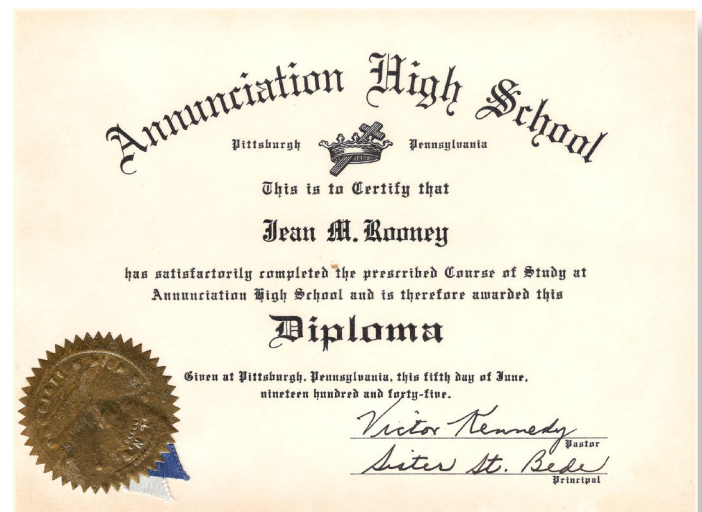
Edward Bender ran a grocery store at 2624 Norwood Street.
Photo courtesy of Sisters of St. Joseph of Baden Archives

years at Annunciation schools, all but one of her classroom teachers were sisters. One of the most memorable events during her high school years was a very emotional and special May Crowning, a ceremony in which families from the parish came forward and laid a flower by the Mary statue in honor of their loved ones who had died in the war (World War II). Another memory was that before they went to their high school dances, the girls accompanied by their dates would go to the convent so that the sisters could see them and share in the excitement of their students. After graduating in a class of 37 students from Annunciation High School in 1945, Jean entered the Sisters of St. Joseph and was given the name Frances, a name which resonated within her family as the names of both her father and her brother were Francis. (Note: Monsignor Francis Rooney of the Diocese of Pittsburgh was the brother of Sister Frances Rooney.)

When Sister Frances left Annunciation in 1945 to become a sister, there were more than 4,000 parishioners; this number that would grow to more than 7,000 within the next twenty years. However, by 1993, the number of parishioners had declined so much that Annunciation merged with Nativity Church to form Incarnation. In 2001, with even further declining attendance, the Annunciation worship site was closed and the buildings were eventually sold. Today, the Pittsburgh Project occupies the school and the church buildings, while the former convent is home to Angels' Place.

While Sister Frances never taught at Annunciation, her memories of her youth in that neighborhood always

include the Sisters of St. Joseph. Over the course of the parish's existence, 33 young women from Annunciation Church, including Sister Frances, chose to enter this religious congregation, not to mention those young women from other parishes who entered because of their encounters with the sisters at the Annunciation schools. By the time the elementary school closed in 1986, more than 380 sisters had served as teachers within the Annunciation schools, some for only one year while others for ten years. To this day, the presence of the sisters continues in the Annunciation neighborhood. The old rectory, which was constructed in 1895, now serves as a home to several Sisters of St. Joseph. As for Sister Frances, while she has not resided in the Annunciation neighborhood since 1945, she is still an Annunciation girl in her heart.



Dearest Jeanne

JEAN ROONEY

"JEANNIE"

Student Council 4, President of Junior Sodality 4, Glee Club 4, Angelus Staff 4, Annunciator Staff 1-3, C.S.M.C. 1-2-3-4.

Amiable is Jean our Sodality Leader. She can get a group of girls gathered at a moment's notice, as can be seen at the monthly sodality meeting. We are sure she will make a good teacher and leader in Christ's work.

Above: Graduation photo and diploma of Jean Rooney. Courtesy Sister Frances Rooney

Left: From *The Angelus*, the Annunciation High School yearbook, 1945

Kathleen M. Washy is Archivist for the Sisters of St. Joseph, Baden, Pennsylvania.

A Treasure Hunt for Your Memorial Day

» John Canning

Several years ago the North Side Leadership Conference, of which the ACS is a member, took on the task of helping to locate sources that tell the story of North Side residents who took part in the nation's armed forces over the past century. As this "Veterans' Taskforce" began to gather names from various memorials and honor rolls that were placed in community parklets, in schools, in churches, and in fraternal organizations, we began to realize that there is a lot of missing information (see *Reporter Dispatch* No 51).

As time goes on these pieces of information may be lost forever. In an attempt to fill in the gaps, the Allegheny City Society is asking folks who might have copies of printed materials kept among family archives to share them with the larger

community. We will make copies of any printed materials and return them to the donor. Any and all help in seeking out these treasures of our North Side history will be greatly appreciated. Please contact John Canning,, ACS Vice President (412 322-3974) to help in recovering these community treasures.



An extravagant Thank You to David McMunn and Dennis Bell

Throughout the past years the ACS has been fortunate to have two strongly committed members on our Board of Directors. David McMunn and Dennis Bell assumed many significant roles in planning, developing and carrying out a number of the Society's programs. David, a true Alleghenian at heart, was always on board to be the Master of Ceremonies at our annual meetings. Dennis, in recent years, took on the technical tasks of designing the program booklets for several of our neighborhood walks and talks. Although living in Greensburg, David and Dennis were regular attendees at our monthly Board meetings as well as participating in every event of the Society.

In the last few years, David's work on the life and architectural legacy of John Comes as well as becoming more

involved with historic preservation issues in the Greensburg/Westmoreland area, had limited the time he could spend on ACS programming. Dennis, as the organist/choir director of the St. Paul's church in Butler found his time spent travelling between a home in Greensburg, a job in Butler, and attending ACS events on the North Side to be draining.

The ACS Directors sadly accepted their decision to resign from the Board at the beginning of 2018. We all have appreciated and are thankful for the many contributions David and Dennis have made toward the success of the ACS. We know they will both be present in ACS events when it fits into their busy schedules, and, we look forward to the publication of David's work on Comes. Both men are true friends of the Allegheny City Society and will be greatly missed.



The Hippodrome pictured on the southeast corner of Beaver Avenue and Juniata Street in the early 1950s

Manchester's Hippodrome Theater

The old Hippodrome Theatre was located at 1624 Beaver Avenue. It opened in 1914 as the Imperial Theater, managed by Thomas Eichholz. It didn't do well, and was purchased and remodeled by Thomas Gilbert in 1915. It was still not successful, and in 1917, Louis Handel acquired the property and it became the *Hippodrome*. In 1924, Handel sold the theater to the Browarsky Brothers Circuit which ran the theater for much of its life.

After the Second World War, the theater, along with the area, began to decline. September 9, 1960 was the end of the line for the Hippodrome. It was showing *Please Don't Eat the Daisies* and *Warlock*. The theater was demolished as part of the highway construction project that decimated the Manchester retail district.

(Source: cinematreasures.org; Cinema Treasures, LLC)

You are cordially invited to the Annual Meeting of
The Allegheny City Society

Wednesday, April 25, 2018

7:00pm gathering with Hors d'oeuvres and Beverages

Program begins at 7:30pm

The Historic Col. James Anderson House

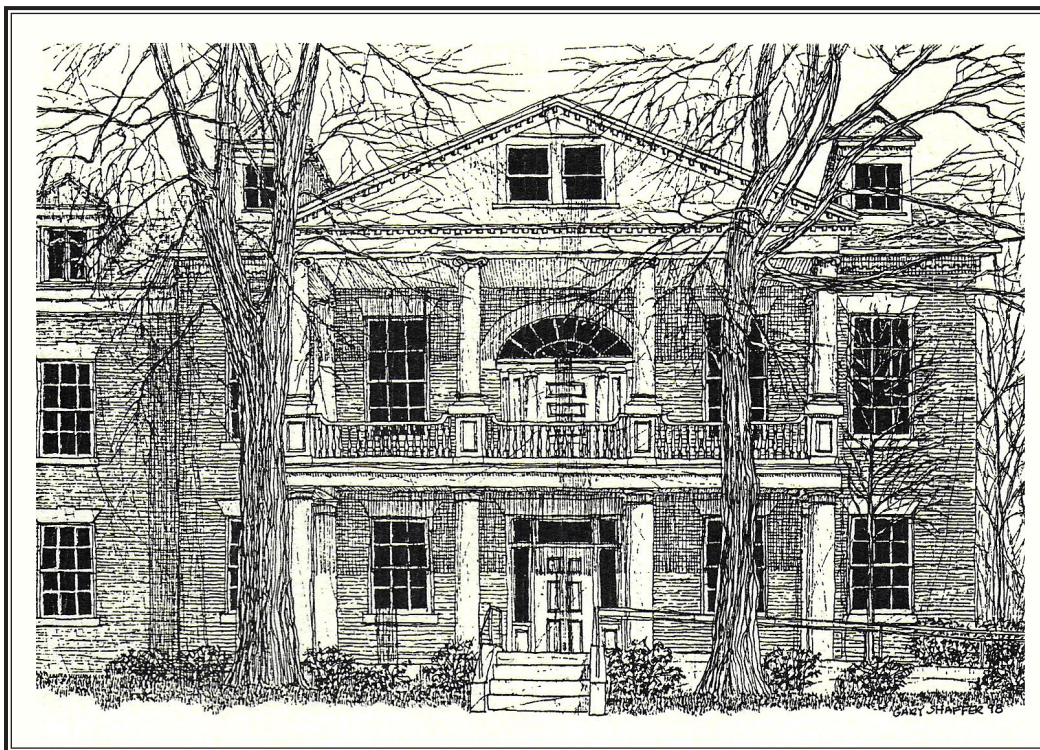
1516 Liverpool Street in Manchester, North Side

(the site is accessible to persons with disabilities)

Brief review of 2017 programs and the election of Board members
"The Story of Col. James Anderson, his Manchester Home and his Legacy"
Presentation of the Society's William Rimmel Award to
the *Manchester Historic Society*

The Annual Meeting is open to all ACS members and any guests, and is free to all

Reservations requested by calling (412) 766-5670 by April 20



Gary Shaffer 1998



Beaver Avenue from Liverpool Street
looking north-northwest with the
Beaver Avenue Garage in the foreground.
January 21, 1935

Pittsburgh City Photographer Collection,
1901-2002, AIS.1971.05, Archives Service
Center, University of Pittsburgh