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North Side at Christmas

Recalling the holidays of the early 1960s.

Patricia M. O'Hare

I only now realize that being 16 at Christmas and growing up on the North Side was among the happiest times of my life.

I remember that every Christmas my mother gave me a job—that of washing down the walls in the kitchen—because that's where she held her family parties. I didn't mind, because I could close the door and play the radio. Art Pallan on KDKA would play all of my favorite Christmas songs, like *Sleigh Ride*, *The First Snowfall of the Winter*, and the University of Redlands Choir's version of *The Song of Mary*, as I went up and down the ladder in the high-ceilinged kitchen.

That year, I was a freshman at St. Peter High School, where we wore dark green uniforms and white blouses. The sisters who taught us were Mercy nuns, and I know now how very intelligent they were. Back then, we just said that they had no "mercy." We studied opera, French, Latin, Trigonometry, and yes, sewing and cooking. Bishop O'Connor had originally brought the Mercy nuns from Ireland to run Mercy Hospital. My aunt, Sheila O'Connor Ihmsen was related to the Bishop, her grandfather had run Ihmsen Glass back in the 1800s in the Birmingham district of Pittsburgh. I was very fortunate to have been educated by the Mercy nuns, because my father didn't believe in women going to college! It was said that the nuns gave us a "classical education," and they did.

In the winter of 1960, streetcars still ran the streets of Pittsburgh. My father was a "motorman" for Pittsburgh Railways. After school, some of us would line up on the "islands" between Buhl Planetarium and Carnegie Library on Federal Street, and wait for the streetcar that would take us home. Most of the time I walked because Buena Vista Street was just a short walk through West Park, and a beautiful walk it was! No matter what the season! I remember all of the fountains that were actu-

ally functional at that time. Hartzell Memorial was my favorite. "For Man, Bird or Beast," it said. On top, a nice place for birds to drink with a continual spring of water, for man, there was a water fountain, and in front a huge tub for horses to drink from. It was fun to walk Federal Street then. After school, we often went into the Central Drug Store, right beside the Carnegie Library, to get ourselves five-cent Cokes. Hite's was on the other side of the library, next to the Market House. There was usually a policeman to direct traffic because the corner of East and

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West Ohio Streets and Federal Street was a very busy place. I seem to remember Joe the Cop. He always had a joke for you as you crossed the street. After John Glenn went into space, he said, "Glenn's wife wanted to go along, but he *ast-her-naut!*" There were corners where men were selling Christmas trees—\$5 apiece. People were overloaded with Christmas gifts, waiting for streetcars and walking along the street heading home. During school break, we would go to the Garden or the Kenyon Theaters to see movies. We went to McCrory's 5 & 10 to pick up some gifts for family members since we didn't have much to spend. But that didn't matter. It was just the going and the

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doing that was so much fun. When I got through West Park to cross West North Avenue onto Buena Vista Street, I would have to walk as far as the eye could see, because my house was right before the big turn at the top! We did our share of falling in the snow. But it was very dangerous to sled down Buena Vista, with parked cars and lots of traffic.

My best friend Beverly and I would go out every Friday night, no matter what the weather. I had a huge allowance of \$2. But back then, it was sufficient. I would walk down to her house on Porterfield Street (which has been taken by the hospital and no longer exists) and we would walk together down Federal Street to the Sixth Street Bridge. We crossed the bridge and went up to Seventh Street where KQV had its windows with live DJs spinning the records. The same kids turned up every Friday night and we knew each other. We stood in the freezing cold for hours, watching our favorite DJs, and eventually had to go the Barbecue on Liberty Avenue for a hamburger and coke and to warm up. That took care of one of my dollars. Then Beverly's family moved to Perrysville Avenue around the curve from me. We would hail a cab and Bev would pay the driver for the ride to her house, then he would continue to the top of Buena Vista, where I had to stop him and give him that last dollar, which included a 10 cent tip! From there, I trudged down Buena Vista in the snow to my house!

Buhl Planetarium was a lot of fun to visit during Christmas with the Christmastown Railroad and the sky shows. When I graduated from high school, my first job was at the Buhl Planetarium as a secretary (I am still a secretary, so you can imagine how well the nuns trained me!). Carnegie Library used to have a gorgeous white marble staircase, but it has since disappeared! I used to walk upstairs on it and pretend I was a princess. There were also paintings of the authors all around the main room of the library. I wonder why they were painted over? Such a loss. We all loved the library. I am sad to hear that it is no longer being used. Mr. Carnegie would not be amused.

A few years later, Allegheny Center replaced Federal Street as we knew it. I think about how many wonderful things we did in that area, like visiting the Bird House in West Park, especially during the holidays, and walking through the Market House, looking at the frozen fish and rabbits in the glass cases. Once mother bought me a tiny turtle there. You could get your picture taken and colored by hand upstairs. There was historic St. Peter's Church. I was baptized and married at St. Peter's. Mother and Dad were married there (they met while they were



both working at the Clark Candy Company). At Christmas, we celebrated Midnight Mass there.

The old Allegheny Post Office was still operating when I worked at Buhl. I often took our mail over there. Years later, when the building became a museum, my friend Martha O'Moore and I took a tour of it. I couldn't help but feel distressed. I'm sure she did, too.

No matter where you were, you knew what time it was by the Library's tower clock. Its Westminster chime rang out the quarters, and then struck the hour.

Then there was the lumber yard fire in the winter snow in the 1960s. My sister and I walked down Buena Vista to see the fire. It was behind Brighton Road, to the west. As you can imagine, a lumber yard being full of wood, it burned and burned. The firefighters had their hands full fighting that one. They were hosing down properties on Brighton Road to save them, and everything was covered with icicles. By the time we got home, all electricity was out in the area.

Yes, I fondly remember Christmas on the North Side. I still think of it as a bustling area with folks rushing to and fro, taking their packages with them to the "Central" to get something to eat after a hard day shopping. Growing up, it was a great place to be!

—Pat O'Hare is a member of the Allegheny City Society who currently resides in Arizona.

Don't forget to visit the Allegheny City Society website for books, CDs, post-cards, maps, mugs and more!

www.alleghenycity.org

Successful Fall Walking Tours

Ruth McCartin

Riverview Park

On a breezy fall day in late October, 15 people enjoyed a hike or maybe a vigorous walk in the one of the jewels of the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy, Riverview Park. Riverview was created in 1894 and has been a hidden gem in the Observatory Hill neighborhood of the former Allegheny City.

A zoo given by August Overbeck in 1896 was a feature of the Park many years before the Pittsburgh Zoo in Highland Park received its first animals. The current maintenance shelter's foundation was formerly part of the bear pit of the Park's zoo. The carousel, a delight of hundreds of Allegheny children is long gone, a victim of old age and lack of preventive maintenance. But thanks to the Parks Conservancy the Chapel originally built in 1913 was rebuilt and now is a venue for summer weddings and receptions. Thanks to Park Ranger Nancy Schaffer, the group got in to see the wonderful reconstructed interior. The Allegheny City Society used the Chapel for its Annual Meeting a few years back.

Riverview Park is on one of the highest hills in all the City of Pittsburgh. At one time you could see the Allegheny River from the park but with the growth of the trees even in winter with all the leaves down the river is obscured. Riverview Park is not just the location of Allegheny Observatory but a respite for everyone all year long.

Allegheny Commons and The Mexican War Streets

After days of rain, the sun finally came out for a few hours on Sunday, November 18 for our last tour of 2018. The west and north sections of Allegheny Commons, and the neighborhood that calls the commons "their backyard," the Mexican War Streets district, were featured. The Society's Board members have given this tour many times and still people come out to learn the history of the Commons and its various monuments.

Landscape designed by Mitchell and Grant in 1867 turned this pasture and former dumping ground of Allegheny City into a pedestrian park to rival Central Park. Monuments and statues erected to honor past heroes from George Washington, to labor leader Thomas Armstrong, to the 4,000 Union soldiers who died during the American Civil War, and the Allegheny City naval officer to die when the Battleship Maine sunk, erected by past generations, are still found here. The stories of these great men and events kept tour participants moving as the clouds moved in and the temperature dropped. Thanks to the Allegheny Unitarian Universalist Church for offering a way-stop for cookies, cider, and rest.



It's hard to imagine (unless you walk by the site) that the former 2nd ward school named for the educational activist Mary Jane Cowley ever filled a vacant church parking lot. Memories of widows and orphans given a place to live in 1838, and then learn that the same building has been used today for housing low- to moderate-income families. Small grocery and confectionery stores which were on every corner in former decades now have given way to up-scale housing. One can only feel the history of the Mexican War Streets district and learn the stories of the past by walking on the streets and seeing the sites on the tour—not much of the built environment changed.

Planning has started for 2019 tour schedule, join us next spring for other tours featuring a different section of Riverview Park and Allegheny Commons. Watch for the dates on our Meet-up site, Facebook and web site.



Christmas at the Cowley School in the 2nd Ward, December 15, 1916

ACS Trip to “The Westmoreland”

Manchester artists are highlighted at the museum.

John Canning

On a cool Saturday in November, the ACS orchestrated an exciting trip to The Westmoreland Museum of American Art, where we focused our attention on works from the collection by Allegheny City/North Side artists.

Several years ago, we observed the works by Mary Cassatt and George Hetzel. This year, along with the works of those two artists, we also had the opportunity to admire the works of two artist with strong connections to the Manchester community: Frederick Demmler and Thaddeus Mosley.

Demmler’s story is a bit of a sad one. He was truly coming into his own as a leading artist in Pittsburgh and beyond, when his life was cut short on the battlefields of Belgium in November 1918—only three days before the end of WWI. Demmler was raised on Chartiers (now Chateau) Avenue in Manchester. He attended Allegheny High School where he was among a small group of students who caught the attention of Willa Cather, who, at the time, was on the English faculty of the school. He went off to study at Cornell and then at the Boston Museum of Fire Arts. He returned to Pittsburgh where he established himself as highly regarded young artist.

At “The Westmoreland” we were treated to an extraordinary viewing of a number of Demmler’s paintings, drawings and sketches preserved in their archives. Doug Evans, a conservator and archivist there, gave our group an opportunity to focus attention on these works, and helped us have a better appreciation of Demmler’s development as an artist. In preparation for our trip to Greensburg a several members of the Demmler family also shared information about the artist with us.



Thaddeus Mosley

Nate Guidry/Post-Gazette

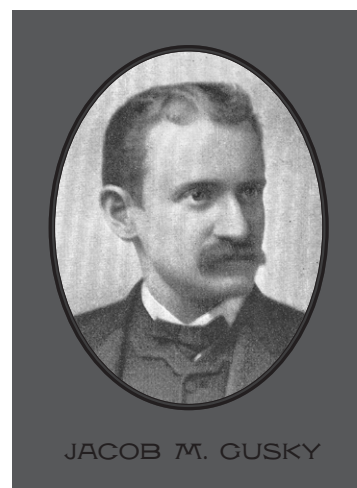
The other “artist from Manchester,” whose work is featured in the “new” wing of The Westmoreland, is Thaddeus Mosley. Mosley, who, in his early ‘90s, is creating massive works of wooden sculpture in his studio in the newly named neighborhood of “Chateau” (always Manchester to North Side old timers). His work in Greensburg is a permanent installation. However a number of his works are also one of the highlights of the Carnegie International Exhibition, presently on view at the Carnegie Museum of Art in Oakland. Mosley’s works are placed both inside and outside of the Carnegie Museum’s entrance. Quite an honor for this exceptional artist with North Side roots.

The Gusky Hebrew Orphanage

Caring service to Jewish children on Perrysville Ave.

Martha L. Berg

In 1891, when Esther Gusky established the Gusky Hebrew Orphanage and Home as a memorial to her late husband, the department store owner Jacob M. Gusky, she was filling a need in the Jewish community. Her timing was perfect, as the 1890s saw a great increase in the Jewish population of Pittsburgh, primarily as a result of immigration from Eastern Europe. Mrs. Gusky wanted a healthy and home-like atmosphere for needy Jewish children, and the Home’s spacious grounds on Perrysville Avenue, then well away from the city’s polluted air, provided just that.



According to the register of the Home (original now at Jewish Family & Children’s Service; copy at the Rauh Jewish Archives of the Heinz History Center), 649 children were admitted between 1891 and 1943, when the Home was closed. The information provided in this ledger book, though not 100 percent complete for each child, paints a composite picture that is, in many ways, contrary to commonly held stereotypes about orphanages. For example, 550 (nearly 85%) of the children had at least one living parent, and, in the case of more than 100 of those, both parents were living. Though the reasons for admission to the Home are not usually specified, poverty was probably the primary reason; when one or both parents had to work long hours at low wages, paying for child care was not an option, so the Gusky Home (and other orphanages) functioned as a residential child-care service for parents until they were once

again able to care for their children. Sickness of one or both parents was also a reason for admission, and in several cases one or both parents were reported as having been committed to “the insane asylum.”

The register disproves the assumption that many of the children needing care in that time period would have been immigrants; although many of their parents may have been immigrants (that incidence is not recorded), the children themselves were overwhelmingly American-born. Of the 607 whose place of birth is noted, 481 (nearly 80%) were born in the United States, followed by 69 children born in Russia, 32 in the Austro-Hungarian region, ten in Romania, eight in England, three in Italy, and one each in Poland, Canada, Czechoslovakia, and Germany.

The children admitted to the Gusky Home ranged in age from two to fifteen years old at entrance and stayed for a few months to several years. All were housed in the residences and educated in the public schools. Many returned to live with their parents or other family members, while others stayed until their graduation from elementary or high school and then left to go to work. A few went on to college or nursing school, a few were sent to reform schools, and a few died at the Home. Those who “aged out” worked as office and store clerks, stenographers, seamstresses, druggists, electricians, optical clerks, stock boys, and tailors, and a few joined the armed forces.

Rodef Shalom [Congregation] members were actively involved in supporting the Gusky Home, both with financial contributions and with hands-on volunteer work. A “Donation Day” fundraiser was held annually to recognize donors of food, clothing, money, and presents for the children. In 1911, Phillip Hamburger, a Rodef Shalom board member, donated the Fannie H. Hamburger Dormitory, which added 32 beds, increasing the capacity of the facility by nearly 50 percent. Many students from the Gusky Home were transported to Rodef Shalom for their religious education, and more than one hundred thirty Gusky Home residents were confirmed at Rodef Shalom.

When the Gusky Hebrew Orphanage and Home closed in 1943, the proceeds from the sale of the property helped to fund what is now the Jewish Family & Children’s Service of Pittsburgh.

Editor’s Note: *In 1945, the Pittsburgh Committee for Resettlement of loyal Japanese-Americans identified the former Gusky Hebrew Orphanage as a site for “. . . housing facilities for the evacuees . . .” This was to be temporary housing for selected American citizens of Japanese parentage. Two families were placed at the former orphanage in the summer of 1945, but only one stayed, and then just for a brief time. The orphanage was razed in 1950, and in its place the campus of the Byzantine Catholic Seminary was built.*



Special thanks to Martha L. Berg, archivist at Rodef Shalom, for permission to reprint this article, which was originally published in *HaKeshet*, the newsletter of Rodef Shalom Congregation, January/February, 2016.



Pittsburgh Department of Public Works' horse-drawn salt or ash spreader at the snow-covered intersection of Irwin Avenue (later Brighton Road) and Ridge Avenue. Photo taken in 1916 by the Pittsburgh City Photographer (Pittsburgh City Photographer Collection, University of Pittsburgh).