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And They're Off!

Horse Racing at Allegheny's Exposition Park

Craig Britcher

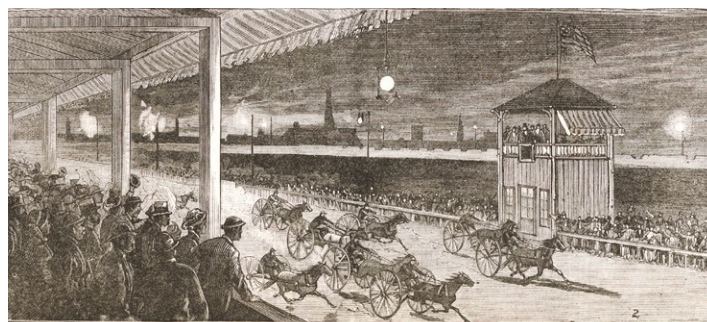
The earliest available account of horse racing in the Pittsburgh area may possibly be found in the *Pittsburgh Gazette* (now the *Post-Gazette*) in September of 1786. Soon thereafter, though, Pennsylvania laws of 1812 and 1820 directly prohibited horse racing, including those on long distances over dirt roads. Still later, following the Civil War, horse racing nationally surged in popularity much as baseball did. Several iconic trotting or driving parks opened in the era, which remarkably are still operating to this day including Saratoga Springs in New York (opened in 1863), Monmouth Park in Oceanside, New Jersey (1870); Pimlico in Baltimore, Maryland (1870) and Churchill Downs in Louisville, Kentucky (1875). During the 1880s, Allegheny City's own Exposition Park opened (between modern-day Heinz Field and PNC Park) and became one of the area's most lively and lucrative sporting venues.

Leading up to the park's opening, horses were a central and familiar part of everyday life in nineteenth century Western Pennsylvania, with uses in many areas including, but not limited to, farming, construction, transportation, and law enforcement. A necessary check soon became needed to protect overworked and underfed horses, and equine cruelty led locally to the formation of the Allegheny County (later "Western Pennsylvania") Humane Society in 1874. Hopefully the society also protected racing horses soon thereafter. Though racing clearly occurred during the preceding decades locally, by 1879 the ban on horse racing was amended "not to apply to agricultural societies offering premiums for trials of speed in horses walking, trotting and pacing, or to trials of speed . . . in any incorporated driving park." (*Pittsburgh Commercial Gazette* July 25, 1881 p4). Thus, in 1881, the Pittsburgh Driving Park Association, chartered as an agricultural association, began harness racing. Soon, horse racing became a main attraction in local sporting and entertainment.

In 1881, racing began on the Exposition Park grounds, the site of a grand annual tradeshow that began in the nearby Exposition Building. A night at the races thrilled thousands who packed the grandstand facing the Allegheny River along what is now known as the North Shore. The 18 electric arc lights afforded nighttime entertainment unknown to past generations. Clearly part of the thrill, too, was in betting – pools were sold at the Monongahela House downtown, the St. Clair Hotel, and H.O. (Harry) Price & Co's pool room. Spirits dampened though on June 16 when the first major flood piled debris on the race-track, which subsequently needed to be re-leveled. Flooding repeatedly remained an ominous seasonal threat for decades.

Baseball fans and researchers know the Exposition site as the first home field of the Pirates franchise (then, the "Alleghenys") in 1882 and 1883, later naming its lower and upper field locations as "Exposition Park I" and "II." Horse racing thrived there until a fire on October 3, 1883 destroyed the Exposition Building, track, and grandstand. The Alleghenys moved roughly a half of a mile northwest to Union Park (remodeled and renamed "Recreation Park" before the 1885 season) and would not return until 1891.

Back on the horse racing oval, after the 1883 fire and in the Spring of 1884, H.O. Price (of the local pool hall) stepped



Racing by Electric Light, a sketch by L.L. Roush of Exposition Park's interior, in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper of New York*. Nov 5, 1881 (Newspaper Collection, Detre Library and Archives, Heinz History Center)

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A close-up of Exposition Park as seen in photographer Peter Krumel's Pittsburgh and Allegheny City panorama c.1889. The Union Bridge is in the foreground with many identifiable Allegheny City landmarks in the background, including the Civil War monument and the library. (General Photo Collection, Detre Library & Archives, Heinz History Center)

up and spearheaded the rebuilding of a grandstand on the leased Pittsburgh and Western Railroad land alongside a half-mile-length oval track and a separate building, the "Summer Theater." Architect Fred Sauer designed a reported \$20,000 plan (with cost overruns later reported) for the grounds and grandstand with contractor John Natcher overseeing construction of the new Exposition Park grandstand and oval, sometimes also called "Exposition Driving Park." An April 10 ordinance granted permission to erect a 522-foot by 43-foot grandstand, one-story stables, fencing, a judges' stand, and other small buildings. Initially capacity was estimated as 8,000 (though likely "as built" capacity was less) in 13 rows, with press box, and bandstand for the Great Western Band (*Pittsburgh Daily Post* February 25, 1884 p4, and *Pittsburgh Commercial Gazette* April 11, 1884). Multiple spires or turrets jutted into the sky as typical horse racing grandstand architectural elements. These spires outlived the track and later distinguished the park as an iconic baseball venue. The brush arc lights for the new grandstand and track were increased from its predecessor's 18, to 60 lights, and were powered by the Allegheny Electric Light Company's station. The May 12 *Pittsburgh Commercial Gazette* (p4) further touted another emerging technology: "special telephonic communication has been arranged for between the judges and the press stand, so that in case of a dead heat, a hitch on the railing, or any other detail pertaining to any particular race, the information can be immediately transmitted."

Throughout the decade, competing driving parks in the region printed a variety of announcements in the Pittsburgh newspapers, so in turn, Exposition Park management touted extravagant purses such as \$3,000 and spectacles such as hot

air balloon ascensions and grand firework displays. In surveying the newspapers, harness racing with a sulky and driver seem to be most prevalent with "rules of American turf to govern" trotting and pacing races. Nationally known horses such as Jay-Eye-See and locally popular horses such as Jewett drew large crowds who typically paid 50 or 75 cents admission.

Other than the move of Chicago's Union Association team for a brief stay at Exposition Park at the end of 1884, few baseball games were played at the newly rebuilt park. The grounds instead proved to be a versatile multi-use venue, hosting Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show in 1884, serving as a home for the Keystone Bicycle club in 1885, and hosting the P.T. Barnum circus three separate times. Barnum's world famous elephant "Jumbo" had already become part of our lexicon to describe anything large in size, and was set to appear at Exposition Park



Keystone Bicycle Club, cropped image, 1885 (Johnston Family Papers, Detre Library & Archives, Heinz History Center)

for the final time in September of 1885 before he was tragically killed by a train in St. Thomas, Ontario, Canada. Still, Barnum traveled and exhibited Jumbo's skeleton in the park in 1887.

By 1887, H.O. Price and co-leasees backed away and soon the Pittsburgh Gentlemen's Driving Park Association took over (*Pittsburgh Daily Post* May 5, 1887 p1). The park is sometimes referred to in that year's newspapers as "Gentlemen's Driving Park." In 1888 the Arbuckles (of local coffee fame) assumed control of the lease and were represented by operating superintendent William Kerr. Pittsburgh's newspapers seem to indicate a slight decline in horse racing in 1889, though a trap shooting club found the grounds ideal for competition – indeed, Annie Oakley outshot John Lavett in a match there the previous fall. Still, change was inevitable.

William Kerr (later a Pittsburgh Pirates owner and president) helped facilitate the partial movement of the grandstand and the new construction of what some baseball researchers term "Exposition Park III" for the 1890 baseball season. Baseball replaced horse racing, first by the local Players' League who subsequently merged with the National League Alleghenys in 1891. The team gradually became known as the "Pirates" after opportunistically signing star second baseman Louis Bierbauer. Within a decade, the park hosted the first modern World Series in 1903 before the Pirates moved to Forbes Field in 1909. Exposition Park's grandstand seems to have been dismantled or destroyed in the summer of 1916, yet mysteriously, conclusive evidence dating the park's last days has yet to be found.

Horse racing in the Pittsburgh area later continued in many area parks such as tracks at Brunot's Island, the Schenley Park Oval, and The Meadows. If you find yourself walking between the North Shore's two modern day stadiums, take a moment to envision horses racing around you in a half mile oval track, cheered on by thousands.

The Remains of the Year 2019

Reviewing a successful year for the Society

Ruth McCartan

As I look back at 2019, it was the Society's best tour year ever, Perry North, Observatory Hill, Central North Side to name only a few of the neighborhoods featured. This could not have been accomplished without the hard work of our Board of Directors and members – plus a few friends. Hundreds were exposed to the varied and interesting history of the old Allegheny City.

February, Black history month, we explored Allegheny's African-American history, walking the streets of East Allegheny. Avery Institute gave a classical education to black students from all over the country back in the mid 1800s. Henry Highland Garnet, the first black minister to conduct services in the

House of Representatives was its second president. If you had attended this tour, you would have learned the Society hopes to get the original Avery Bell out of storage and placed in a prominent location in the Commons. Check out the Ioby website as we are collecting donations for this project and your donation will be matched. The cold and windy weather forced us into The Allegheny Brewing Co. where a glass of locally brewed beer warmed us up.

March, gave us Woman's history month when we featured female authors and artists of Allegheny and North Side. You know them: Mary Cassatt, Gertrude Stein, Ida Tarbell, the major stars, but did you know of Lois Weber, an early female movie director born in Allegheny City. Tom Wilson, a Board member rediscovered her, and with his research, pushed for her to be honored with a Pennsylvania Historical marker this past summer. The tour ended during a March snow storm with a visit to City Books and a conversation with a current Allegheny City woman writer, Kathleen George.

April featured our Annual Meeting, which was held at the Byzantine Catholic Seminary on Perrysville Avenue. Jon Klosinski, a new Board member, gave a brief presentation on the World War II letters he has catalogued and that the Society gave to the University of Pittsburgh Archives. Light hors d'oeuvres preceded an informative talk by Todd Wilson, author of *Pittsburgh's Bridges* published by Arcadia Publishing. Featured images of many of the present and lost bridges in Allegheny and North Side brought back memories to all in the audience. The evening ended with a tour of the seminary chapel and its beautiful icons.

The new murals along the highway retaining wall on Route 28 were the subject of our walking tour in May. You drive by them at high speed, unable to see these historical images of this lost Allegheny neighborhood. The Pennsylvania Canal, Thomas Carlin and Sons Foundry, and Marohnic Bookstore sandblasted vignettes are all that remain. The very heart of this once vibrant area, St. Nicholas Roman Catholic church (dating from 1894) and the first Croatian national parish in the U. S., was the last building to remain, and was razed in 2013.

Summer in the City. Riverview Park was featured with an early evening June walk. It is hard to realize you are in an urban environment while hiking their nature trails. Riverview is one of the grand parks of the city and a member of the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy. The park office & visitors center was built by the Works Progress Administration back in 1941, a nice cut-stone building. The Wissahickon Nature Center built in 1913 (now gone) gave hundreds of Allegheny City children their first experience of their natural environment. City Park Ranger, Nancy Schaffer, deserves a special *thank you* for coming in on her off day to guide us.

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The East Commons was the star for July, and we started the tour at the new North East Fountain and ended at the Allegheny Elks. Tim Zinn, a member of the Elks, told of the history of the organization concluding with a building tour. Adult beverages served by the oldest active bartender capped off the evening.

August brought us back to Spring Hill to view murals and mansions with an impromptu private piano concert by Tom Roberts playing his composition entitled *The Allegheny Rag* which was commissioned by the Society to commemorate the 100th anniversary of Allegheny “joining” Pittsburgh. You can’t plan this happening. That summer evening ended after a walk to Spring Hill Brewery and a cooling cider drink.

In September, Union Dale Cemetery welcomed us for an extensive walking tour of politicians, soldiers, philanthropists, and a North Side madam to name only a few of the highlighted citizens of Union Dale. Thank you to Sarah Schneider who created and coordinated the tour, and the cemetery management for welcoming us.

Craig Britcher one of our new Board members created a new tour of the baseball- and football-related historical sites found around Heinz Field and PNC Park. Exposition Park came to light, along with the various baseball teams and players, courtesy of Craig’s research. We stood where Franco caught the “Immaculate Reception” and Roberto Clemente hit his 3,000th hit. What an experience for any Pittsburgh and Allegheny sports fan.

A new program for the Society is a Book Club. It was the idea of Mark Tomlinson who leads the group. It explores local and locally associated books. The group meets every two months and is growing in participation. Check on the website or the meet-up site for current information.

Three new Board members were added this year, Carole Ashbridge, Jon Klosinski, and Craig Britcher, who are a welcome addition to the group, and who have already made important contributions.

The Society did more than tours and meetings in 2019: newsletters, record keeping, merchandise sales, and communication with individuals and groups about Allegheny City history, helped to fill out the year. The Society has many new and interesting plans for 2020. Come join us.



That last statement was written before Covid-19 entered our lives and gatherings were restricted. I cannot say when the Society will be back with its plans for 2020—only time will tell. So, keep checking our website, Facebook page, and Meet-up site for information on future events. Stay safe and healthy. This too will pass...

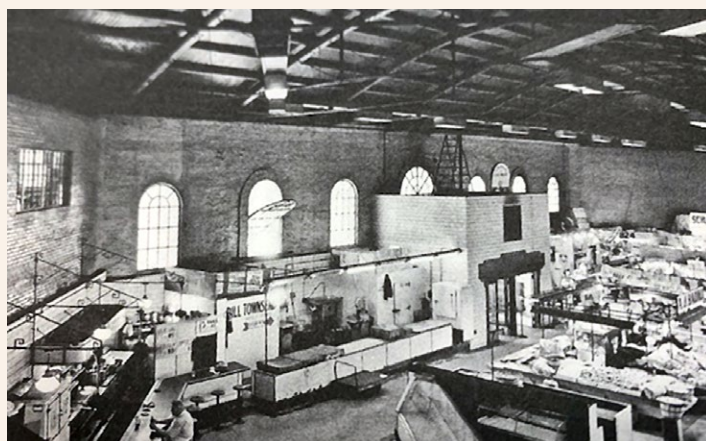


Photo: Pittsburgh History & Landmarks Foundation

The Allegheny Market House

A community “shopping center” for over 100 years

Sarah Schneider

When the Allegheny Market House opened in 1863, its well-lit interior was home to vendors of all types. Records show that the stalls inside housed butchers, green grocers, poultry dealers, dairymen, and trades people. Outside the market, there were vendors selling all types of goods. The market catered to both wholesale and retail customers.

The City of Allegheny chose the firm of Barr and Moser to design the market, and the firm of White and Alexander to build it. The new market replaced an earlier one built around 1830. The new market stood at the center of Allegheny, occupying the prominent southeast corner of Federal and Ohio Streets.

This grand building was razed in 1965 to build Allegheny Center (a modern shopping center) and a highrise apartment building. Later, the Pittsburgh History and Landmarks Foundation erected a historical plaque near the site commemorating the former market house.

ACS member Judy Cook Robertson has many memories of the Market House of the 1950s. Judy grew up on Marshall Avenue, and was a 1958 graduate of Annunciation High School on North Charles Street. “The Market House was located on Federal Street with East Ohio Street on one side and Sandusky on the other,” she remembers. “Boggs and Buhl Department Store was catty-corner on Federal Street and Ober Park was just across Federal Street. Catty corner on one side was Sears, Roebuck and across the street from the back of the market house was McCrory’s five-and-ten-cent store. The Library was on Federal Street just before the market house, with the street car stop right in front. Across from the library on Federal Street was Buhl Planetarium.”

Judy continues, “As you entered the market house from the Federal Street entrance, there usually sat a man who cro-

cheted articles and sold them. Right inside the door to the left was a stand that sold eggs, noodles, poultry and smeerkase (cottage cheese) in the '40s and '50s, this was my aunt's stand (my mother's sister). Her name was Mary Elizabeth Greene and her husband, Homer Ross Greene was Director of Lands and Buildings for the City. As a little girl, I remember going to my aunt's stand. When I had to use the toilet, I would go up to Hite's Drug Store that was on the corner facing the Library. Catty corner from my aunt's stand on the same side as Hite's was Andy Schlosser's Meats. In the center of the Market House was Louis Hahn's Flowers. Sylvan Hahn was my grandmother's brother; I'm thinking Louis's father.

Before my aunt had the stand, my grandmother, Mary A. Schmitt owned the stand. My grandfather, Philip Schmitt, had been a streetcar conductor who was injured on the job and could no longer work so he made the homemade noodles that my grandmother sold at the stand. She passed away in 1924 and I am not sure if my aunt took over the stand then – probably so since she would have been 28.

My mother told me when she was a young girl, probably 9 or 10, she used to deliver food from the stand to the rich people over in the area of Beech Avenue. One of her other stops was the Madam's (Nettie Gordon's) house on East North Avenue. They would always have milk and cookies ready for her." (Editor's Note: Ms. Gordon is buried in Union Dale Cemetery. Her former



home is now the Light of Life Mission.)

ACS Board member Charlie Schneider recalls his grandfather Charles Schneider (b. 1885) telling the story of driving a wagonload of tomatoes from his family's Emsworth farm to the Heinz plant. At the same time, Charlie's great-grandparents had a produce stall in the Market House.

John Canning, long-time ACS Board member grew up, and still lives, on the North Side. He says, "At its prime, it was one hell of a market house, but, alas along came the automobile, the free parking spaces, a new way of shopping by self-selecting all products in one cart with one checkout, and, of course, massive refrigerators, all leading to a major transformation in how folks shopped."





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Allegheny Market House c.1905

Early afternoon view looking northeast toward the corner of Federal Street and South Diamond Street, with Allegheny's Carnegie Library in the background. (Detroit Publishing Company photograph collection; Library of Congress)