

REPORTER DISPATCH

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Remember The Ladies

Carole Ashbridge

As we celebrate the culmination of the years of struggle, protest, and articulate speeches that resulted in the ratification of the 19th amendment 100 years ago, we cannot help but remember that plea by Abigail Adams:

"I long to hear that you have declared an independency. And, by the way, in the new code of laws which I suppose it will be necessary for you to make, I desire you would remember the ladies and be more generous and favorable to them than your ancestors. Do not put such unlimited power into the hands of the husbands. Remember, all men would be tyrants if they could. If particular care and attention is not paid to the ladies, we are determined to foment a rebellion, and will not hold ourselves bound by any laws in which we have no voice or representation." And fomenting a rebellion is exactly what occurred.

One of the often overlooked avenues of the Women's Rights movement developed during the Progressive Era with the formation of a number of women's clubs. It was a means by which women could help nurture independent thinking, be informed of current cultural and societal current events, and transform public policy. The formation of these women's clubs also fostered the rise to prominence of a number of ladies in the Allegheny City and Pittsburgh area. Ironically enough not all were proponents of women's suffrage.

Woman's Club of Pittsburgh

On 4 November 1875 Helen Phileo Jenkins brought together at her home at 57 Arch Street in Allegheny City, a number of

women whose common thread was journalism and literary concerns. The invitation that was extended was for a "Blue Tea." In literary circles the term "Blue Stocking" was applied to women who had a taste for learning. Mrs. Jenkins was a confirmed suffragette and was known for her lectures around the cities of Pittsburgh and Allegheny. She was also a Universalist preacher in the Pittsburgh Universalist Church. According to Mrs. C. I. Wade (who wrote under the name of Bessie Bramble), the other women who attended the tea were Gertrude Phileo (Helen's sister), Millie J. Chapman, M.D., Minnie Owry, Ellen A Becker, Rev. Augusta J. Chapman, Mrs. John McCullough, the guest of honor, Mrs. Jane Grey Swisshelm, her daughter Zoe, and niece Miss Robinson.

The idea of women getting together without the eyes of men was a novel concept and the organization of this group of women into the Woman's Club of Pittsburgh was the first such club in Pennsylvania. At the initial meeting Jane Grey Swisshelm was presented with a pair of blue stockings on a silver tray before she addressed the women. Her talk was to be on William Shakespeare, but she had inadvertently left it at home and so delivered a talk on "The Women's Question." Swisshelm was also a champion of the suffrage movement in Pittsburgh and who, along with Helen Jenkins, belonged to the American Woman Suffrage Association. Jenkins was nominated to be President of the Woman's Club of Pittsburgh, but declined because of the potential of threats to other members of the club because of her association with the suffrage movement. However, when Miss Fanny Kyle, who was elected, declined to serve Jenkins assumed the presidency.

By 1880, Jenkins had moved to Detroit, Michigan where she continued to be a nationally known figure in support of the suffrage movement. Upon her death on 9 March 1913, she was lauded as one who blazed the suffrage pathway.

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Fast forwarding twenty years, the formation of another prominent entity in the history of women's clubs in Allegheny county was taking place.

Twentieth Century Club

In April 1894, upon returning from Philadelphia where she became familiar with the New Century Club, Julia Morgan Harding invited a few women to her home at 59 Allegheny Avenue in Allegheny City and discussed a plan of organization for a club that would, according to their charter focus on "woman's work, thought and action: advancing her interests; promoting science, literature and art; and providing a quiet place of meeting for its members." Harding was the great-granddaughter of Pittsburgh's first mayor, and was a prominent figure in journalism, music, a faculty member of Margaret Morrison Carnegie College, and an advocate for clubs.

At the third informal meeting of the group of visionary women in May of that year, the name Twentieth Century Club was proposed by Kate Cassatt McKnight who was the daughter of the prominent lawyer and U.S. Congressman, Robert McKnight of Western Avenue, Allegheny City. The charter for the new club was filed in November of that year and was granted on 8 January 1895. The club adopted the motto of "Non nobis solum, sed toti mundo," (not for ourselves alone, but for all the world).

As the club began to grow, it featured talks and classes on music, language, literature, and social issues. It became a force for addressing social issues and was instrumental in establishing the Pittsburgh Playground Association and the Consumers' League of Western Pennsylvania. It attracted many of the educated and socially prominent women of the county. One of those women was Jennie Bradley Roessing who was elected the club's recording secretary in 1904. About the same time according to Roberta J. Leach in her essay, "Jennie Bradley Roessing and the Fight for Woman Suffrage in Pennsylvania,"



Photo: Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University

Pittsburgh's Jenny Bradley Roessing drove the Justice Bell to campaign events in all 67 Pennsylvania counties.

Roessing's career in the suffrage movement began. She and four other women including Hannah J. Patterson, a spirited champion for women and graduate of Wilson College, organized the Allegheny County Equal Rights Association. Roessing and Patterson formed a formidable team in taking the suffrage message across the state.

On 10 January, 1912 the seed was planted at the Twentieth Century Club for the formation of an anti-suffrage society when Mrs. Horace Brock spoke to oppose the proposition to grant women the right to vote. It was on 1 February 1912 that the Pittsburgh Association of Women Opposed to Women Suffrage was formed and Julia Morgan Harding made president. For the founder of the club devoted to the advancing of women's interests, it was, indeed, ironic. It was not unusual to find Roessing and Patterson speaking at one event, while Harding was speaking at another.

Speaking at a luncheon of the Hungry Club on 3 December 1912, as reported in *The Pittsburgh Post Gazette* on that day, Harding said that the women who make spectacles of themselves should be spanked and that women are too emotional to be trusted in times of excitement. At the same time Hannah Patterson and Jennie Roessing were presenting to the Women's Club of Wilkinsburg on equal suffrage.

The dichotomy between the two sides played out in the newspapers and in the speeches that were given at civic organizations around the city. On Saturday, 11 May 1912 a recommendation was made to the membership of the Twentieth Century Club that "the subject of suffrage and anti-suffrage be excluded from the club and that no literature regarding either move-



ment be sent to club members.” According to the *Pittsburgh Press* on 14 May 1912, many members thought the “ruling was too autocratic and the question is too pressing to shelve.” An examination of the minutes of the organization found no record of this ever being formally adopted. However, in October, 1917, members of the Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage protested a private reception that was to be hosted at the Twentieth Century Club by a member of the Suffrage Association. In a letter to those who opposed the reception, President, Mrs. William Watson Smith replied,

“For many years, the Twentieth Century Club has refused to permit the subject of Suffrage to be made as issue in the Club by the Suffrage Association and the present Executive Board is not empowered to have the subject of Suffraged [sic] made an issue by the Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage.”

Jennie Bradley Roessing and Hannah Patterson continued their push for equal suffrage, embarking on a tour of Pennsylvania with the Liberty Bell of Suffrage in 1915. Roessing headed the Pennsylvania Woman Suffrage Association and then in 1917 became vice president of the National American Woman’s Suffrage Association with Patterson as secretary. As such with Carrie Chapman Catt, president, they were able to implement the “Pittsburgh Plan” for achieving equal voting rights for women. With the onset of World War I, their interests

turned to other causes, but the two remained friends until the death of Hannah in 1937, just months after she was re-elected treasurer of the Twentieth Century Club. As a testimony to that friendship, Patterson left a portion of her estate to Roessing.

Julia Morgan Harding maintained her opposition to suffrage, and after the amendment was passed continued her “Current Event” talks at the



Hannah Patterson

Twentieth Century Club, advocated for the preservation of the Fort Pitt Block House, and the Tuesday Musical Club, until her death in 1943.

Four of the most influential, but often overlooked, women of the suffrage era in western Pennsylvania can attribute much of their success to the affiliation with women’s clubs. Jenkins, Harding, Roessing, and Patterson were able to gain respect and esteem from their association with the Woman’s Club of Pittsburgh and the Twentieth Century Club.



SLABTOWN

Sarah Schneider

The name *Slabtown* caught my interest when I read Pittsburgh writer Marie Benedict’s historic novel *Carnegie’s Maid*. Fictitious Clara Kelley is an Irish immigrant in 1863 who becomes a maid to Andrew Carnegie’s mother. In the novel, Clara goes to visit her cousin and his family in Slabtown in Allegheny City. She finds them living in squalor and helps them by taking food from her employer for them. Clara travels to her cousin’s by horse-drawn streetcar.

So, where was Slabtown (aka Barefoot Square) located in Allegheny’s First Ward, and how was it connected to Andrew Carnegie (1835–1919) and his friends?

William Carnegie moved with his wife Margaret Morrison, son Andrew, 12, and Andrew’s younger brother Tom (1843–1886) to Allegheny City when he could no longer support the family in Scotland.

William had been a master weaver with four looms operating on the first floor of the family house in Dumferline. Hand weaving at home had been a lucrative way to earn money until the weaving became automated. The family had become destitute, with Margaret resorting to sewing the soles of shoes when she could no longer sell food out of their home.

When they first arrived in Allegheny, they rented two rooms from Margaret’s sister in a building on a back lot in Slabtown. Later they moved to the house on the front of the property (vignette in header), which was at 336 Rebecca Street. The street was later renamed Reedsdale Street when Allegheny became part of Pittsburgh. That site would be most familiar to Pittsburghers as the former location of Three Rivers Stadium.

Andrew or Andra (his mother’s name for him) met two other young men – Henry Phipps Jr. (1839–1930) and Irishman Henry W. Oliver (1840–1904) – in Slabtown. The Phipps family had come from Philadelphia to Allegheny City. Phipps Sr. was a shoemaker, and the family lived next door to the Carnegies. Henry Oliver came to Allegheny City as a two-year-old when his family emigrated from Dungannon, Ireland.

When families moved to Slabtown they found themselves in a rather squalid and overcrowded neighborhood. Research shows that Slabtown was indeed “an unpleasant place to live.” It had no municipal water system until 1848, no gas lines until 1853, and no sewer system. Wild hogs roamed the streets attack-

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ing children. There may have even been a red-light district. Such was life for the families in Slabtown.

Andrew's younger brother Tom was able to attend public school, but Andrew took employment. His first job was as a bobbin boy, then, at 13, he became a telegraph messenger for the railroad (as did Henry Oliver). Henry Phipps worked as an office boy.

Col. James Anderson, a wealthy iron manufacturer, lived in the Manchester section of Allegheny City. His grand house faced south towards Pittsburgh, down a long slope to Beaver Lane (later, Pennsylvania Avenue). Colonel Anderson had a great influence on the working boys in the area by opening his 400-volume library to them in 1850. Margaret enrolled her Andra in "The Sunshine Club," where working boys were encouraged to borrow a book from Anderson's library on a Saturday and return it the following Saturday. While it appears that Phipps and Oliver attended public school, Andrew had no more formal schooling after arriving in Allegheny, but he read widely and studied to learn as much as he could. Most of Col. Anderson's books formed the nucleus of the library at the original Allegheny High School in the 1880s.

Andrew and his youthful friends all became well-known industrialists despite their humble roots. Each can be followed separately in articles, books, and online. Andrew and Henry Phipps became partners in Carnegie Steel. Carnegie went on to establish libraries and a museum.



Andrew Carnegie (16) and brother Tom (7) in 1851
Photo: Project Gutenberg

Carnegie Borough, south of the city, is named after him and was also given a Carnegie Library. Phipps's name is connected with Phipps Conservatory in Oakland (the first Phipps Conservatory was on the site of the current National Aviary). Henry Oliver did not go into business with his friends. He fought for two years in the Civil War, and then in 1863, formed a partnership to create the firm of Lewis, Oliver and Phillips that manufactured hardware. He also owned a great deal of the real estate in downtown Pittsburgh.

Note: See the Summer 2018, Number 75 issue of the *Reporter Dispatch* for articles about Col. James Anderson, his house, and his library.



Percy McGrew Gerwig

Ruth McCartan

The Allegheny City Society has an ongoing project to document all veteran monuments, memorials, plaques or tablets found in Allegheny City and the North Side. The following article will tell of a young Alleghenian, a World War I pilot whose name can be found on three different veteran memorials and who has a small scholarship fund in his honor.

His name is Percy McGrew Gerwig. He lived on Davis Avenue, attended John Morrow School, and graduated from Allegheny High School in 1914 at the age of 16. But Percy was more than a sum of where he lived or the schools that he attended. This is his story, gathered from documents and newspaper articles, a boy willing to fight and die for his country.

The first place that we learn of Percy's fate during the Great War is at the North Side YMCA. On a wall of a first floor recreation room, among the mats and basketballs, is a memorial plaque telling of the "Hi Y" boys who perished serving their country. Hi Y was an organization for high school boys only, dedicated to the Christian ideals of the Y.M.C.A. The boys attended meetings and summer camps featuring various sporting events, this being intermixed with learning the worth of scholastic achievement, service, Christian values, and leadership. The Gerwigs also spent many summers up at Lake Chautauqua at the Institute with the Overholts, Obers, the Chalfant and the Lappes. Putting on plays, sailing on the lake, listening and playing music, reading the classics, discussing current events with other families in their social sphere. The Gerwig extended family was very involved in Allegheny German social and cultural life with many of them working for the Teutonia Insurance Company.

On one of the outside walls of the Old Allegheny High School Annex is featured the second of the three mentions of Percy. Here he is listed with 22 others who attended Allegheny High School and never returned from the war. His father George Gerwig spoke at the plaque's dedication in 1925. George Gerwig was involved in some form of education all his adult life, first as a teacher, then a school board member, both in Allegheny and Pittsburgh, and lastly the secretary and treasurer of the H. C. Frick Educational Commission. He was responsible for the establishment of the scholarship fund in his son's name, now with the Pittsburgh Foundation entitled the "Unselfish Service Award" given to Pittsburgh school students.

In the summer of 1914 the Gerwig family was traveling in Europe with a group of teachers from Pittsburgh. While visiting in Europe World War I broke out on August 3 when Germany declared war on France. The family's chaotic return to the States was featured on the front page of the *Pittsburgh Post* along with the unfolding war news. Percy and his sister Margaret listened to their father tell of their travails while being welcomed at the railroad station by hundreds of people. Percy had graduated that June from high school and was heading off to Penn State in the fall majoring in Mechanical Engineering.

Military leaders were becoming worried that the war in Europe would involve America soon and the country was not prepared. But how to prepare? Where would the junior officers that were needed to serve in leadership positions come from? A plan to hold university and college student volunteer military training camps was begun in the summer of 1913. A few hundred attendees paid their own way for this basic military instruction, which was conducted by regular Army soldiers. It was a success, and planning was moving forward for summer camps in 1914 at various sites in the country. Many believed only highly educated members of society would be able to be turned into successful military officers in such a short time. In May 1915 the Lusitania was sunk with the loss of over a hundred American lives. That summer Percy attended junior officer's summer training camp in Ludington, Michigan learning basic marksmanship, first aid and leadership techniques. He returned to college in the fall and in 1916 he participated in the summer camp at Plattsburgh, New York and became a member of the trained military reserve who would become commissioned officers in time of war. President Wilson declared war on April 6, 1917, the officer reserves were called up and told to report. Percy went to Chandler Field in Essington, Pennsylvania which is a few miles outside of Philadelphia on July 2, 1917 and enlisted in the Army as a Private First Class at the young age of 19. After basic training he was ordered to report to an Army air field outside of Austin, Texas called Penn Field. The air field still needed to be converted from a rock-filled cornfield, and was not ready for pilot training in September. Percy reported and he was discharged home his "Services no longer required" to wait to be called back to active duty. The United States and most especially the Army were not prepared to train all the student pilots that volunteered at the beginning of the war. Percy was not to be denied, and on June 4, 1918 he was inducted into the United States Marines at the recruiting station in Pittsburgh. He had volunteered for Marine pilot training. It's not known what propelled this young man with such a promising future to want to become a World War I military pilot and endure all the risks associated with flying and war. It's only conjecture to



reason why: was it his seeing the early days of the war in Europe and its devastation, maybe he felt America's condemnation of all things German or maybe just the desire that he had for adventure and the glamour of flying.

The last mention of Percy McGrew Gerwig's name is on the dramatic monument of "Sacrifice" the World War I Honor Roll in Legion Park in Brighton Heights with the listing of the many names of war veterans of the 27th Ward. He has a place of honor before the thousands of veteran names, his is listed under "Our Honored Dead." Sacrifice was dedicated in 1922 and was the largest gathering ever in the 27 Ward. What Percy volunteered for was the special Marine Corps flight training program being held at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). The rank of Gunnery Sergeant was given to the promising student trainees with a commission of Second Lieutenant in the Marine Corps Reserves Flying Corp to be awarded when flight school was completed and you earned "your wings." The privilege of flight training was only given to men who passed a strenuous series of tests both physical and mental. The age requirement was for men between 19 and 39, weighting between 135 to 165 and at least two years of college or university study, single and unmarried. Percy was living his dream as one of 49 in Class Number 5 which started in June 1918. The cadets would spend 10 weeks of military training and ground school at Walker Memorial Student Center, which was converted in to barracks on the MIT campus. On August 19, 1918 the flight students - after finishing ground school - were transferred to the Marine Flying Field just outside Miami, Florida. Percy had just celebrated his 21 birthday. The Marine flying field was a small sandy airstrip on the edge of the Everglades. In March the Marines had purchased the Glenn Curtiss Field for \$1 and renamed it the Marine Flying Field, then they commissioned the Curtiss Flying school instructors to train the incoming Marine student pilots. Aerial

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reconnaissance, navigation, gunnery, aerial tactics and bombing instruction filled their days. Flight training was done in the Curtiss J N -4A which was nicknamed “Jenny” built of wood and fabric. Before graduating, 40 to 50 hours of flight training had to be completed. The Jenny was a two-seater biplane, in the front was the pilot and behind him was the observer. The Marine in the second seat, the observer, functioned as enemy spotter, aerial photographer, machine gunner and was sometimes responsible for dropping bombs on the enemy by hand. The pilot flew the plane, fired his stationary machine gun and fought off aerial attackers. One added benefit of flight training: if you washed out as a pilot you became an observer. Later in the war the observer was not required to learn to fly the plane.

On October 22, 1918, a sunny Florida day, with flight school almost over, Percy and classmate Martin A. Hope were soloing and the plane malfunctioned causing it to plummet straight into the ground. Percy it is believed was flying and to save lives on the ground he cut the engine before crashing. A

sign of excellent character his commander stated later. This was one of two air accidents that month. Early flight was very dangerous with most air casualties during the war coming from accidents not combat. Telegrams were sent to the grieving families. A parent’s worst nightmare became George Gerwigs’s reality. The family had just hours earlier received a letter from him telling how much he was enjoying himself. Percy’s body was sent home to 1105 Davis Avenue with a military guard for a private burial. In Section 10 of Highwood Cemetery he was laid to rest next to his mother who died when Percy was four. His tombstone reads, “Pilot, 1st Marine Aviation Corp.” Within two weeks the Great War was over, and in not too many years the veteran memorials started to be dedicated with thousands of citations like *Marine Corp Cadet Percy McGrew Gerwig dead at 21.*

It is the goal of the Allegheny City Society veterans’ project to ensure that the honored dead be not forgotten.

