

REPORTER DISPATCH

JOURNAL OF OLD ALLEGHENY HISTORY AND LORE

REFLECTION ON A HERITAGE

BY KATHLEEN M. WASHY

When Union Dale Cemetery put out a call in 2010 for help in the annual placement of flags on veterans graves for Memorial Day, Boy Scout Venturing Crew 321 from Mt. Nebo United Presbyterian Church answered the invitation and began by helping the dwindling number of local veterans mark the graves. In 2011, the Crew drew in other area Scout troops and packs to help place approximately 2,500 U.S. flags on veterans graves in the cemetery. What has become an annual event on the Thursday before Memorial Day, Scouts, leaders and family members treat their charge with solemnity, by walking the cemetery quietly, while searching for veterans graves to mark with flags – an action that was begun more than 150 years ago.

Originally called Decoration Day, Memorial Day was initially established on May 5, 1868 by an order issued by General John A. Logan, the national head of the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR). In this order, he called on local GAR posts to mark May 30 as an annual date to pay tribute to deceased Union veterans by assembling and marching to local cemeteries. Once there, post members were to decorate the veterans graves with flowers and hold a graveyard service. As reported in the *Pittsburgh Weekly Gazette*, local GAR posts kept their events restrained as there was little time to plan. While not discouraging the decoration of graves, the decision instead was to focus their energy

that year on a program for honorably discharged soldiers and sailors. Assembling initially at the League Hall on Allegheny City's Lacock Street, the parade of veterans processed to First Presbyterian Church in Pittsburgh, where a service was held.

While the 1868 event was low key as it was planned at the last minute, the following year's was a well-choreographed event. On May 30, 1869, local GAR posts held the main program in Pittsburgh's Academy of Music, after which delegations of veterans processed in divisions to the area cemeteries. For Union Dale Cemetery, a division of veterans marched from downtown, over the Suspension Bridge (Sixth Street Bridge), to Federal Street. While parading along Federal Street, the veterans were joined by approximately 200 orphans from the Orphan Asylum of Allegheny and Pittsburgh, many of whom were war orphans.

Their route continued on until they reached Union Dale Cemetery, a cemetery that earlier in the year had been a consolidation of two branches – the Mount Union branch founded in 1846 and the Hilldale branch founded in 1857. Marching up the streets, the growing parade was met with decorations of flags, wreaths, and flowers that hung on both businesses and homes. Throngs of spectators lined the route. This was the first of many such celebrations. Once at Union Dale, a solemn dirge

was played while relatives and friends decorated approximately 120 veterans graves with flowers, starting in the cemetery's Hilldale branch before moving on to the Mount Union branch.



With 1868 a modest beginning and 1869 an organized affair, the 1870 Memorial Day proved to be a historic day, one that was dominated by the laying of the cornerstone for a new Civil War Monument on Seminary Hill, a location which was renamed Monument Hill that day. A lengthy ceremony to mark the occasion was held, with the *Pittsburgh Weekly Gazette* reporting that the “only event which marred the occasion in the slightest, [was] when the band, mistaking their time, struck up before the minister [Rev. Dr. Page] had concluded [the final benediction].” Flags and flowers were then placed on the graves in the area's cemeteries.

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Post 68 VFW parade, Post 68 VFW Women's Auxiliary, and Post 68 VFW at Union Dale (1931)

(F. Theodore Wagner, Photographs, ca.1903–1947, MSP 388, Library and Archives Division, Senator John Heinz History Center)

Throughout the next 50 years, May 30 would annually be marked with ceremonies and the decoration of Union veterans' graves. The annual processions to the cemeteries expanded not only to include Spanish American War veterans, which were added by the turn of the century, but also to incorporate civic organizations, including Boy Scouts. The most notable of the other groups was Swift's Boys Brigade, which began escorting the veterans in 1894, the same year that Captain E.M. McCombs formed the group at Allegheny City's United Presbyterian Church. Swift's was not the only local boys brigade – one from the Baptist Church (Woodburn) also

marched to Union Dale in 1895 – nor was it the only local civic organization to participate; however, the Swift's Boys Brigade would prove to be unswerving in their commitment in the years to come. During the Memorial Day processions, Brigade members would escort weary older GAR members to carriages that would take them the remaining distance and once at the cemetery, Brigade members would also help the veterans decorate the graves.

By 1898, the number of veteran graves had increased and the corresponding crowd was reported at 10,000 that year. Prior to the ceremony of decorating the graves with flowers, "all the graves of the old soldiers [were] previously marked with small flags to avoid any chance of some being missed," so reported the *Pittsburgh Press*. By 1903, there was a push to transform the Soldiers' Lot, which was a section in the cemetery established for the Civil War veterans, into an area that looked like a national burying ground. This section would draw attention in July 1910 when the Cemetery superintendent removed all 250 flags that had been placed on those Civil War veteran graves on Memorial Day, as reported in the *Pittsburgh Gazette Times* (July 8). The excuse for the removal was reported to be the poor weathering of the flags.

As the years went on, the number of living veterans declined and the crowds shrank. Then, in 1919, when World War I brought a resurgence of awareness, the crowd in attendance of the services at Union Dale Cemetery were considered "unusually large" by the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*. The sudden renewal of attention was a natural consequence of the war. By time of the Great Depression years, there were very few remaining GAR veterans to take part in the Memorial Day placement of flowers and flags on the graves; the ones still living had to be taken in automobiles to the cemetery.

During World War II, there was a shift in the tone for Memorial Day. Processions, services and decorating of graves were still held, but picnics and recreation were becoming a prominent part of the day. As the war was winding down in 1945, mainly women and young children were in

attendance at the ceremonies – and in leisure at the parks – while the men remained at their jobs, focused on reaching the end of the war. Into the 1950s and 1960s, the day continued to be marked by events decorating veterans graves but the shift to a day of recreation was more apparent with increased automobile accidents, especially when falling close to or on a weekend.

Because of a lack of veteran interest, the year 1962 marked the end of an era as there was no longer a parade to Union Dale Cemetery. While the parade had its day, Swift's Mission Brigade was active in any ceremonies until the Brigade disbanded in 1969. Another big change took place in 1971, when Memorial Day was designated as the last Monday in May. For most of the public, this day became a day that marked the beginning of summer. Veterans continued to place flags on the graves and ceremonies continued at Union Dale Cemetery but this was nowhere close to the scale of the GAR years. With diminishing numbers in recent years, the veterans turned to Scouts to help, and ultimately to serve in their stead and see to the placement of flags.

While there are no longer throngs of people turning out for a parade from the North Side to Union Dale Cemetery, the veterans in Union Dale Cemetery are remembered in silent reflection by those decorating the graves with flags. Thanks to the original impetus of the Venturing Crew 321, which has in recent years merged with Scout Troop 321, the tradition of what was originally called Decoration Day has passed on to Scouts, leaders, and families, providing a new generation the opportunity to honor the veterans who rest in peace in Union Dale Cemetery.

(Author's note: Unless otherwise noted, any newspaper references are to issues published on May 30 or May 31 of the respective year.)

The Allegheny City Society arranged for the transfer of two 1950s N.S. VFW Memorial Day films to YouTube. You can find them at:
<https://youtu.be/TUQ8Y5CxxuQ>
<https://youtu.be/FulPIYokua8>

THE GREAT ZACCHINI

BY CRAIG BRITCHER

On May 18, 1936 the *Pittsburgh Sun-Telegraph* ran an image from the World's Fair Show, captioned in part, "Remarkable picture showing the Human Projectile... sailing through the air..." The daring Vittorio Zacchini soared to both an apex and overall length of 200 feet over twin Ferris Wheels on the North Side Exposition Grounds (the site of Exposition Park prior to 1916 and now the area between present day PNC Park and Heinz Field). A puff of theatrical smoke belched from the cannon which shot him out at a speed of roughly 70 miles per hour towards a waiting catch net, with the Phipps Apartments in the background. The newspaper caption further indicated that this was the first successful photograph of this stunt and remarkably an original print survives (image courtesy of Swann Auction Galleries).

Daredevil stunts always thrill audiences by dangerously stretching the boundaries of belief and possibility. Rossa Matilda Richter or "Zazel" first flew as far as 70 feet out of a cannon in 1877 in London. Later, Ildebrando Zacchini (1868–1948) founded Circus Olympia at the turn of the century and trained all nine of his children to become performers. In 1922, he created a human cannonball act debuting in Cairo, Egypt. Zacchini brothers Hugo and Edmondo, principally the engineer who calculated trajectories, were the core pioneers of the Italian family which created and popularized the death-defying spectacle for decades, much as the Flying Wallendas became the standard bearers of high wire acts. Vittorio (1904–1997), an adopted brother who later went by his original last name Mangiavacchi, first flew on the North Side in 1934. The traveling Zacchini act became a local Kennywood staple in the following decades as the Zacchini women carried on the show as "projectiles" during WWII. Vittorio's daughter Maddalena was also later "shot" (out of the cannon).

Thought to be propelled by compressed air, the Zacchinis at times denied this explanation and created an air of mystery surrounding their cannon's technology trying to thwart copycats. Mario Zacchini was the last original brother to be shot out of a cannon at the age of 69 in 1991.

The photo recalls two local history connections. The inventor of the Ferris Wheel, George Ferris (1859–1896), lived on Allegheny City's Arch Street for three years. Also, the Rodman cannon was built at the Fort Pitt Foundry during the Civil War along the Allegheny River in what is now the Strip District. As noted in a 2018 *Western Pennsylvania History* magazine article by Leslie Przybylek, in 1865 Jules Verne published the novel *From the Earth to the Moon* in which three men and two dogs are shot to the moon from Tampa, Florida using a cannon

based on the Rodman cannon. Incredibly, Ildebrando Zacchini lived in Tampa, read the book, and was inspired by the story.

The Zacchinis' popularity resulted in the inevitable next step of pop culture success – parody. On PBS nationally and WQED locally Pittsburgh native Michael Keaton appeared in two 1975 "Flying Zookeeni Brothers" skits on Mister Rogers' Neighborhood and two years later the Muppet Show featured episodes with the "Flying Zucchini Brothers."

Sources, along with newspaper surveys:

Przybylek, Leslie. "Shooting the Moon with a Pittsburgh Icon." Curator's Corner–*Western Pennsylvania History* p14,15 Fall 2018.

"The Zacchini Family: Human Cannonballs" <https://travsd.wordpress.com/2018/01/17/the-zacchini-family-human-cannonballs/>



Photo from the *Pittsburgh Sun-Telegraph*, May 18, 1936 – Vittorio Zacchini soaring 200 feet over twin Ferris Wheels on the North Side Exposition Grounds

AND THEN THERE WERE NONE

BY SARAH SCHNEIDER

Ask anyone in the “older” generation about the movie theaters on the North Side of Pittsburgh. If they grew up there, a flood of memories comes back of what movies they saw and who they went with! These theaters were scattered throughout the North Side before and after they were born. The admission was 10¢/25¢/35¢/50¢ depending on the time of day. The Nickelodeon flourished in storefronts from 1905–1915. The first one started in downtown Pittsburgh on Smithfield Street.



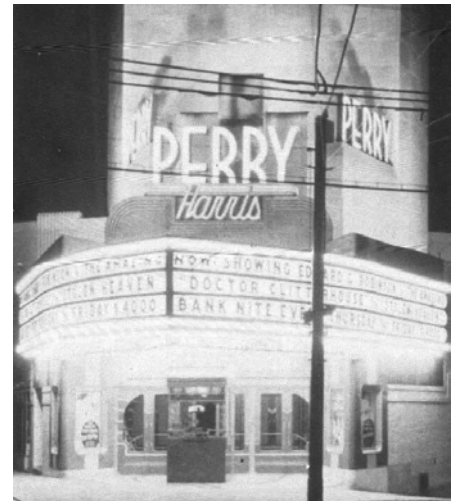
The New Garden Theater

Actually, some early theaters opened with stage shows, burlesque, vaudeville, and silent movies. ACS member John Canning found 16 theaters listed in the 1928 Pittsburgh Directory. Some of the smaller movie houses may have disappeared when the “talkies” and big motion pictures arrived, but every neighborhood appears to have had their own special place. John says there was even a North Side drive-in located between the present Northview Heights and the Spring Garden Valley! Growing up in Brighton Heights, he could walk with his friends to the Perry, the Bellevue, the Paramount and sometimes the Manchester neighborhood’s Hippodrome. The building was renamed in 1917 (began as the Imperial in 1914 with early vaudeville) and closed in 1960. People rode trolleys to theaters all over the North Side.

I found 11 theaters in the 1950 phone directory. Those not mentioned above included the Sky, Century Family and Arcadia Theatres, all on East Ohio Street. Add to the list The Northside and The Novelty, both on Federal Street.

When I started my research, I found that there was a “New Garden Theatre” in 1914 or 1915. It was replaced by the newer 1,000-seats venue designed by Thomas N. Scott. The owner’s name was David E. Park, who owned the Park Building downtown. You could find first and second run movies there for years. Adult films started in 1972 and it closed in 2007. The “Garden Theater Block” project features the restored Beaux Arts-style terra-cotta façade of the theater, and a new building with retail space, restaurants, and apartments.

In the Cinema Treasures guide, former Press/Trib film critic Ed Blank contributed a gem about the Variety Theater 1717 Beaver Avenue: “Located in the Manchester section of Pittsburgh’s North Side, it was known as the Comique (or Cinemique) from 1915–16, then the Manchester from 1916–18 and finally the New Variety and Variety from 1918–30. The property, if not necessarily the original structure, was used later for a bowling alley before being razed for a strip mall and the connector from the Fort



Duquesne Bridge to Routes 19 and 65.” ACS member Rosemary McLaughlin remembers “taking my little brother Frank Madia to see *To Kill a Mockingbird* and when the kids found things tucked in the tree, he asked if the mockingbird put them there! We went to the Paramount on Brighton Road. We also often walked to Bellevue Theater. I think it cost a quarter to get in and popcorn was 15¢ and a dime for a drink. I remember seeing the *The Seventh Inn of Happiness* and *Ben Hur*.”

DO YOU REMEMBER?

Harris-Perry Theater 1,261 seats; 3900 Perrysville Ave. next to Perry High School; Opened 1938; Closed in 1959. Served as an annex to the high school.

Kenyon Theater 1,644 seats; 819 Federal & Erie Sts; Opened 1909; Closed early 1950s. Considered North Side’s oldest theater.

Arcadia Theater 575 seats; 823 East Ohio St. (now under I-279); Closed 1959.

Brighton Theater 700 seats; Art Deco building at 1739 Brighton Place; Closed in the late 1960s; featured a 10-lane bowling alley on the 3rd floor.

Hippodrome Theater 900 seats; 1624 Beaver Ave, 1917–1960; part of the Manchester retail area (900 buildings demolished for urban redevelopment).

Atlas Theater 450 seats; 2603 Perrysville Ave. near N. Charles St; building survived in disrepair for many years.

Paramount Theater 530 seats; 3240 Brighton Rd. at Woods Run; 1920–1958; earlier named the “American Theater”; later an auto repair shop.

MARY CASSATT

BY AMELIA GEHRON

Mary Cassatt, quintessential Impressionist painter of maternal love, was born one of seven children in Allegheny City in May 1844. Her parents, Robert and Katherine Johnson Cassatt, lived in various houses in Allegheny City. They settled finally on Rebecca Street, which is now known as Reedsdale Street, the house was built in 1840. Mary's Father followed Robert Simpson, his previous business partner and Uncle, into public service, serving on the Select Council of Allegheny and was its fifth Mayor in 1847. During Robert's administration the Mt. Union Cemetery was laid out, which later became Union Dale cemetery.

Robert's inheritances and his successful business ventures made him a small fortune. In 1848, when Mary was four, the family moved to Hardwicke in Lancaster County, before sailing to England to see the Great London Exposition of 1851. The family spent two years in Paris and Germany; this was an educational advantage for their children. Mary became fluent in both French and German.

The Cassatt family returned to Pennsylvania and lived in Philadelphia while spending time in their country house in West Chester. Mary enrolled in the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts where Thomas Eakins was a classmate from 1860–62. Eakins would later be considered one of the greatest realistic painters in America. Mary commuted as a day student, while attending she became good friends with Elizabeth Haldeman. They both were in the top of their classes in painting and drawing. In 1867, Mary and Elizabeth decided to return to Paris to study. They studied with Edouard Frere and Paul Soyer because they hadn't been admitted to the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. The following year, 1868, her painting "Mandolin Player" was chosen for exhibition. Mary continued her study with Thomas Couture until the Franco-Prussian War began and she returned home. Her family was then living in Altoona, and she was still an unsold artist.

In 1871 Mary received a \$300 commission from The Roman Catholic Bishop of Pittsburgh, Michael Domenec, to copy two works by Antonio Correggio: *Coronation Of The Virgin*, and *Madonna of St. Jerome*. The copies were for St Paul's Cathedral in Oakland. The Coronation of the Virgin, the one selected, was installed in 1872, but was later destroyed in a fire at St. Paul's in 1877. The commission gave Mary money to return to Europe.

In 1874 Mary met Louisine Elder who was an heir to a sugar business fortune. They became great friends and because of their friendship, Mary convinced Louisine to purchase a pastel, *Ballet Rehearsal* while attending an exhibit by Degas. This was the beginning of a great friendship.

That same year, Degas invited Mary to join a group of artists that called themselves the "Independents," today known as the Impressionists; Monet, Sisley, Renoir, Pissarro, Morisot, were also members. The first exhibition included Degas's painting of a human figure, Monet and Pissarro, landscapes, but what they had in common was painting the reality that they saw in front of them. The paintings had small, thin brush strokes with an emphasis on light and its changing qualities. The exhibition was not a success. Critics disliked the light, airy paintings.

In the 1890s Mary was still studying, and took up printmaking after meeting Toulouse Lautrec. Mary later became known as the America's Greatest Printmaker.

In 1893, she produced a 72-foot-long mural for the Chicago World's Fair that heralded the accomplishments of Modern Women. The mural was created with the support of Mrs. Potter Palmer, a socialite from Chicago. With money Mary earned from selling her work, she was able to purchase Chateau de Beaufresne 50 miles outside of Paris, where she would spend the rest of her life.

Mary painted some of her very best "mothers and children" works during this period when her extended family members



Mary Cassatt, Grasse, France, 1914, near the end of her painting career

were visiting: *Child in a Straw Hat*, *Children Playing on the Beach*, and *Little Girl in the Blue Armchair* to name a few.

If Mary had not been a great artist, she would have been a great art dealer. She encouraged her brother Alexander, President of the Pennsylvania Railroad, and helped him build an excellent art collection. There were many patrons who benefitted from Mary's guidance. These included the Havemeyers, the Sears Family, Mrs. Palmer from Chicago, and James Stillman (who also was interested in Mary romantically). They all benefitted from her vast knowledge of the arts.

Mary's health was becoming a problem, she suffered from diabetes, rheumatism, and most distressingly failing eyesight due to cataracts. Mary continued to paint and always had time for visiting American students. In 1915 Mary stopped painting altogether due to failing sight. She died at Beaufresne on June 14, 1926.

Mary Cassatt was elegant, self-sufficient, and held in high regard as an artist and a humanitarian. Sadly, during her lifetime her fellow Americans didn't recognize her importance as an artist. ❧



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2022 ACS ANNUAL MEETING

The 2022 Annual Meeting of the Society was held on the evening of May 4 at the Chapel Shelter in Riverview Park.

As part of the brief business meeting of the Society, two new members to the Board of Directors were

welcomed and elected: Sarah Axtell and Jon Hanrahan of Fineview.

President David Grinnell gave a brief report on recent programs sponsored by the Society, as well as a preview of plans for upcoming events to round out 2022.

Members and guests shared in an informative presentation by Brian Butko, author and the Director of Publications at the Senator John Heinz History Center.

The 2022 William M. Rimmel Award was presented to Bette McDevitt.

