

News For Members of PITTSBURGH HISTORY & LANDMARKS FOUNDATION

NUMBER 28 JULY-AUGUST 1971

POST OFFICE RESTORATION PROGRESS



We are extremely pleased (and relieved) to be able to report that the contractor is making excellent progress on our restoration of the North Side Post Office. The work has frequently been painstaking and has involved many change orders along the way, but the firm, Henry Busse, Inc., has been singularly cooperative as have our architects, Williams/Trebilcock/Whitehead. The building has now been entirely cleaned, all plastering is about complete, and painting is now beginning. A ninety foot scaffold has been erected inside so that the painters can reach the dome. We have built in many artifacts including making some handsome iron gates from a porch rail from Manchester, adding leaded glass windows, and including a number of handsome doors from Ridge Avenue mansions. Members are invited to look in the building at their convenience to see the work.

HOUSE COMMITTEE APPOINTED

Mr. Arensberg is pleased to announce the appointment of a house committee for the museum consisting of the following persons:

Mrs. Kenneth S. Boesel
Mrs. J. Judson Brooks
Mrs. Robert B. Dickey, III
Mrs. Robert E. Fulton
Mrs. David Genter

Mrs. Henry L. Hillman
Mrs. Henry P. Hoffstot
Mrs. B.F. Jones, III
Mrs. J.C. Oliver, Jr.
Mrs. W.C. Robinson, Jr.

The committee has been charged with the selection of interior decorations for the museum and is planning our opening party. At the first meeting the committee selected the paint design for the post office and based their selections upon the way in which renaissance buildings were actually painted. The government had covered the interior of the old post office with dull blue and beige and had painted out all the fine woodwork, much of which will now be restored.

List of summer tours announced

July 25th 2:00 p.m.Elizabeth, Pennsylvania
Take exit from Route 51 into Elizabeth and turn into the supermarket parking lot just below the Route 51 underpass and park in the lot. We will gather at that point. Members free; non-members \$2. No reservations required.

August 22nd 2:00 p.m.Shadyside East
Meet at Union Presbyterian Church parking lot

September 25th 10:30 a.m....Bus tour of houses designed by Peter Berendston
Details to be announced later

We are pleased and gratified to announce that United States Steel Foundation has made a grant of \$5,000 for current needs in our general operations. We were very happy to receive this gift because it will bolster our programs for 1971; a portion of the funds will be allocated to our Birmingham program so that we can allocate further staff time to the South Side area. "Grants of this size enable us to take enormous steps forward", said our President, Mr. Arensberg, "and we are delighted to have the support of a national corporation of the size of United States Steel".

The sorry chronicle of demolitions at the old U.S. Allegheny Arsenal continues with the destruction of a large two story stone building near the river. This was probably one of the once numerous structures associated with the manufacture or storage of military equipment, and its handsome masonry walls were noteworthy. The site is now a graveyard for derelict trailer trucks. PHLF has long recommended that something be done to preserve the few remnants of what was once one of the most historic sites in western Pennsylvania, but if the destruction continues there will soon be nothing to preserve.

The City of Pittsburgh has signified its willingness to donate 20,000 belgian blocks to us for use in paving the garden court next to the old post office. . .
Mr. Van Trump addressed the Society of Architectural Historians recently in Chicago on the subject of urban preservation and in February addressed our members and the general public on "John Hancock and the Chancellor's residence". . . A conference was held in early May at Washington, D.C. on "Legal Techniques in Historic Preservation", sponsored by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, and Arthur Ziegler spoke on "The Quest for Community Self-Determination in Historic Preservation Projects". He will also address the Ohio Conference on historic preservation later in the month on the subject of "A Social Conscience for Historic Preservation". . . We have acquired two fine old clocks recently, one from the tower of the Heeren Building and one from the old city hall. More will be announced about these in a future newsletter. . . We retrieved the bronze bell from Avery College on the North Side. We arrived on the scene as it was being removed by others. . . We regret to announce our sad discovery that the convent building of St. Mary's R.C. Church in Lawrenceville, 1867, (see LAAC, p. 81) with an exceptional ornamental cast iron porch has been demolished.

The National Trust for Historic Preservation recently established a National Historic Preservation Fund, the purpose of which will be to make loans to local organizations like ours to help them with their restoration efforts. A special National Advisory Committee of seven persons has been appointed to counsel the trustees of the National Trust, establish policies for the Fund, and advise about disbursements from it. Our Executive Director, Arthur Ziegler, has been asked to serve as a member of this committee.

THANKS BE TO THE CITY ADMINISTRATION

We would like to take a moment to thank Mayor Peter F. Flaherty and his able administrators for listening attentively to our point of view on a variety of matters, for participating in discussions with us to help us all better understand many issues, and for implementing so many programs in which we are concerned.

For example, after four years of previous struggle, the Mayor, Mr. Forrest at the Zoning Department, Robert Paternoster at City Planning, Ralph Lynch, City Solicitor, and William Farkas at the Urban Redevelopment Authority cooperated to produce our historic zoning ordinance, which passed City Council unanimously.

We are indebted to Bruce Campbell, the Mayor's executive secretary, for resolving difficulties that were inhibiting our opening the Neill Log House to the public.

The Mayor's office with the assistance of Bert DeMelker, Director of Public Works, and Lee Goldman, Director of Streets, sought and received Councilmanic approval for delivery to us (at our expense) of 20,000 belgian block for building our garden court wall at the old post office.

Stephen George, Director of Lands & Buildings, has diligently worked to see that the Allegheny Library will be restored, and he appointed the fine architectural office of Damianos and Pedone to design it. Director George and Director Cooper of Parks have been of invaluable assistance in our effort to spare the Allegheny Commons of a proposed ballfield with a foul line longer than that at the new stadium!

Recently Director Paternoster invited us to testify on behalf of the sign and billboard control ordinance proposed by the Mayor's office, which we were delighted to do.

In our restoration work on Jane Street, again Mr. Forrest, Mr. Paternoster, James Morgan at City Planning, and Robert Boulden, the City's Housing Coordinator, sped our proposals along faster than any that we ever submitted to the City before.

And as always William Farkas and his excellent staff at the Urban Redevelopment Authority have patiently talked with us of many things, and the dialogue has been fruitful. In fact one of the values for our own organization is the amount of learning and experience we have acquired by being involved with these city agencies on a daily basis. The experience helps us, too, in understanding the complexities involved in implementing useful programs.

We should add that we have developed daily and fruitful relationships with a number of county offices, including that of the Commissioners, Parks, Planning, and Property, and further with the offices of our local Congressmen and with the Pennsylvania Department of Highways, as announced in a prior newsletter.

One of our members has suggested that we request trading stamps that any of our members would care to send to us. These could include S&H green stamps, Top Value stamps, Plaid stamps and any others available.

STAMPS WANTED We could trade these stamps in for equipment that will be needed for the new museum. Already we have received several thousand stamps from our members and we would appreciate it if you would put them in an envelope from time to time and mail them to us.

THE PRESIDENT'S RAMBLE

The seven years we have been intimately connected with the Landmarks Foundation have been happy ones. We have been happy in the small success we have had--and appalled by the continuing destruction and facelessness of much of the modern Pittsburgh. We are heartened by some of the daring new architecture and turned off by inhuman constructions of the new computer age, as well as jejune rehashes of worn out styles.

Let us take a walk in seven league boots around our favorite city--let us pretend we are seeing it for the first time in years.

It's a beautiful spring day--pollution level low, a light wind. May in Pennsylvania. What better day to live!

Why not start at the Mayor's house--set in a quite Shadyside street of Victorian roofs, John Hancock houses, wisteria vines, an air of calm, the reassurance of the Establishment but modest, restrained, clannish really like the Scotch and English who founded so much of the city.

Walk to Amerson, Westminster, Pembroke, the very heart of Shadyside, devoted urban dwellers with an anchor to windward in Ligonier, Virginia, Maine, the coast of New Jersey. Here is the elegant core of the city dweller, tenacious of architectural style, slow to change, innovative in business but with horizons of art that abjure the Twentieth Century.

On through these manicured streets and charming by-ways of Victorian and Edwardian lesser houses on St. James, Schoolhouse Lane and Kentucky Avenue are finally debouch on Walnut Street, the fabulous Pittsburgh rive gauche, the very realm of civil rights and free permissiveness, the two great achievements of our beleaguered democracy in this century. One hundred yards from Westminster, but what a change! Here we find a street of false fronts, and individualistic shops, leather, wood, clothing galore, bars, silver shops, art galleries good and bad, sidewalk pizzerias and hot dog huts. Behind the fronts, the old houses still rise up like parents standing behind their performing children, like organ grinders behind the box and its dancing monkeys. Here all is color and life, real and false, brave and cowardly. Cheek by jowl the side streets, frame and brick, present a Pittsburgh character all their own and on a decent human scale.

Our boots carry us on to Ellsworth Avenue and finally into Pittsburgh's daring experiment, reviled by many, but beginning to shape into a viable picture of the Twentyfirst Century. Here for once the automobile is degraded and the inner streets of East Liberty are turned out for the pedestrian. The town of Tasso Katselas! His highrises, great brick walls with brick buttresses mingle with two and three story row housing with pleasing courts. Here is a taste perhaps of a good future for many people. At any rate the old city gets a brave new mark for effort.

Swinging back, our boots take us down Fifth Avenue to Oakland, past two or three magnificent mansions of pre-income tax days, past the supreme bastion of elegance and ease, Warwick Heights. We see Kent Bloomer's strange wave-like facing on the Rodef Shalom portal, reminding us of the Red Sea in Moses' time, past the massive eclecticism of the University, Greek temples, gothic pinnacles, a mausoleum of Hallcarnassus, elegant Florentine palaces and finally Litchfield Towers, pleasing cylinders of student habitation.

Standing forlornly isolated like a cry from the past is the Coltart House, last remnant in the area of the early Nineteenth Century Georgian Pennsylvania vernacular, double porch and all. Is this not a must for harboring as a remembrance of things past, as a shell with echo of distant seas and still shores? What do the poets, what do the psychiatrists say of those who cannot remember who they were, or where they came from?



We amble along Forbes Street under the roaring highway past the inevitable detritus of automobile culture wondering if this indeed is the walk of the future--tin cans, beer cans, once planted interspaces, forever abandoned, cement columns and moribund housing, assaulted forever by the noise and fumes of ten thousand gasoline motors a day.

But wait, the river appears, the calm, deep Monongahela and the bridge and the honest houses marching up the mountainside. This is Pittsburgh, this the city of hills that cannot be destroyed like the flat Clevelands or Detroit of the plains. It is true, in twenty years, the lovely pinks and reds of the South Side hills just like the North Side red houses of Troy Hill and Spring Hill have yielded to the white sidings of a lesser culture--sidings which obliterate the old fenestration detail, cover up the natural brick. But no matter, the siding which conceals now is preserving the brick and someday in a future culture it can be removed to offer again the natural honesty of the house inside.

Over the Brady Street Bridge we march past Pittsburgh's most painted steel mill, the J&L Works and onto Carson Street and old Birmingham, home first of the Ormsbys then the Scotch and Irish, then the Germans and last the Slavs who now own the valley in a proud and individualistic fashion. The shops along Carson Street are from 1870, 1880, 1890, many of them sporting still the elegant cast iron cornices of those Georgian times gone Victorian. Here the Foundation has bought a meat market, and hopes to restore it as a model store front for a rejuvenating South Side.



We turn up South 12th Street and walk stepping over the tracks to Pius and 15th where St. Michaels stands proud on the hill. Listen to its limpid church bells ring over the hillside streets and wooden houses, with the Slavic carvings around the doors. Stroll on up to one particular cottage on Brosville Street, a hundred years old or more, straight out of Munich, with its faded yellow stucco walls and its back yard a perfect platform for looking down on the blazing Golden Triangle far below to the west.

We wander aimlessly over the streets still and quiet like some ancient hillside town in Bulgaria or Turkey, down again to Market Square on Carson Street, where the enterprising Mr. Pekich has installed his putti saucily on the second story ledges and where he demonstrates the effectiveness of imaginative restoration in a previously marcescent neighborhood.

Down the Monongahela we stride to Smithfield with a quick glance at the magnificent baths of Caracalla in the Pennsylvania and Lake Erie Station, and a lingering look at the delicate feminine tracery of iron on the Smithfield Bridge.

We leave the many opulent wonders of the downtown for some future account but walk through Cantini's mosaic city of the future in the Tunnels behind the mighty Steel Building, over the 9th Street Bridge past the Foundation's home, the Old Post Office and over to Ridge Avenue. We remember Davenport's Valley of Decision, we remember the old Patrizierhaueser of Bamberg, of Ulm of Augsburg, of the great Hanseatic cities of the Baltic. We mourn the loss of Ridge Avenue, but are grateful out of desperation for what remains: Jones Hall, Byers Hall, the Snyder House with its ballroom, the rooms of Oliver and Denny that someday again will grace the walls of the Old Post Office.



We turn down Chateau Street, past the incredible Chinese wall of highway that keeps the Manchester resident away from the rivers, and allows him one dark tunnel entrance to the shopping mall. We turn up Liverpool Street and past the great 1300 block of Victorian porches and brick houses lining the street. Here is the very heart of the embattled city; here is where the battle will be won or lost. Ruins on every side, hate and poverty and impermanance vying for ascendancy. But wait, here is an old truck house being rehabilitated; there's a row of new small houses, simple, functional, there a church with its new breed of pastor, born and trained to cope with the inner city and its myriad, desperate problems.



We end this day's walk at the Mexican War Streets, bright hope of urban renewal on the small scale, the human scale. It is not Georgetown--it is Pittsburgh--its inhabitants will be white and black, proud of their community, eager to teach the lesson that the small house, aesthetically renovated and artistically maintained can be a mainstay of the new city, and one answer to a mechanistic world of computers and faceless highrises. No longer can O'Henry say of Pittsburgh--"Oh City of Diurnal Night". *Charles Covert Arensberg*



PITTSBURGH HISTORY &
LANDMARKS FOUNDATION

900 BENEDEUM-TREES BUILDING
PITTSBURGH, PENNSYLVANIA 15222

Non-Profit Org.
U. S. POSTAGE
PAID
Pittsburgh, Pa.
Permit No. 598