



The Pittsburgh History & Landmarks Foundation

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BOUQUETS AND BRICKBATS: The Fourth Avenue Post Office

This special newsletter inaugurates a new feature with us that will come to you from time to time as a Bouquets and Brickbats feature. We want you, our members and our strongest supporters, to know exactly what is going on in preservation in Pittsburgh.

We fought the good fight last spring to bring back four wooden eagles that the General Services Administration of the Federal Government had removed from our Fourth Avenue Post Office and carted off without any permission or authority from the Parking Authority of Pittsburgh, whose property the building had then become. Bouquets to the Parking Authority, who helped us retrieve them, and brickbats to the GSA who simply thought no one in Pittsburgh would care to regain the eagles.

Next we rescued a large number of marble and carved wooden ornaments from the interior, and ten of the stone Keystones from the exterior were given to us. We also retrieved and donated two other Keystones to the Borough of Oakmont to be placed in a public park. Our artifacts will be on display at the Garden Market at the Pittsburgh Garden Center in the spring.

Now we have concluded the third chapter, that of the Ladies of Stone of the Post Office. To obtain the statues we were obligated to pay the demolition company for all costs in bringing them down from the roof. These costs came to \$5,977.68.

We initiated a public campaign to obtain the needed funds and we were immediately joined by the Pittsburgh Post Gazette, who ran a series of articles about the statues and our research into their past.

The history proved to be mysterious, however, and we called upon Congressman James G. Fulton, who asked the Library of Congress to join the hunt. The search through all the contracts and disbursements for the building at the Library of Congress was abortive, and the mystery remains.

Jason Flake, morning disc jockey on radio station WTAE, also joined the campaign and ran a series of pleas and anecdotes concerning the statues and requesting funds to save them.

Both the Post Gazette and WTAE worked very diligently and persuasively for the Ladies of Stone and we offer bouquets and gratitude to them.

However, the time came when the contractor had to remove the statues because of the demolition work, but not enough funds were secured. We then released our claim to the statues and expected them to be toppled. Mr. Michael Peluce, President of American Demolition Company, which was doing the work,

decided at his own risk to hire a special crane to lift the statues down and pay the bills and allow us to continue the public campaign for funds.

He in no way obligated us to paying these costs but offered to bring them down as a public service and as a gesture of faith in their value and confidence in the necessity that they remain as visual representatives of this significant government building.

Mr. Peluce is the hero of this story because without his confidence, his sense of public duty, and his time and effort, the statues would have been smashed by the headache ball.

The campaign was carried on for some weeks during which time the Allegheny County Redevelopment Authority entered into a contract with us in the form of a letter from its Executive Director offering to make up the amount of funds needed to rescue the statues that were not collected in the public subscription by a date to be mutually agreed upon. In exchange for this, the Redevelopment Authority would receive one set of statues to be placed in one of its public redevelopment projects.

Our officers accepted this contract in writing but when the campaign drew toward its conclusion, the Authority had a sudden change of heart and it repudiated its letter and backed out of the deal. A great many pleas were made to the Authority to uphold its commitment to this public enterprise but they were unavailing. Brickbats!

To us the real danger of the behavior of this agency is in the fact that if such behavior is condoned in public representatives of the people, ordinary citizens may give in without any struggle. We of the Landmarks Foundation will fight against any such apathy on the part of the citizens and we intend to go on struggling to save Pittsburgh's heritage.

Subsequently we closed our campaign with a total of \$2000.00 having been raised. Bouquets to all of our members and friends who donated to the campaign.

In the meantime the statues were moved to the main gate of the Westinghouse East Pittsburgh plant, and the employees of this plant joined in the public subscription. Because of high interest there, we were asked if the employees could obtain a set of statues if they raised the funds, and we agreed. Our original intention was to ensconce one set of statues in the park that will replace the Fourth Avenue Post Office. We had no designation for the other set.

We then notified Mr. Peluce the total of the funds raised and, again acting in the best interest of the city, he requested that we pay the minimal cost of the removal of one set, \$2300.00. We agreed and subsidized the purchase from our general funds.

Another unexpected change of plans occurred at this time. The Parking Authority disallowed placing the statues on the site of the Post Office because they would interfere with the parking lot that is temporarily there.

After searching for other accommodations for the set of statues, we accepted a request from The Edge, a new motel being built in Mt. Washington, for the statues. Lacking a fully public place for them and being assured that the statues would be on public view at street level, we agreed to sell the statues to The Edge under a written contract that requires the motel to sell the statues back to us if at any time in the next twenty years they decide they do not want them.

Recently we had the statues moved to the new site and they are now on full view at the eastern end of Grandview Avenue opposite the Monongahela Incline.

Here where viewers can see not only the statues but the entire city, the rivers, the mills, the hillsides with their housing and churches, the Ladies of Stone stand as emblems of the magnificent old Post Office that Pittsburghers built eighty years ago.