

# Pittsburgh History & Landmarks Foundation

NEWS FOR MEMBERS

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We are very pleased to announce that the trustees of the Sarah Mellon Scaife Foundation have given our organization a three year grant of \$78,800 for general operations. Designed to enable us to increase our effectiveness, the grant allots us \$28,800 for the first year and \$25,000 for each of the following two years. We have also received a grant from an anonymous donor of \$10,000 and a grant from the Allegheny Foundation of \$2,500 for our general funds. This money, combined with membership donations, maintains our staff and offices, pays for publications, preservation planning studies, and all of our general work. Most important, it provides us with the means and the professional staff to give historic preservation a strong voice in Allegheny County.

Our book Landmark Architecture of Allegheny County will be off the press in late May or early June. A delay was caused by the decision of the executive committee to expand the book to include more pictures. It is a handsome and thorough edition, and members will be given a special discount price as part of their membership. Hardbound, it contains a listing of every significant building that our staff knows about in Allegheny County. We think that the book is destined to be judged both the first and, as the years pass, the finest of its kind. A brochure describing it will soon be mailed to you.

There is no stay of demolition in the metropolitan area and the most recent tragedy has been the destruction of the Fort Pitt Hotel at Tenth and Penn downtown. Designed by Alden and Harlow and Janssen and Abbot, the two best architectural firms of the turn of the century, it was a handsome if not a great architectural work, and it had some fine interiors. Particularly noteworthy was the spacious English Room with its William Morris inspired murals, its elegant Jacobean oak paneling, and its huge, hulking fireplace. Much of this paneling will undoubtedly be saved because it is not too difficult to remove, but we are sorry that we cannot say the same for the Norse Room in the basement. This splendid vaulted room constructed in 1909 as a cafe is a tour-de-force in Rookwood tiles and a work of decorative art of the first magnitude for its period. That its period is not appreciated nowadays is one potent reason for its destruction, but it is also lamentably true that its hundreds of firmly embedded tiles would be extremely difficult and expensive to remove. Some interest was shown elsewhere in its preservation--and the University



of Minnesota even sent an emissary to examine it--but all to no avail. So perished the masterpiece of John Dee Wareham, the talented designer of the Rookwood Studios. Before the holocaust we had these rooms photographed and prints are available in the office. . . Other losses include the worker's apartment house designed by Grosvenor Atterbury for Henry Phipps, which was located on West General Robinson Street. It stood in the way of the new stadium and a highway complex. . . The deathly acres of dull suburban villas which consumed its fields and pastures finally devoured the Brierly farmstead within recent months and this large early 19th century house with its echoes of 18th century brick work has vanished. It sometimes seems as if Allegheny County will not suffer anything built before 1850 to exist within its borders. We understand that the Wallace-Nasor House on Mosside Boulevard in Monroeville is doomed. This is a fine Western Pennsylvania vernacular stone farmhouse with a spectacular view down the Turtle Creek Valley. As Robert Frost said, "Nothing gold can stay." . . . In East Liberty Urban Redevelopment is taking dozens of houses, some nondescript, some decayed beyond recall, and some very fine. We lament the loss of some of the late nineteenth century simple brick houses with their fireplaces and stained glass. . . . Over in Wilksburg in the Trenton Avenue-Thomas Boulevard district, several stone houses that appeared to be in good condition have been broken and torn and stand waiting their final demise by the headache ball. . . . Still on the list for removal for highway "improvement" is the Daniel Ross House overlooking the Parkway at Rosslyn Farms. This is one of the best surviving examples in Allegheny County of the double-verandah brick Western Pennsylvania farmhouse of the early nineteenth century. This will be one of our most unfortunate losses. . .



Our Vice-President, Mrs. Henry P. Hoffstot, Jr., received our Award of Merit from Dr. S. K. Stevens, Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Historic & Museum Commission in Harrisburg. The award was given to us by the American Association for State & Local History as national recognition for our work.

Two programs initiated by the Landmarks Foundation have met with great success. The first was a lecture program on Pittsburgh history in all fifth grade classes in the city schools carried out by the GROWING Junior League. The girls completed the program with great zest THINGS and drive, and the students and teachers as well enjoyed the sessions. The second program is being implemented by the Garden Club of Allegheny County. We saw the great work of Mrs. James Bush-Brown in Philadelphia in getting residents in slum areas to plant window boxes of flowers in block-long areas. The people, sparked by the pleasure of seeing the blooms, often proceeded to clean up, paint up, fix up. From there they moved on to cleaning out and planting community flower gardens in vacant lots. We asked Mrs. Bush-Brown to address the Garden Club of Allegheny County and various community leaders, and now the Club is working in several sections of the city and meeting with interest and anticipation from the people. Come this summer, some of the decaying areas of Pittsburgh may be coming up roses!

Please note our new telephone number: 281-6207 and 281-6208