

Pittsburgh History & Landmarks Foundation

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PLAQUE CEREMONY A TRIUMPH

Never has historic preservation in the United States seen quite a day like September 24 in Pittsburgh. On that day, at noon, a band broke out in patriotic music, the Court House carillon echoed it, Grant Street in the heart of the Golden Triangle was closed to traffic, and a crowd of about 200 joined the Allegheny County commissioners, the mayor, and officers of our organization to affix the first of our landmark plaques to be placed on buildings in Allegheny County. That day we unveiled them on the Court House, the Jail, and the Union Trust Building.



Commissioners Foerster, Staisey, & Hunt unveiled the plaque with Mr. Arensberg & Mr. Richardson.



Mayor Barr commended our work on behalf of the city.



The crowd filled Grant Street.



Mr. Van Trump described the importance of the Union Trust Bldg.

The commissioners and the mayor spoke glowingly of our work in general and the program of marking buildings in particular. They were followed by the grandson of the architect of the Court House and Jail, Frederick Richardson, and Charles Arensberg and Stanton Belfour from our organization. Mr. Van Trump described the importance of the structures, and we then moved by car-avan over to the Union Trust Building where another large crowd gathered in the lobby.

The intense interest of our local government leaders in our work was rewarding, but more important was their own enthusiasm about marking the Court House and Jail. It would seem that these great structures are in safe hands.

Our vest-pocket park for Sheffield Street on the North Side is at last a reality. Weary of trying to give the funds to the City to construct two such parks on North Side, we finally built one of them ourselves. (The other was turned down for housing.) A lot laden with debris and marred further by an abandoned auto was turned into a delightful children's playground. Under the aegis of the Garden Club of Allegheny County, the neighbors will plant a community flower garden along one side next spring. Already flower boxes are blooming on this street and the nineteenth-century houses are looking better and better.

There is never a day that doesn't present us with the demolition of at least one building. In every case where our crew can spare the time, they retrieve all interior fittings that are worth preservation and re-use, and exterior ornaments as well. We now have warehouses on both North Side and South Side. Recently we have been working in Allegheny Avenue and Avery College areas of the East Street expressway demolition. We have secured materials from some early Greek Revival houses as well that stood at 16th and Chestnut Streets. For two weeks during the summer Mr. Schweitzer and his crew removed panelling, doors, mantels, and even the entire dining room of the Henry W. Oliver house on Ridge Avenue. Mr. Van Trump has termed this house as containing "one of the most valuable interiors in America" and yet the Community College of Allegheny County insists on demolishing this structure as well as the Fitzhugh house and the Denny house on the same street. Only a grant from the Henry Oliver Rea Charitable Trust saved this material because it enabled us to cover the large expenses of removing it. Soon to be announced: an artifact sale at which time members will be able to see the many items that we have rescued over the past few years and where some of them will be available for purchase.

Our booklet Legend in Modern Gothic: the Union Trust Building of Pittsburgh has received an Award of Merit from the Art Director's Society of Pittsburgh for excellence of design. Our publication on Liverpool Street also won such an award two years ago as well as a Golden Quill award for the written presentation.

In the past several months we have held a number of exhibits of Allegheny County buildings and the work of the Landmarks Foundation. Included among these were two exhibits in the window of the Capital Finance Company on Wood Street, downtown, an exhibit of artifacts at the Joseph Horne Company, one at Second Federal Savings & Loan Association on Oliver Avenue, the Garden Market in East End, the Three Rivers Arts Festival, the County Fair, and two on the Birmingham program at the Good Will Store on South Side and at the Chamber of Commerce there. Currently we are showing artifacts in the front windows of the old Hahn Building, South Side, and our exhibit of Pittsburgh buildings still can be seen at the Fort Pitt Museum.

Also popular this summer were our various tours. For the all-day tour of South Side we had about 90 persons who enjoyed walking and riding all through the curious streets and areas of this fascinating section of Pittsburgh. A luncheon of Ukranian food--all delectable and very filling--was served at St. John's Ukranian Church on Carson Street. Then in July about 125 people came to North Side to see the houses that we are restoring, and they experienced the startling difference of "before" and "after". For our three summer walking tours we had smaller groups but just adequate for these informal amblings through sections of the city. Here again the enjoyment was sometimes seeing the unfamiliar but more often it was seeing the familiar in a new way.