

Pittsburgh History & Landmarks Foundation

NEWS FOR MEMBERS - NUMBER ELEVEN
MARCH 1969

BREAKTHROUGH ON PRESERVATION AND THE POOR

One of our first concerns when we organized the Pittsburgh History & Landmarks Foundation was the fact that in both Pittsburgh and across the nation, so many of our significant buildings are in the ghettos or decaying urban areas. At that time preservation groups largely ignored this problem. However, we made it paramount in our work; we had condemned the pattern of renewing cities by displacing the poor and turning their neighborhoods over to more affluent persons. We began our studies with Liverpool Street in Manchester, and since that time we have explored every possibility of solving the impasse between the cost of restoration versus the minimal rental income available in these areas.



Last month we undertook an experimental program which we think will provide us with a major tool in solving this problem. Under recently enacted federal laws the Housing Authorities of major cities are permitted to rent dwelling units from private and non-profit sponsors in such areas. However, the units must be empty and derelict, then must be rehabilitated by the owner-sponsor, and then rented to the authorities at a rent that will enable the owners to pay for the work and enjoy a return on their investment. In turn the authorities rent to low income families at rates that they can afford.

On 19 February we signed under this program with the Housing Authority of the City of Pittsburgh to restore one such unit on North Side and to rent it to the Authority for five years. In this way we will be able to restore an empty and decaying but still handsome late nineteenth century house (1220 Monterey Street) and yet provide housing for a low income family. Alfred L. Tronzo, director of the Housing Authority, said, "This method is quick and practical and really is a true renewal, a reuse of basically sound but derelict housing." We are now entering negotiations with

the Authority to apply the program to some of our houses in Manchester.

To our knowledge, we may be the first preservation group in the United States to take this significant step, one that should have important and useful results for all such groups in the country.

Our campaign to establish the Museum of History at the North Side Post Office is in progress. Pittsburgh Outdoor Advertising Company has donated ten billboards to us; KDKA-TV is giving us station break announcements, and the Equitable Gas Company and Dollar Savings Bank have provided exhibit space. The students of the Ivy School of Art are proceeding to paint posters on the plywood that we secured over the windows of the building. Donations are beginning to come in; our own members have already given over \$2,000. We are now completing our presentations before Pittsburgh foundations and industry as well as applications to government agencies for funds. If you have not sent a donation, please do so; we cannot establish this facility unless the public helps support it.

We have had many offers of gifts of artifacts to the museum. In the past few weeks articles of nineteenth century clothing and furniture have been donated as have an iron cook stove, an early mangle, an antique clock, a large old-time movie projector, an early camera, artifacts from the Monongahela House, a christening dress, the lamp standards at the East Liberty Library, the clock from the tower of the Heeren Building that stood on Penn Avenue, downtown, a settee, a doctor's case, and several rare books. These gifts show how many historic objects are extant locally and that owners wish them to be made available to the public.

Our efforts to save the Rotunda of the Pennsylvania Railroad Station are continuing. In recent weeks the national news media have given them considerable attention: Architectural Record ran a brief story, Progressive Architecture ran a two page review, and the Philadelphia Inquirer along with the Victorian Society Newsletter printed articles. Preservation News, the newspaper of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, also published a story. We are pleased to announce that the first year students in architecture at Carnegie-Mellon University are making studies of finding adaptive uses for the Rotunda. A jury will evaluate their renderings in May and we will offer several awards of merit. The completed work will be presented to the officials of the railroad.

The news is not good about the Burtner House. Now the Pennsylvania Department of Highways no longer wants to build the temporary route that they originally spoke of; they want instead to substitute an interchange! Oddly enough the actual construction will not harm the house, but a view of traffic will be cut off by it. The commissioners of Harrison Township and local service organizations have joined with us to defeat this tragic decision, but so far the prospects are dim. Not even a house by the side of the road is wanted.

Another governmental decision against preservation was that of West View borough when it decided recently to forego the glory that the old Schwitter Mansion bestowed on municipal activities by serving as its borough hall (see page 262 in Landmark Architecture of Allegheny County) and replace it with contemporary apartments. The borough has authorized us to make a photographic record of the house and to retrieve valuable artifacts.



Nothing appears to remain but the chimney and the old shed, but work has finally begun on restoring our Neill Log House in Schenley Park. Charles M. Stotz, our architect, recently had the remnants of the old house dismantled and tagged for the rebuilding, which will begin in June. Ralph E. Griswold, our landscape architect, is now redesigning the grounds to include more outbuildings of the period.

Reassuring it is to see the formation of local preservation-historical organization. We commend the newly-launched Monroeville Historical Society, which grew out of local concern about the impending loss of several important buildings. . . . Our membership campaign that was carried on throughout the winter has increased our membership to almost 1,000. . . . The exhibit we co-organized with the University of Pittsburgh on the architectural history of that institution was favorably reviewed by both city newspapers and attended by many persons. . . . A businessman's committee for the Birmingham program has been formed to bolster the program with the business community. . . . The First National Bank Building and the stately smaller classical buildings that lined Oliver Avenue, downtown, are now gone. . . . That fine row of Greek Revival Houses at Canal and Chestnut Streets on the North Side have been demolished. . . . Our course in the History of American Architecture with emphasis on Western Pennsylvania at the University of Pittsburgh has 27 enrollees, the largest to date. . . . The Linhart House (page 268 in Landmark Architecture of Allegheny County) has been given a historic marker by the Century Club.

We plan to hold several tours within the next few months. One will include the cultural mall on North Side, which we have been defining and promoting in our Museum campaign, another will probably be an all-day bus tour to Meadowcroft Village, a newly formed historical complex near Avella, and then we hope to hold one or two tours of landmarks important in local Negro history.

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

Our staff is becoming inundated with work and would like to sound a call to members who might be interested in assisting with our various programs. Immediately we need some persons who would attend a brief orientation session and who would then speak about our plans for the Museum to other organizations of which they are a member. A five or ten minute talk to other groups to inform them of the need for this facility and for their support of it would help a great deal. We also need some help in addressing envelopes for our solicitations.

We also require the services of a person with an automobile who would escort Mr. Van Trump to see artifacts that donors wish to give the Museum. Other needs are for research, visiting South Side residents to explain our restoration program, speaking, cataloguing museum and library accessions, typing research cards for Mr. Van Trump, general office work, and organizing our volunteer program.

If you would like to help, please mail in the form below and we will contact you.

PITTSBURGH HISTORY & LANDMARKS FOUNDATION
900 Benedum-Trees Building, Pittsburgh, Pa. 15222

I would like to help on a volunteer, part-time basis with the work of the organization. My interests include the following:

- Speaking to other organizations of which I am a member about the Museum.
- Speaking about PHLF's general work to other groups.

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Research | <input type="checkbox"/> Filing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Escorting Mr. Van Trump | <input type="checkbox"/> Envelope addressing for |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cataloguing | <input type="checkbox"/> Museum campaign |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Visiting residents in South Side | <input type="checkbox"/> General office work |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Typing research materials | <input type="checkbox"/> Organizing the volunteer program |

Name _____

Address & Telephone _____



PITTSBURGH HISTORY &
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PITTSBURGH, PENNSYLVANIA 15222

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