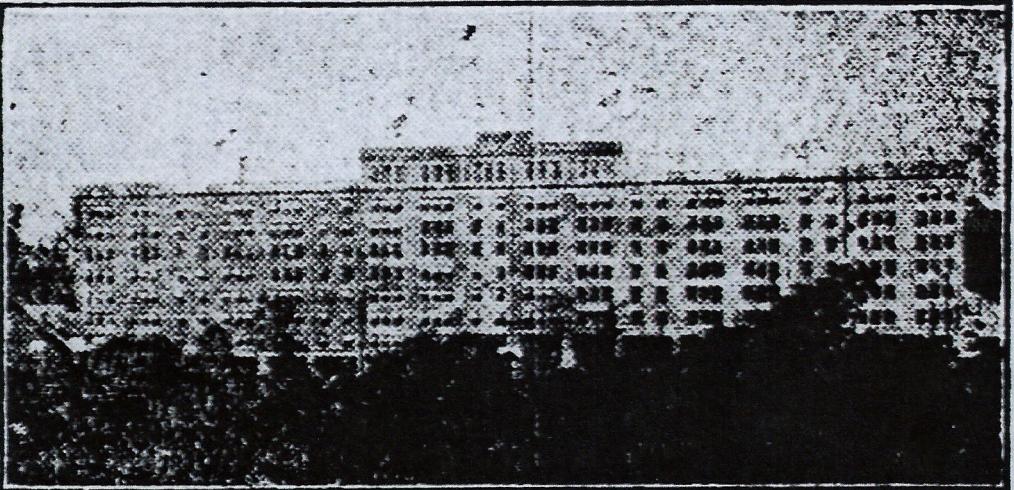


Squirrel Hill Historical Society

The Morrowfield Apartment, Hotel and Reflection of the Roaring Twenties

The Morrowfield Hotel on Murray Avenue has a long and fascinating history. This display featurea the interesting story of the Morrowfield Apartment Hotel, part of a complex of buildings that encompasses most of the area bounded by Forward, Shady, Morrowfield and Murray Avenues.



THREE ROOMS, \$120. FOUR ROOMS, \$140.

These rentals include gas for cooking, free cleaning of windows and rugs, heat, hot water and refrigeration. Dining room; garage.

FURNISHED SUITES WITH FULL HOTEL SERVICE.
POSSESSION MAY 1ST OR EARLIER.

Morrowfield Apartment Hotel

Murray at Morrowfield Ave. Hazel 5700.

The Crowning Gem

The Morrowfield Apartment Hotel opened in 1924 on the block bounded by Murray and Morrowfield Avenues across from the (now) Squirrel Hill Tunnel entrance. The towering nine-story building, a whole block long, has been a visual landmark for 90 years and is an official historic landmark. It holds a lot of stories.

The Morrowfield was the crowning gem of a visionary real estate developer, Thomas A. Watkins. It was to be an elegant apartment hotel, combining the amenities of both. It is surrounded on three sides by Watkin's planned development of apartments and businesses that was called the Watkins Community.

Morrowfield Edition **THE GAZETTE TIMES.** *Morrowfield Edition*

PITTSBURGH, PA., SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 27, 1924.

MORROWFIELD APARTMENT HOTEL READY FOR GUESTS

SQUIRREL HILL DEVELOPMENT UNIQUE IN SERVICE.

New Dwellings Embody Latest Features in Housing Plans

Building of 1-2-3-4-Room Suites in Part of \$2,500,000 Project.

EVERY NEED AT HAND

The new Morrowfield Apartment Hotel, the first part of a massive group of apartment buildings now rising three city blocks between Squirrel Hill Avenue, Murray and Morrowfield Avenues, appears not to be mere pride in ownership.

It is the type of structure which it offers to represent the latest type of one-story, three stories in height, and containing 120 stories of one, two, and three-story suites. The group has every advantage of unhampered space life, yet has all conveniences and the comforts of the modern hotel.

Located on the corner and side of a hill, the entire group of buildings commands a fine view of the surrounding districts for miles. Apartments are provided for business and pleasure, and the site thus commands the advantage of a residential boundary and fine views of the action of steel girders to the center of the city and the business district.

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A 20-minute drive over the Baldwin Hill of the Allegheny brings the guest into the heart of Pittsburgh, while no motorist is sufficient to reach East Liberty. The wooded slopes of Schenley Park are virtually at the door, and the Shadyside golf course may be reached in a few minutes. The Pittsburgh Golf Club is also within 40 minutes' distance. The site of the new Taylor Aluminite High School is close at hand, and the school is at a distance of 100 yards from the hotel.

15,000,000 Project.

The group of buildings represents more than three years of continuous labor by a force which has averaged 100 men and 400 workers. The cost of the project is planned at \$15,000,000 and is the largest group of apartment buildings between New York and Chicago.

A total of 800 apartments are included in the group, calculating at the average of 600 persons to the apartment, the entire will house 1,200 persons. Bathrooms, heating, elevators, garages are provided within the apartment to bring pleasure and comfort to the doors of the guests.

The total of rooms in the group includes the 100 apartments in the Morrowfield Apartment Hotel, 25 two-room

Alderson Unit Built on Hill After Streets Are Relocated

Quarters Grouped for Families Wanting All Modern Conveniences.

DE LUXE APARTMENTS

The rooms are planned under private to the exclusive and business. Convenient lamp posts are used with beautiful effect in the court yards between the houses.

Alderson Apartments.

In the one four-family apartment of the addition across the street right of the hotel has been used. A small entrance hall gives access to the apartments on either side of the stairs, and the entrance leading to the second floor.

The apartments on either side of the entrance hall are 10x12 and there is but one entrance to the second floor. The entrance to the first floor is 10x12, and is located on a large dressing room on the side of the stairs.

From the entrance room a short hall and stairs will lead to the second floor. The stairs will be located in a separate entrance on the side of the stairs, and is located on a large dressing room on the side of the stairs.

Group of Six-Family Apartments.

The rooms are located on a central staircase. A residential laundry is used. The water closets are the permanent fixtures and are now being furnished through the German Company by the St. Louis Valve Company of Chicago. The water supply is furnished by a four-inch porcelain tank.

All of the exposed fixtures and piping to the bathrooms are nickel plated. Laundry of space is enclosed throughout. There are two large clothes closets, one for men and one intended as a wash hamper located within the room. In the large laundry are located the wash tubs for the bath tub and shower.

A very large amount of closet space is available in each room, to allow for the four pieces of furniture planned for the room. This is a great convenience to the guest and is an unusual feature in apartments.

A large laundry is located in the building. This department is equipped with a number of wash tubs, laundry machines, ironing boards, dryers and drying room. The guests are privileged to bring their laundry here and have it cleaned by hotel employees at reduced rates.

Radio Service.

An elaborate radio-circuiting system makes it possible for each guest to choose one of four programs broadcast from as many stations. A local station is located in the building.

Group of Six-Family Apartments.

The rooms of each of the apartments are built in the floor plan. The hall spaces are separated with a central partition which

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Five-Family Houses.

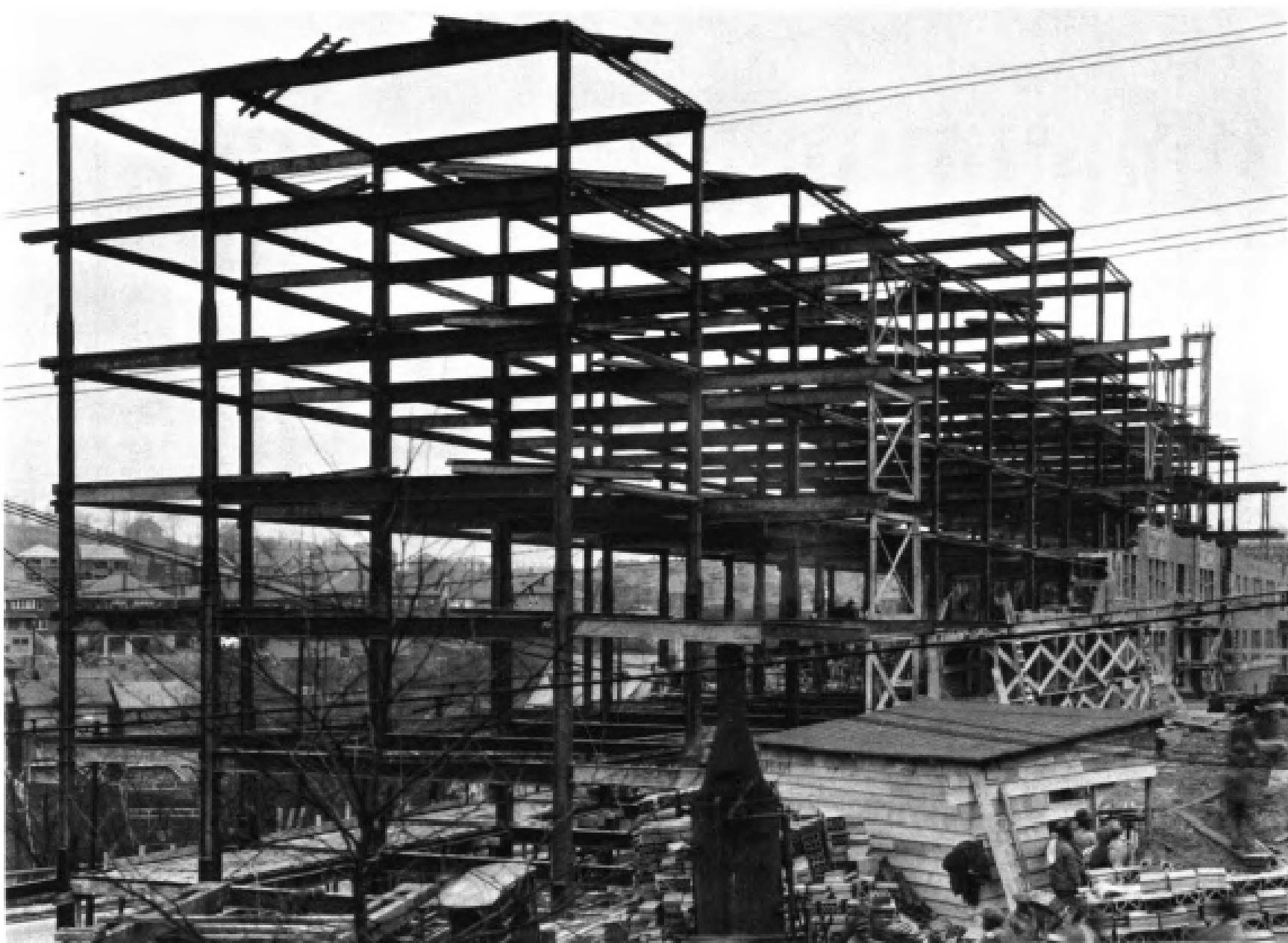
The same type of four-room apartment is used in the five-family houses.

The rooms of each of the apartments are built in the floor plan. The hall spaces are separated with a central partition which

Featured article in *The Gazette Times*, September 27, 1924

Innovative Construction

The Morrowfield Hotel was constructed along the hillside that was once called Maeburn Road hill. The hillside was mostly stone, which was used for much of the foundation. The steel superstructure came from the local Levinson Steel Company. The hotel had central heating and—new to the time—central refrigeration piped into every unit's refrigerator. Construction was done with quality materials and attention to workmanship. It was one of the early fireproofed buildings in the area. Standard wages for the time were 50 cents an hour for carpenters and \$5.50 a day for brick masons. The cost to build the Morrowfield was approximately \$1.5 million.



Construction of the Morrowfield in 1923

Morrowfield Amenities

The Morrowfield Hotel was a forerunner in comfort and design. The exterior was imposing, but the interior was carefully designed with a remarkably human scale. It blended the luxury of a hotel and the privacy of an apartment unit.

And that is how it was marketed. A Pittsburgh Gazette-Times article from July 27, 1924, read in part:

"Will you live in the Morrowfield, Pittsburgh's first and most elegant residential hotel? ... the relief from the full responsibilities of a house—new environment in a magnificent new home."

The apartments became available in 1924. Furnished ones rented for \$250 per month and unfurnished for \$120-\$140. If a resident did not wish to cook, the Morrowfield Dining Room was available for lunch or dinner. Like today's large resort hotels, the lobby had small shops and convenience stores.

The lobby, with a receptionist for residents and guests, set the tone of refinement.

The current lobby gives a glimpse of its elegant past.

The Morrowfield lobby today



Interior Design

The apartments, ranging from studio to two-bedroom, were built with 12-foot ceilings, decorative moldings, French doors separating living room and dinette, dark oak floors and memorable efficient kitchens. A feature that pointed to the “apartment-hotel” genre was the service room. Adjacent apartments shared a service room entered from a small door in each kitchen. There, brooms, mops, pails and trash were placed out of sight.

Here is a recollection of a resident of 47 years who was interviewed in 1981:

“I like the high ceilings, and cupboard space is remarkable. We kept the garbage pail in the service closet and a man came after every meal to dump it. ”



The caption to this photograph in a 1924 article reads, “Morrowfield kitchen, showing numerous built-in cupboards, central refrigeration, and refuse closet.”

The Garage



Builder Thomas Watkins knew the upscale residents he wanted to attract would be the same people as those who would be interested in owning a newly popular automobile. Accordingly, he insisted on an adjacent indoor garage—a novel concept at the time.

Service at the garage reflected the hotel's service. Your vehicle would have a clean windshield each morning and would be delivered by valet to the entrance for free. Over the years the garage has been adapted to serve a variety of uses. Storage of an elegant Packard was just one of those uses.

1934 Packard Twelve Sport Coupe by LeBaron

According to Edward J. Blend's book, *The Magnificent Packard Twelve of Nineteen Thirty-Four*, vehicle number 1106-4 remained with the Packard manufacturer for five years. When

purchased, it was delivered to a Pittsburgh industrialist, Mr. Braeburn, in 1939. It was kept at the Morrowfield garage. It was sold 10 years later. Most recently it was auctioned through The Andrews Collection in 2015 and sold for \$2,200,000.



The Roaring '20s

Completed in 1924, the Morrowfield Hotel captured the *zeitgeist* of the era. There was constant activity—celebrations, ladies' card parties and luncheons, charity balls, wedding receptions. It was the place to be and be seen. The Grand Ballroom on the top floor was in frequent demand.



Written on the above photograph are the words,
"CHAS I. AARON CLUB,
Graduation – Banquet.
– 1929 –
Morrowfield Hotel

In the Roaring '20s at the Morrowfield, one would see flappers, cotillions, and bathtub gin.



The Celebrities

The guests at the Morrowfield included famous names of the day; Fanny Brice, Al Jolson, Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne were a few. Some members of the Pirates baseball team stayed there for the season, notably Lee Meadows, George Grantham and Joe Harris. The Morrowfield was convenient for visiting teams, too.

The Watkins family, who ran the hotel then, knew how to treat entertainers. They would run transportation for them to and from Downtown and Oakland where they performed and arrange to take them to and from the train station.



Fanny Brice as Baby Snooks, 1940



Al Jolson, c. 1916



Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne in 1950



Lee Meadows, c. 1925

Up to the Present



The Watkins family lost the Morrowfield Apartment Hotel during the Depression era. It was converted to all apartments in the 1940s. It has had several out-of-town owners. In 2010, Philadelphia-based CMS Management sold the building to Oakland-based Mozart Management, which owns and manages a host of apartment properties throughout Pittsburgh's East End.

Today, according to the Mozart Management website, the building is 100 percent leased and attracts a stable mix of senior citizens and college students. With 156 units, 23 retail storefronts and a four-story garage, the property, originally built as an apartment-hotel, seems ready for more decades as a unique shelter for Squirrel Hill citizens.



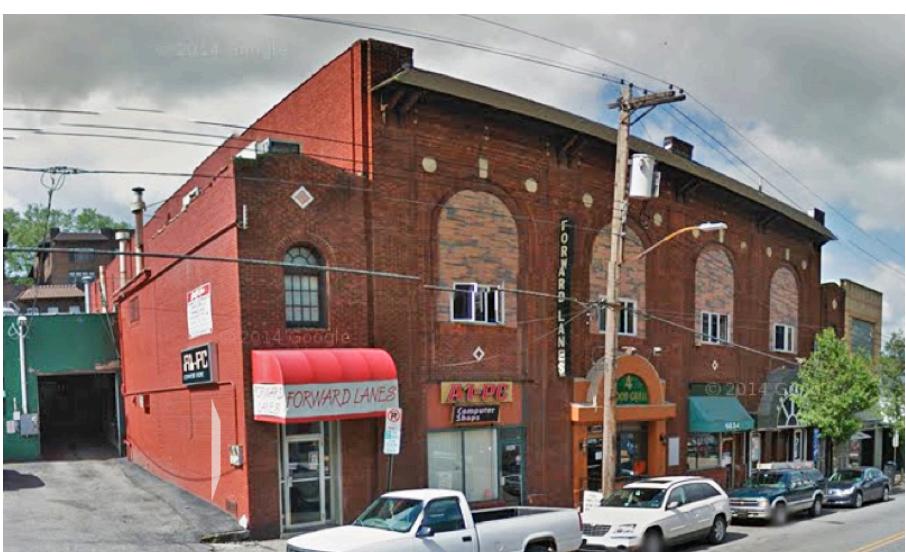
The Morrowfield today

Because the Morrowfield was the place for many celebrations, if anyone reading this display has photos of family events at the Morrowfield or recollections of them, the Squirrel Hill Historical Society would be excited to hear from you. We will copy your photos and return them to you. You can reach us at our website: squirrelhillhistory.org.

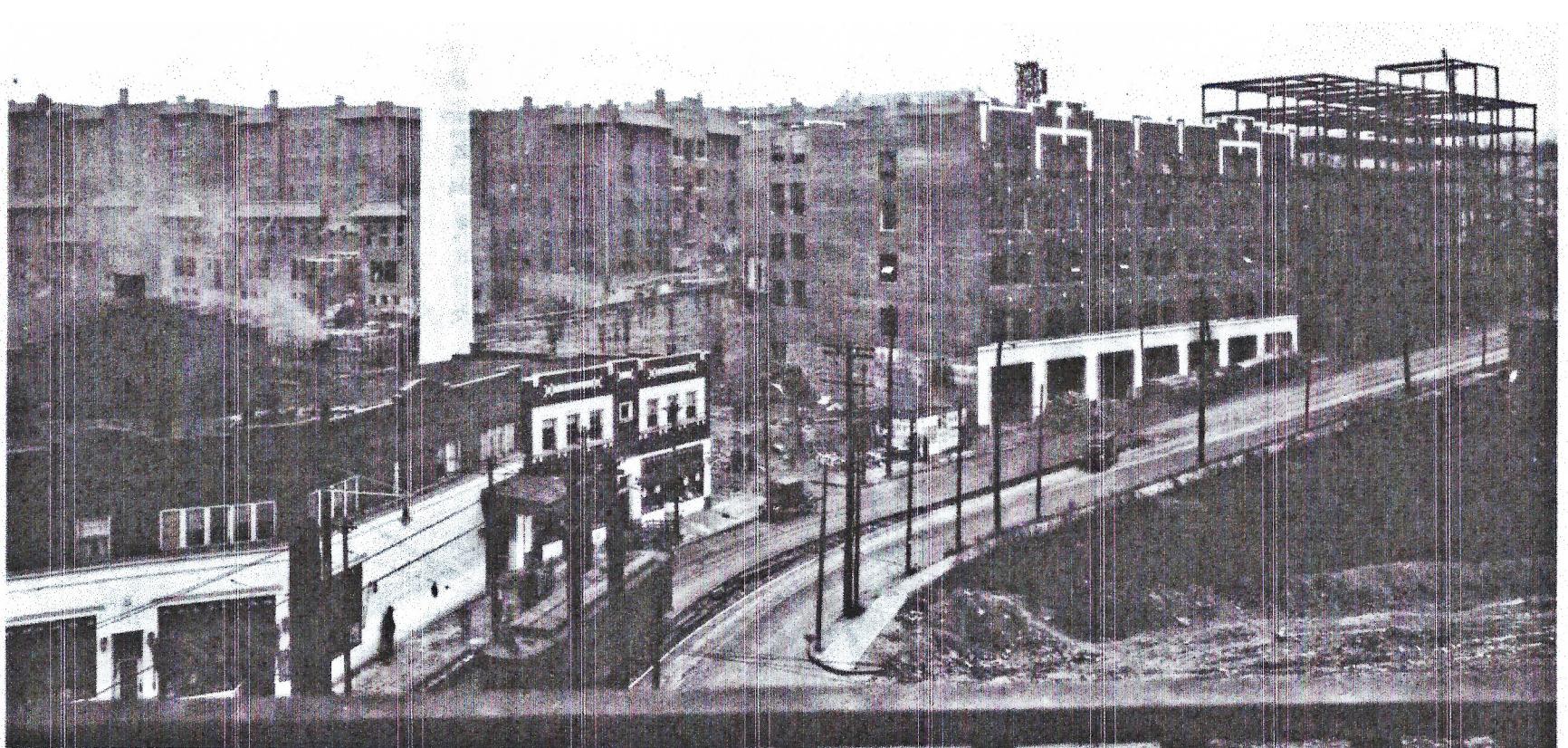
The buildings along Murray and Forward were extensions of the Morrowfield Hotel.

Besides the Morrowfield Apartment Hotel and the indoor parking garage, the other buildings along Forward and Murray Avenues were also part of the Watkins Development.

The complex of buildings included the McKean Oldsmobile Company's new car showrooms, a bowling alley, a dance hall and an 800-seat theater. The theater wasn't the Squirrel Hill Theater, which opened in 1937. Its exact location isn't specified in articles about the complex, but plat maps show the theater was probably at the same location as the Squirrel Hill Theater.



Forward Lanes



The Morrowfield Complex under construction in the 1920s.

The Fire on the Corner of Forward and Murray

A fire on May 14, 2015, destroyed several buildings at the corner of Forward and Murray Avenues. The buildings were called "historic." Why? What was so significant about them?

It so happens they were part of the Watkins Community. The buildings that burned were part of the community. In the old days, they housed a deli, lounge and ice cream parlor.



The fire also damaged the adjacent, closed Poli's restaurant building, so it was demolished. This picture from 2016 shows the site after the debris was cleared but before the new Seymour and Corinne Krause Commons building was constructed.

