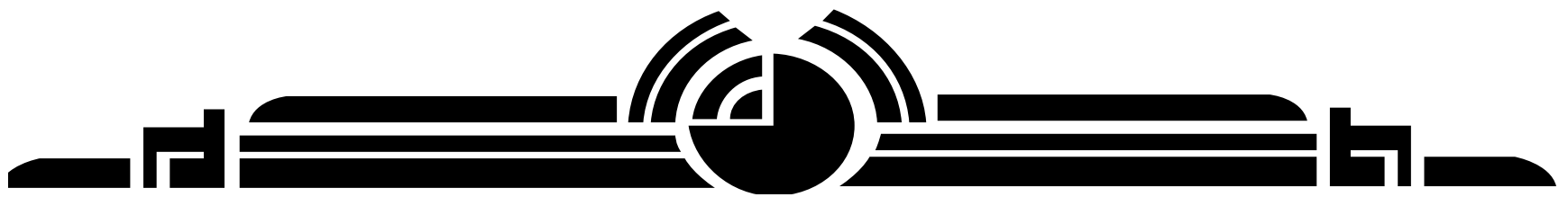# Squirrel Hill Historical Society

What Was at This Corner of Forbes and Murray Before the Squirrel Hill Carnegie Library Was Built?

The inaugural display of the Squirrel Hill Historical Society's Museum Board shows the development of the corner where the Squirrel Hill Carnegie Library now stands.

What happened on this spot is a microcosm of the way Squirrel Hill developed.

ARE YOU STANDING IN THE HEART OF SQUIRREL HILL?

The corner of Forbes and Murray is considered to be the very heart of Squirrel Hill.

Read on to find out how the intersection of Forbes and Murray came to exist.

1. The Early Years

In the early 1900s, the Pennsylvania Department of Internal Affairs compiled the *Warrantee Atlas of Allegheny County.* The atlas shows the earliest records of land ownership in the county, dating to the late 1700s and early 1800s.

The atlas can be viewed online at the University of Pittsburgh's **Historic Pittsburgh** website, http://digital.library.pitt.edu/maps/

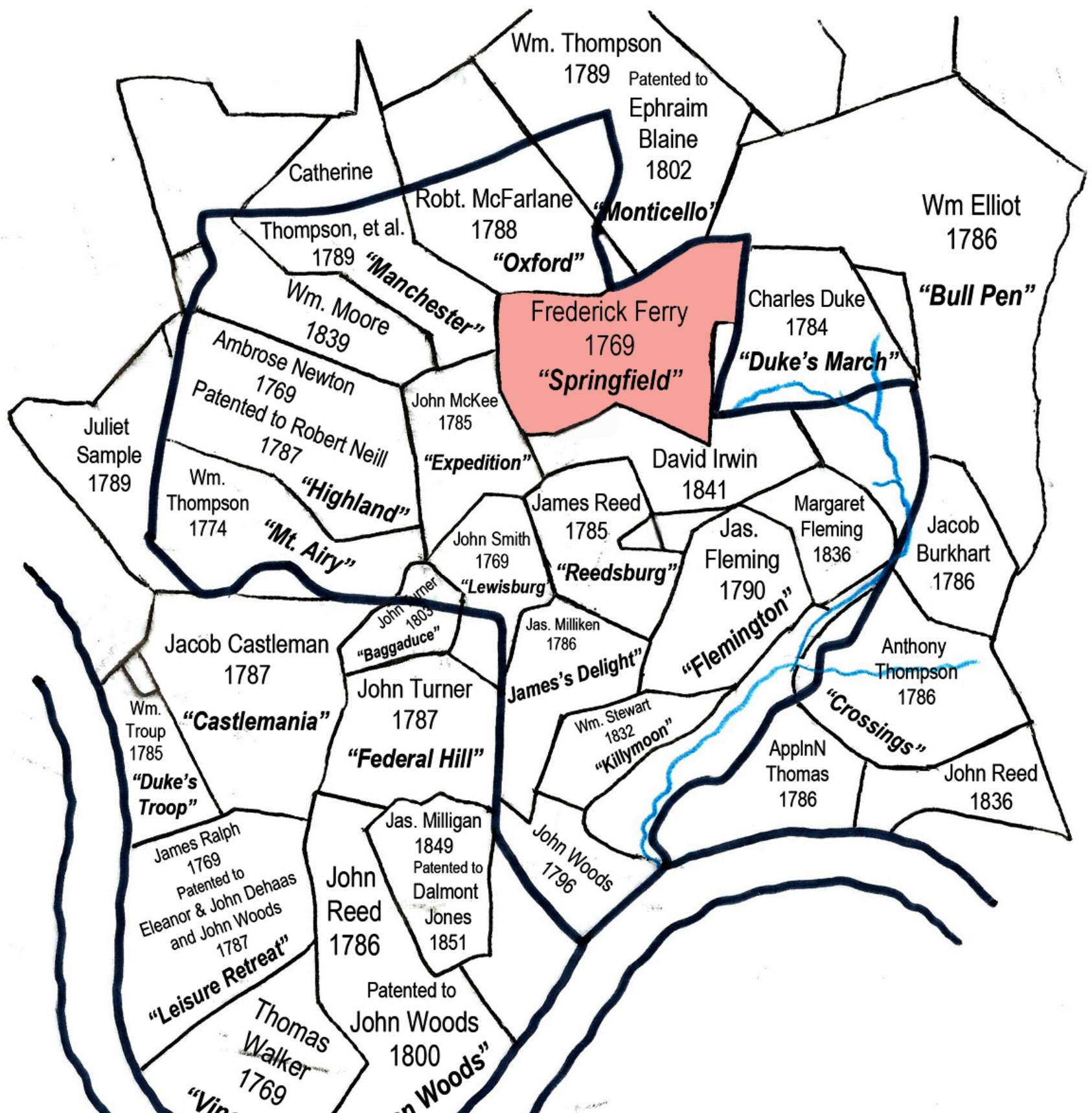Squirrel Hill looked like this in the late 1700s (modern boundaries are shown as a heavy black line):

2. The First Landowner

The earliest known owner (1769) of the land around Forbes and Murray was Frederick Ferry, who named his property "Springfield." It was the custom of the time to give names to farms and estates.

Below is a simplified version of the Warrantee map showing Ferry's property.
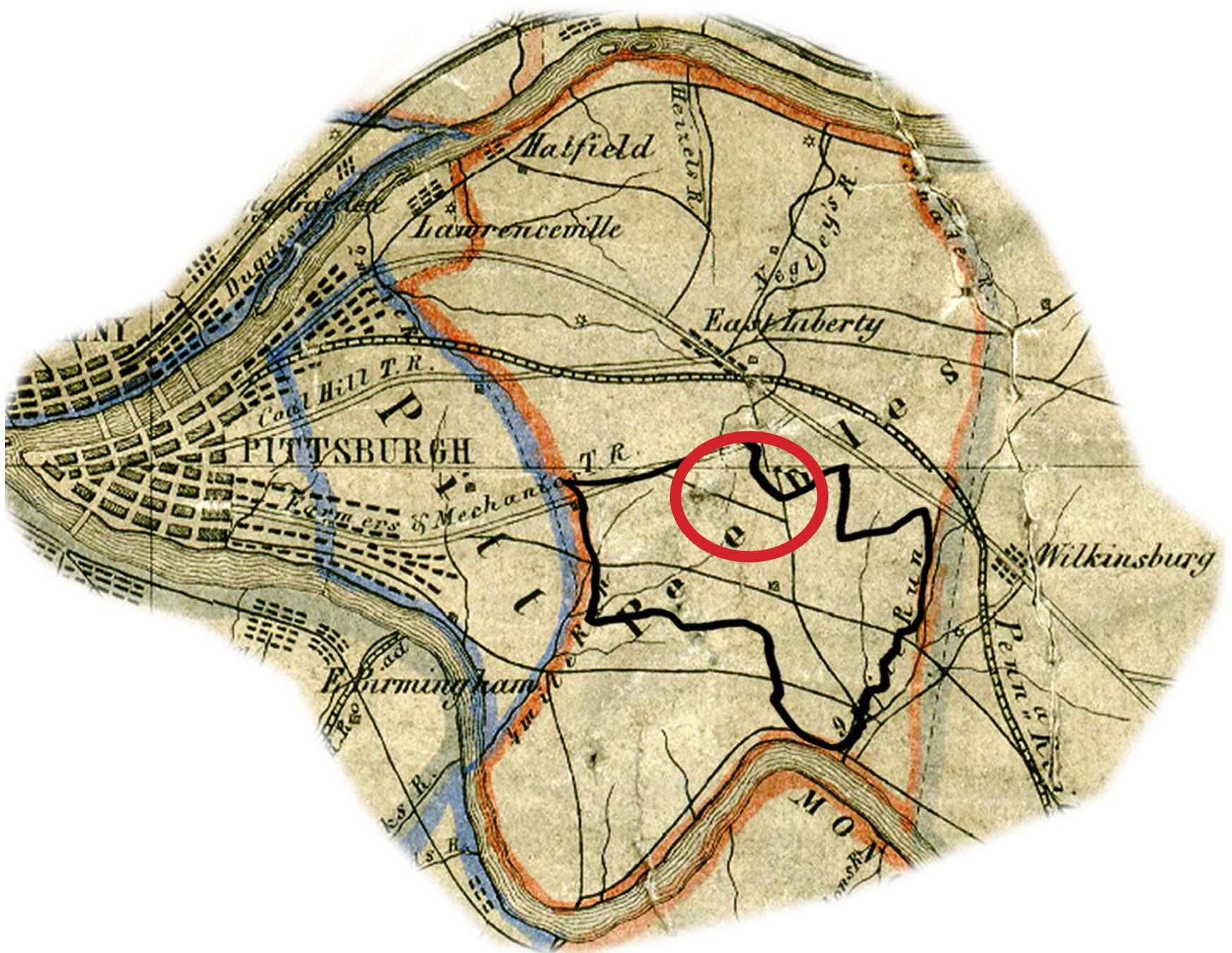
Wm. Thompson 1789 Patented to Ephraim Blaine 1802

Catherine

Robt. McFarlane 1788 *"Monticello"*

Wm Elliot 1786

Thompson, et al. 1789 *"Manchester"*

"Oxford"

Frederick Ferry 1769 *"Springfield"*

Charles Duke 1784

"Bull Pen"

Wm. Moore 1839

Ambrose Newton 1769 Patented to Robert Neill 1787 *"Highland"*

John McKee 1785 *"Expedition"*

"Duke's March"

Juliet Sample 1789

Wm. Thompson 1774 *"Mt. Airy"*

David Irwin 1841

Margaret Fleming 1836

Jacob Burkhart 1786

James Reed 1785

Jas. Fleming 1790

John Smith 1769 *"Reedsburg"*

"Lewisburg"

John Turner 1803 *"Baggaduce"*

Jas. Milliken 1786 *"James's Delight"*

"Flemington"

Anthony Thompson 1786

Jacob Castleman 1787

John Turner 1787 *"Federal Hill"*

Wm. Stewart 1832 *"Killymoon"*

"Crossings"

Wm. Troup 1785 *"Castlemania"*

"Duke's Troop"

ApplnN Thomas 1786

John Reed 1836

James Ralph 1769 Patented to Eleanor & John Dehaas and John Woods 1787 *"Leisure Retreat"*

John Reed 1786

Jas. Milligan 1849 Patented to Dalmont Jones 1851

John Woods 1796

Thomas Walker 1769 *"Vir..."*

Patented to John Woods 1800 *"...n Woods"*

3. Peebles Township

Until 1868, Squirrel Hill was part of Peebles Township, which was a mostly rural area with farms and large country estates. Squirrel Hill was sparsely settled. Few roads existed. Forbes and Shady were country roads. Murray didn't exist.

Pittsburgh annexed Peebles township in 1868. The heavy black line shows modern-day Squirrel Hill. The red circle shows Forbes and Shady.
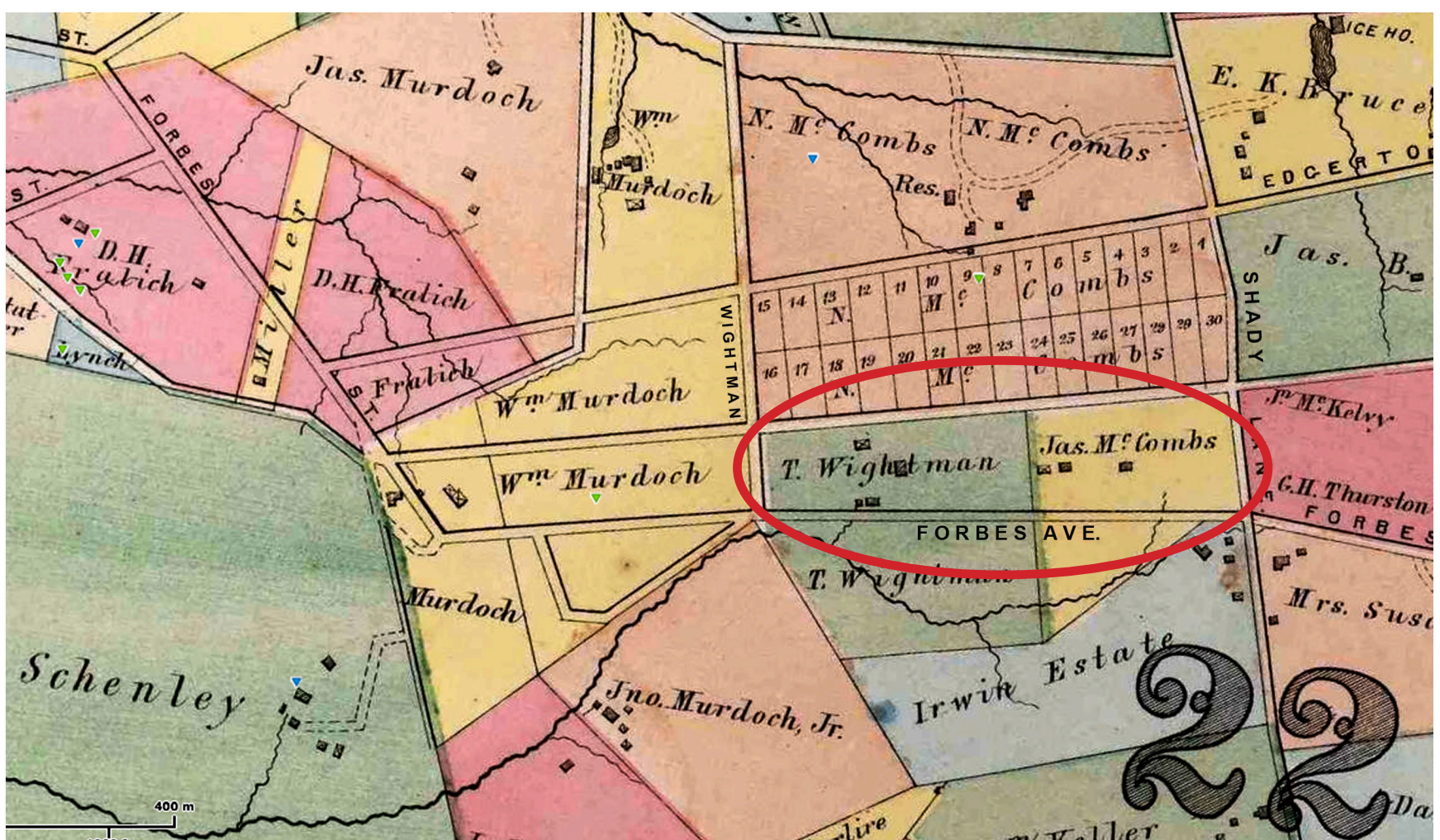
4. Forbes and Murray in 1872

This map from 1872 shows that Thomas Wightman owned the land to the left of Murray Avenue, and Jas. McCombs owned the land to the right—except that there was no Murray Avenue yet. The large estates in the area were just beginning to be divided into smaller residential lots.

Edgerton Avenue is now Northumberland Street. The large 22 in the bottom right corner shows that Squirrel Hill became part of the 22nd Ward after annexation.
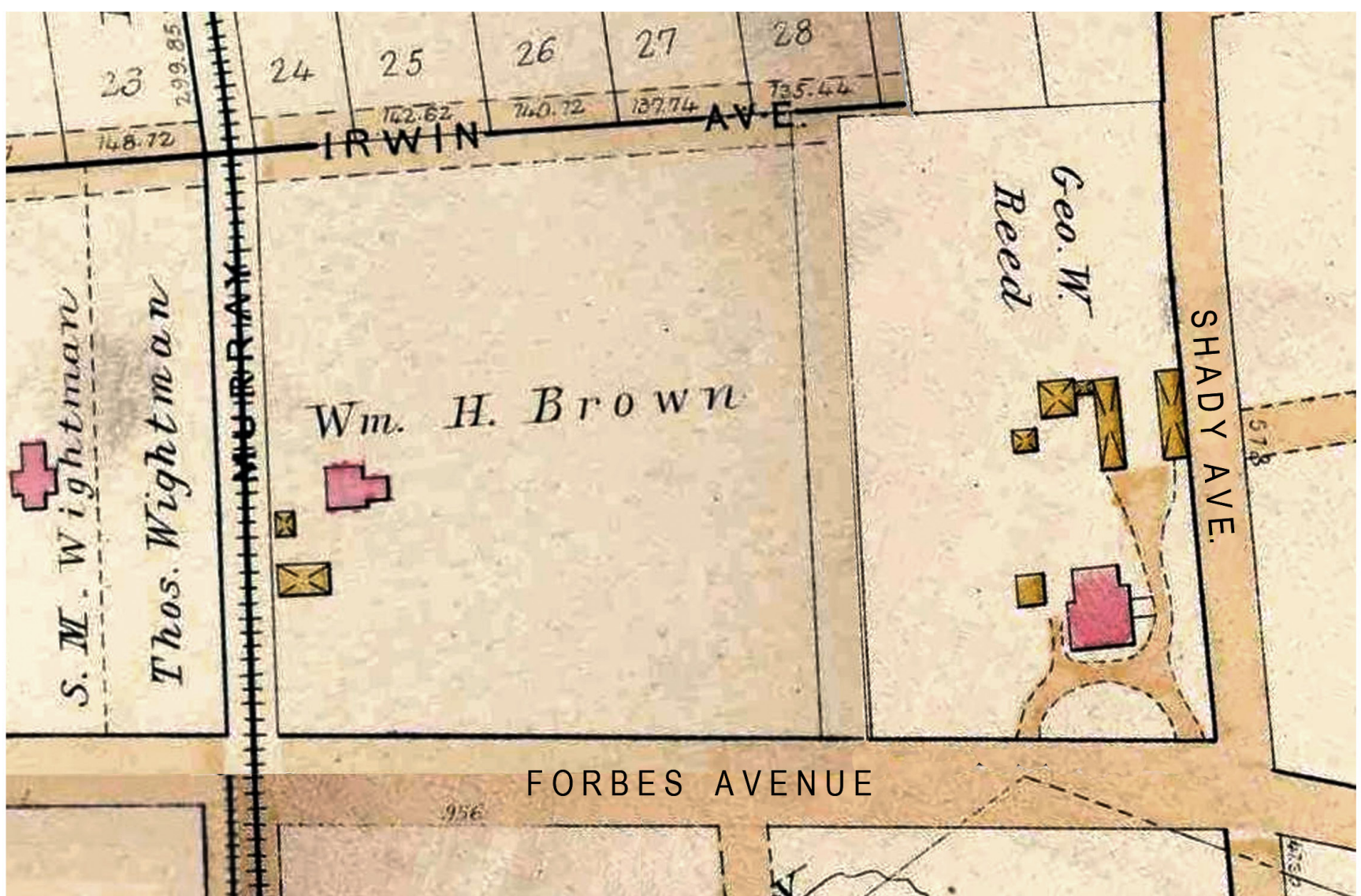
All maps in this display except for the Warrantee map and the Peebles Township map are adapted from the **Pittsburgh Historic Maps** website, peoplemaps.esri.com/pittviewer/.

5. A Few Years Later ...

Moving along to 1895, the corner of Forbes and Murray on which Carnegie Library is located was owned by William H. Brown, who had a house and two outbuildings on it. Irwin Ave. is now Aylesboro Ave. There is no sign of Marlborough Ave.

This map also shows trolley tracks coming down Murray Ave. from Northumberland St. Electric trolleys came to Squirrel Hill around 1893.
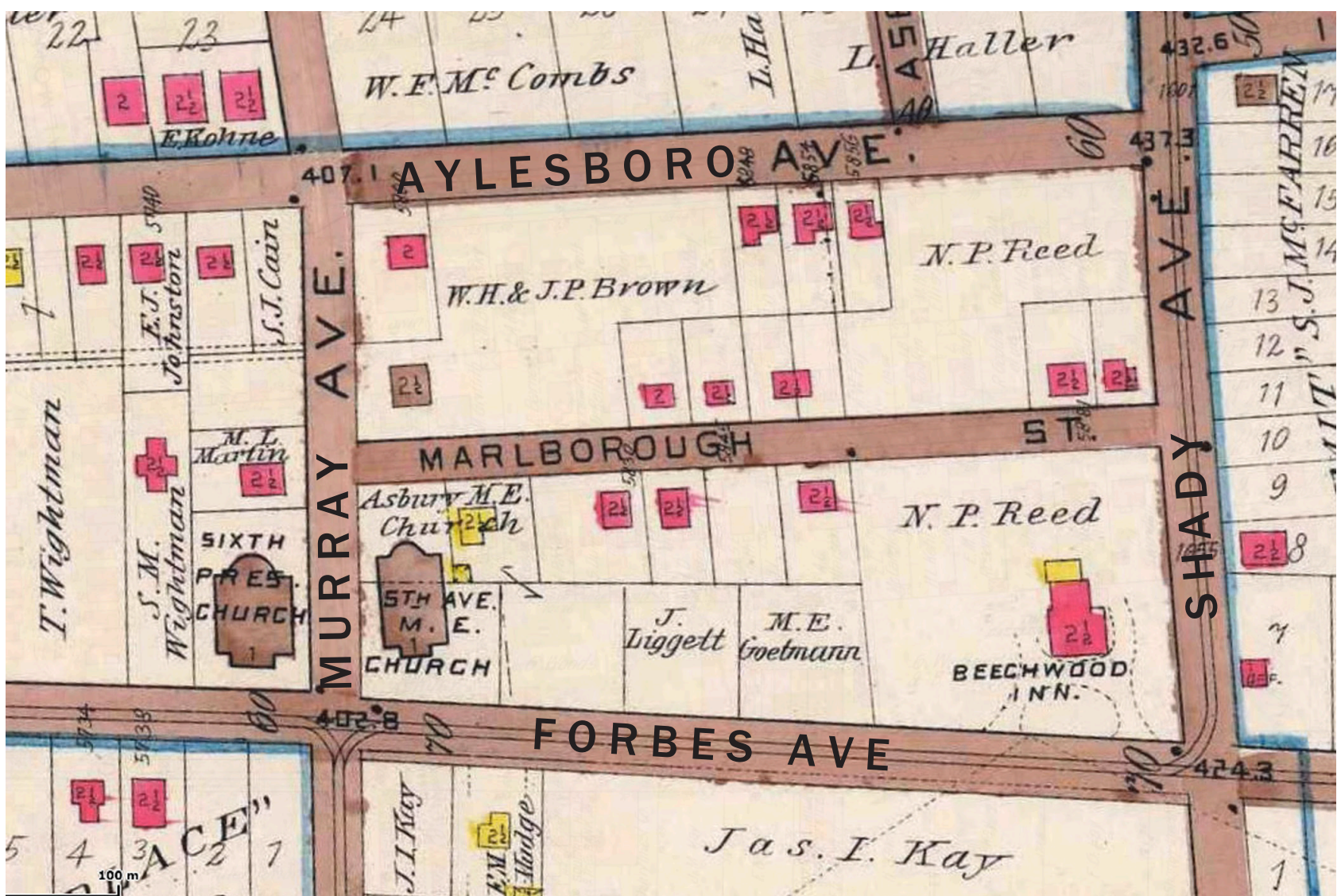
6. Along Came the Trolleys

Electric trolleys spurred the development of Squirrel Hill and the growth of the business district around Forbes and Murray.
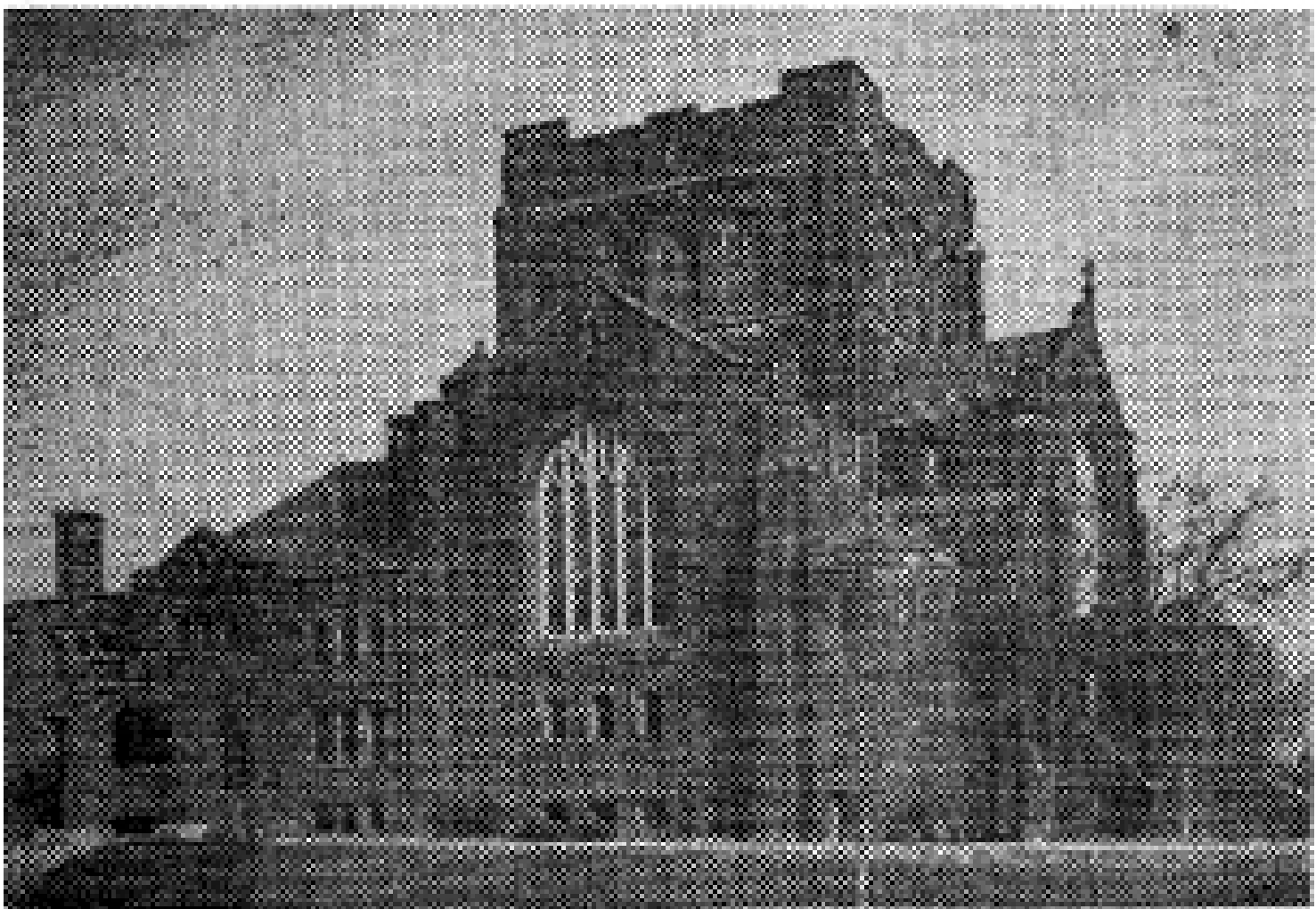
In this map from around 1910, trolley tracks come up Forbes and split at Murray. One route continues down Forbes to Shady, where it splits again to go to East Liberty and Wilkinsburg. The other route continues down Murray all the way to Homestead Note the Beechwood Inn at the corner of Forbes and Shady.

7. Asbury Methodist Church

In 1906, Asbury Methodist Church was built on the corner of Forbes and Murray where the Carnegie Library now sits. It was a majestic stone Gothic structure with an auditorium seating 500 people.

The church closed in 1966 due to declining membership. The Squirrel Hill branch of Carnegie Library was built on the site in 1971, with a parking garage at street level. The library was renovated in 2004-2005, which brings us up to the present time.