The Squirrel Hill Historical Society

Time to Celebrate!

The Squirrel Hill Branch of Carnegie Library Turns 50 this Year!

The Squirrel Hill Branch of Carnegie Library sits at the corner of Forbes and Murray, at the very heart of Squirrel Hill. The year 2022 marks its 50th anniversary at this prime location.

This display features the history of the library and also takes a look back at what was here before the library was built.

This display was created by Helen Wilson, Vice President of the Squirrel Hill Historical Society, 2022.

Timeline of Forbes and Murray

This display features photos and maps showing the development of the corner of Forbes and Murray where Carnegie Library is now located. Here is an overall timeline:

Pre-1760s – Native Americans hunted here since prehistoric times; European fur traders and trappers came in the 1700s.

1769–1872 – European settlers moved to Squirrel Hill and claimed large tracts of land for farming and country estates. The land where the library sits was claimed by Frederick Ferry in 1769. He patented it to John Ferry the same year.

The **1872** Hopkins plat map shows that the corner of Forbes and Murray where the library now sits was owned by James McCombs. Murray Avenue didn't exist yet. Abutting McCombs' property to the west, where Sixth Presbyterian Church sits, was Thomas Wightman's property.

The **1890** Hopkins plat map has Murray Ave. on it for the first time. The McCombs' property is now owned by W. H. Brown.

The **1903-06** Hopkins plat map shows the beginning of the urban development of Squirrel Hill after electric trolleys began running there. The property at the corner of Forbes and Murray has been bought by the 5th Ave. Methodist Church, but no building has been erected yet. Sixth Presbyterian Church across Murray was erected in 1903.

The **1910** Hopkins plat map shows the stately Asbury Methodist Episcopal Church now on the library corner. Asbury M.E. Church was built in 1906 and demolished in 1967.

In **1972**, the Squirrel Hill Branch of Carnegie Library opened on the corner.

In **2004**, the library underwent a $4.4 million renovation and has been serving the public in many ways ever since.
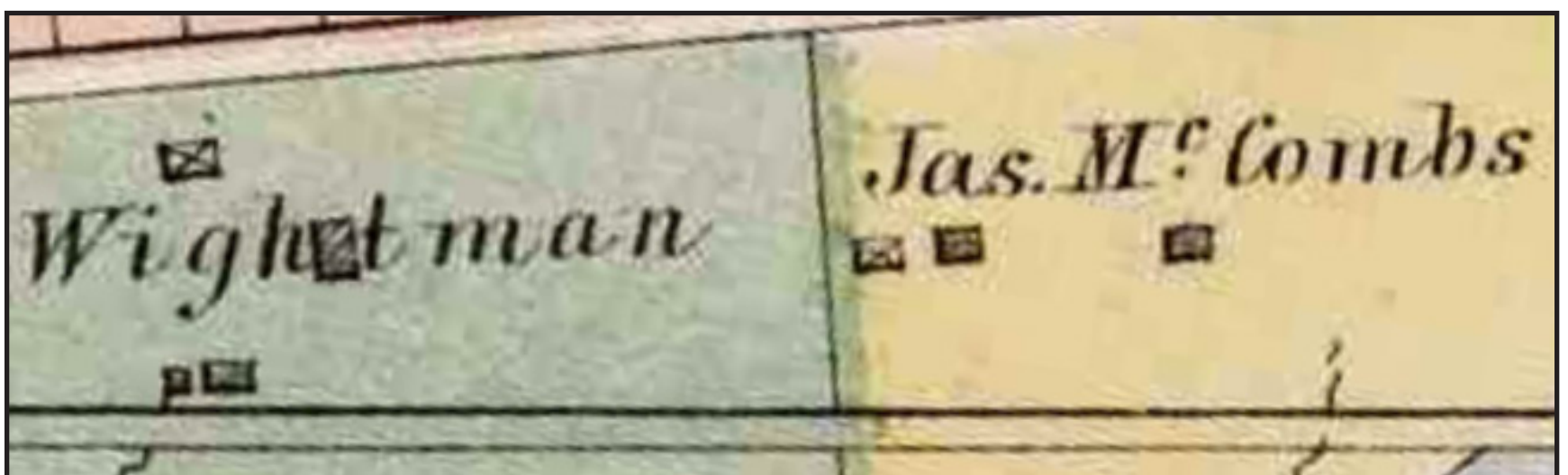
G. M. Hopkins Co. Maps

One of the best ways to see how an area developed through time is to look at a series of maps of that area. Although other maps are available online, none have provided as much information as the **G. M. Hopkins Company Maps.**

The Hopkins map collection comprises 47 volumes with more than 1,800 plates of plat maps. The volumes were published from 1872 to 1940. The plat maps show lot and block numbers, dimensions, street widths, names of property owners, churches, cemeteries, mills, schools, roads, railroads, lakes, ponds, rivers, and streams in the greater Pittsburgh area.
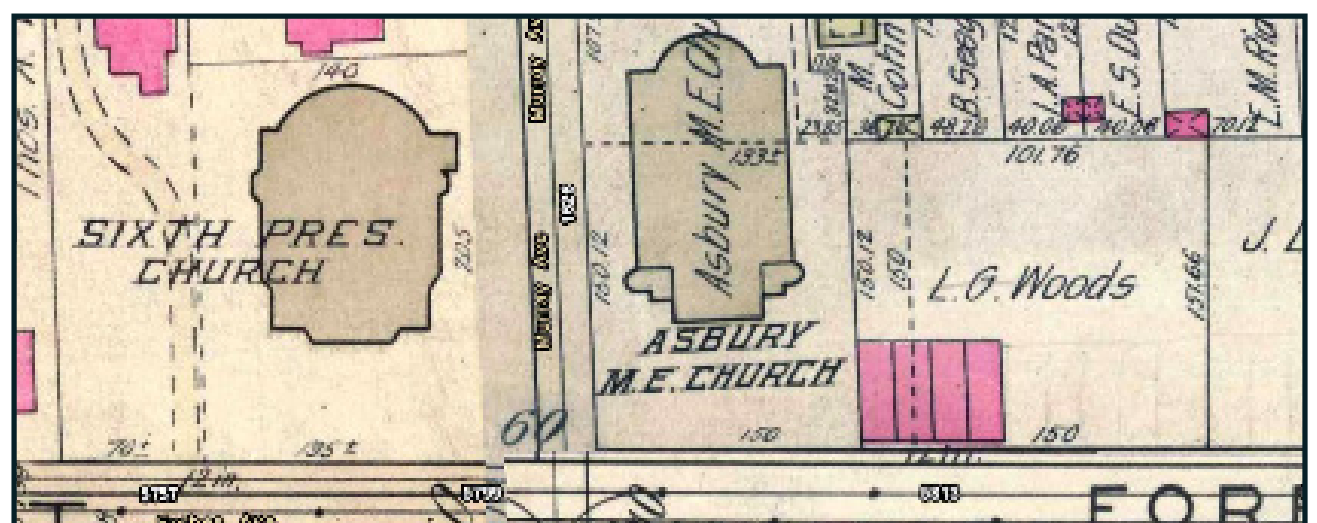
The maps are online on the University of Pittsburgh's **Historic Pittsburgh** website, **historicpittsburgh.org/maps-hopkins**.

Another great website for research is **Pittsburgh Historic Maps.** (The web address is long and complicated, so just google "Pittsburgh Historic Maps." The address begins with **arcgis. com/apps/).** The advantage to this website is that it has layers of maps of Pittsburgh that allow viewers to see how a particular area changes through time.

Screenshots of two maps of the corner of Forbes and Murray. *Above:* **1872**. Murray Ave. does not exist yet. *Right*: **1923**, showing Asbury M.E. Church, where the library is now.
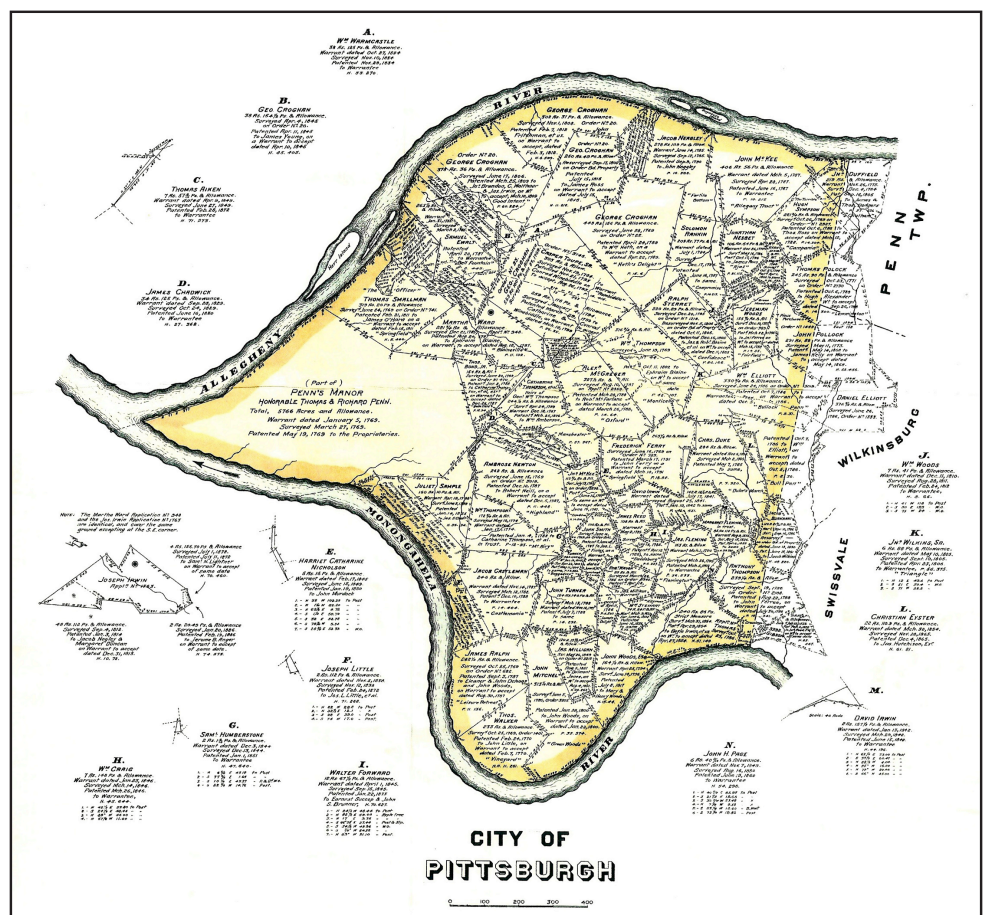
Forbes and Murray in the 1700s

The first inhabitants of Squirrel Hill were Native Americans, who used the forested hill as a hunting ground.
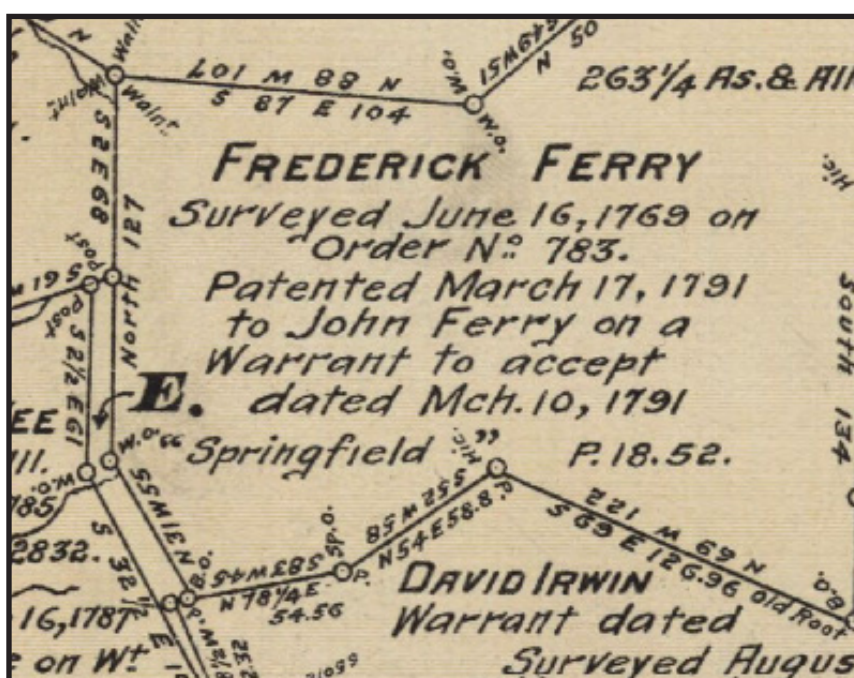
French and British hunters and trappers came in the mid 1700s. European settlers moved here beginning in the 1760s, blazing claims to large tracts of land. They later legalized their claims when the government of the colony of Pennsylvania opened a land office in Pittsburgh in 1769.

(Right) In 1914 the original deeds were compiled into the **Warrantee Atlas of Allegheny County, Pennsylvania**, "constructed from the records on file in the Department of Internal Affairs, and surveys made on the ground during 1909, 1910, 1912."
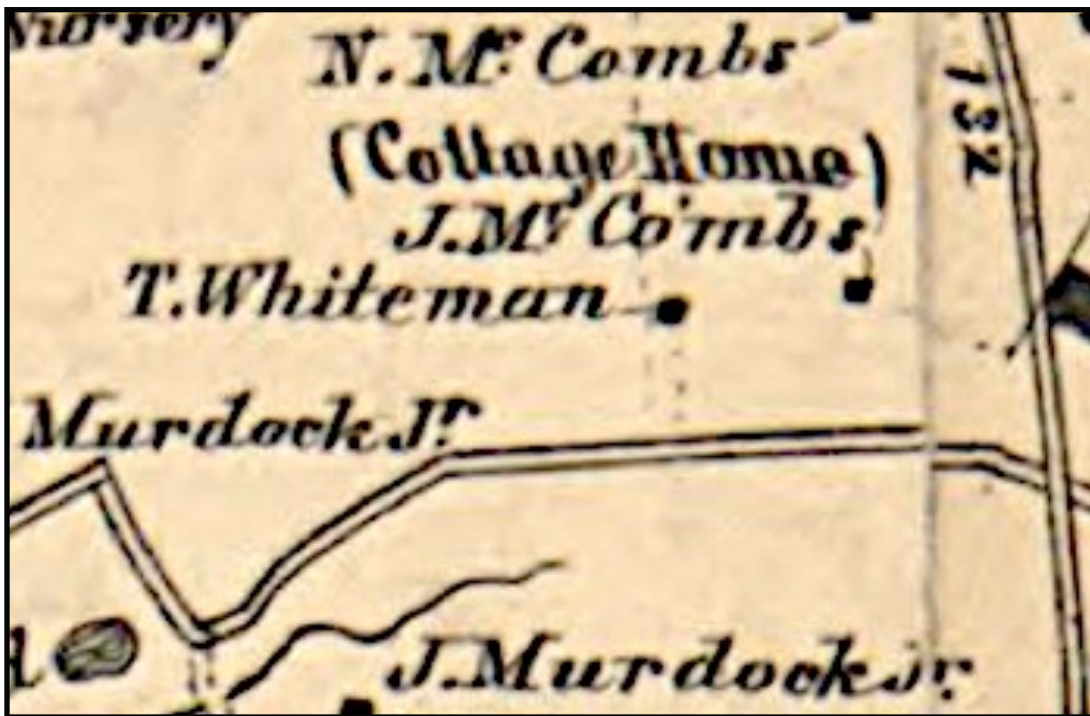

CITY OF PITTSBURGH

The land where Carnegie Library now stands was first claimed by Frederick Ferry, who legalized his claim in 1791. He patented it to John Ferry the same year.

The excerpt from the Warrantee Map *(below left)* shows Ferry's land. Below right is an overlay of modern Squirrel Hill showing where Forbes Avenue (blue line) and Murray Avenue (red line) are located.
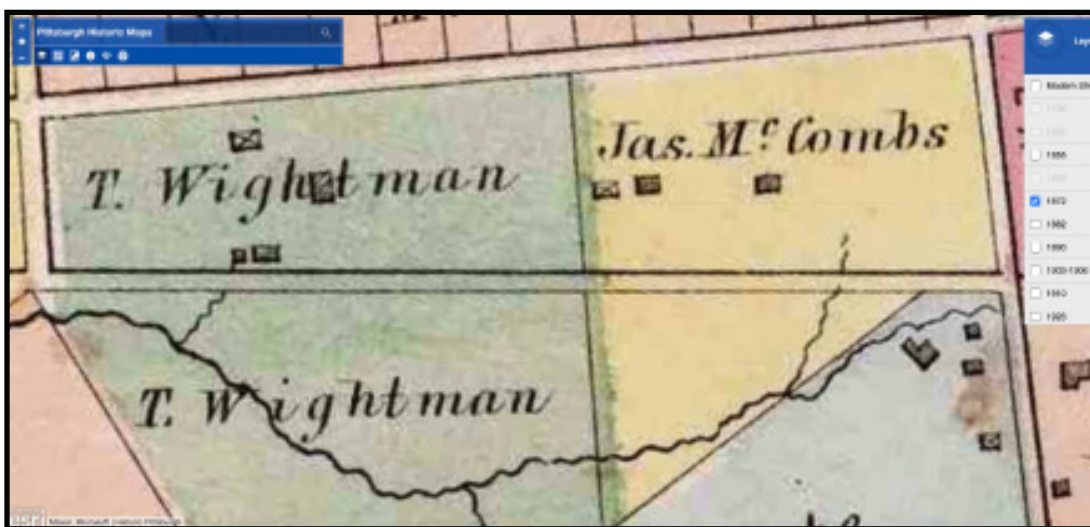
Forbes and Murray in the 1800s

Nothing much was going on at the corner of Forbes and Murray in the 1800s. In fact, Murray Avenue doesn't appear on Hopkins plat maps until 1882.
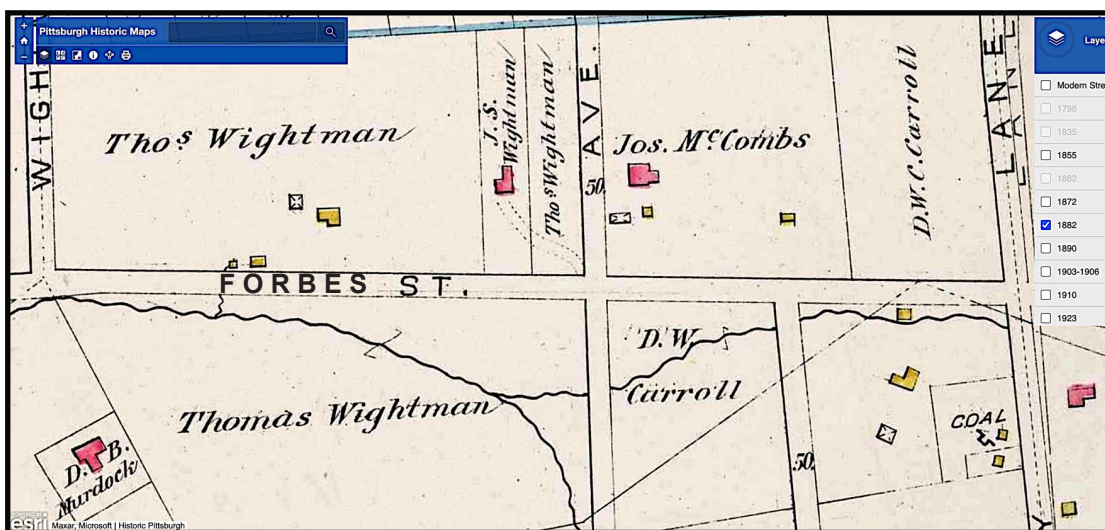

1862

J. McCombs' property is where Carnegie Library is now. The small squares represent houses. Shady Ave. is on the right. Forbes Ave. has a different alignment below McCombs' property. Murray Ave. doesn't exist.
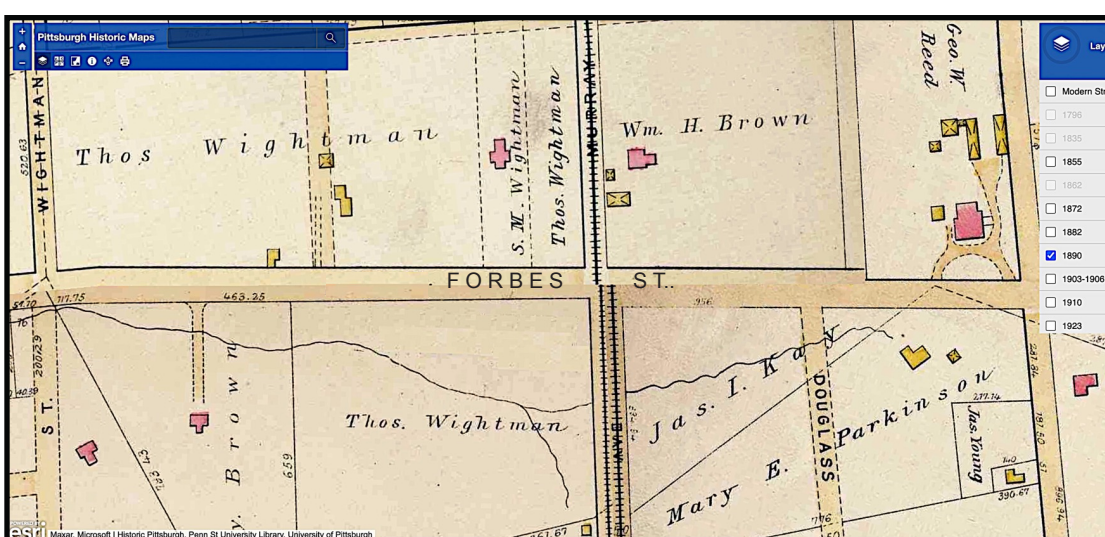

1872

Still no Murray Ave., but Forbes Ave. has been straightened out. Houses and outbuildings are indicated on the map. Note the creek, now culverted.

1882

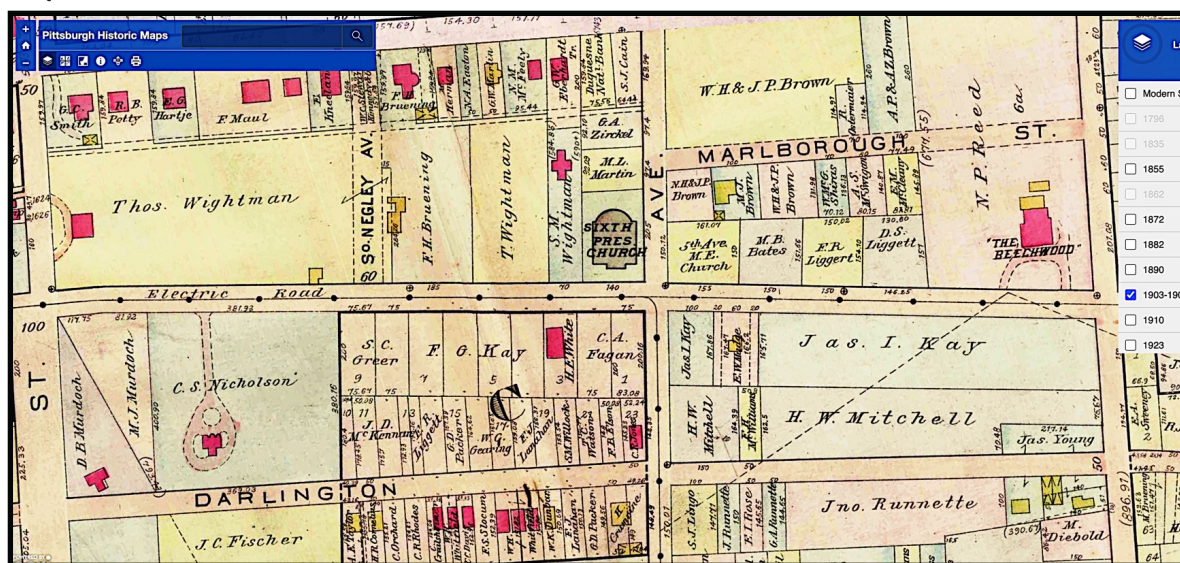Murray Ave. appears between McCombs' and Wightman's properties. Forbes Ave. was Forbes St. until 1957.

1890

Wm. H. Brown now owns the McCombs property. Trolleys came to Squirrel Hill in 1893, first coming up Northumberland St. to Murray.
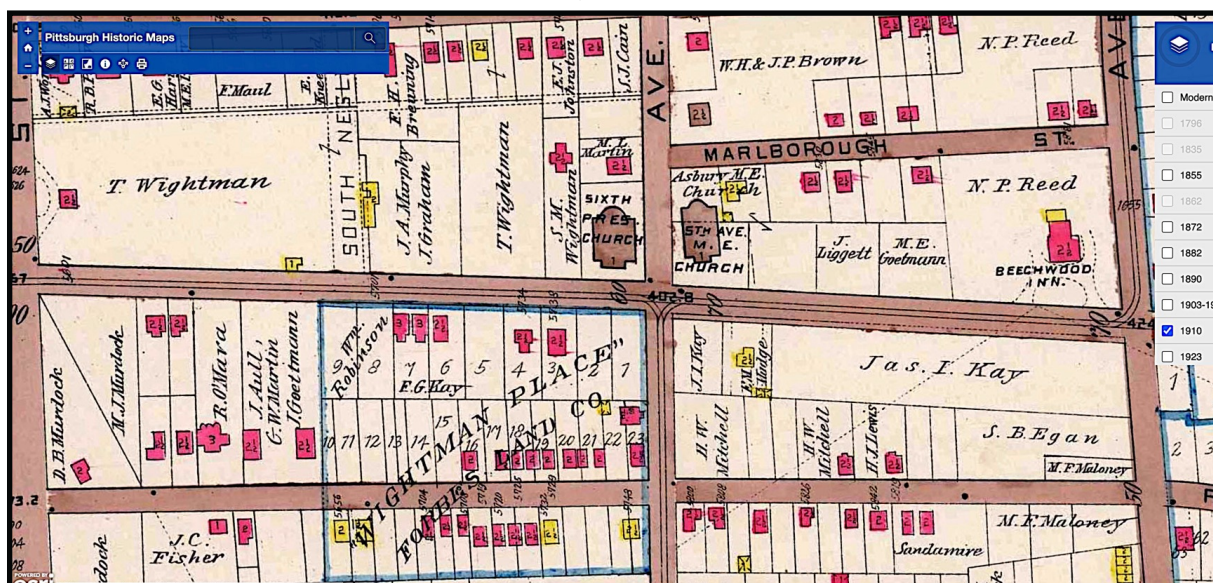
Forbes and Murray in the 1900s

With the coming of electric trolleys in 1893, Squirrel Hill's commercial and residential development skyrocketed. Within ten years, the large tracts of land around Forbes and Murray had been subdivided into smaller lots and buildings erected on them. Streets were added as needed. The creek disappeared underground.

1903-06 – The Fifth Avenue Methodist Episcopal Church acquired the property where Carnegie Library now stands. Sixth Presbyterian Church across Murray was built in 1903.

1910 – Asbury M. E. Church was built in 1906. It takes up a larger lot than the Fifth Ave. M.E. Church property, whose name is still on the map.

1923 – Many new buildings appear on the map. Forbes Ave. was slower to develop than Murray Ave. because the trolley route first went down Murray to Homestead.

The Corner in the Mid-1900s

Another great source of information about Squirrel Hill is the set of *Squirrel Hill News* newspapers from 1935-1970 donated to the SHHS and digitized by Carnegie Library. Go to the SHHS website, *sqhillhistory.org* to access them.
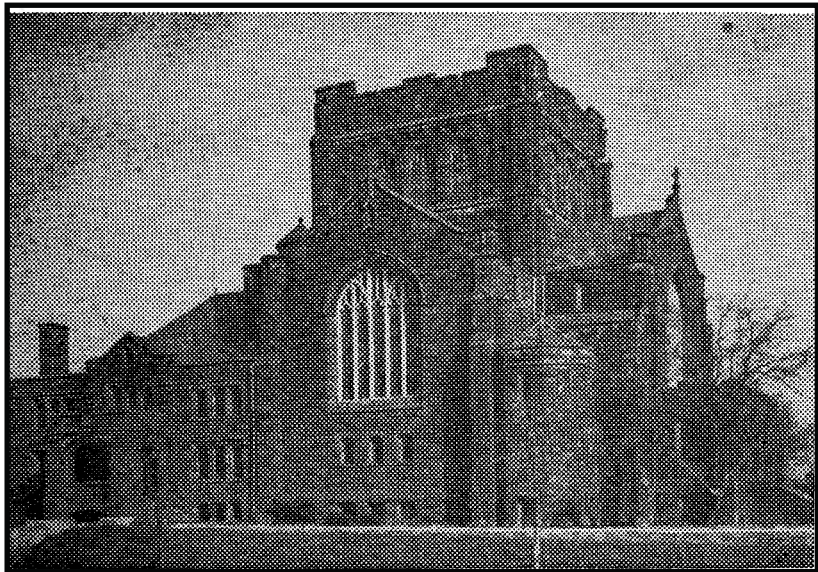

Along with Sixth Presbyterian Church, Asbury M.E. Church *(left)* towered over the corner of Forbes and Murray until it was demolished in 1966.

The last mention of Asbury M.E. Church in the *Squirrel Hill News* was in 1965 *(bottom left)*.

The picture above shows the Asbury M.E. Church on the corner of Forbes and Murray in 1941. Note the trolley tracks and Belgian block roads. *(Pittsburgh City Archives, Records Management Division of the Office of the City Clerk.)* Below left: "Coffee and Folk Song." *(Squirrel Hill News, May 13, 1965.)*   Below right: Forbes and Murray in 1966. The trolley tracks on Murray have already been paved over. Trolleys stopped running through Squirrel Hill in 1967. *(Pittsburgh City Photographer Collection, Archives & Special Collections, University of Pittsburgh Library System.)*

COFFEE AND FOLK SONG

While long-range plans are being made for Squirrel Hill, Rev. Lewis Hastings of the Asbury Methodist Church has done something to alleviate one existing problem: the need for more teenage recreation in this neighborhood.

Asbury Church is sponsoring a Saturday Night Coffee House program each week in the social hall of the church. All high school and college youth of the area have been invited to attend the weekly folk-singing sessions and to meet with friends in a coffee-house atmosphere.

Planning the Library

ROUND-ABOUT SQUIRREL HILL

By IDA RUBENSTEIN

Last week's Town Meeting at the Irene Kaufman Center proved beyond doubt that the 14th Ward resident is acutely interested in his neighborhood's future. Approximately 300 people jammed into the All-Purpose Room of IKC to hear Neiland Douglas, principal planner for the Pittsburgh Department of City planning, present an over-all renewal plan for this area.

He discussed recommended improvements for the business district, the need for more off-street parking, particularly for the lower Murray Avenue district, additional parklets at Sterret, Davis, Minadeo, and Swishelm Schools, and extension of the park system. It is hoped that, eventually, the blighted Nine Mile Run area can be improved with the elimination of slag dumping in this area.

Suggested for 14th Ward are a new library, the relocation of No. 6 police headquarters, a freeway cutting through to East Liberty, improvements to secondary streets, a fire station for the Point Breeze area, and apartment buildings for high density sections.

This report in the *Squirrel Hill News*, May 13, 1965, shows that residents were concerned about the welfare of their community. One of the suggestions for improvement of the 14th Ward, which includes Squirrel Hill, was for a new library.

★ ★ ★

THE SITUATION then began deteriorating rapidly. On April 20, 1970, council passed a resolution ordering the Flaherty administration to continue work on the Squirrel Hill branch of the Carnegie Library — a library which the mayor insisted the community did not need immediately.

Flaherty vetoed the resolution. It marked the first time that the mayoral veto had been used in Pittsburgh since 1943 when Cornelius D. Scully rejected a councilmanic zoning change.

Council overrode the veto, signaling the beginning of a series of mayoral vetoes and councilmanic overrulings which have come to be commonplace.

Council's latest and perhaps most serious conflict with the administration stems from the mayor's refusal to permit them as individuals to have free access to city books and records.
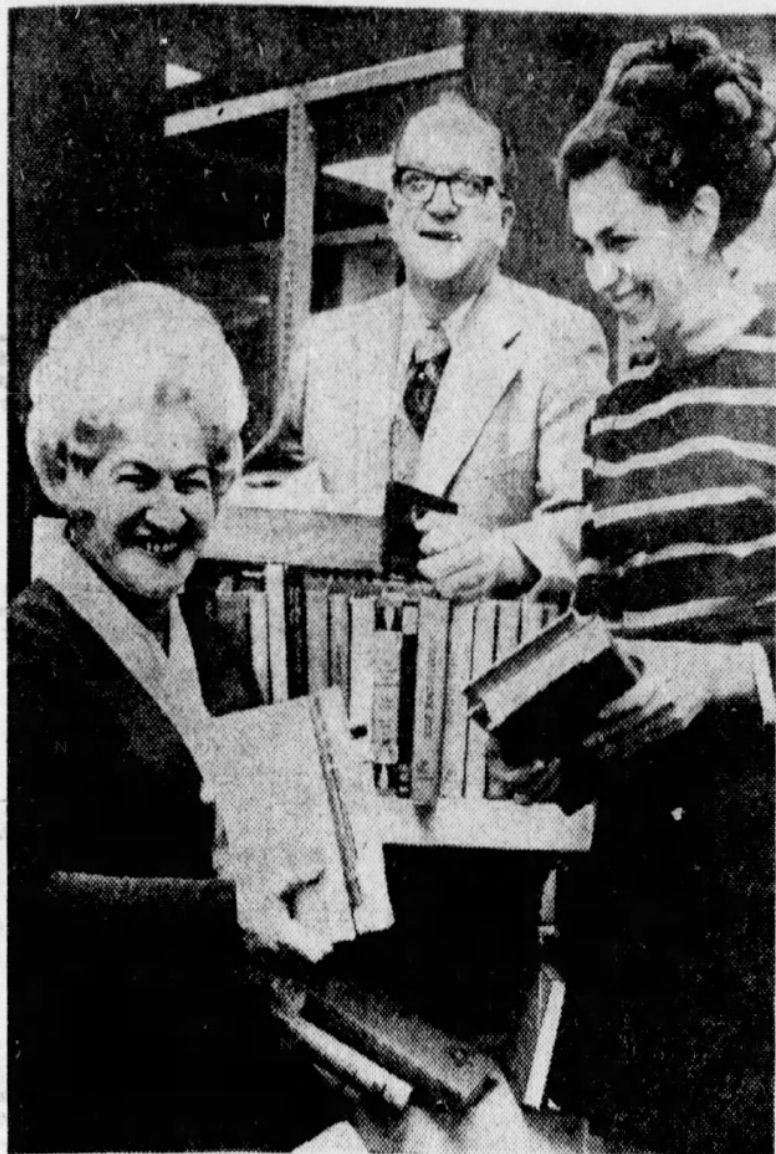
The law appears to be clearly on council's side; some of them have been assured of it by eminent legal authority. But they have been told by City Solicitor Ralph Lynch Jr. that Flaherty is right and they are wrong.

In the two-year see-saw battle with the mayor, council has a rather undistinguished win-loss record. Should council lose the "books and record" dispute, it would be relegated to the status of little more than a legislative eunuch.

For a while, Squirrel Hill residents weren't sure they would have a library. Then-mayor Pete Flaherty was opposed to the idea and vetoed the resolution by City Council ordering the Flaherty administration to continue work on the library. (*Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, March 2, 1972, Newspapers.com.)

Carnegie Library Opens!

—Press Photo by Edwin Morgan

AWAITING DEDICATION of the new Squirrel Hill Branch of Carnegie Library Dec. 13 are members of the Temple Sinai Sisterhood: Mrs. George W. Dunn, left, and Mrs. Darwin Rosenfeld, and Anthony A. Martin, director of Carnegie Library, center.

Library To Open In Squirrel Hill

Squirrel Hill residents are finally getting their long-awaited library.

A branch of the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh, the facility will be dedicated at an open-house Dec. 13 from 7 to 9 p.m. at the library, c o r n e r of Forbes and Murray avenues.

The project, okayed by Joseph M. Barr in May, 1967, was at first opposed by the Flaherty administration, according to Anthony A. Martin, director of Carnegie Library.

But, after approval of the library was given, the city did everything possible to aid the project, Martin said.

In recent months, according to Martin, the opening of the library branch has been delayed due to slow delivery of shelves and furniture by the manufacturer.

The library d i r e c t o r is scheduled to speak to the Dec.

13 meeting of the Temple Sinai Sisterhood.

His topic will be "Total Library Services in the Squirrel Hill Community." The meeting begins at 12:30 p.m. at Temple Sinai in Squirrel Hill.

The Squirrel Hill Branch of the Carnegie Library was dedicated at an open house on December 13, 1972. This article from *The Pittsburgh Press*, November 29, 1972, *(Newspapers.com)* says the project was okayed by Mayor Joseph M. Barr in May 1967.

Then, after initial opposition by Mayor Pete Flaherty, "after approval of the library was given, the city did everything possible to aid the project."

The article says the library director was scheduled to speak to the Dec. 13 meeting of the Temple Sinai Sisterhood. The topic of the speech says it all: "Total Library Services in the Squirrel Hill Community."

The picture below *(undated, Squirrel Hill Historical Society)* shows the library before its renovation in 2004.
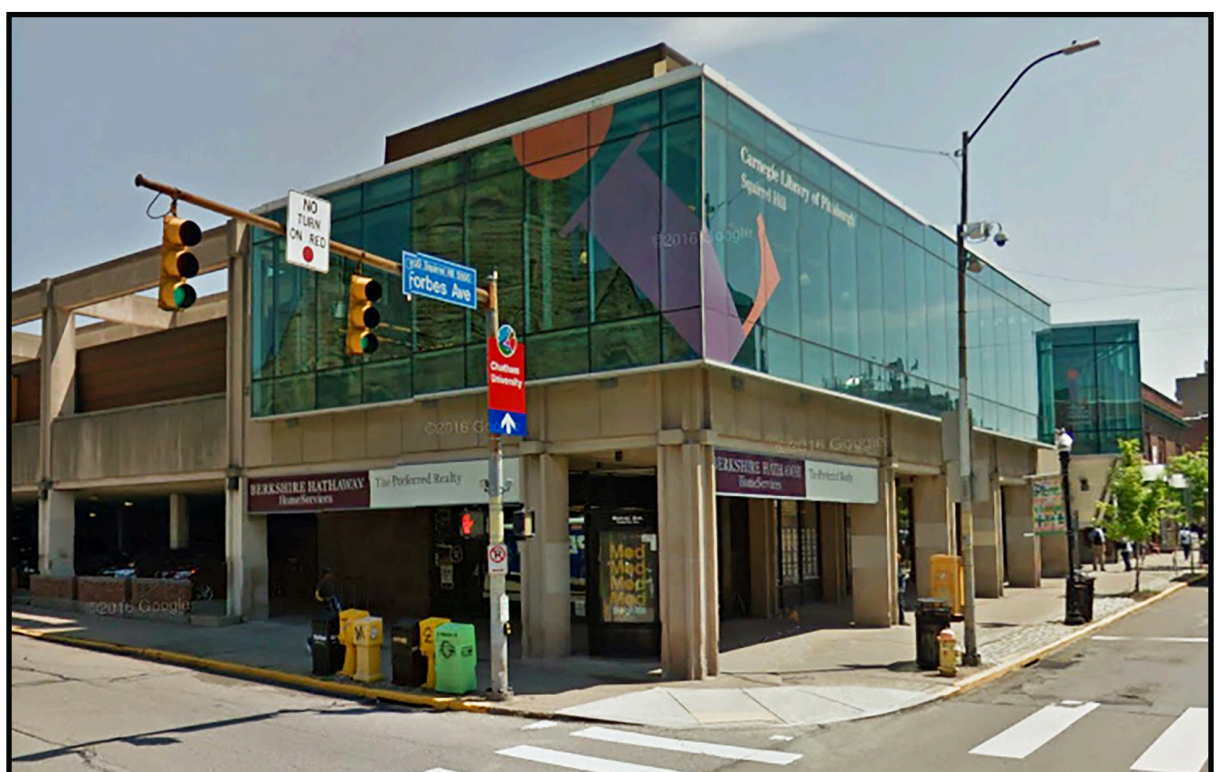
The 2004 Renovation

In February 2004 the library closed for a $4.4 million renovation and reopened in 2005. The renovation added an additional 7,000 square feet, creating a comfortable, urban, loft-style library overlooking the business district.

This photo is from "In Photos: Squirrel Hill Then & Now," Action News 4, image courtesy Arcadia publishing/Squirrel Hill Historical Society.)

The description of the renovated library on the Squirrel Hill Branch of Carnegie Library website says, "This large neighborhood location offers a variety of areas for reading, studying and working, including four comfy reading nooks built into the Library's outside wall. Additionally, there are places for our community to gather and connect in spacious meeting rooms or the lovely enclosed garden area.

"To meet the information needs of the community, CLP – Squirrel Hill is open seven days a week and provides 30 desktop and 17 laptop computers for adult patrons. The children's section has nine computers with tables and chairs to accommodate young Library users. Guests can enjoy a variety of programming for all ages, like storytimes, STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math) programming, Teen Time, Book Discussion Groups and several language programs."
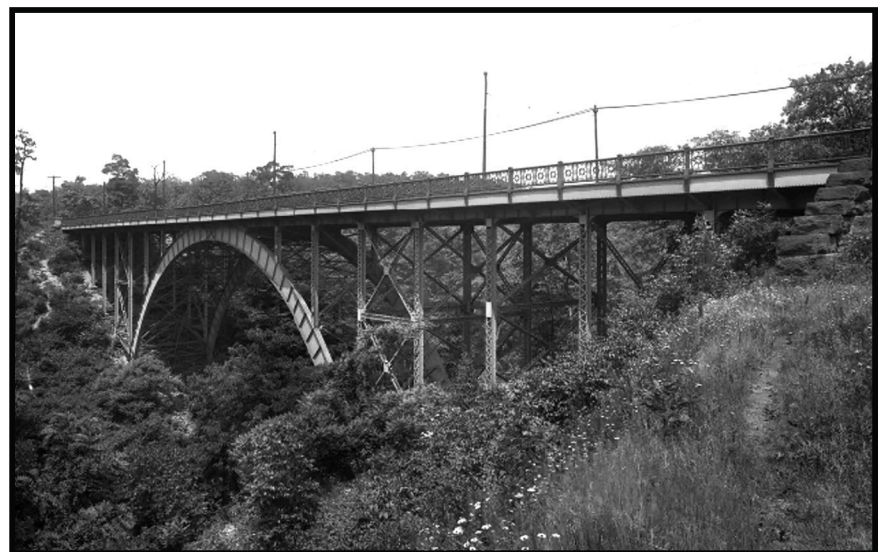
What Else Happened in Squirrel Hill in 1972?

In 1972, Squirrel Hill residents, like those in other Pittsburgh neighborhoods, were concerned about decaying infrastructure and decline in amenities. **The Squirrel Hill Urban Coalition** was founded that year with the purpose of "Preserving, Improving, and Celebrating the Quality of Life in Squirrel Hill." SHUC has worked tirelessly ever since to meet those goals. To see all the ways SHUC is involved in the community, go to *shuc.org.*

Community Day School was founded in 1972 by a group of parents as a nondenominational Jewish day school, first located in the old Hebrew Institute building at the corner of Forbes and Denniston Avenues. It moved to the St. Philomena's property in 1996.

The first **Fern Hollow Bridge** closed in 1972. It opened in 1901, giving commuters easier access to Squirrel Hill, Oakland and Downtown from Regent Square, Wilkinsburg, Braddock, and communities farther east.

"Frick Park." *(Pittsburgh City Photographer Collection, Archives & Special Collections, University of Pittsburgh Library System.)*

The **Manor Theatre**, which opened in 1922 and is celebrating its 100th anniversary this year, was divided into two theaters in 1972, reflecting changing moviegoer preferences.

Slag dumping ended in Nine Mile Run valley in 1972. Beginning in 1922, more than seventeen million cubic yards of slag had been dumped in the scenic valley to a depth of 120 feet. The dump sat abandoned while various uses were proposed for it. The barren space was eventually filled by the lively residential Summerset Development at Frick Park.

Manor Theatre. *(Squirrel Hill Historical Society., photo by Patricia Hughes.)*