

# Significant Buildings of Squirrel Hill, Then and Now



**This display is about the Who, What, When,  
Where and Why of (Just a Few of) Squirrel  
Hill's Historic Buildings.**

Squirrel Hill doesn't have a uniform look because it developed haphazardly, and the vision of what it should be like has changed drastically through time. Although a few buildings have been torn down, most remain but have undergone a number of alterations over the years.

If you'd like to see our past displays, they are online on the SHHS's website, *[squirrelhillhistory.org](http://squirrelhillhistory.org)*. If you have questions, email us at *[sqhillhist@shhsoc.org](mailto:sqhillhist@shhsoc.org)*.

# Designated Historic Buildings in Squirrel Hill

Squirrel Hill has a wealth of significant structures from different eras displaying a variety of architectural designs. Here is a list of buildings that have received historic designations.

**CODE:**

**Eligible**—Meets Criteria for Eligibility in the National Register

**NR**—Listed in the National Register of Historic Places

**PI**—Listed in the Pennsylvania Inventory, Eligible for Listing in the National Register

**\***—Located within a National Register Listed Historic District

**Born Building**, 1821-35 Murray Ave. Eligible

**Hamburg Hall**, Carnegie Mellon University (formerly the Bureau of Mines), 4800 Forbes Ave., NR

**Harter House**, 2557 Beechwood Blvd., Eligible

**Howe-Childs Gate House**, 5918/6000 Fifth Avenue, CD PI

**Wightman Community Center** (formerly Wightman Elementary School, 5604 Solway St.), NR

**Neill Log House**, 5229 E. Circuit Rd, Schenley Park, \*CD

**Panther Hollow Bridge**, Schenley Park, \*CD

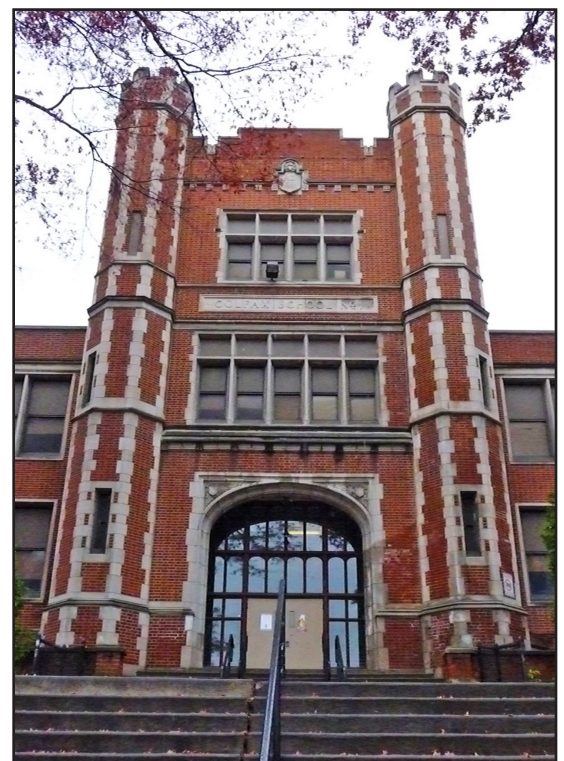
**Phipps Conservatory and Botanical Garden**, 1 Schenley Dr., CD \*NR

**Pittsburgh Allderdice High School**, 2409 Shady Ave., NR

**Pittsburgh Colfax School**, 2332 Beechwood Blvd., NR \*CD (*pictured*)

**Schenley Park Bridge**, Schenley Park, \*CD

**Sunnylegge** (formerly the McClelland House), 5136 Fifth Avenue, CD Eligible





# Manor Theatre

The Manor Theatre looked like this when it opened in 1922. A newspaper article announcing the opening stated, "After a profound study of the location,



Mr. Clark decided on ... a blending of the Elizabethan and Tudor styles. As a result, the [theatre] harmonizes with the surrounding handsome residences."

The Manor was divided into two theaters in 1978 and four in 1992. Sometime after 1990, the building to the left of the Manor was incorporated into the theater building and another dormer gable added. By 2010, Manor owner Rick Stern had to decide whether to close or remodel. He chose to do a complete remodel, bringing back the former glamour of the interior while installing state-of-the-art digital equipment.



Space in the building has been occupied by various stores and restaurants, most recently by the CMU Robotics Institute.





# The Oldest Building “ON” Squirrel Hill— The Woods House



The stone house that John Woods built in 1792 is located at 4604 Monongahela St. in Hazelwood. Before Pittsburgh annexed it in 1868, the whole hill was called “Squirrel Hill,” and included what is now Greenfield, Glen Hazel, and the hilly part of Hazelwood. People said they lived “on” Squirrel Hill, not “in” it.

John Woods and his father laid out the City of Pittsburgh in 1784. Woods Street downtown is named for them. Stephen Foster was a friend of the family and came to play the piano in their parlor in the mid-1800s. The house was added to the List of City of Pittsburgh Historic Designations in 1977, and in 1993 it was added to the National Register of Historic Places.

The house stood vacant for a long time and was in danger of being demolished, but in 2020 it was beautifully restored to authentic historical standards.

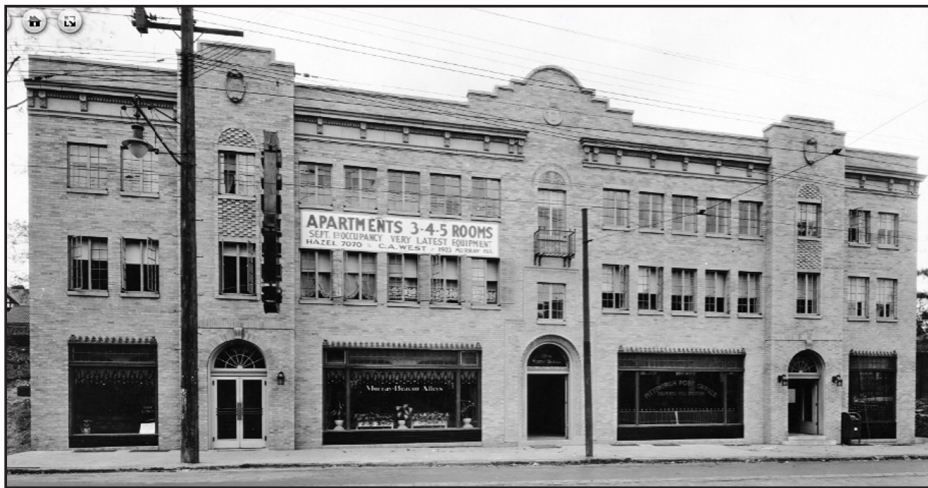
It is now the **Woods House Historic Pub**, with great food in a setting that evokes its 18th century beginnings.



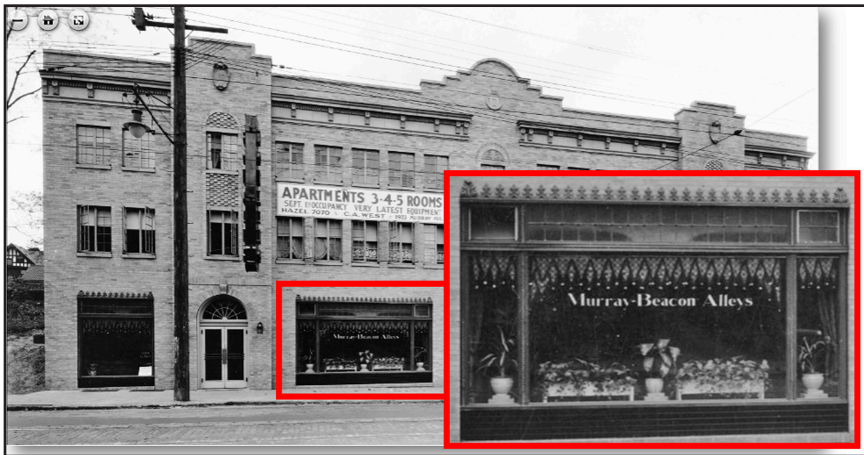


# C. W. West Building

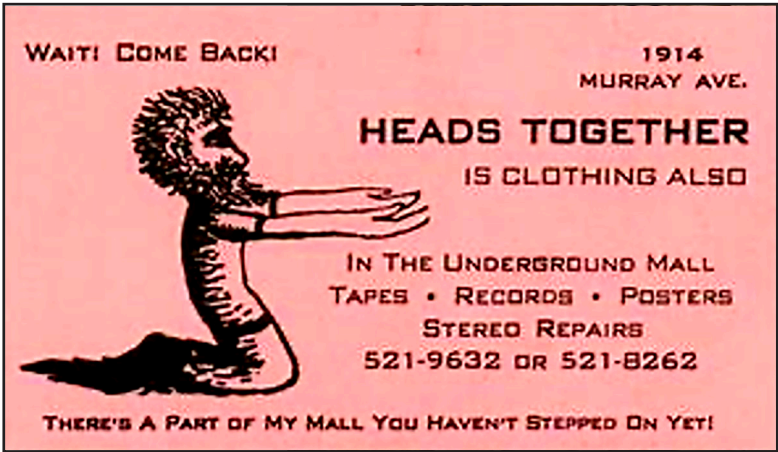
The **C. W. West Building**, 1914 Murray Ave., is located across the street from the Giant Eagle. It is an imposing building, but few people notice it as they pass by. It has been many things since it was built in the 1930s.



This view of it from before 1939 shows that the **Murray Beacon Alleys** and the **Post Office** were located in the building. The bowling alleys became Funland in 1963.



The basement became **Heads Together** in the 1970s and closed in 2009. **Steal City Vintage** has occupied the space since 2023. Other parts of the building have offices, apartments, and a variety of changing businesses.





# “Kamin” Building



The elegant building with the white ceramic facade in the middle of Forbes Avenue has no official name now, going by the individual addresses of the businesses in it, but on a 1939 Hopkins plat map it is named “Kamin.”

Herman Kamin (1879-1965), an immigrant from Lithuania, founded the Kamin Realty Company in 1916. In the 1920s he began buying up properties to develop in Squirrel Hill, sometimes using a fake name to avoid being turned down because he was a Jew. He was a major real estate developer in Squirrel Hill, building houses and apartments on Marlborough and Darlington Roads, Malvern and Inverness Avenues, Fair Oaks, Wightman, Kamin and Covode Streets, and Beechwood Boulevard. The Kamin Realty Co. is still in business. In 2024, Daniel and Carole Kamin donated \$65 million to the Carnegie Science Center, which will be renamed for them.

## Marlborough Building

Famous actor and dancer Gene Kelly had four different dance studios in three Squirrel Hill buildings. His first studio was in the Marlborough Building, 5628 Forbes Ave. The renovated building is still there. After that, he had two studies in the Kamin building at 5854-5862 Forbes Ave.



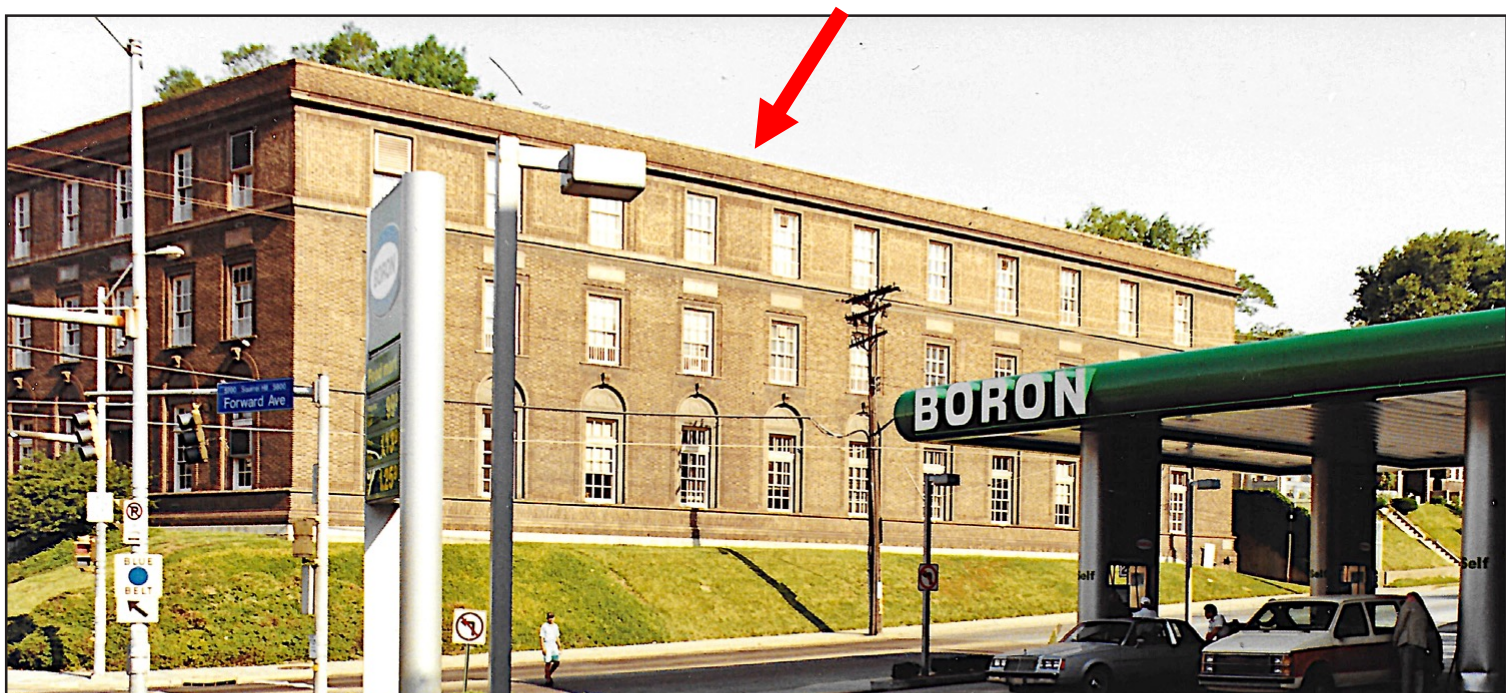
His last studio was in the Beacon Apartment Hotel on Munhall Road, which was replaced by the Imperial House. Kelly also did musical productions for Beth Shalom.





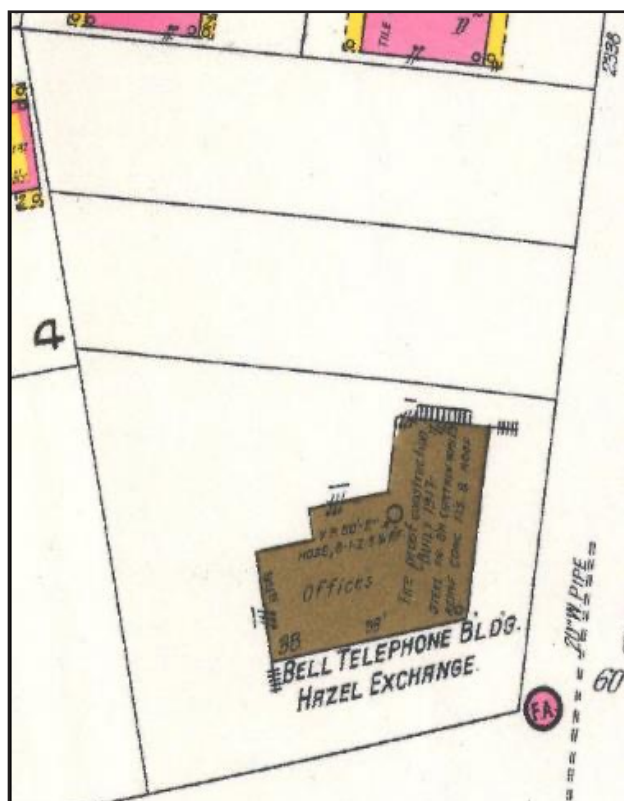
# Verizon Switch Station

In 1916, the Central District Telephone Company of Pennsylvania bought a plot of land at the corner of Murray Ave. and Pocusset St. and began construction of the new Hazel telephone exchange—the first in Squirrel Hill and the one still in use today. It's now called the **Verizon Switch Station**. In 1933, the company built a three-story addition and installed new dial equipment. The red arrow points to the almost seamless juncture of the addition with the original building.

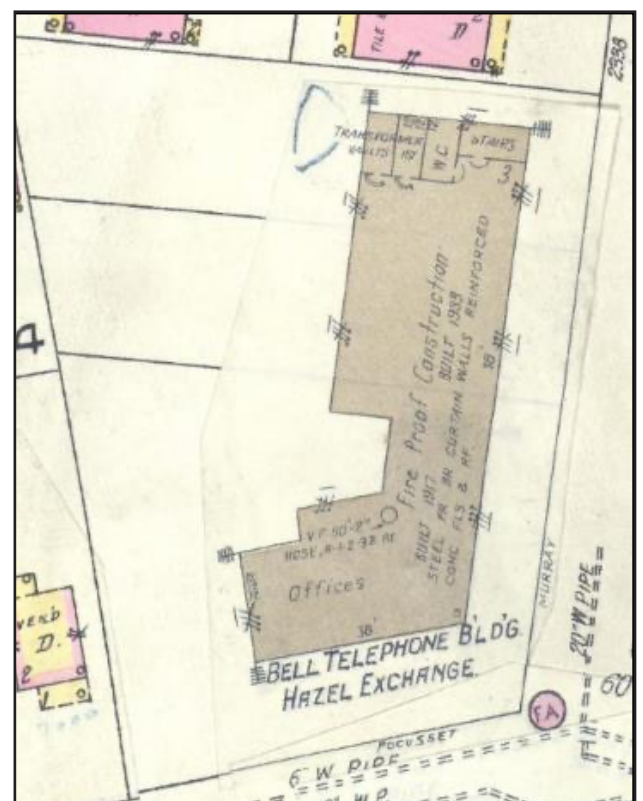


A 2015 Squirrel Hill Urban Coalition report said, “The building, now practically derelict and housing computer operated switching gear, essentially runs itself. Though two-thirds of the building is vacant, ... it still appears to have a lot of potential for rehabilitation and new productive uses.”

Across the country, vacant phone exchanges have been repurposed into condominiums and apartments. With such a prime Squirrel Hill location, perhaps the phone exchange will find a new use someday.



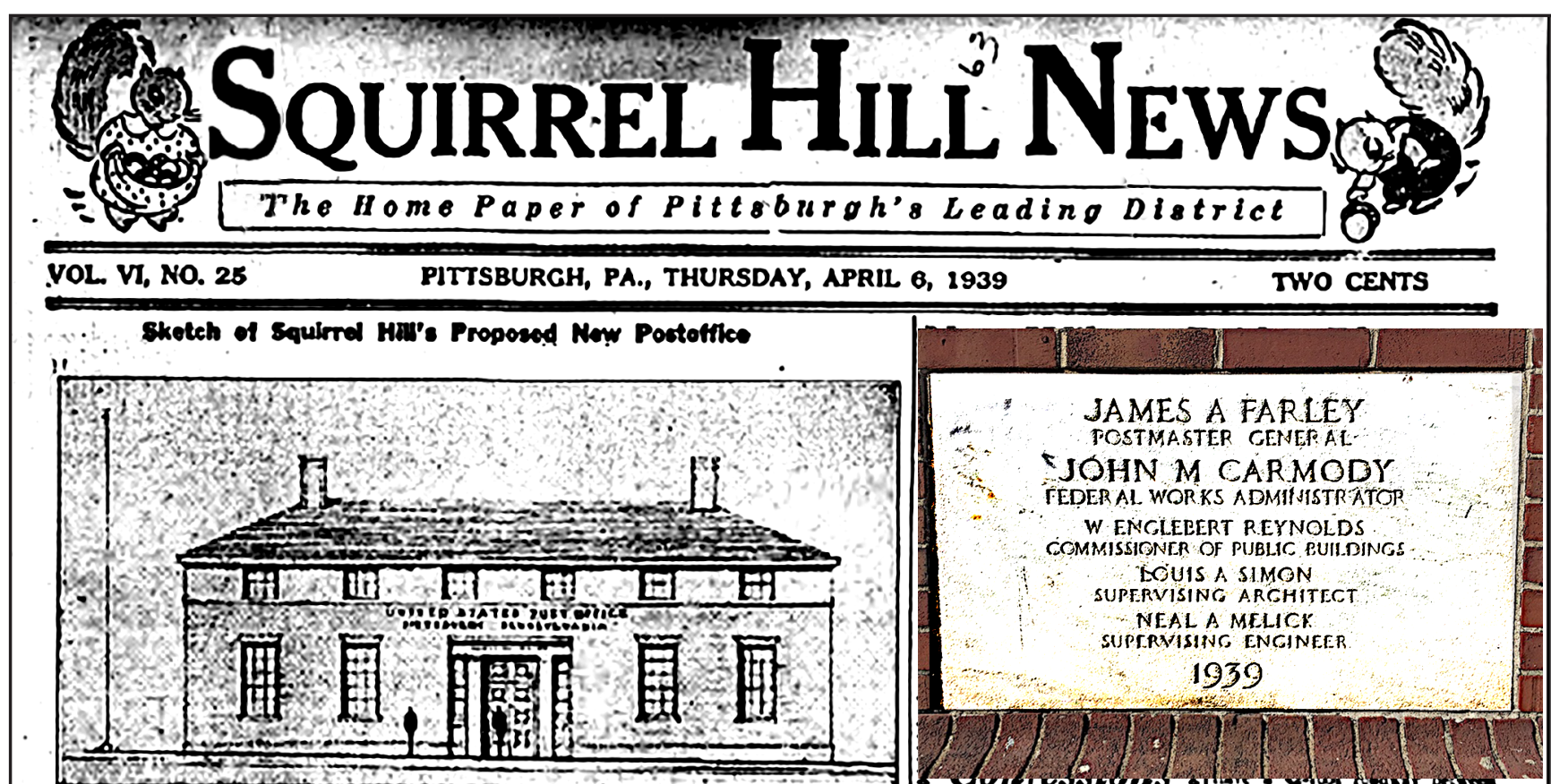
Pittsburgh, Vol. 4, 1925, 415 (Sanborn Map Company, 1925),  
Digital Map Drawer - Penn State University Libraries' Digital  
Collections



Pittsburgh, PA, Vol 4, 415 (Sanborn Map Company, 1951-1925).



# U.S. Post Office



*"The building will be a Neo-Grecian design with exterior walls of brick and transite at second story, wood and marble trim, wood cornice and windows, with marble and metal entrance."*

The U.S. Post Office on Murray Ave. was built in 1938. It is still a beautiful building, even after having being remodeled and modernized. This is its third location in the Squirrel Hill business district. In 1923 the Post Office was where Little's is on Forbes Ave. It later moved to the first floor of the West Building. It now occupies the lot at the corner of Murray Ave. and Darlington Rd. where a gas station used to be. The Post Office holds one of Squirrel Hill's most significant art treasures—a New Deal mural painted by Alan Thompson in 1942.





# Neill Log House

The oldest building in Squirrel Hill is the Neill Log House adjacent to the golf course in Schenley Park at 5229 E. Circuit Road. Recent dendrochronological testing (tree ring dating) indicated the house was built in 1795.

In 2023, the house underwent a complete restoration, initiated by the SHHS and the Squirrel Hill Urban Coalition (SHUC). Landscaping is now being done around the house, and a new stairway has been constructed from E. Circuit Road up to the house. Plans call for the house to be open for visitors later this year and for school groups and tours to visit in the fall.



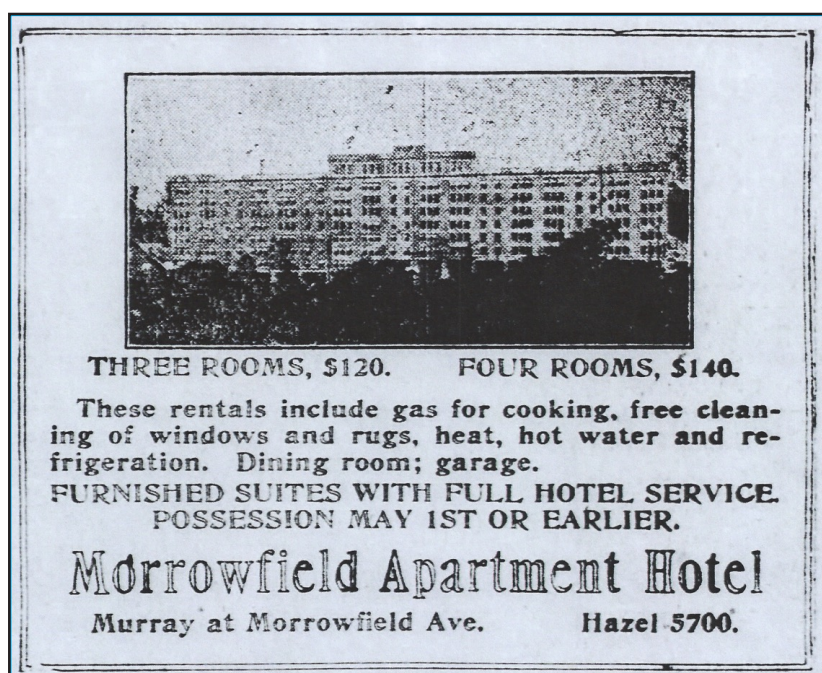
Along with the reconstruction, research is being done on the house and its builder, Robert Neill. Go to the SHHS website, [\*\*\*sqhillhist@shhsoc.org\*\*\*](mailto:sqhillhist@shhsoc.org), to read about the history of the house and the progress of the restoration effort. And watch for the announcement about the grand reopening of the Neill Log House.





# Morrowfield Apartment Hotel and Watkins Development

Until the 1920s, Squirrel Hill had mostly single-family houses. Large apartment buildings were thought to be for those who couldn't afford a house. Then developer Thomas A. Watkins built an elegant apartment complex that made apartment living fashionable and greatly contributed to the growth of the Squirrel Hill business district.



Watkins' development had more than just the 148-unit Morrowfield Apartment Hotel. It also had

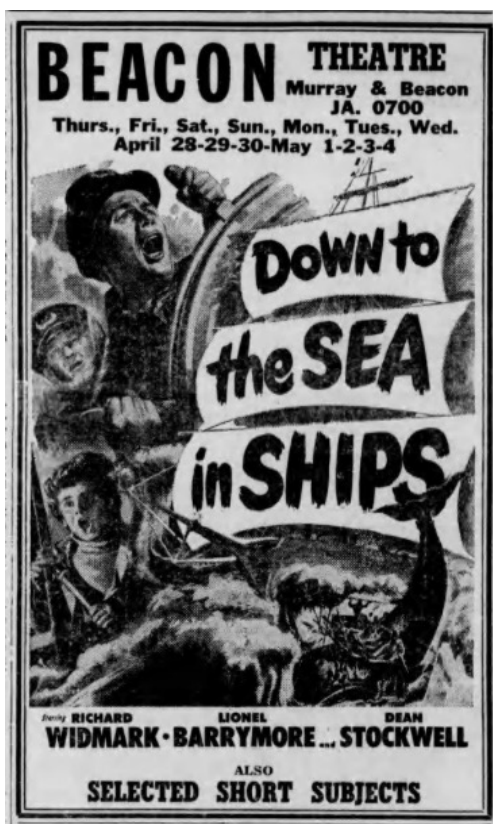
- 4 fourteen-family apartment houses
- 1 six-family apartment house
- 11 five-family apartment houses
- 6 four-family apartment houses
- 24 two-family apartment houses
- 8 stores inside the Morrowfield
- A 5-story parking garage
- Its own heating and refrigeration plant
- An ice-cream parlor, delicatessen, beauty shop, and barbershop
- A new-car showroom and repair shop
- A dance hall, 800-seat theater, snack bar, and bowling alley
- Thomas Watkins also built other apartment complexes and urban villages throughout Squirrel Hill.



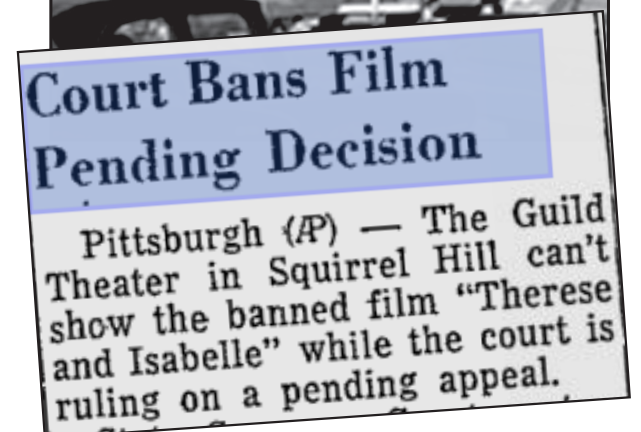


# The Princess, Beacon, and Guild Theaters, Gullifty's, and Friendship Circle

Yes—it's the same building at 1922 Murray Avenue and has quite a history!



The building began as the **Princess Theater**, which opened sometime before 1937, when it was purchased by the Beacon Amusement Company and renamed the **Beacon Theater**. It was renamed the **Guild Theatre** in 1954 and was known for showing controversial films. It closed in 1979.

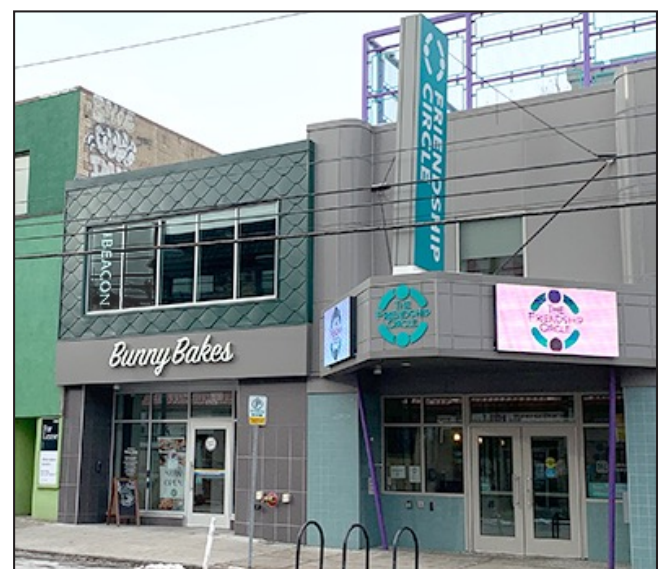


After a short stint as the **Guild Restaurant and Deli**, in 1982 it became **Gullifty's** restaurant, "A Unique Eatery," with scrumptious desserts.



Now the building is **Friendship Circle**, a Jewish nonprofit organization that pairs teen volunteers with children who have special needs. The renovated building has classrooms, offices, and a kitchen. There are areas for just hanging out and socializing.

The small building next to Friendship Circle has a history of its own. In the 1940s, the upstairs housed the **Beacon Club**, a gambling joint. Friendship Circle bought the building in 2017 and turned the upper rooms into **The Beacon**, a place focusing on wellness for high-school students, and the downstairs into **Bunny Bakes**, a bakery and coffee shop owned and run by Friendship Circle.

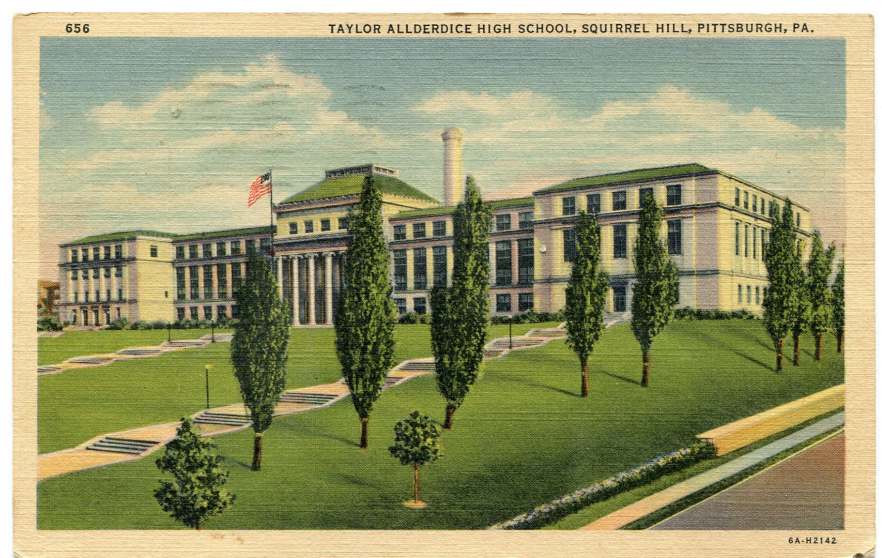




# Pittsburgh Alderdice High School

***“Know Something, Do Something, Be Something”***

One of the most imposing buildings in Squirrel Hill is so huge it can't be taken in at once glance—**Pittsburgh Alderdice High School** at 2409 Shady Ave. It was named for Taylor Alderdice, (1863-1934), one of the first members of the Pittsburgh Board of Education, who maintained his interest in education throughout his life. He was also a major Pittsburgh industrialist, being president of the National Tube Co., and many other businesses.



Taylor Alderdice High School was built in 1926 in neoclassical architectural style. Before 1964, the school has two graduating classes a year, one in June and the other in January. For a while, a junior high school was in the annex. In 2005, then-superintendent Mark Roosevelt mandated that “Pittsburgh” be put before every Pittsburgh public school’s name so that they would be listed together in directories. The school is now Pittsburgh Alderdice.

Among the alumni who have followed the school motto to “know something, do something, be something” is a uniquely long list of notable musicians, actors, professional athletes, scientists, economists, mayors, political activists, artists, writers, and filmmakers, including Billy Porter, Rob Marshall, Kathleen Marshall, Wiz Khalifa, Bob O’Connor, Richard Caliguiri, and many others.

The foyer, pictured in the 1957 yearbook, has the Parthenon frieze above the doors.





# Citizens Bank



One of the most unusual buildings in Squirrel Hill is the **Citizens Bank** at 1801 Murray Ave. on the corner with Darlington Rd. It was built by Mellon Bank in 1965, one of four mid-1900s Mellon Banks built around the city in the

“corporate modern” style of architecture. Each bank is unique and innovative in its design, but all featured tall windows that allow light to fill the interior and sometimes glazed emerald-green glazed brick in the interior, which subtly identified the buildings as Mellon Banks. The bank in Squirrel Hill is the only one that is circular, with a continuously poured concrete dome and barrel arches circling the top of the outer walls. It is the only one of the former buildings that is still a bank.

# Key Bank

At the other end of the architectural spectrum from Citizens Bank is Key Bank, located at 1730 Murray Ave., diagonally across Murray from Citizens Bank. The building



is one of a number of Squirrel Hill businesses that began as a private residence when Murray Avenue was just beginning to develop in the early 1900s. The house can still be seen above the storefronts. A picture from 1939 shows the house with its porch where the bank addition is now.



# CMU's Hamburg Hall, Formerly the U.S. Bureau of Mines



Although Carnegie Mellon University looks toward Oakland for its common interests, it is actually located in Squirrel Hill. The border between them is Junction Hollow. Forbes Avenue is the conduit between them, and for that reason a number of

significant past and present buildings line the road.

One of these is **Hamburg Hall**, formerly the main building of the **U.S. Bureau of Mines**. It was designed in the Beaux Arts style by noted architect Henry Hornbostel, who designed six other CMU buildings in the early 1900s. It was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1974. The building was purchased by CMU in 1984 and renovated in 2016 and is now the home of the graduate-level Heinz College of Information Systems and Public Policy.

## Guastavino Staircase in Baker Hall

Carnegie Mellon University has many architectural treasures. One of the best known is the staircase in Baker Hall, a three-story engineering marvel that has been likened to water flowing down a drain. In Guastavino vaulting, the terra cotta tiles form interlocking self-supporting architectural structures.





# Frick Park Gatehouses



What does Frick Park have in common with Washington, D.C.? It's that the picturesque gatehouses at the lower Beechwood Blvd. entrance, as well as the small gatehouse at the end of the Fern Hollow Bridge, the cairn at the lower corner of Beechwood and Forbes, and the Reynolds St.

gatehouse in Point Breeze were designed by noted architect John Russell Pope, who also designed the National Archives and Records Administration building (1935), Jefferson Memorial (1943) and West Building of the National Gallery of Art (1941), in Washington, D.C., along with significant public buildings in other U.S. cities and England. The gatehouses were completed in 1935.

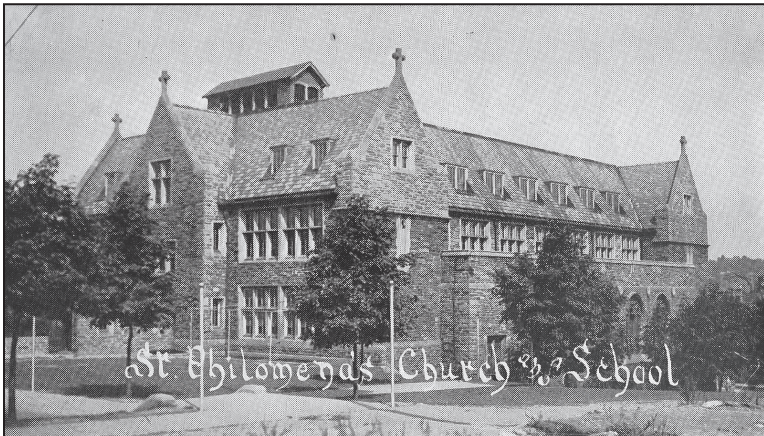
As inspiration for the gatehouses, Pope used a stone hunting lodge of Louis XII, who ruled France from 1498–1515. Another significant thing about them is that they were built in variegated Neshaminy stone from eastern Pennsylvania, except for the Fern Hollow gatehouse (*right*), which is built of mica schist, also from the eastern part of the state. Both types of stone are metamorphic and are not found in Western Pennsylvania. The gatehouses have been repaired and restored in recent years, bringing them back to their full picturesque glory.



Continuing the French architectural theme, the new pavilions recently built in Shelburne Park, an extension of Frick Park in Summerset (*left*), echo the designs of the older gatehouses.



# St. Philomena's Church and Community Day School



## St. Philomena's Roman Catholic Church

began in the Strip District in 1839. In 1922 the church moved into its new buildings on the corner of Beechwood Blvd. and Forward Ave. The Gothic Revival buildings were designed by noted ecclesiastical architect John T. Comés and were built of mica schist, a

sparkling gray metamorphic stone found in the eastern part of the country, rarely used for buildings in Pittsburgh.

Declining attendance caused the school to close in 1991 and the church in 1993.

In 1996, the property was purchased by the Jewish Education Institute (JEI). The buildings were renovated, and

**Community Day School** moved in. The school is an independent Jewish day school for students in Early Childhood through Grade 8, with an exceptional academic program rooted in Jewish values.



The Forward-Beechwood corner of the property has become an inspirational outdoor art gallery. The **Gary and Nancy Tuckfelt Keeping Tabs on the Holocaust Sculpture** was conceived in 1996, when social studies teacher Bill Walter had his students collect pop-can tabs to give them a tactile way to understand what "6 million" meant, as in the 6 million Jews who were murdered by the Nazis between



1933 and 1945. After a decade of work and the participation of many people, the sculpture of glass block walls formed into a Star of David stands open for visitors to enter. It is lit at night.



**Anne's Frank's Tree** is a European Horse Chestnut that was planted near the Tuckfelt Sculpture in April 2024. The tree was grown from a sapling from the original tree that Anne Frank wrote about in her diary from her secret annex in Amsterdam.

The **"Tree of Life"** is a welded wire sculpture near the Tuckfelt sculpture and Anne Frank's tree created by Eli Diamant, CDS Class of 2013. The plaque beside it says, "In memory of the 11 souls lost on October 27, 2018. For my Jewish community. For the city of steel. For every victim of hate."

