

Click here to return to 2024 Newsletters



NEWSLETTER

SEPTEMBER 2024

About SHHS

The Squirrel Hill Historical Society (SHHS) is a membership organization established in 2000, committed to gathering, preserving, and celebrating the historical memories of our neighborhood. The SHHS sponsors a monthly lecture series on topics of interest primarily focused on Squirrel Hill and Pittsburgh history. The programs take place on the second Tuesday of each month at 7:30 p.m. at Church of the Redeemer, 5700 Forbes Ave. A Zoom option is also available.

How to contact the SHHS:

P.O. Box 8157
Pittsburgh, PA 15217

Website:
squirrelhillhistory.org

Email:
sqhillhist@shhsoc.org

Most of our programs are recorded. If you would like to view past programs, go to squirrelhillhistory.org and click on the link "Squirrel Hill Past Program Videos and Events."

SHHS Newsletters are sent only to SHHS members. Past issues are posted on the password-protected Members page on the SHHS website. If you are a member and need the password, email the SHHS to request it be sent to you.

The Squirrel Hill Historical Society, Inc. has been determined to be exempt from federal income tax under Internal Revenue Code Section 501(c)(3). All contributions to the SHHS, including dues, are deductible from federal taxes under Section 170 of the IRS Code.

The Squirrel Hill Historical Society (SHHS) is a membership organization established in 2000. It is committed to gathering, preserving, and celebrating the historical memories of our neighborhood.

To submit an item of historical interest for publication, suggest a topic for a speech, ask a question, or give feedback, send an email to sqhillhist@shhsoc.org, or write to SHHS, PO Box 8157, Pittsburgh, PA 15217.



President's Message

Dear SHHS Members:

Welcome to the September issue of the SHHS Newsletter.

Unfortunately, the **August SHHS Social** had to be cancelled due to a scheduling conflict. We missed having conversations with members and guests and getting to know you better. We invite you to come to the programs a little early so we can chat before the program starts.

With the **U.S. presidential election** and other elections taking place on Tuesday, November 5, we are seeing many political ads and candidates' visits to our battleground state of Pennsylvania and the Pittsburgh area. This election is very important for the future of our country, so please make sure to vote!

Students are returning to schools and colleges, so be defensive in your driving. **Watch for students and school buses.** It is great to see the increase of students in Squirrel Hill and the vibe they bring, but remember they will be crossing streets and getting on and off buses. Remember to stop when a school bus has its flashing red lights on. (You could get a very expensive ticket if you don't!)

The **I-376 Commercial Street Bridge** prework has started, and the Wilkinsburg exit reconstruction has been completed. PennDOT is working to ensure that the project is done with the lowest possible impact on roads, trails, and environmental areas. The new bridge is scheduled to be slid into place in 2026, with I-376 closing for approximately 25 days. You can google "Commercial Street Bridge Project" to see the project overview and updates and view the 60-minute recording of the virtual public meeting that was held on August 14, 2024.

The Squirrel Hill Urban Coalition (SHUC) has announced that the **Neill Log House** will be the 2024 Squirrel Hill Place Treasure. This is a great honor for all the people who worked so hard work that went into the restoration and pending opening of the Neill Log House for tours and educational purposes. SHHS is proud of the work the Friends of Neill Log House (FONLH) board and its president, SHHS board member Tony Indovina, and SHUC, especially Mardi Isler, have done in the preservation of this Pittsburgh treasure.

Other things happening in our area in September:

The **Squirrel Hill Farmers Markets** continue on Sundays from 9:00-1:00 in the Beacon-Bartlett parking lot until November 24.

The **Squirrel Hill Night Market** will be held on Saturday, September 28, from 6-10 p.m. on Murray Avenue from Forbes Ave. to Beacon St.

Fair in the Park at Mellon Park will be held September 6, 7, and 8. Hours are Friday, 1 p.m.-7 p.m.; Saturday, 10 a.m.-7 p.m.; Sunday, 10 a.m.-5 p.m. The event is free.

SHHS Officers and Board

The SHHS is an all-volunteer organization. Board Members are Toby Chapman, Audrey Glickman, James Hammond, Tony Indovina, Stanley Klein, Todd Miller, Charles Succop, Helen Wilson, Todd Wilson, Eveline Young.

President: Jim Hammond
Vice-President and Newsletter Editor: Helen Wilson
Program Coordinators: Todd Miller and Toby Chapman
Membership Coordinator: Stanley Klein
Email Coordinator: Tony Indovina
Treasurer: Eveline Young
Media Specialist: Audrey Glickman
Website Manager: Janine Michael
Principal Researchers: Wayne Bossinger, Helen Wilson, and Tony Indovina

All SHHS members are welcome to contribute articles, suggest programs, and participate in our activities.

The Frick Pittsburgh exhibition, “**Treasured Ornament: 10 Centuries of Islamic Art**” is now open and continues until October 20. Visit TheFrick-Pittsburgh.org for tickets and information.

The next **Doors Open Pittsburgh Boat Tour**, “Bridges, Building and Architecture of the Three Rivers” will be on Saturday, September 28, from 1-3 p.m. **Todd Wilson**, SHHS board member, will be one of the two guides.

Thank you for being loyal members! We’re looking forward to seeing you at the September program.

Jim Hammond, President, SHHS

Editor’s Note: History in the Built Environment

Helen Wilson

I’ve been thinking about the buildings of Squirrel Hill and have started to amass an archive about their various histories. Several things stand out. First is that the buildings in Squirrel Hill are rarely demolished. Instead, many are rehabilitated, remodeled, and reused—often more than once. An example is the building at Murray Avenue across from the Giant Eagle housing Friendship Circle. It began as the Princess Theater, then was the Beacon Theater, then the Guild Theater, then the Guild Restaurant and Deli, then Gullifty’s, before it



Photo by Patricia Hughes, SHHS Archives, c. 1990

became Friendship Circle. Squirrel Hill has many more examples of these transitions.

An exception is the full-service gas stations that once stood on many corners. Except for one, they’re all gone, likely due to the rise of larger self-service stations. The sole exception is the Get-Go at Murray and Forward, which in 1939 appears on a plat map as an unnamed gas station next to the Samson Buick car dealership located in the red brick building behind it. In 1990 it was a Boron station. And Giant Eagle recently announced that it is selling its Get-Gos to Couche-Tard, a Canadian company, so more changes are in store.

New SHHS Display About Squirrel Hill’s Buildings at the Squirrel Hill Carnegie Library

In May of this year, I gave a SHHS presentation about some of Squirrel Hill’s buildings. (It can be viewed on the “SHHS Past Program Videos and Events” link on the SHHS website.) Now I’ve created and installed a new display in the Squirrel Hill branch of Carnegie Library that features more information about some of the neighborhood’s most significant buildings. It’s been an interesting research project, helped by input from many others. Visit the library to see the display, and if you have a question about a building or would like to provide us with information about other buildings, contact us at sqhillhist@shhsoc.org.



**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.

The SHHS Is Still Looking for Old Newspapers!

Please keep looking to see if you have any old issues of *The Squirrel Hill Gazette*, *Squirrel Hill News*, or other local newspapers. If you have any newspapers, contact us through our website, squirrelhillhistory.org, or email us at sqhillhist@shhsoc.org. We will scan the newspapers and return the originals to you.



Click here to return to 2024 Newsletters **SHHS Programs (Live and on Zoom)**

September 2024

***UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED**, all programs are presented live and on Zoom on the second Tuesday of each month at 7:30 p.m. Live programs are held at Church of the Redeemer, 5700 Forbes Avenue. Free parking is available in the St. Edmund's Academy parking lot. Members will be sent a link to the Zoom program a few days before the program.*

NOTE: The SHHS board is in the process of deciding whether to continue broadcasting our programs on Zoom beginning in September. During the pandemic we averaged around 30 viewers, but now the number has dropped to 10 or fewer per program. We have hired a tech specialist to help run the Zoom part of the programs, but since the number of viewers is declining, we might decide to discontinue the Zoom effort. Meanwhile, a longtime SHHS member has stepped forward to managing the Zoom part of the programs. Stay tuned for further details. And if you're willing to help us, contact us at sqhillhist@shhsoc.org. We would also like to hear from members about this matter. Contact us at sqhillhist@shhsoc.org to weigh in. Programs are still being recorded and put on YouTube and can be accessed a few days after a live program through the "SHHS Past Programs and Events" link on our website.

Upcoming SHHS Programs

(Date TBD): Neill Log House Opening Celebration

Progress on the Neill Log House and the landscaping around it is progressing, but we've experienced some delays in completion of the project, so the opening date has not been scheduled yet. We'll announce the grand opening as soon as soon as details are finalized.

Tuesday, September 10: "Jewish Family & Community Services, Present & Past"

Ivonne Smith-Tapia, Director of Refugee and Immigrant Services at Jewish Family and Community Services (JFCS) will explain how the organization helps immigrants and refugees build new lives in Pittsburgh and will also provide an overview of the organization's 80-year history. Ivonne joined JFCS as Director of Refugee and Immigrant Services in July 2021. She holds master's degrees in Cultural Anthropology and Social Work with a certificate in Human Services Management. Ivonne worked for more than a decade with the Colombian government, international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and think tanks promoting community development, education, human rights, and leadership in diverse rural and urban communities in Colombia.

Tuesday, October 8: "The Story of Dragon's Den"

Guilia Lozza Petrucci, executive director of Dragon's Den, a nonprofit organization housed in the former St. Mary Magdalene Church on Amity Street in Homestead, will discuss the history of the building and how Dragon's Den's innovative programs teach youth from diverse backgrounds and abilities to overcome challenges in themselves, their communities, and the world.

Saturday, November 2, 11:30–4:30: "Local History Day" at Carnegie Library in Oakland

Join SHHS officers and board members at the Local History Day on the third floor of Carnegie Library in Oakland. See the schedule on the next page for details.

Tuesday, November 12: "Writing the First Draft of History" (Rescheduled from April)

Ann Belser, publisher and writer of *Print, the East End Newspaper*, will tell the story of how *Print* came to be, some of the stories behind the stories that have been published, and what it is like running a local newspaper where the people you cover are also your neighbors. She will also talk about some of the Squirrel Hill businesses that Jan Kurth has written about for the newspaper.

Tuesday, Dec. 10: "Friends of Neill Log House Update"

Tony Indovina, president of the Friends of Neill Log House (FONLH), and some members of his board will report on the results of the project to restore the house, landscape the area around it, and welcome visitors to it once again.



This event is awesome, so we're adding it here. **Alcosan's Open House** is Saturday, September 14, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. If you haven't been, you've gotta go! It's free, it's fun, and it's informative. Google "Alcosan Open House" to see the schedule of events and register for tours.

Mark Your Calendars for November 2: Local History Day at Carnegie Library Main in Oakland

Local History Day is an annual event held on the third floor of Carnegie Library in Oakland, featuring tables staffed by various local historical organizations, including the SHHS. This year the event will be on November 2 from 11:30 to 4:30. It is a great opportunity to learn about different aspects of Pittsburgh's history and to meet the groups of people who are working to keep that history alive. We hope you can join us there!

Schedule of Activities: 11:30: Opening Speaker in the South Wing Reading Room. 12:45 and 2:45: Breakout sessions in the Third Floor Conference Room. 1:30: Panel discussion in the South Wing Reading Room. 3:30: Historic Pittsburgh's 25th Anniversary talk in the South Wing Reading Room. 1:00 and 3:00: Historical tours. Book displays and takeaway tables will be placed throughout the library on all floors.

More information will be in the October SHHS Newsletter.

The East Liberty Valley Historical Society Fall 2024 Marilyn Evert Lecture Series

Lectures begin at 7:00 PM

Calvary Episcopal Church Parish Hall
315 Shady Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15206

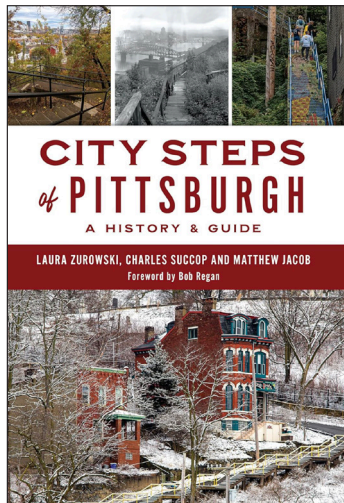
Parking in the adjacent church lot and on-street is free.

Wednesday, September 4, 2024

"Three True Crimes from the Smithfield Cemetery"

In this illustrated talk, Print journalist Jan Kurth reports on three cases from the 1910s to the 1930s—a double murder, dubious accident and mysterious disappearance. Inspired by their gravestones, Jan used newspaper accounts, census records, and other historical and genealogical information to uncover the subjects' tragic and all too human stories from "neighborhood Girl." Book signing will follow.

City Steps of Pittsburgh: A History & Guide by Laura Zurowski, Matthew Jacob, and Charles Succop



In July 2023, Laura Zurowski gave a SHHS presentation, "A History of the Steps of Pittsburgh," in which she talked about Pittsburgh's many and sometimes unique public steps. She told the audience a book was in the works and would be offered for sale at SHHS programs as soon as it was released. Now it is out, and Charles Succop, SHHS board member, will bring it to SHHS programs from October on to sell before and after presentations. It is priced at \$25.

The description of the book reads: "In Pittsburgh, the elevation varies wildly, fluctuating 660 feet from highest to lowest points throughout the area and making it one of the hilliest cities in the United States. Throughout this unruly and physically challenging landscape, the city's first mass transportation system was built—a steadily expanding network of public stairways, locally referred to as city steps, these flights of stairs are a throwback to a very different time in history and a very different Pittsburgh. Authors Laura Zurowski, Charles Succop and Matthew Jacob present the history of the Steel City steps and a walking guide to their scenic locations today."

Doors Open Pittsburgh Boat Tours

Doors Open Boat Tours, featuring SHHS board member and bridge historian **Todd Wilson**, along with architectural historian and preservationist **Justin Greenawalt** (October tour) and architect **Paul Tellers** (September tour), take place two more times in the coming months. The tours sail for 90 minutes from Station Square. Go to doorsopenpgh.org for more information and tickets.



Saturday, September 28, 1-3 p.m.: "Bridges, Buildings and Architecture of the Three Rivers"

Todd Wilson and **Paul Tellers** will again be your guides for this riverboat journey through time. Pittsburgh's amazing bridges and impressive architecture on all three rivers.

Saturday, October 19, 1-3 p.m.: "The Mighty Monongahela"

Todd Wilson and **Justin Greenawalt** will take you beyond the typical sightseeing tour as we sail past the Hot Metal Bridge and discover how the Monongahela River shaped the Steel City. Fragments of its industrial past dot the riverbanks, but the Monongahela River began shaping the fortunes of Pittsburgh long before iron and steel.



Click here to return to 2024 Newsletters

Serpentine Drive Update

September 2024

Helen Wilson



After the Grand Prix was over, Serpentine Drive was closed to ALL motor vehicles. (Does that include electric bicycles?) Before that, cars were permitted to drive down the road. The city says the closure was because the way the road was marked was confusing to drivers, pedestrians, and bicyclists alike, which is true. But instead of making the markings clearer, the city decided to just completely close the road to vehicular traffic.

At a recent meeting, a city representative said that there wasn't money in this year's budget to address the costly repairs needed to rebuild the retaining wall that collapsed when a paving truck was repaving the road a few years ago.

In January 2024, Bike Pittsburgh wrote on its website, "It's clear that the road is not an integral part of the motor vehicle network and would serve residents much better as an area for park users to enjoy Schenley Park without motorized vehicles." That begs the question—how, then, would most people get to the inner parts of the park, which are too far to walk from the edges? East and West Circuit Roads are the only conduits through the main part of the park, and Serpentine Drive provided a way to get through the park and access those roads without having to go outside of the park into residential neighborhoods. We would like to hear from SHHS members (our contact information is on page 1) about how they feel about the closing of Serpentine Drive to cars, and we suggest contacting our City Council representatives and DOMI to express your opinion. Go to <https://pittsburghpa.gov/council/d5-contacts> for contact information.

Squirrel Hill's Ongoing Traffic Problems

Helen Wilson

In advance of Eric Lidji's third article about how the Squirrel Hill neighborhood dealt with parking problems (see next page), here is a headline from the *Squirrel Hill News*, October 26, 1967. As one of Pittsburgh's original "suburbs," Squirrel Hill could not have flourished without automobiles, and the vast majority of residents still depend on them to get to work, school, shopping, and socializing. The newspapers continually deal with the community's ongoing demands for safer traffic flow and public officials' responses.



NEWS

FIRST IN
COMMUNITY
SERVICE

Vol. XXXIII No. 42

PITTSBURGH, PA., THURSDAY, OCTOBER 26, 1967

FIVE CENTS

The *Squirrel Hill News* newspapers have many articles about traffic and parking problems in Squirrel Hill. You can access them by going to the SHHS website, squirrelhillhistory.org, and clicking on the link, "Squirrel Hill News newspapers" in the main menu.

City Approves Site For Library Facility

City Council has approved the location of the Squirrel Hill Library on the site of the former Asbury Methodist Church at the corner of Forbes and Murray. The property has been acquired by the City.

It is understood that an architect has been tentatively selected and is already working on preliminary phases of design. The present schedule calls for actual construction to begin in the fall of 1968.

Multipurpose use of the site is keeping the Library's share of the costs at a reasonable level. The plan provides for a branch library, commercial frontage along Forbes and a public parking garage under a

landscaped plaza.

The total number of parking stalls is now below the original estimate as test borings disclosed the site to be located above a bed of granite.

For this reason, a single level underground garage had to be substituted for the originally contemplated multilevel garage.

The Squirrel Hill Merchants Council is considering a proposal that they finance the construction of a temporary parking lot on this corner. The City would lease the lot to an operator and revenue from the lot would go toward paying for the temporary lot which could provide about 50 spaces and thereby relieve the area's parking problems until library construction begins.

New Legion Building Set for 14th Ward

The 14th Ward will soon be blessed with a new Legion Building Post 577 according to the present post Commander, Joseph L. "Ziggy" Kahn he stated: "In our Ward, we have hundreds of former war veterans who are not affiliated with any veteran organization. With the advent of our new building, a fine civic program will be started."

Veterans interested in joining are asked to contact Commander Kahn at 5808 Forbes Ave., Squirrel Hill, or call 521-9973.

All veterans are invited to attend the Nov. 10, 1967 meeting at 8 p.m. in the Pittsburgh National Bank, Forbes Avenue, Squirrel Hill.

Chess Tournament

YM&WHA Chess Club announces an Open Tournament, SR Swiss, to be played at the Y in Oakland on Saturday and Sunday, November 4 and 5.

Traffic Changes Draw Sparks in Some Areas

A bold new traffic pattern, designed to implement traffic through congested areas of Squirrel Hill has been instituted following completion of a comprehensive traffic plan by the Civic Association, the Dept. of City Planning and the Bureau of Traffic Planning.

But not all retail businessmen, and particularly some of those in the Murray Ave. area are happy about the changes.

One of these, in an irate mood, told The Squirrel Hill News he plans to petition other small retailers in the 1900 block of Murray Ave. to eliminate the changes. He says "The elimination of parking meters and loading zones are destined to bankrupt those smaller business affected by the change."

As a result of his contention, he said he would be immediately to petition for a change back to the former traffic pattern in the vicinity of his store.

Meanwhile special left turn lanes have been installed at Forbes and Murray, Forbes and Shady, Murray and Bartlett, Murray and Phillips and Shady and Beacon.

A synchronized signal system is planned for the Forbes-Murray area in the belief that it will permit traffic to move more readily. An increase in the amount of short term parking is also planned on portions of side streets immediately adjacent to Murray.

Plans also call for an extension of meter operations to 9 p.m.

[Click here to return to 2024 Newsletters](#)

Part 3 of Squirrel Hill Parking: Squirrel Hill Gets Parking Garages

September 2024

Eric Lidji, Director of the Rauh Jewish Archives at the Heinz History Center, researched and wrote three intriguing articles about Squirrel Hill parking. The articles appeared in the June 2, 9, and 16 Rauh Jewish History Program & Archives, an Enewsletter of the Heinz History Center. (To sign up for the enewsletter, google “Rauh Jewish History Program & Archives” and click on the link that pops up. Then scroll down to the bottom of the page and type in your contact information.) The articles were also published in The Jewish Chronicle. Lidji has graciously given the SHHS permission to reprint the articles in our newsletter. This is the third of the three-part series.

Squirrel Hill was a leading commercial district in the 1960s.

A city survey from 1965 counted 280 commercial properties in the Murray-Forbes business corridor. Only 12 were vacant. The commercial district reported some \$18 million in annual sales. Adjusted for inflation, that would exceed \$180 million today.

The problem was traffic.

Even though Squirrel Hill lost about 2,000 people in the 1960s, it was increasingly choked with cars. Its popular shopping district sat between an important freeway interchange and one of the most densely populated sections of the city. Squirrel Hill couldn't handle local traffic as well as pass-through traffic. “Traffic congestion and parking space deficiencies are growing to major proportions which will eventually strangle commercial activity,” the city predicted in a 1967 survey of the neighborhood.

The survey marked Bartlett Street as “perhaps the most congested location on Murray Avenue.” The Giant Eagle parking lot connected directly with Murray Avenue at the time, cutting through a sidewalk. It created a persistent bottleneck during peak hours.

For three days in June 1967—coincidentally, during the Six-Day War—a city technician stood at Murray and Bartlett, counting cars and people. In a given 30-minute period, about 114 people crossed the driveway and between 60-70 cars crossed the sidewalk.

Traffic lights at that intersection already cut drive time on Murray in half. The light was red for 30 minutes each hour. The two lanes of cars waiting to enter the parking lot cut drive time in half again, down to 15 minutes each hour. Some 12,000 cars passed through the intersection daily. There was extreme congestion and a high risk of collisions.



Excerpt from a photograph accompanying Eric Lidji's article. The caption in the Jewish Chronicle reads, “2000 block of Murray, showing Pincher's, M. Fogel Meats, Murray News Stand, Stern's Café, and Kablin's Market—Nov. 3, 1965.” (Allegheny Conference on Community Development Photographs, Detre Library & Archives)



A car makes a left turn from Murray Ave. into the Giant Eagle parking lot. The image is from a video of a fire in a building next to the supermarket in 1965. (Pittsburgh City Archives).

The city recommended moving the entrance of the Giant Eagle parking lot onto Bartlett Street, and moving the exit onto Murray Avenue. To accommodate the change, Bartlett Street and Darlington Street would become one way from Shady to Wightman.

Giant Eagle rejected the plan. It preferred a new left-turn lane on Murray Avenue.

The city agreed but forgot to cancel the work orders for reversing Bartlett and Darlington between Murray and Shady. For days dozens of people unknowingly parked illegally.

It took a campaign by business and civic leaders to get the turn lane removed, the meters reinstalled, all the streets returned to normal, and all the parking tickets waived.

Eventually, the city and Giant Eagle agreed to the current solution: Darlington heading one-way toward Shady, and Bartlett heading one-way toward Murray, and a quarter block of two-way traffic on Bartlett to allow shoppers on Murray to enter the parking lot.

The Bureau of Traffic Planning report had additional ideas for improving traffic.

It proposed left-turn lanes on Murray, Shady, and Beacon. (Beacon got one.) It proposed installing more than 100 meters on residential side streets within 200 feet of Murray Avenue. (Bartlett and Darlington got a few.) It wanted to extend all meters to 9 p.m., create 30-minute parking zones in front of the Post Office and the Baskin-Robbins. It wanted to add loading zones to allow service vehicles to park along Murray Avenue.

As this traffic study was underway, the Pittsburgh Parking Authority was completing a long review of downtown and Oakland and turning its attention to the neighborhoods.

It launched a \$1.632 million plan in 1969 to build eight parking lots in Shadyside, Squirrel Hill, the North Side, Brookline, and East Liberty. Squirrel Hill got two. (East Liberty got three, a desperate attempt to self-correct from the failures of redevelopment.)

The first parking lot was connected with a new Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh branch.

In the early 1960s, the library launched the largest expansion in its history. It planned to modernize several existing branches and build new branches in Woods Run, Knoxville, Beechview, East Liberty, and Squirrel Hill. The Squirrel Hill branch would be an experimental “joint development concept,” intended to be replicated. It would have a 76-space parking garage, an open plaza, and commercial facilities with a new library.

Although it was approved by 1969, the complex wasn’t built until 1972. The Flaherty Administration tried to cancel the project in early 1970, and then came the usual delays.

In addition to the new library, the Pittsburgh Parking Authority purchased five properties on Douglas Street and Phillips Avenue for the new 48-space Mid-Murray parking lot. It was again funded partly through a bond sale to merchants. It opened in July 1970.

The Flaherty administration made no major changes to Squirrel Hill parking. Early in the Caliguiri administration, in 1978, the Pittsburgh Parking Authority conducted a new parking survey. It found that the streets off the business district were 90 percent occupied.

The city found a lot at the northwest corner of Murray and Darlington. It planned a two-story garage with 73 spaces. Years of deliberation ensued with residents on Darlington, who felt that the post office loading dock and the drive-through bank across the street already made traffic so tight that emergency vehicles couldn’t easily get down the street.

As these negotiations were underway, the Jewish Community Center was planning a major expansion in Squirrel Hill. It first considered Wightman Playground. In the face of neighborhood opposition, it next considered an open section of the Smithfield United Church cemetery at S. Dallas and Aylesboro. Again, there was local opposition.

And so in 1985 the Pittsburgh Parking Authority and the Jewish Community Center worked out a deal. The Jewish Community Center would build a new 95,000-square foot facility at its existing location, and it would lease part of the basement to the Pittsburgh Parking Authority—for 75 years without charge—for a 70-space metered parking lot.

That was the last big expansion of public parking facilities in Squirrel Hill.

Like most residents of Squirrel Hill, I often have small and large moments of frustration arising from neighborhood traffic. The history put things in perspective.

Accommodating the growing demand for parking while retaining the character of the neighborhood is a complicated. It’s made more complicated by intense emotions: business owners worried about their livelihoods, residents worried about their property.

The city didn’t always get the parking situation right in Squirrel Hill, but it didn’t get it catastrophically wrong either. The car could have killed Squirrel Hill. It didn’t.

Eric Lidji is the director of the Rauh Jewish Archives at the Heinz History Center. He can be reached at rjarchives@heinzhistorycenter.org or 412-454-6406.

Click here to return to 2024 Newsletters

September Update on the Friends of Neill Log House (FONLH):

Meet Evan Alexander, Immersive Media Intern, Chatham University

September 2024

Tony Indovina, FONLH President and SHHS Board Member

Mission Statement for the Friends of the Neill Log House (FONLH Inc.)

Adopted February 2022



Friends of
NEILL LOG HOUSE

"We secure funds to restore and maintain the Neill Log House, foster knowledge of its historic significance, and work with interested parties to ensure the continued educational use of the structure and its site for future generations."

Individual support for the FONLH restoration effort will always be needed. To make online donations by credit card or PayPal, go to the SHUC website, shuc.org, and click on the "Projects" link in the black menu bar at the top of the page. A pull-down menu will appear. Select "Friends of the Neill Log House." Alternatively, checks can be sent to SHUC (put FONLH in the memo line) at the following address: SHUC, 5604 Solway Street, Pittsburgh, PA, 15217.



Recently, FONLH's intern coordinator and vice-president Mardi Isler was approached by Chatham University to accept another student from their Immersive Media Program (IMM). As we have updated our history of the Neill Log House and its inhabitants, we have embraced this discipline as another way to present history to our visitors. This was suggested to us several years ago when our Executive Committee met with Chatham faculty and administrators to discuss the first of several internships Friends of Neill Log House would eventually enter into with them. At this meeting, we learned how their distinctive IMM offering could enhance our docents' resources through innovative media projections. Chatham's website explains that their IMM Major trains students to create immersive experiences in virtual and augmented reality and 3D modeling, utilizing a variety of "industry-standard design practices and artistic methods with cutting-edge technology."¹



I subsequently agreed to meet Evan Alexander (*pictured above right*), a young man entering his senior year in the IMM program at Chatham University. In his own explanation to me of his major, Evan used the term XR, or Extended Reality, an umbrella term that encompasses everything from Augmented Reality (AR), to Virtual Reality (VR) to Mixed Reality (MR). We met at the Neill Log House for a visit and some explanation from me about its history, and Evan later related that his first impression was in being charmed and enamored of the rustic setting he entered.

During our visit, I suggested a few options for his involvement with us to serve as his senior Capstone Project and a credit-bearing internship. Evan soon got back to us with a proposal to satisfy his internship project through working with the collection of artifacts gathered from the Neill Log House site just prior to the 1969 reconstruction. Early in our project, we had acquired a digital copy of the voluminous journal called the *Papers of Kirke Carpenter Wilson* from the Deidre Library at the Senator John Heinz History Center. The *Journal* we possess is from Kirke Wilson's work on the excavation of the Neill Log House site for approximately 18 months between the collapse of the house in 1967 and when it was reconstructed by Pittsburgh History and Landmark Foundation in 1969. It is one of the three archeological projects Wilson oversaw before his death in the early 1970s.

The complete, original file of all of Wilson's *Papers* is contained in two large boxes at the Deidre Library. The account of the Neill Log House archeological project contains much of the history of the log house and its inhabitants, and lists and drawings of the over 19,000 artifacts recovered from the site.² A few years ago, several of us from FONLH were able to personally visit the Carnegie Institute storage facility, called the Annex, where all the NLH artifacts are catalogued and hermetically stored in plastic bags in numerous metal cabinets. The collections



Left to right: Helen Wilson; Tony Indovina; Kristina Gaugler, Anthropology Collection Manager; Amy Covell-Murthy, Archaeology Collection Manager. Photo by Charlie Stewart.

¹ Chatham.edu/academics/undergraduate/immersive-media.

² Kirke Carpenter Wilson Papers, MSS 137, Deidre Library and Archives, Heinz History Center.

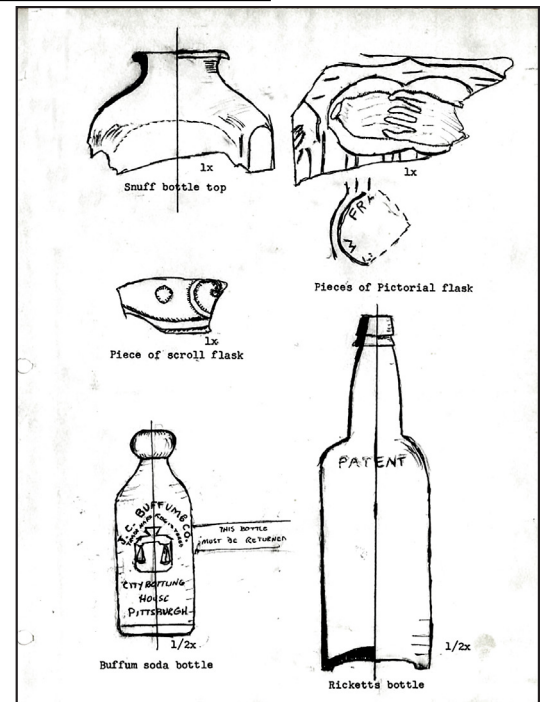
manager allowed us to photograph items she selected for us to view. Though it is not practical to share this entire collection with the public, nor is it possible to take any artifacts outside this Carnegie facility, the collection manager agreed to allow Evan to spend time there to record what he chooses from among the items. During our interview, Evan reminded me that IMM students are not being trained as historians but as researchers to find ways to create media experiences to sometimes bring history to life and, in a situation like ours, make objects from the past become more real and accessible to the public. His efforts to transform what he selects to record into an IMM presentation promises to be a dramatic and historic way to share this collection with those visiting the Neill Log House in the future.

The brief time I spent with Evan has inspired confidence about having him develop this program for us. After hearing from him about how he felt upon first entering our log house, I was struck to learn that his home is in Portland, Oregon, where he grew up very close to the end of the Lewis and Clark Trail. He will now be working on a project near the beginning of that journey.³

Evan grew up in a small town very near Portland called Clackamas and later moved into the city. He talked of what it meant to grow up in the Pacific Northwest, close to many different biospheres, from snowcapped mountains to rainforests and the ocean. His outlets of snowboarding, hiking and biking took full advantage of all of this. When we discussed what drew him to Pittsburgh for his undergraduate education, Evan was quick to relate that he has always been drawn to the East Coast and has a sister who first went to Boston. The choice of Pittsburgh seemed easy for him because of the major he found at Chatham University and of what he sees as similarities between what he loves most about Portland and what we have in Pittsburgh, which he says is known as the “Portland of the East.” He loves the vibrancy and art events found in downtown Portland and has found similarities in Pittsburgh. Evan thinks Pittsburgh has been a good match for him personally—a tight-knit city that is not too big or too small, with enough patches of green space and of people and culture to satisfy him. We discussed his next step after graduation from Chatham and the goals he has for employment or graduate study.

He admits he is somewhat unsure at this time because of the many changes occurring in this relatively new field. For now, he says he is comfortable in planning to spend at least another year in Pittsburgh.

Evan Alexander’s goal is to be able to make the collection found at the NLH site experiential and to recreate how these items looked back then. Expect to be able to meet this young man in future visits to the Neill Log House, virtually if not personally, as he unfolds the stories told by these artifacts.



| RECAPITULATION | | |
|----------------|--------|------------|
| Category | No. | Percentage |
| Ceramics | 3,977 | 23.8 |
| Kaolin pipes | 51 | .3 |
| Glass | 7,803 | 39.9 |
| Metal | 4,407 | 24.0 |
| Bone | 1,553 | 8.9 |
| Miscellaneous | 340 | 3.1 |
| | 19,100 | 100.0% |

Two excerpts from the *Wilson Papers*, showing a sketch of some artifacts and a list of the objects found under the Neill Log House..

³ “Meriwether Lewis and the Nemacolin Trail through Squirrel Hill,” by Tony Indovina, Squirrel Hill Historical Society Newsletter, October, 2020.



Lawrenceville Historical Society Lecture Tuesday, September 17

“George Croghan: Kingdom of Trade,” presented by Frank Kurtik.

Irish-born fur trader George Croghan (c. 1718–1782) was a key player in Western Pennsylvania who helped negotiate treaties alliances between Native Peoples and the British. Frank Kurtik’s lecture will help shed light on the complicated events of the Colonial and Early American periods in US history.

The presentation will be held at Zion Lutheran Church, 237–37th Street at 7:30 p.m. Parking is available on the street or after 7:00 p.m. in St. Augustine Church’s parking lot on 37th Street.

[Click here to return to 2024 Newsletters](#) **Fort Pitt Museum—"Homelands: Native Nations of Allegheny"**

September 2024

Helen Wilson

As Tony Indovina and I research the history of Robert Neill and the Neill Log House in Schenley Park, we realized we hadn't paid enough attention to the Native Americans who had roamed the area before Europeans arrived, and what happened when they did. In the new version of the "History of the Neill Log House" that we recently put on the SHHS website, we have this passage: *"Before Europeans arrived, the area was dense woodlands used as hunting grounds by Native American tribes, including the Shawnee, Haudenosaunee, Lenape, and Osage. Europeans began to arrive in the 1700s. They were fur trappers, traders, soldiers, and missionaries. ... The story of European settlement at the Neill Log House site begins in 1769, when Ambrose Newton, an artilleryman stationed at Fort Pitt, laid claim to a 262-acre tract of land in what is now Schenley Park in the Squirrel Hill neighborhood of Pittsburgh. His claim followed the acquisition of land by the British from the Iroquois Confederacy in the Treaty of Fort Stanwix in 1768. The following year, the government of the Colony of Pennsylvania opened a land office in Pittsburgh that allowed Europeans to legally purchase the land they had claimed."*

These few sentences barely scratch the surface of the complicated and often tragic history of Native Nations and European interactions with them in the 1700s. For a fuller understanding of those interactions, we recommend that you visit the Fort Pitt Museum, as we recently did, to view the exhibition, "Homelands: Native Nations of Allegheny." The description for the exhibition says, "Created in collaboration with federally recognized Delaware, Seneca, Seneca-Cayuga, and Shawnee communities in Oklahoma and New York, this ground-breaking exhibition illuminates the rich history and present-day cultures of the Native peoples who settled this regions three centuries ago."

One of the places where this complicated history intersects with the Neill Log House is that a January 31, 1925, article in *The Pittsburgh Press*, "History of Log Cabin In Schenley Park Reveals Story of Indian Battle Fought During Wedding," describes two Native American attacks at or near the house. However, no primary sources are given for the events related in the article, so we are left to wonder where the stories originated. The events and the article are separated by about 130 years. So far, we haven't found any original sources. Possibly the stories were passed down through generations and embellished in the telling, but there is no way of knowing for sure. There are details in the story that we know are incorrect, an example being that our research points to Ambrose Newton never having lived in Squirrel Hill at all, selling the property he had claimed rather than moving there. We formed this supposition by studying original deeds, wills, tax records, and census figures.

That being said, there are other stories of Native Americans attacking settlers in a desperate attempt to hold onto lands they felt were their own and that they had been cheated out of with broken treaties and violence. The hill above the Frick Environmental Center was called "Gunns Hill" because it was believed to be the site of an attack on the Gunn family cabin in the early 1800s. Likewise, a story exists that the cabin of early Squirrel Hill settler John Turner, whose burial plot on his farm became Turner Cemetery (3424 Beechwood Blvd.), was attacked. The interesting thing about Turner's story is that although, like the Neill stories, the reporting was done over 100 years later, some validation exists for the idea that family stories were passed down through generations. A 1920s list of members of Mary S. Brown Memorial Chapel, now demolished but which stood next to the cemetery, and a 1949-50 Yearbook of the Squirrel Hill Community Club, which met in a small church building just down the street from Mary S. Brown, shows family names that are the same as those of early settlers in the area, suggesting that descendants of early settlers were still living in the area and likely passing down family lore. Some of those stories were compiled by Hodge McIlvain Eagleson, pastor of Mary S. Brown Memorial Church, in his 1957 book, *Right Here in Squirrel Hill*, filled with stories about the Turners and their friends, relatives, and descendants. He says in his introduction that he heard the stories from his parishioners.

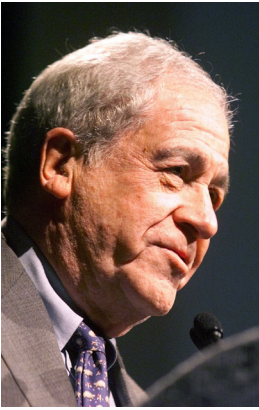
In the 1700s and early 1800s, life on the frontier was precarious, difficult, and dangerous. How the people of the Native Nations and the settlers viewed and treated each other depended very much on what they felt they had to do to ensure their own survival.

A Note on Terminology

One of the placards at the exhibition states, "While we have strived to refer to each group or nation as specifically as possible, the occasional use of collective terms is necessary. In these cases, we occasionally use the term American Indian, as it is still widely used by many Native peoples, including many of those we have worked with, to describe themselves. While not used in the exhibit, Native American also remains an accepted collective term among many Native peoples in the present-day United States."

Dr. Bernard Fisher

Dr. Stacy Wentworth



Dr. Bernard Fisher (Photo courtesy of American Society of Clinical Oncology)

Editor's Note: During a visit to Pittsburgh from North Carolina, radiation oncologist Dr. Stacy Wentworth gave a SHHS presentation, "The Life and Accomplishments of Dr. Bernard Fisher," on October 10, 2023. It can be viewed by going to the SHHS website, squirrelhillhist.org, and clicking on the link, "SHHS Past Program Videos and Events." You can also subscribe to her blog about her take on various hot-button topics in cancer care. Go to cancerculture.substack.com.

I didn't quite know what to expect as I ascended the hill leading up to the Church of the Redeemer in October 2023. I was attending my first in-person meeting of the Squirrel Hill Historical Society (SHHS). I joined this wonderful organization in 2020 after stumbling upon a YouTube video in the SHHS archive that covered the history of Pittsburgh's Jewish community. I promptly ordered all the books listed on the SHHS website and sent in my membership application.

A few years later, SHHS Program Coordinator Todd Miller accepted my offer to speak about one of Squirrel Hill's famous residents, Dr. Bernard Fisher. My presentation was scheduled just a few days after the October 7th terrorist attack by Hamas. I said a prayer as I hurried past the police cars parked in front of the Jewish Community Center near the Church of the Redeemer, where the presentation would take place. Their flashing blue lights reminded me of the horrific violence of antisemitism present in our world.

Journalist Dara Horn recounts the history of antisemitism in her book *People Love Dead Jews* and discusses the experience of turn-of-the-century Jewish immigrants to America: "These Jews brought with them memories of pogroms, of men invading synagogues with weapons and of blood on holy books." They traveled through Ellis Island and made their way to cities like Pittsburgh, carrying the "utterly irrational faith in the fantasy of acceptance." They hoped their families would, for the first time in centuries, live full, free lives. They believed in the American dream.

Bernard Fisher's grandfather was one of these early immigrants to Pittsburgh. After a brief stint training horses in Kansas City, Joseph Fisher worked as a greengrocer in the Strip District. His son, Reuben "Ruby" Fisher, joined the family business, eventually opening his own wholesale produce business specializing in apples. He married Anna Miller in 1917 and the couple settled with other Jewish families in the Hill District.

Ruby and Anna's first child, Bernard, was born on August 23, 1918, at the new Wexler Maternity Hospital just a few months before the end of World War I. A month later, the *Pittsburgh Post Gazette* reported the first confirmed case of Spanish Flu in the city. By the end of Bernard Fisher's first year of life, the average death rate in Pittsburgh (807 deaths per 100,000 people) was almost double that of other major cities. Eventually, the Fishers moved to Squirrel Hill. The 1923 Pittsburgh City Directory lists Ruby, Anna and Bernard Fisher living at 2324 Sherbrook Street in Squirrel Hill. Sherbrook Street, Fisher later said, was filled with "not much money but lots of motivation."

As a high school student at Taylor Allderdice, Fisher announced the basketball games on WWSW. He was even invited to interview to be the first radio announcer for the Pittsburgh Pirates. After climbing to the top of the Keystone Hotel (now Point Park University) where the broadcast studio was located, Fisher reports that he sat in a cramped closet with only a table and a microphone. He spent a few hours reading symbols from a Western Union tickertape.

The only other person interviewing was the famous national orator and die-hard Pirates fan, Albert "Rosey" Rowswell, who was hired instead of Fisher. Rowswell became famous for his on-air antics, including his fictional "Aunt Minnie," and served as the beloved voice of the Pirates for decades.

Fisher also reportedly interviewed at KDKA. Dave Garroway, later founding host of NBC's Today Show, told him, "Go home and we'll be in touch." Fisher later recounted how the audition went, laughing, "I'm still waiting."

After graduating from the University of Pittsburgh in 1940, Fisher entered the University of Pittsburgh Medical School. A letter written by Fisher's great uncle, a member of the Pitt faculty, helped secure his spot. Despite Pittsburgh's large Jewish population, unspoken quotas of Jewish students (men only, of course) allowed only eight Jewish students out of a medical school class of around eighty.



Dr. Wentworth with SHHS board members, left to right: Audrey Glickman, Todd Wilson, Helen Wilson, Todd Miller, Dr. Wentworth, Tony Indovina.

Fisher received his medical degree in 1943 and began his internship later that year at Mercy Hospital. There he found his career path: "I discovered that either radical or super-radical surgery was the only cure for many disorders and that the operating room was where the real drama of medicine took place. Consequently, I decided to become a surgeon."

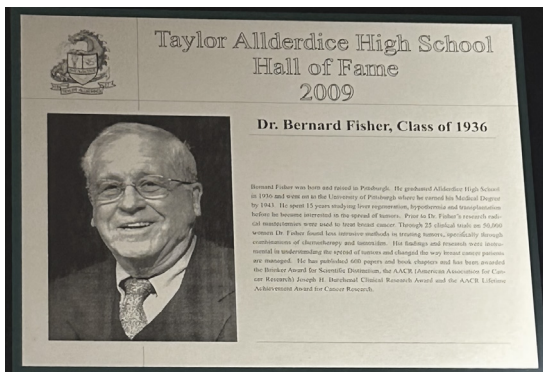
In 1950, for the first (and only) time, Fisher moved away from Squirrel Hill. He recalled this experience in an oral history interview recorded by the Council of Jewish Women in 1981: "I went off to the University of Pennsylvania, where I completed my training at the Harrison Department of Surgical Research. I was the second Jewish person to be allowed to enter the surgical program at the University of Pennsylvania. The first one was Nick Gimble from the Gimble Department Store...There's just no question that surgery was a highly discriminatory area in medicine against Jews. I had been interested in going to Mayo Clinic. The Lahey Clinic. Lots of other places. And it was almost impossible, mainly because as a Jew, it was virtually impossible unless there was some anomalous situation."

Fisher's training at Penn would eventually shape his life, my life, and the lives of every woman diagnosed with breast cancer.

After his fellowship at Penn, Fisher returned to Pittsburgh. He received a prestigious Markle Award, which recognized him as one of the top physician-scientists in the country. In 1957, he performed the first kidney transplant in Pittsburgh. In Pitt's laboratories, he discovered that cancer spread through the blood, overturning centuries of belief that cancer spread locally or through contamination by a surgeon's knife.

In September 1974, Fisher counseled First Lady Betty Ford on her decision to take chemotherapy. He just happened to be in Washington to present results on the first trial testing chemotherapy for breast cancer. On that same trip, Fisher presented initial findings that initiated the turn away from the brutal Halsted radical mastectomy as the standard treatment for breast cancer and towards more evidenced-based and patient-centric approaches. In doing so, he was one of the first physicians to declare that randomized clinical trials should be the gold standard in clinical research.

Through his work at the University of Pittsburgh and around the world, Dr. Bernard Fisher established a new paradigm of cancer as a systemic rather than a local disease, which eventually led to the expansion of cancer treatment beyond the knife. He increased survival of cancer patients, provided women with a choice to save their breasts, and gave me a



Dr. Bernard Fisher's plaque on the Taylor Allderdice High School Hall of Fame, awarded in 2009.

career. And he did it all while living and raising his family with his wife Shirley in Squirrel Hill. A journalist who covered cancer news wrote Fisher late in life. In his opinion, he told Fisher, "No one in medicine or biomedical research has contributed more, in terms of reducing trauma and saving lives, in this century than you have."

Fisher's remarkable life is a testimony to the American dream. A dream that lives in the hearts of immigrants and descendants of immigrants who call Squirrel Hill home today, searching for a better life for themselves and their families, but improving ours as well.

*Want to hear more? Less Radical is a podcast that covers Dr. Fisher's remarkable life and the scandal that almost ruined his career. **The first episode of the podcast will be released on September 25.** Subscribe to cancerculture.substack.com. Or download in your favorite podcast app.*

Rice 'n Stew Co.—Great Place, Great Food!

Helen Wilson



Tony and I like to try new restaurants, so when we read about Rice 'n Stew in the July *Hazelwood Homepage*, we decided to try it. The headline of the article went, "Restaurant creates oasis of Afghan culture where women are full partners." The online description says, "Specializing in complete meal options, we take pride in offering individually portioned to-go packages that are perfect for those seeking quick, nutritious, and satisfying meals. ... Each Stew includes your choice of Rice (White & Brown), Salata (Chopped Salad), Chatni (Dressing) & Ferrini (Dessert)." And indeed, so it was! The friendly man behind the counter, who was the owner, explained the way things worked, and then Tony

and I ordered a traditional Afghan stew dish with a choice of rice, accompanied by a salad and dessert. The food was fresh and delicious. The small restaurant is located at 4371 Murray Ave. in Greenfield, almost at the intersection with Hazelwood Ave. The owners are Afghan refugees, Haida and Sohrab Baskhshi, who came to the United States from Afghanistan. The *Homepage* article relates the various ways they tried to earn a living in several cities before settling in Pittsburgh, choosing the Greenfield location for its "affordable rent and the diverse neighborhood," according to the article. Check out their website, ricenstewco.com, to see their tantalizing options.