



The East Ender

A Publication of the East Liberty Valley Historical Society

P.O. Box 4922, Pittsburgh, PA 15206
eastlibertyvalley@gmail.com
eastlibertychamber.org/Historical-Society
www.facebook.com/EastLibertyValley

Spring 2019

Prose Made Permanent: Thomas C. McKee, Architect

Justin P. Greenawalt

Pittsburgh's East End is awash in monuments, a fact made all the more miraculous when considering the trials of mid-20th century urban renewal and the sweeping changes affected by its recent renaissance. The spire of Ralph Adams Cram's East Liberty Presbyterian Church is omnipresent. D. H. Burnham & Company's Highland Building stands a gleaming terra cotta visage. These are monuments with provenance. But countless other buildings are shrouded in anonymity.

Their architects? A mystery. Their patrons? Forgotten.

These anonymous buildings contribute to the rich tapestry of the East End's built fabric. They are no less important. Rarely, however, one of these buildings will reveal its secrets and in so doing, unshroud countless others. One such building is the Cumberland Presbyterian Church.

The Shady Avenue Cumberland Presbyterian Church (later known as the Shady Avenue Presbyterian Church and the Shady Avenue Christian Assembly) has anchored the intersection of Shady Avenue and Aurelia Street since 1889. Generations of Pittsburghers have known this building. Even author Willa Cather tangentially acknowledged the church in her 1905 short story *Paul's Case: A Study in Temperament*. The building is a tempest. The architect throws caution to the wind. The design is balanced and proportionate, but exemplifies a type of artistic and architectural abandon that is rarely observed in Pittsburgh. Parapets and pinnacles, brackets and belfries, sunbursts and scrolls all work in tandem to form a rich mélange of whimsy. The Aesthetic Movement stained glass windows, although weathered, still manage to shimmer in the mid-winter sun.

Who is responsible for this Queen Anne jewel box?

Thomas Cox McKee.



Shady Avenue Cumberland Presbyterian Church (1889-1891). Addition at left completed 1911-1912 by Rogers & Minnis. Source: J. Greenawalt

The Early Years

Thomas Cox McKee--more commonly known as T. C. McKee--was an East Ender. He came into the world on July 19, 1865, one of six children born to William and Mary Jane Cox McKee.¹ The family resided at the intersection of Broad Street and Frankstown Avenue, near Larimer Avenue.^{2,3} William McKee identified himself as a "Boss Carpenter."⁴ In a nineteenth-century, pre-professional world, "...the majority of those engaged in design and building were known as builders, carpenters, or building mechanics."⁵ Today, we would likely recognize William McKee as a builder-architect. Evidenced by his chosen profession, the young Thomas clearly shared his father's interest in the building trades.

Following the death of the family's matriarch in 1877, T. C. McKee moved to Enon Valley, Lawrence County, Pennsylvania with his widower father and his siblings.⁶ However, McKee soon returned to the East End where he took a job as a draftsman; apprenticing under architect James W. Drum.⁷

Master and Apprentice

James W. Drum (1829-1886) was born in Punxsutawney, Pa., in 1829. Around 1871 Drum relocated his home and practice from

Indiana, Pa., to Pittsburgh; settling at 125 Larimer Avenue in East Liberty. Maps indicate that 125 Larimer Avenue had previously been owned by William McKee, T. C. McKee's father.⁸ This appears to be the connection between Drum and the young McKee. The 1885 city directory reports McKee as living on Larimer Avenue near Station Street, likely with Drum and his family.⁹

McKee's apprenticeship with Drum was brief but clearly influential. Drum was an experienced architect, a master of the Romantic Period. Over the course of his career, he garnered praise for the Jefferson County Courthouse (1868-1869)¹⁰, the Indiana County Courthouse (1869-1870)¹¹, Miller Hall at Waynesburg University (1872)¹², Sutton Hall at Indiana University of Pennsylvania (1873-1875)¹³, the Mercer County Home and Hospital (1880)¹⁴, the Westmoreland County Home (1880)¹⁵, the Fayette County Home (1882-1883)¹⁶, and the Washington School in Lawrenceville (1886)¹⁷, among numerous other buildings.

“...whatever laws may be necessary to regulate the erection of lofty buildings should be governed by the unwritten law of ‘the greatest good to the greatest number.’”

~ Thomas C. McKee, Architect, 1892

Drum's aesthetic conveyed a confidence in his craft. His buildings were grand and fashionable, but they exhibited restraint, solemnity, and respectability. This ideology was passed from master to apprentice. Yet as any young architect is wont to do, T. C. McKee may have heeded his master's instruction, but he ultimately forged his own path. In his early work, McKee chose to push the boundaries of convention--at least for Pittsburgh.

T. C. McKee, Architect

On May 7, 1886, James W. Drum was struck and killed by a freight train near the Brilliant Station of the Allegheny Valley Railroad.¹⁸ Drum's death thrust T. C. McKee into the world of professional practice. He was not yet 21 years old. Shortly after his mentor's passing, McKee opened his first office at 6108 Penn Avenue in East Liberty, sharing the space with the real estate office of Daniel C. Negley.¹⁹

McKee's earliest known commission was the East End Gymnastic Club (1887; demolished), located at 205-207 Shady Avenue.²⁰ It was this small but remarkable building that helped to distinguish McKee “...as a thoroughly representative member of the distinctive American school of architecture...”²¹ At the time, architecture in Pittsburgh had a tendency toward brusqueness.

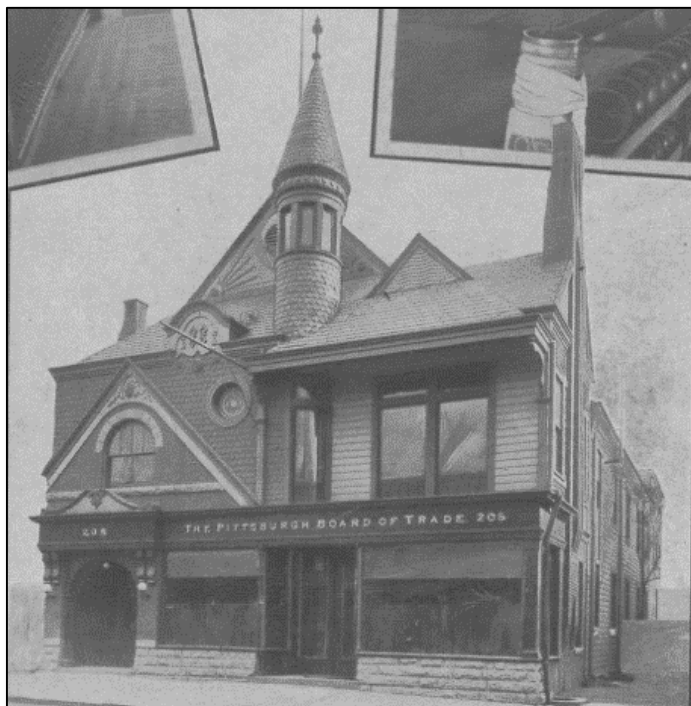
Many of McKee's contemporaries labored under the supposition that ornament was just another place for soot to settle. But in the East End Gymnastic Club, McKee dispensed with this notion. He experimented with massing, proportion, texture, and ornamentation. Its slender tower and the undulation of its façade was subtly reminiscent of work by Philadelphia architect Frank Furness. The design was intrepid and clearly caught the eye of would-be patrons. Between 1888 and 1889, published reports confirm McKee's hand in the design of no fewer than ten projects.

In 1888, McKee completed designs for the Daniel C. Negley House at 6407 Fifth Avenue (demolished 2015), the Reed M. Vincent House (extant), and a six-story building on Third Avenue for A.J. Logan & Company (demolished).²² In 1889, McKee designed the Cumberland Presbyterian Church (extant)²³, the A.C. Ellis House (extant)²⁴, the Casper Reimer House (extant)²⁵, the J. C. Jamison House (demolished)²⁶, the James Lyons House (believed extant)²⁷, and a storefront on

Frankstown Avenue for A. C. Gies (demolished).²⁸ McKee's career continued to trend upward throughout the 1890s; he designed individual residences, commercial buildings, and multiple-dwelling plans for developers.

A Pittsburgh Progressive

McKee's work speaks for itself. It is a built testament to his talent. But an October 16, 1892 publication by the Pittsburgh Press offered a rare glimpse into McKee's progressive ideology. In *Pittsburgh Skyscrapers: The High Building Era Has Come to Stay*, McKee was one of four architects interviewed about the new trend of tall building construction. Also interviewed were U. J. L. Peoples, T. H. Scott, and J. E. Obitz. McKee's position stood in marked contrast to most of his contemporaries. Both Scott and Obitz believed, respectively, that nine to fourteen stories was “...a safe limit...” and “...ought to represent a fair average limit...” to the height of the skyscraper.²⁹ McKee, however, opined, “...there is no reason why we should curtail the height of our buildings under 25 or 30 stories,” pointing to the contemporary advancements in Chicago as the basis for his bold assertion.³⁰ Instead of strictly limiting the height of new buildings, McKee proposed enacting setback regulations, stating, “...I think the height should not be more than three times the extreme width of the street. In the case of wide streets there should be a stipulation to the effect



that if it was desired to go above the regulation height it would be allowed, provided that above this height the building should not occupy more than 50 per cent of the area of land ... This plan would make the front as well as the sides break back from the building line. If the owner wanted to pursue this method indefinitely I would permit him to do so, providing always that when each section reached the regulated height the next section should set back a prescribed distance.”³¹

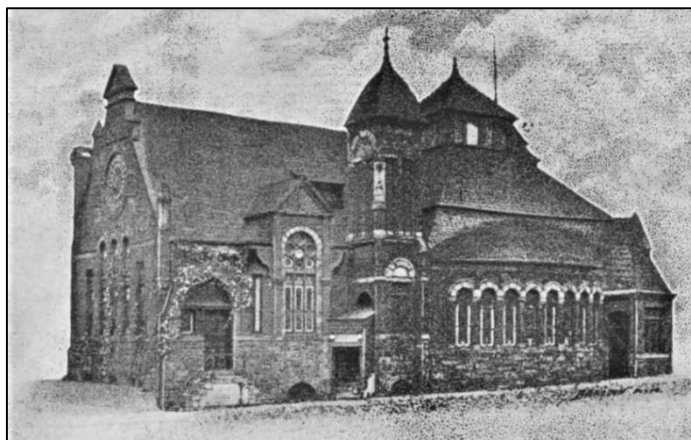
The concept of setback regulations may not have originated with McKee, but he was advocating for regulation in tall building construction a full fourteen years before New York City codified this exact concept in its 1916 Zoning Resolution. His exceptionally well developed thesis identifies him as someone who was deeply concerned with and committed to the quality of the built environment.

McKee concluded, “...whatever laws may be necessary to regulate the erection of lofty buildings should be governed by the unwritten law of ‘the greatest good to the greatest number.’”³² In a Pittsburgh that McKee himself acknowledged was resistant to change and technological advancement, he was nothing short of a visionary.

The Nineteen-Aughts

The decade spanning 1900 to 1910 would be McKee’s last ten years in Pittsburgh, but it also marked the period in which he grew into the most consummate version of his professional self. Keenly aware of the post-1893 Columbian Exposition shift in American architectural taste, McKee had been dabbling with Neoclassical and Colonial design since the mid-1890s.³³ But even as his design aesthetic evolved, he maintained one key element from his early career: a penchant for excess. The nineteen-aughts proved to be the decade in which McKee embraced Eclecticism, sloughed off Romanticism and the Victorian Period, and endowed Pittsburgh with his most consequential work.

In 1900, McKee delivered his design for the Belmar School (1900-1901) (extant) in Homewood, the Pittsburgh equivalent of an Italian Renaissance palazzo.³⁴ It was one of the largest commissions of his career. Teetering precariously on the edge of aesthetic vulgarity, the Belmar School drips with deeply fluted pilasters, Ionic capitals, and blind oculi.



Above Left: McKee’s first known commission: East End Gymnastic Club (1887). View shows the building after being purchased by the Pittsburgh Board of Trade in 1902. Source: Up-town, Greater Pittsburgh’s Classic Section: East End, The World’s Most Beautiful Suburb

Middle Left: A.J. Logan & Company Building (1888). Source: Cover, Illustrated Catalog of A.J. Logan & Company, c. 1899.

Bottom Left: Shady Avenue Cumberland Presbyterian Church (1889-1891), view c. 1907. Source: Up-town, Greater Pittsburgh’s Classic Section: East End, The World’s Most Beautiful Suburb

Pedimented windows with foliated wreathes flank oversized Romanesque arches. Scrolled keystones anchor vermiculated voussoirs. A deep, corbelled cornice encircles the roof while a rough-hewn sandstone foundation firmly anchors the building to the Earth, lest it rend itself free and float away. In keeping with the theme of opulence, McKee employed the Winslow Brothers Company, eminent Chicago bronze fabricator, to produce ornamental bronze work.³⁵ The resultant building stands as a built essay on ornamentation; prose given permanence.

As remarkable as McKee's design for the Belmar School was, his swan song is best observed in both the Vilsack House (1906-1907; extant) and the Minetti House (1909; extant). These were among McKee's last two buildings in Pittsburgh.

The Vilsack House took nearly two years to complete. McKee bought the lot at 5544 Beverly Place in Highland Park in 1906.³⁶ It is unclear if McKee intended the house for himself and his family or if he had designed and built it speculatively. But in January 1908, McKee entered into an interesting swap with A. A. Vilsack. McKee bought Vilsack's house at 5510 Ellsworth Avenue for \$10,000.³⁷ In turn, Vilsack bought McKee's house for \$26,000.³⁸

Like the Belmar School, the Vilsack House is a masterpiece of Italian Renaissance Revival architecture. But unlike the Belmar School, excess is replaced with restraint. It is orderly, calculated, and deliberate in its design. With Roman brick, splayed lintels, stained glass, and a massive, deep, overhanging cornice, the house is imposing even on a street populated with other grand residences.

The Minetti House is McKee's last known documented work within the city limits of Pittsburgh.³⁹ The house was designed and built for Italian virtuoso Carlo Minetti and his wife Juliet Mansfield Minetti. Minetti chose the Tudor Revival style



Vilsack House (1906-1907), November 2018
Source: J. Greenawalt



Belmar School (1900), November 2018. Additions and alterations completed May 1959. Source: J. Greenawalt

“after a long study of European architecture in his many trips abroad...”⁴⁰ Minetti asserted that he found no style “...more pleasing and practical...”⁴¹ Although Minetti sometimes referred to Pittsburgh as his temporary home, he spent the remainder of his life here, clearly approving of McKee's design. He even composed his only English-language opera, *Edane the Fair*, while living in the house.

In the Minetti House, McKee clearly demonstrates both skill and confidence. And doubtless, McKee thoroughly understood the gravitas of the commission. Carlo Minetti was a client of considerable social stature and Schenley Farms was a veritable who's-who of Pittsburgh's most prominent, accomplished architects. The Minetti House would mingle amongst houses designed by the likes of Henry Hornbostel, Benno Janssen, MacClure & Spahr, Maximilian Nirdlinger, and Vrydaugh & Wolfe to name a few.

The design of the Minetti House is commensurately grand but does not boast. It is neat, handsome, and reserved. McKee perched the house high on a terrace overlooking Schenley Farms, oriented away from the bustle of Centre Avenue. The primary



Minetti House (1909). Source: Letters from Schenley Farms Dwellers, Courtesy: Jonathan Daniel

façade faces Fairfield Lane, an oft-overlooked hillside pedestrian path that, at the time, had been designed as a “...fine botanical parkway...” for the use of Schenley Farms residents.⁴² By treating Centre Avenue as a service road and orienting the house toward Oakland, McKee functionally maintained the exclusivity of the Schenley Farms community while maximizing the impressive views afforded by the site.

The Cleveland Years

By 1910, at the age of 45, McKee had proven himself worthy of his place amongst the cadre of Pittsburgh’s architectural elite. With his Minetti House complete, McKee was poised to further advance his career. But for reasons not yet fully understood, he opted instead to relocate his practice and his family to Cleveland.⁴³ Interestingly, before the move, McKee decided to indulge his penchant for excess one last time. In June 1910, McKee rented *Nestamalia*, the estate of newspaper magnate William C. Connelly, Jr. near Valencia, in rural Butler County, Pa.⁴⁴ There, he and his family summered before starting anew.

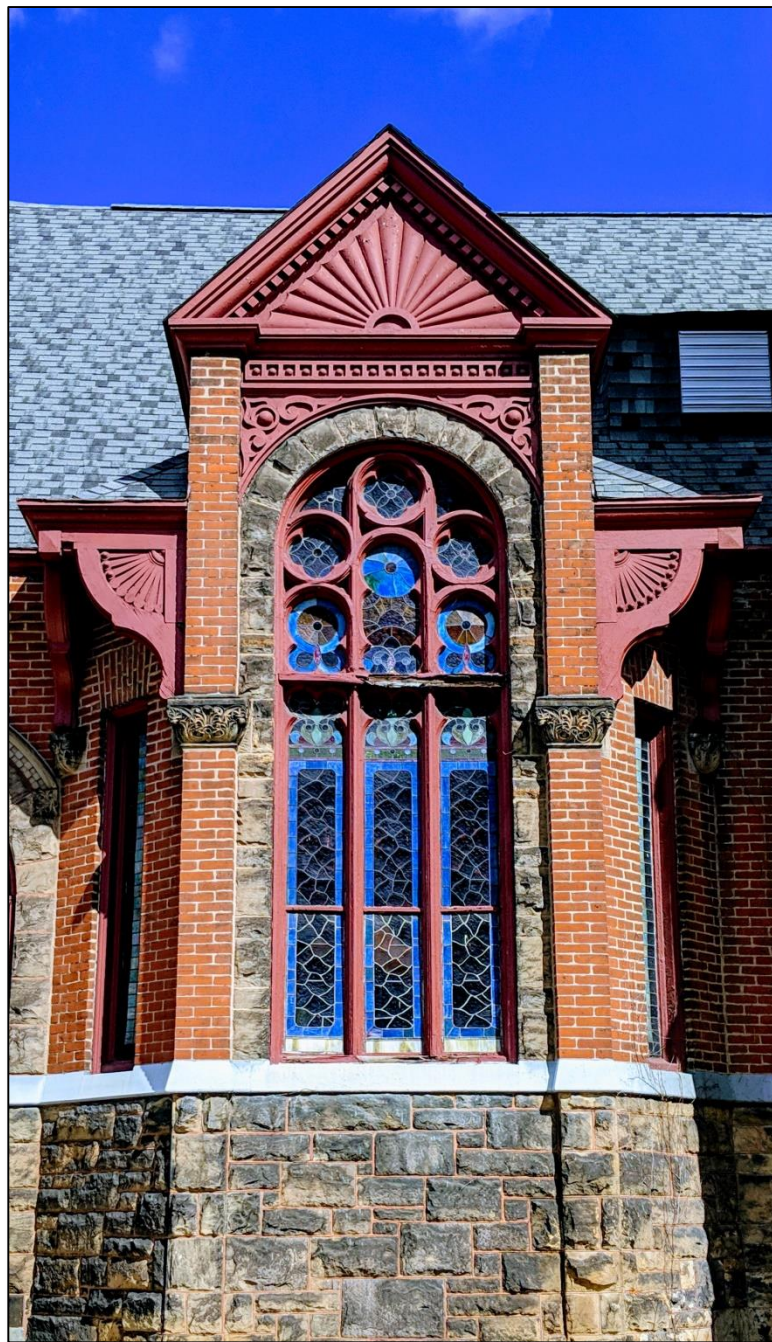
McKee’s relocation begs the question: why would an established, regionally significant architect in the prime of his career decide to start over in a new city? Most unfortunately, he has left us with no clues. Between 1911 and 1922, sources list numerous occupations for McKee: draftsman⁴⁵, fireproof building materials salesman⁴⁶, and newspaper reporter.⁴⁷ McKee began designing soda fountains c. 1920.⁴⁸ Around 1922, he accepted a position as a draftsman designing soda fountains with the Bishop & Babcock Company.⁴⁹

However varied his occupations may have been, McKee never relinquished his identity. Even while employed in other lines of work, his entry in the Cleveland city directory nearly always read:

Thomas C. McKee, Architect.

McKee left Cleveland around 1932, presumably entering retirement. The last decade of his life yields no clues about his activities or his whereabouts. McKee died on May 4, 1942 in Madison, Lake County, Ohio.⁵⁰ Although he had been away from his native Pittsburgh for nearly 32 years, McKee’s final journey was one of homecoming. He was interred near his parents and siblings in the McKee family plot in Allegheny Cemetery.

McKee was one of many architects working in Pittsburgh at the turn of the 20th century, indeed. But of those architects, only a select few produced a caliber of work worthy of immortalization in the annals of architectural history. After nearly a century, Thomas Cox McKee is owed his recompense. McKee’s brilliance, much like the windows of his Shady Avenue Cumberland Presbyterian Church, still shimmers, unspoiled by the miasma of time.



Southwest window of the Shady Avenue Cumberland Presbyterian Church (1889-1891), March 2019. Source: J. Greenawalt

Justin P. Greenawalt, M.S. is an architectural historian and historic preservationist with a deep appreciation of the history and development of Pittsburgh’s greater East End. Professionally, Justin is employed as a member of Michael Baker International’s Cultural Resources staff. He is also a licensed real estate professional with the Sewickley Office of Howard Hanna Real Estate Services. In 2015, he joined the Board of Directors of Preservation Pittsburgh. Justin has served as President of the East Liberty Valley Historical Society since January 2017. Justin graduated *Cum Laude* from the University of Pittsburgh in 2008 with a Bachelor of Arts in Architectural Studies. He graduated from Columbia University in the City of New York in 2010 with a Master of Science in Historic Preservation.

Acknowledgements:

The author wishes to acknowledge Ms. Mary Beth Pastorius, President, Pastorius Historic Properties, Inc., for her assistance with the biographical account of architect James W. Drum. Additional acknowledgement is due Mr. Jonathan Daniel for sharing his expertise and source material on Oakland's Schenley Farms. The author also wishes to thank Ms. Patricia Lowry for her assistance in the editing of this work. Lastly, sincere gratitude is due the East Liberty Valley Historical Society for preserving and promoting the exceptionally unique history of Pittsburgh's greater East End through the presentation and publication of worthwhile research.

Endnotes:

1. Wills and Orphan's Court Records, Pennsylvania Marriage License Docket, Allegheny County 1890-1904, License No. 22420, Allegheny County, Pennsylvania.
2. Eighteenth and Nineteenth Wards Pittsburgh [map]. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: G.M. Hopkins & Company, 1872.
3. 1870 U.S. Census, Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, population schedule. Pittsburgh, Ward 19, p. 11, dwelling 73, family 72, William McKee; digital image, Ancestry.com, accessed March 8, 2019, <http://ancestry.com>.
4. Ibid.
5. Mary N. Woods. *From Craft to Profession: The Practice of Architecture in Nineteenth-Century America*. (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1999), 4.
6. 1880 U.S. Census, Lawrence County, Pennsylvania, population schedule. Enon Valley, Little Beaver Township, p. 26, dwelling 240, family 254, William and Thomas McKee; digital image, Ancestry.com, accessed March 8, 2019, <http://ancestry.com>.
7. *History and Commerce of Pittsburgh and Environs: Consisting of Allegheny, McKeesport, Braddock and Homestead 1893-4*. (New York, New York: A.F. Parsons Publishing Company, 1894), 135.
8. Eighteenth and Nineteenth Wards Pittsburgh [map]. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: G.M. Hopkins & Company, 1872.
9. J.F. Diffenbacher's directory of Pittsburgh and Allegheny cities 1885/1886. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Diffenbacher & Thurston, 1881-189-, 654.
10. "The New Court House." *Blairsville Press*, Blairsville, Pennsylvania, June 26, 1869, 3.
11. Ibid.
12. "The Normal School Finished." *The Indiana Democrat*, Indiana, Pennsylvania, February 18, 1875, 1.
13. Mary Beth Pastorius, email to Justin P. Greenawalt, January 14, 2019.
14. George H. Frost, *Engineering News* Volume 7 (1880): 302.
15. Ibid.
16. "1883 Building to be Razed: County Home Has Long History." *The Evening Standard*, Uniontown, Pennsylvania, January 28, 1977, 1,19.
17. "Obituary." *Indiana Weekly Messenger*, Indiana, Pennsylvania, May 12, 1886, 7.
18. Ibid.
19. J.F. Diffenbacher's directory of Pittsburgh and Allegheny cities 1886/1887. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Diffenbacher & Thurston, 1881-189-, 687, 1103.
20. "East End Gymnastic Club." *The Pittsburgh Post*, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, December 23, 1889, 6.
21. *History and Commerce of Pittsburgh and Environs: Consisting of Allegheny, McKeesport, Braddock and Homestead 1893-4*. (New York, New York: A.F. Parsons Publishing Company, 1894), 135.
22. "Building (News Supplement), Pittsburgh." *Architecture and Building*. Volume 8, Number 13 (1888): 3.
23. "Another New Church." *The Pittsburgh Post*, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, November 12, 1889, 2.
24. "Synopsis of Building News. Pittsburgh, Pa." *Inland Architect and News Record*. Volume 13, Issue 8 (1889): 106.
25. "Synopsis of Building News. Pittsburgh, Pa." *Inland Architect and News Record*. Volume 14, Issue 5 (1889): 56.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid.
28. "Pittsburgh Skyscrapers: The Tall Building Era Has Come To Stay." *The Pittsburgh Press*, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, October 16, 1892, 4.
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid.
33. "Recent Brick and Terra-Cotta Work in American Cities." *The Brick Builder*. Volume 5, Number 8 (1896), 154.
34. "Sealed Proposals." *Pittsburgh Commercial Gazette*, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, April 28, 1900, 7.
35. *Ornamental Iron & Bronze, Executed by the Winslow Bros. Company Chicago*. (Chicago, Illinois and New York, New York: Rogers & Company, 1910), 230.
36. "Transfers of Real Estate." *The Pittsburgh Press*, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, April 21, 1906, 9.
37. "Sale of East End Houses." *Pittsburgh Daily Post*, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, January 28, 1908, 13.
38. "Pays \$26,000 For New House in Beverly Place." *The Pittsburgh Post*, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, January 7, 1908, 8.
39. "Old English Home Will Grace Schenley Farms." *Pittsburgh Daily Post*, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, April 28, 1909, 11.
40. Ibid.
41. Ibid.
42. Ibid.
43. Cleveland City Directory. Cleveland, Ohio: Cleveland Directory Company, 1911-1912, 979.
44. "Col. William C. Connelly, Jr., Leases His Handsome Country Place to T.C. McKee." *The Pittsburgh Post*, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, June 9, 1910, 5.
45. Cleveland City Directory. Cleveland, Ohio: Cleveland Directory Company, 1911-1912, 979.
46. Cleveland City Directory. Cleveland, Ohio: Cleveland Directory Company, 1914-1915, 113.
47. Cleveland City Directory. Cleveland, Ohio: Cleveland Directory Company, 1921-1922, 1851.
48. 1920 U.S. Census, Cuyahoga County, Ohio, population schedule. East Cleveland City, Ward 2, p. 15B, dwelling 228, family 415, Thomas C. McKee; digital image, Ancestry.com, accessed March 8, 2019, <http://ancestry.com>.
49. Cleveland City Directory. Cleveland, Ohio: Cleveland Directory Company, 1922-1923, 1741.
50. *Ohio Death Index, 1908-1932, 1938-2007*, Ohio Department of Health, p. 1133, 1942; digital image, Ancestry.com, accessed March 8, 2019, <http://ancestry.com>.

Q & A: Ask the E.L.V.H.S.

Is it true that East Liberty once had another skyscraper like the Highland Building?

Yes! The East End Savings & Trust Building (later known as the Peoples Building) was once one of East Liberty's most fashionable skyscrapers.

By the nineteen-teens, East Liberty boasted one of the largest and most robust commercial districts in the region, second only to Downtown Pittsburgh. Unlike many other city neighborhoods, East Liberty had developed as an independent town from the time that Alexander Negley established a frontier outpost here in 1778.¹ Separated from Downtown Pittsburgh by a distance of five miles, during the nineteenth century East Liberty developed its own financial institutions, cultural institutions, and commercial enterprises. The East End Savings & Trust Company (EES&T) was one of East Liberty's preeminent banking houses.

In April 1912, the EES&T selected Pittsburgh architect Frederick J. Osterling to design its new banking hall and office building.² Previously located in a three-story building at Penn and North Sheridan Avenues, the EES&T decided to purchase one of the most prominent, visible sites in the East End: a lot at Penn and South Highland Avenues. The lot was small for the skyscraper that Osterling designed. It measured only 59 feet wide on Penn Avenue and a mere 24 feet wide on Antler Way. But the building's masterful design and its juxtaposition with the 13-story Highland Building contributed to its perceived immensity.

The site was cleared and construction began by the summer of 1912. The building was constructed using a steel frame. The exterior was draped in white terra cotta and granite. The interior was trimmed in white Italian marble and dark mahogany.³ The rounded corner was the building's defining feature. The viewer's eye was instantly drawn to the grandiose entrance and then upward along the shaft to a magnificent two-story loggia. The building was crowned with a massive, overhanging cornice. The building formally opened to the public on June 14, 1913.⁴ Upon completion, the East End Savings & Trust Building stood 14 stories tall. It was the second tallest building in East Liberty. Only the Highland Building stood taller by virtue of its rooftop elevator head-house.

The East End Savings & Trust Building stood for 56 years. In October 1968, Pittsburgh National Bank, which had acquired the building in a 1959 merger, announced plans to raze it for a new one-story banking hall with eight parking spaces.⁴ Demolition commenced in late 1969 and was complete by early 1970. The new banking hall was demolished and redeveloped in 2015.

It is true that grander buildings have met the wrecking ball, but the East End Savings & Trust Building is one that we sincerely wish we had back.



The East End Savings & Trust Company with the Highland Building, c. 1920, Postcard Image, Personal Collection of J. Greenawalt

Endnotes:

1. Georgina G. Negley. *East Liberty Presbyterian Church with Historical Setting and Narrative of the Centennial Celebration*. (Pittsburgh: Murdoch, Kerr & Co. Press, 1919), 5.
2. "New Building for East Liberty." *Pittsburgh Post*, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, April 21, 1912, 8.
3. "Much Building Throughout City." *Pittsburgh Post*, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, April 21, 1912, 8.
4. "Notes and Comment." *Pittsburgh Gazette Times*, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, June 14, 1913, 13.
5. "PNB To Raze Bank Building in E. Liberty." *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, October 2, 1968, 17.

Do you have a question about the history of Pittsburgh's East End?
Ask the E.L.V.H.S.

Write us at:
eastlibertyvalley@gmail.com

Historic Home Economics

Justin P. Greenawalt

What did the past *taste* like? Perhaps that's an unusual query, but for me, it's a question I've pondered since childhood. I may have been a bit of a precocious child. My fascination with the topic began around age six when my grandmother took me to an estate sale in Mount Pleasant, Pa. There, I found a book bound in mottled, gray paper. In faded silver letters, the cover read:

COOK BOOK
COMPILED BY
HOME ECONOMICS DEPARTMENT
OF THE
ASPINWALL WOMAN'S CLUB
ASPINWALL, PENNSYLVANIA
1923

As a six-year-old, it seemed as if I could never desire anything more in this world. I showed it to my grandmother and she very kindly obliged. I've cherished it ever since. But as much as I wanted to recreate every recipe contained within its pages, as a child, I was never permitted. "The recipes are too vague," I was told. "The measurements are probably off and some of the ingredients haven't been made for decades." So I waited.

In 2013, I had recently rented my dream apartment in F. G. Scheibler, Jr.'s Highland Towers. I was unpacking boxes when I pulled out my prized cook book. There I stood. Alone. Without supervision. With a kitchen all my own. What should I make?! Gladys Creasy's sugar cookies? No. Mrs. Deardorff's orange loaf? No. It had to be perfect. But what to choose?

I came to a page with soft, worn edges. It was smeared with molasses. Someone had visited this page frequently. It clearly contained something good. And there it was:

GINGERBREAD
MRS. ANSLEY

As I reflect on that moment, it must have been fate. In time, I would learn that this recipe belonged to a fellow East Ender. Census sleuthing led me to the author: Mrs. Ella M. Ansley. In 1910, Ella, her husband Harley, and their daughter Beatrice rented at 7129 Idlewild Street in Homewood. Ella was a homemaker. Harley was employed as a wholesale meat salesman. By 1920, Ella and her family had purchased their own home and moved to Lexington Avenue in Aspinwall. The 1930s took the Ansleys to Akron, Ohio and Middlesex, New York, but they returned to the Pittsburgh region by the mid-1940s, settling on North Sprague Street in Bellevue.

I imagine that this dense, warm, spice cake graced the Ansleys' table many times. Accompanied by coffee or cocoa, it is perfect for warming up a cold winter day. As it undoubtedly was in 1923, I assure you, this recipe remains a triumph of historic home economics.

Mrs. Ella Ansley's Gingerbread Cake

Ingredients:

1/2 cup boiling water
2 tsp baking soda
1/2 cup butter
1/2 cup granulated sugar
1 cup molasses
2-1/2 cups all-purpose flour
1 tsp ground ginger
1 tsp ground cinnamon
1 tsp ground cloves
2 large eggs

Instructions:

- Step 1:* Preheat the oven to 350°F.
- Step 2:* Grease two 9" cake rounds with butter.
- Step 3:* Bring the 1/2 cup of water to a boil. Dissolve the baking soda in the boiling water. Set aside.
- Step 4:* Beat the eggs well. Set aside.
- Step 5:* Cream the butter and sugar. Add the molasses. Mix until smooth.
- Step 6:* Sift the flour and spices together. Gradually add the dry ingredients to the wet ingredients, ensuring that all dry ingredients are fully incorporated. The mixture will form a dough.
- Step 7:* Add the water/baking soda solution to the mixture, incorporating fully.
- Step 8:* Add the beaten eggs to the mixture just before baking. The mixture will thin to form a batter.
- Step 9:* Divide the batter evenly between the two cake rounds and bake for 25 to 30 minutes, or until a toothpick inserted into the center comes out clean. Allow to cool.
- Step 10:* Once cooled, frost. A vanilla buttercream is recommended to balance the warm spice of the cake.

~

This recipe was tested and adapted from the original by the East Liberty Valley Historical Society. Measurements, temperatures, and instructions are believed suitable for modern kitchens. This recipe was originally published in 1923 in *Cook Book, compiled by the Home Economics Department of the Aspinwall Woman's Club, Aspinwall, Pennsylvania.*

Mystery Photo



Do you recognize this handsome East End building?

Clue: This building was constructed in 1906. Although very much altered, it still stands. But maybe not for long...

The first three respondents who correctly identify this building *and* its location will win a free 2019 membership to the East Liberty Valley Historical Society.

Please email all responses to eastlibertyvalley@gmail.com. Responses will be accepted until June 1, 2019. The answer will be revealed and winners will be recognized at the last lecture of the Spring 2019 Series on Friday, June 7, 2019.

Did you identify the Mystery Photo from our last issue?



The George W. Hailman House, view c. 1889. The Hailman House, later known as the Hotel Kenmawr, was located at the intersection of Shady Avenue and Walnut Street. The Kenmawr apartment building occupies the site today.

Board of Directors

East Liberty Valley Historical Society

Justin P. Greenawalt, President
 George A. Clark, Vice President
 Charles Honeywell, Executive Director
 Lu Donnelly
 Janet Dilts
 Robert Dilts
 Taafoi Kamara
 Edward Lesoon
 Patricia Lowry
 Mike Staresinic

A Note of Gratitude

The East Liberty Valley Historical Society wishes to extend its sincere gratitude and appreciation to Mr. Alfred Mann, President Emeritus, who formally retired from the Board of Directors this past autumn. For more than a decade, Mr. Mann volunteered his time and expertise in directing the Society and its activities. Without his years of steady, resolute administration and his immeasurable contributions to the body of research on Pittsburgh's greater East End, it is doubtful that the Society would have been able to attain the level of esteem that it enjoys today. The Board of Directors sincerely wishes Mr. Mann well in his retirement.

Your Membership Matters!

Your East Liberty Valley Historical Society membership supports quality programming, reinforces a commitment to high-caliber research and documentation, and demonstrates dedication to the indispensable historic assets of Pittsburgh's greater East End.

Join or Renew for 2019

Questions? Write us: eastlibertyvalley@gmail.com

East Liberty Valley Historical Society

P.O. Box 4922
 Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15206

Pittsburgh's East Liberty Valley

Few places in Pittsburgh can claim the historical significance that is found in the East Liberty Valley; even fewer can claim the resiliency to constantly adapt and reinvent.

Over the past 200 years, the only constant in the Valley has been change. From farm community, to railroad hub, to commercial and industrial center, to urban renewal experiment, to pioneer in urban renaissance, the East Liberty Valley has boldly endured.

The East Liberty Valley Historical Society. Who we are.

The East Liberty Valley Historical Society is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization dedicated to preserving the unique history of the Greater East Liberty Valley.

Through the preservation of our history and the education of the public, we aim to enhance a sense of self and place within the residents of the East End; to encourage community esteem. We work to develop a renewed awareness of the area's significant sites, historical events, and momentous contributions. But most importantly, we strive to foster future growth and development through a broad understanding of our past.



What you can do.

As someone who cares about the history of your community, your membership is critical to the preservation and promotion of the East Liberty Valley. We welcome your participation; as a member, as a donor, as a committee member, or as a contributor to our various publications. It is through **your** participation that we are able to accomplish our mission.

If you have any additional questions, please write us at P.O. Box 4922, Pittsburgh, PA 15206 or email us at eastlibertyvalley@gmail.com.

Follow us on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/EastLibertyValley/>



Interested in Becoming a Member?

Tell Us About Yourself!

Name _____

Address _____

Telephone Number _____

Email Address _____

Please make all checks payable to:
East Liberty Valley Historical Society

Choose a Membership Level:

Student \$10

Adult \$20

Business,

1-10 Employees \$35

11-30 Employees \$100

30 + Employees \$200

I am interested in potentially serving on a Committee.

Online Donations may be made with Debit, Credit, or PayPal at: <https://tinyurl.com/ELVHS02>

The East Liberty Valley Historical Society

Spring 2019 Marilyn Evert Lecture Series

First Fridays This Spring

March 1, 2019

“Irish Presbyterians and the Shaping of Western Pennsylvania”

Peter E. Gilmore

Historian, journalist, educator, and author.

April 5, 2019

2019 Annual Meeting at 6:00PM followed by

“Digging Solitude: Exploring and Interpreting the George Westinghouse Estate”

Christine Davis

Archaeological and historical consultant; president,
Christine Davis Consultants.

May 3, 2019

“Baseball Goes West: The Dodgers, the Giants, and the Shaping of the Major
Leagues”

Lincoln Mitchell

Political analyst, pundit, educator and author.

June 7, 2019

“Albright United Methodist Church: A Historical Past, Present and Future”

Friends of Albright

East Liberty Presbyterian Church

116 South Highland Avenue, Chapel

Each Lecture Begins At 7:30PM

- Free and Open to the Public -

East Liberty Valley Historical Society

P.O. Box 4922

Pittsburgh, PA 15206