



CARNEGIE MAGAZINE

APRIL 1969

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CAFETERIA OPEN WEEKDAYS FOR BUILDING VISITORS

Refreshments 10:00 to 11:00 a.m.; 2:00 to 4:00 p.m.

Luncheon 11:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

Dinner 4:00 to 7:00 p.m., April 3, 10, 17

COVER

Lamentation over the Dead

Christ, polychromed tin-glaze terracotta attributed to Benedetto Buglioni (1459/60-1520), Florence. Recently purchased through the generosity of Mr. and Mrs. George L. Craig, jr. (page 113)

CARNEGIE MAGAZINE

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SCHENLEY FARMS AREA IN 1897. CARNEGIE LIBRARY OF PITTSBURGH AND CARNEGIE MUSIC HALL WITH TWIN TOWERS, SCHENLEY HOTEL AT RIGHT, BELLEFIELD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH WITH TOWER AT LEFT.
R. W. Johnston photo, copy by Leo T. Sarnaki, courtesy Pennsylvania Room, Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh

SCHENLEY FARMS: *MR. NICOLA'S DREAM*

THE Schenley Farms, an enclave of single dwellings almost completely surrounded by a wall of learning, is in the Oakland area on the eastern edge of the University of Pittsburgh campus.

Here a group of earnest and alert citizens wage a continual war to keep their combined properties a high-class neighborhood for families only. So far these householders have successfully warded off a Communist-satellite legation, a town hall, multiple housing; have lost to a church and some religious foundations; and are at present challenged by a real threat, the University.

With the Trojan horse of University ownership of some of the properties already inside the wall, these people recognize the unbeatable foe. For, while the Pitt holdings are at present used as homes for faculty members and conform to the letter of the Schenley Farms Civic Association constitution, it is obvious that there is a broader plan for the future behind the investment.

Conceived by the Schenley Farms Company in 1905 on the acquisition of Mary Schenley's

cow pasture, the "Farms" were projected as a real estate development that would "make this tract of land a section to command the attention of the country at large." The plot of ground of 345 acres had been originally conveyed by William Penn to Edward Smith in 1791 for the consideration of £310 sterling. For 104 years, 170 of these acres (purchase price \$2,000) had been in the possession of the O'Hara family and its descendants, whose policy was to lease rather than to sell or improve. On the death of Mrs. Schenley (the former Mary Croghan, granddaughter of General James O'Hara, aide to General George Washington), the trustees—Andrew Carnegie, Denny Brereton, and J. W. Herron—were instructed to put the acreage on the market.

And so, on April 15, 1905, the Schenley Farms came into being. The area, according to the constitution and bylaws of the Schenley Farms Civic Association drawn up in 1920, comprised "all the land east of the University of Pittsburgh and west of the properties of the Blind Asylum and the Schenley High School, extending from and including Schenley Farms

Terrace and the residence properties north and south of Grant Boulevard (now called Bigelow) and Bayard Street."

(Today this is reduced to the land east of the University, west of the School for the Blind and Schenley High, and the resident properties north of Bigelow. Only three public buildings are within these boundaries: the Twentieth Century Club, the Western Pennsylvania Historical Society—both built in the early days of the development—and the Central Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses, built in 1954.)

In a prospectus setting forth the advantages of this Utopian subdivision, the Schenley Farms Company made a few promises. All service lines would be underground; sidewalks would be six feet wide, the streets asphalted and lighted by lamps hung from ornamental frames of a type in use on Fifth Avenue, New York. Landscape gardening would show hillsides banked by artistic stone walls and covered with vines. Pine trees and beautiful shrubs would be planted on most of the residential lots, and shade trees on all the streets, to give a uniform effect. Restrictions were set for the character of the houses to ensure quality and the safety of the investment. The Company further guaranteed the maintenance and appearance of the streets and vacant lots until such a time as the owners could take over the responsibility.

The Company did all these things, and, when the termination of the contract was reached, the Schenley Farms Civic Association was formed to continue and further the good thing it had going. Letters by satisfied homeowners from 1910 to 1914 published by the Company stressed the cleanliness, the coolness in summer, and the combination of country air and city conveniences. One writer prophesied that the Farms' restrictions would assure "a high class residence section for half a century at least."

The driving power of the Schenley Farms Company was Frank F. Nicola (1860-1938), a

businessman of superior rank. A lumberman (Nicola Lumber Company), a builder (Nicola Building Company), a realtor (Schenley Farms Company), a printing machine manufacturer (Miller Printing Machinery Company), he was interested in whatever had to do with building a city. In his office hung the motto: "Air castles aren't substantial dwellings but they are very good working drawings."

With the inspiration of Pericles' plan for Athens, Mr. Nicola envisioned the ideal home-site in the midst of a million-dollar civic center that he set about creating for himself. He chose his spot wisely near the Carnegie Institute and not far from the new St. Paul's Cathedral, and he lived to see great buildings of religious, recreational, educational, medical, and scientific activity rise around his houses.

Nearly every extra-business pursuit a man might care to follow was soon represented. In 1898 Mr. Nicola himself had put up the yellow brick Hotel Schenley on a spacious lawn suitable to its proximity to Schenley Park. Perhaps the hotel was to house the followers and fans of the Pittsburgh Pirates whom he brought to Forbes Field from the flood area of the North Side. (Forbes Field, incidentally, was built by Nicola in four months in 1909.)

More sports enthusiasts were soon attracted to the Pittsburgh Athletic Association, a light Renaissance (sports) palace in decided contrast with Henry Hornbostel's great Halicarnassan cenotaph to the Civil War dead across the street. In the same way, Bertram Goodhue's slenderest of spires, "the fancy toothpick," on the First Baptist Church (1914) soars to emphasize the weight of the flat Moorish dome on Syria Mosque, home of the Pittsburgh Symphony. (The neighborhood does not actually hear rehearsals, as Misterogers at nearby WQED claims.)

A skyline of enthusiastic early twentieth-century eclecticism soon rimmed the new sub-



WATCH TOWER BIBLE AND TRACT SOCIETY OF PENNSYLVANIA (JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES)

division, to be encircled later by even greater contrasts: Mellon Institute's Ionic monoliths versus the dainty tracery on the Heinz Chapel; the Norman towers of Boys' Central High School versus the modern cylindrical dormitories at Pitt (nicknamed Ajax, Babbo, and Comet by irreverent undergraduates). A high-rise, vertically accented Chemistry building on the site of present State Hall will soon dwarf the pile of concrete ramps that is a parking garage accommodating the Medical Center.

Most of the new buildings are Pitt's, and it is ironic, if touching, that the only recognition of Mr. Nicola's genius on record was the beautiful floral tribute sent to his funeral by the University. He was a potent factor in persuading the administration to leave the North Side for a more expansible location in 1908, never anticipating this greatest of all encroachments on his best of all possible neighborhoods.

The Schenley Farms landowners held their first meeting of organization on July 29, 1920, to consider the renewal of building restrictions,

continuance of care of trees, sidewalks, vacant properties. Questions as to whether lighting on Bigelow should be improved, paving on Parkman repaired, and the matter of dumping sweepings on the Boulevard were taken up.

In 1924 the secretary was instructed to write to the City Police Department calling attention to numerous robberies in the past few months, and a night watchman was engaged—a necessity to this day. At this meeting, the feeling was expressed that the proposed Cathedral of Learning would depreciate the neighborhood, and a resolution was considered to oppose the building permit. "No Parking" signs were to be placed on all vacant lots. Members were shown photographs of students lolling on fraternity house steps to encourage a protest against the City's rezoning classification of the Farms as a "B" district. In 1926, the sum of \$2,500 was paid to cover legal services in connection with reclassification to Class "C," single family dwellings only.

In 1929, the last large unsold plot, "Nicola's

lot," bounded by Bigelow Boulevard, Ruskin, Tennyson, and Fifth Avenues was offered by the Company to the County as a site for a town hall that could be completed for the sum of six million dollars. Fred Allen's weekly cackle on the radio, "It's Town Hall Tonight," had people assembly-minded—but not the people in the immediate vicinity of this proposed site.

Mr. Nicola was invited to a Civic Association meeting to present his case. It was, however, soundly opposed, even in spite of his and a downtown department-store owner's offer to contribute toward the expense of parking facilities. Litigation between the Nicola Company and the County continued for many years during Mr. Nicola's lifetime, and, regardless of the signed agreement, the suit was lost in 1944. It was the Depression, however, and not the weight of the Civic Association that halted immediate construction of a town hall.

In 1955 the Association undertook incorporation. Article V of the bylaws states that pecuniary gain would not be contemplated or profit, incidental or otherwise, to its members; that the Association be organized on a non-stock basis and in compliance with Non-Profit Corporation Law; that selling or dispensing liquor be prohibited, and so on.

What is it these Schenley Farmers cherish that makes them so organized?

Three city blocks of rather uninspired domestic architecture, a horrible parking situation, traffic jams on football Saturdays, Sundays, and every baseball-doubleheader day, litter endlessly tossed onto the front grass plots, daylight hold-ups, and early morning and evening break-ins?

These things they accept as the price they must pay for something good they derive from the land they own. Perhaps to each it is something different, but it must be of great value. A certain amount of *laissez-faire* prevails — as when two houses share a driveway—but there is little togetherness except at the once-a-year

Association meeting, when even Town and Gown are buddies over the vodka punch.

Neighborliness such as only a do-it-yourself necessity can generate there is, certainly. Mrs. G hoses Mrs. M's porch or waters her lawn, and Mrs. M takes in the G's mail and feeds their dog while they are away. But this is a new attitude brought about by the lack of resident help to do these chores: no more uniformed chauffeurs or capped and aproned maids to take an interest in the place in off-duty hours.

The Farms are not so glamorous as they were once. Daughters used to marry foreign titles. Famous actors like Marlowe and Sothorn were house guests. Douglas Fairbanks, jr., lived here a while, and Marilyn Miller was married here the week she danced in *Sunny* at the Nixon. Lois Moran, as the beautiful first lady, Mrs. Wintergreen, who played opposite Victor Moore's immortal Mr. Throttlebottom in *Of Thee I Sing*, lived here at her grandparents' and went to art classes at Carnegie Institute as a child. Mike Romanoff once wore a borrowed costume at a Halloween party with feature writers from the *Pittsburgh Press*. Long Stutz roadsters transported boys in raccoon coats, or, in one instance, a pair of Great Danes that were kept from jumping out by stout brass bars built up above the doors. Several men had private art collections of paintings that filled every room and even hung behind doors. A university chancellor walked to work.

The houses? Many were built around 1908 and continued to set the style for others to

Mrs. McDonough lived as a girl in the Schenley Farms and now divides her time between Tennyson Avenue and Tallahassee, Florida. Her father, who had been manager of Kennywood Park, was one of three partners who bought the Park from Pittsburgh Railway Company. Her sisters were Genevieve McSwigan, *Post-Gazette* writer, and Marie McSwigan, author of children's books and of *Skybooks*, the autobiography of Pittsburgh artist John Kane.



THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA

follow—conservative, English-looking, reminiscent of the Cotswolds and the Shakespeare country with half-timbering. There are a few Italian villas but they blend somehow.

All are so well constructed that they withstand remodeling remarkably. "Built like a fortress," said a contractor, asked to modernize one and taking a whole day to remove a brick fireplace. Each has its "olden times" particularity.

While third-story billiard rooms and basement game rooms were common to many of the houses, throughout the Schenley Farms there was but a single elevator, only one driveway turntable, one playhouse built like a miniature fire station, one refrigerator opening into two rooms. There was much wood paneling, stained and leaded and beveled glass, hand-decorated ceilings, beautiful brass hardware, copper pipes, and slate roofs.

People have liked the houses so well they sometimes lived in a succession of them, and some families have been represented by more than one branch. During the Depression of the 1930's, the houses were looked on as big barns with exorbitant taxes, and went for a song, as the saying goes. Now, with larger families the houses have come back into their own.

Of whatever religious persuasion, the Schenley Farmers enjoy having their churches near by. They like living here because it is convenient to the performing and fine arts activity—the Symphony at the Mosque, theater at the Playhouse and Carnegie-Mellon, the art exhibitions at Carnegie. Many of the large social clubs are in the area. Everyone likes the easy access to town, to the airport, to the Turnpike.

But better still, we like being where the action is!

KITTY McS. McDONOUGH