

Nov 7, 1926

PSW Schenley Farm

INTERESTING SIDELIGHT

An interesting sidelight on the early history of the Schenley Farms tract is recalled in connection with the announcement of the medical center project. The tract originally was part of the holdings of William Penn, who at one time owned all of the state of Pennsylvania, having acquired it through a deal with the Indian tribes. Penn retained title to Pittsburgh and its outlying districts when the commonwealth was formed. On January 27, 1791, John Penn deeded 354 acres to Edward Smith for the sum of 310 pounds and four shillings. In 1802 Smith sold to General James O'Hara, a hero of the Revolutionary war, one-half of this acreage for \$2,000, no doubt giving himself a few vigorous slaps on the back for his judgment.

In 1820 it passed by the will of General O'Hara to his daughter, Mary O'Hara, who married William Groghan. The latter, dying in 1827, left it to his daughter, afterwards Mary E. Schenley. *Sold Nov. 7, 1926*

SOLD FOR \$2,500,000.

In 1905 this property was sold by John W. Herron, Andrew Carnegie, and J. Dennis Brereton, trustees of the Schenley estate, for \$2,500,000—1,250 times its value 103 years before when a sum of \$2,000 made what seemed a quite satisfactory profit.

Through the sale of the tract by the Schenley estate in 1905, it passed into the hands of P. F. Nicola and his associates. Then began the real growth. The tract in 1905 paid only \$8,400 in taxes. In 1916 the municipal income from it was \$250,000—a rather potent argument for the commercial success of aesthetic development.

ONE MAN CREDITED.

Credit for the Schenley Farms development can be laid at the door of one man, whose dream has come true in a most practical way. That man—P. F. Nicola—had observed the haphazard growth of other sections of the city and noted the advantageous location of the old homestead. Explaining his "air castle" to a group of advertising men, he said:

"The old dairy farm having been an object of interest for some time, it seemed an opportunity to create a civic center that would be big in all its phases. The thought was dominant to develop in Pittsburgh a grouping of buildings similar to those found in Athens, Rome, Munich, Paris and Washington. Pittsburgh, great in all things, should not be less in architecture and monumental expression than the capitals of the world. Furthermore—and a very particular thought—was the chance to idealize the commercial side of the development of land. What has happened there needs no further detail. The buildings are there, the center is there, they all stand for themselves.

INFLUENCE IS EVIDENT.

"What influence the development in Oakland had had on our city, is best shown by the park-like surroundings

being established in every new allotment—an increasing evidence of improved architecture. Not only is this artistic gain to be considered, but the main factor for permanency is that Schenley Farms has proved that land can be handled in a beautiful way for a profit."

Smooth sailing was not encountered all the way, however. Many were unable to see how values could be maintained when such vast acreage was set aside for landscaping and open space. Had their advice been heeded, buildings would nudge each other as on downtown corners. Those who held the dream of creating a beautiful civic center, however, refused to give up and as a result the perfection of the panorama is unmarred.

The Cathedral of Learning, the university's new skyscraper university, which will rise 32 stories above the ground, will become an inspiring point in the civic center. When the medical center, with its associated group of hospitals, has been completed, the crowning architectural touch will have been added.