

HOMAGE TO THE FALLEN

Top Ten Buildings We Wish We Had Back

LESSONS FOR A BETTER FUTURE

Young Preservationists Association of Pittsburgh

May 2010



Syria Mosque, 1991

Top Ten Buildings We Wish We Had Back

LESSONS FOR A BETTER FUTURE

Most people would agree that Pittsburgh's modern-day baseball stadium, PNC Park, is outstanding. With sweeping views of the city and an "olde tyme" feel, it is a fashionable addition to the city's skyline. Except, we used to have a perfectly good stadium just like it, right in the middle of Oakland—Forbes Field—to which people walked or took the streetcar.

Sometimes it takes a loss to appreciate what we have now, and what could have been. Imagine if the North Side had not lost the Market House, or if the Lower Hill were still standing. It is tempting to think how things would be different, how, if restored and reinvigorated, these buildings and neighborhoods could be assets to our region.

These are the lessons we learn the hard way. YPA was founded in part due to the loss of an old building, the Ellis Hotel, in the Hill. We cannot undo the mistakes of the past, but we can learn from them and make better choices for the future.

For instance, we learned that urban renewal is not the way to revitalize cities. However, it gave rise to the modern preservation movement and success stories like the Mexican War Streets, South Side, and preservation laws and incentives.

We have also learned that by tearing down signature buildings, such as mansions and one-of-a-kind structures like the Syria Mosque, does not create goodwill among citizens.

Unfortunately, the Pittsburgh region continues to demolish its history, and young people continue to leave. Perhaps lists like this one will remind people that tearing down old stuff is not the best way to build new cities.

Criteria

The Top Ten Buildings We Wish We Had Back list grew out of several criteria. The sites were chosen for the following reasons:

1. Innovation in engineering,
2. Historical significance,
3. Architectural interest,
4. Associations with important people or events, and
5. Potential for adaptive use.



Lower Hill District



Wabash Terminal

TOP TEN BUILDINGS
WE WISH WE HAD BACK
May 2010
1.
SYRIA MOSQUE



Syria Mosque, c. 1913-1920

Perhaps no building inspires fond memories more than the Syria Mosque, which stood at the center of Oakland's Civic Center, a proud symbol of the City Beautiful movement.

Completed in 1915 by the Chicago firm of Huehl, Schmidt, and Holmes at a cost of \$750,000, it served as a temple for the Shriners. The bronze sphinxes were the work of sculptor Giuseppe Moretti, whose work can be seen all over Pittsburgh. The building served as the home to the Pittsburgh Symphony and the National Negro Opera Company. It was demolished in 1991 and was the major impetus for a renewed preservation movement in Pittsburgh.



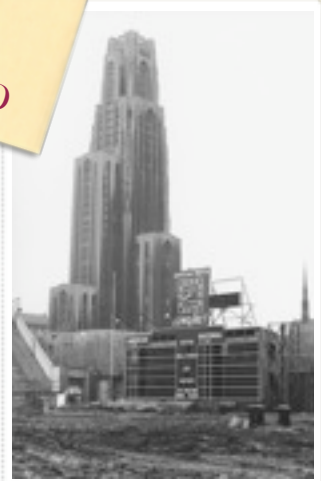
Syria Mosque, 1926

TOP TEN BUILDINGS
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2. FORBES FIELD



Forbes Field



Forbes Field is demolished in 1972

Opened on June 30, 1909, in Oakland, Forbes Field served as the home to the Pittsburgh Pirates. The Pirates had moved to Forbes Field from their original location at Exposition Park on the North Side.

The field was built at a cost of approximately \$2 million and was the first ballpark in the country constructed entirely of poured concrete and steel. The first night game was played there on June 4, 1940.

Forbes Field hosted not only the Pirates, but the Negro Leagues' Pittsburgh Crawfords and Homestead Grays, as well as an occasional Steeler game. Babe Ruth hit his last two home runs at Forbes Field.

The last game at Forbes Field was played on June 28, 1970. Demolition began one year later. The original home plate from Forbes Field is embedded in the floor of Wesley Posvar Hall, which replaced the stadium.



Night game at Forbes Field, 1951

TOP TEN BUILDINGS
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3. WABASH TERMINAL



Demolition of the Wabash Terminal in 1955



Wabash Terminal, c. 1947

Completed in 1904 by Theodore C. Link, the Wabash Terminal served as one of five major railroad terminals in Pittsburgh. It was the terminus for the Wabash Railroad Lines, which covered 15,000 miles of territory and cost an estimated \$20,000,000.

The terminal was the largest Beaux-Arts building in Pittsburgh and was considered one of the most magnificent in the nation.

The train shed burned on March 22, 1946, and it was subsequently demolished in 1955. According to Historic Pittsburgh Image Collections, “[t]he destruction by fire of the terminal was a major factor in the decision to move ahead with plans to raze the area below Stanwix Street to make way for Gateway Center and Point State Park.” Gateway Center Four occupies the spot now.



Wabash Terminal, 1912

TOP TEN BUILDINGS
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4.
**HOMESTEAD
STEEL WORKS**



Homestead Steel Works, 1951

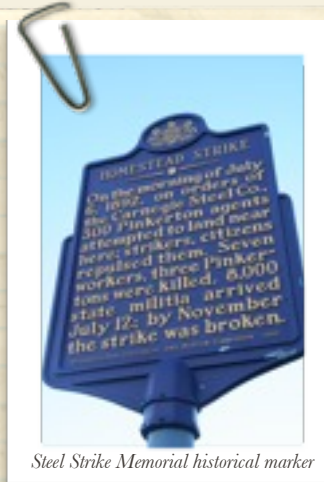


12,000 ton press in 1989

Steel commanded Homestead's waterfront for more than 100 years, from 1881 to 1986, and provided jobs and wealth for generations of workers. Andrew Carnegie purchased the mill in the 1880s to form Carnegie Steel, which later became United States Steel in 1901.

The mill was as famous for the innovative use of technology and production records it broke as well as the site of the epic Homestead Steel Strike in 1892. At one time there were 450 buildings on the 256-acre site that produced more than 200 million tons of steel for the nation's growing railroads, bridges, skyscrapers, and armor plates during World Wars I and II. The mill was expanded in the 1940s during wartime production and displaced up to 8,000 people.

The mill was closed in 1984 and demolition began in 1986 until 1990. The mill site was cleared and The Homestead Waterfront mall was developed in 1999. A few artifacts remain, including the 12,000-ton press and a few structures from the 1892 strike.



Steel Strike Memorial historical marker



Pump House and Water Tower, 2005

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5.
LOWER HILL
DISTRICT



The Lower Hill was a thriving neighborhood for immigrants, blacks, and people from all walks of life



"Root Shock"

The Hill District is one of Pittsburgh's oldest neighborhoods, developed in the 1840s by Thomas Mellon. It served as Pittsburgh's "salad bowl" of immigrants (Jews, Italians, Syrians, Greeks, Poles were predominant), along with African Americans. Between World War I and World War II, the neighborhood became better known as the heart of black Pittsburgh.

During the 1950s, the Lower Hill was targeted for the nation's largest government-sponsored urban renewal effort. Removed forever were 80 city blocks, or 100 acres, to construct the Civic Arena, opened in 1962 as the nation's largest stainless steel dome.

Lost was over a century of history, including the oldest black church west of the Allegheny Mountains, Bethel AME Church, and more than 8,000 residents, or one-fifth of the Hill's population. Urban renewal was a phenomenon that spread across the United States, and the detrimental affects of which Mindy Thompson Fullilove referred to as "Root Shock."



The Lower Hill District, c. 1945



The Lower Hill District, 1958

TOP TEN BUILDINGS
WE WISH WE HAD BACK
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6. NIXON THEATRE



The Nixon Theatre

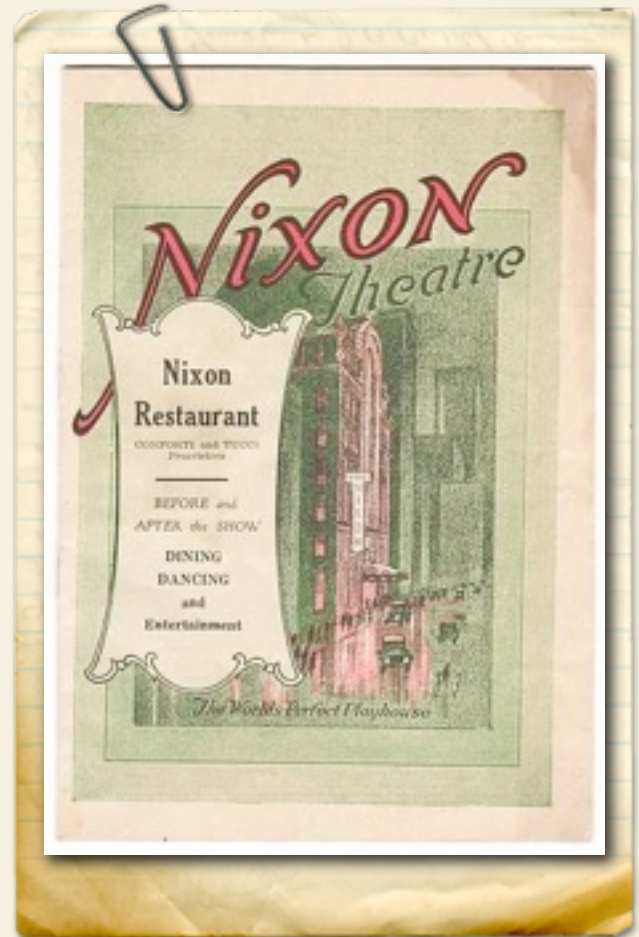


Construction of Alcoa Tower, 1950

Built in 1902, the Nixon was one of several grand theaters built in Downtown Pittsburgh between 1900 and 1930 (the others included the Gayety (now the Byham), Loew's Penn (now Heinz Hall), and the Stanley (now Benedum Center). But to many, the Nixon was the most opulent of them all. It was designed by Benjamin H. Marshall as one of the few examples of Beaux Arts architecture in Pittsburgh.

When it was announced that it would be demolished, actress Katherine Hepburn wrote the city, "I'm infuriated. The new skyscraper will be just another building—maybe fascinating, but not glamorous." When the Nixon was sold to the Alcoa Corporation and demolished in 1950, it was replaced by the Alcoa Building (now called the Regional Enterprise Tower), the nation's first all-aluminum skyscraper.

The Nixon was moved three blocks to Liberty Avenue and renamed the Senator Theater, which closed in 1972 and was demolished in 1975 for a parking lot.



TOP TEN BUILDINGS
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7.
SIXTH STREET
BRIDGE



Roebling's Sixth Street Bridge (1859-1892)



Sixth Street Bridge entry post

The Sixth Street Bridge was built in 1859 to connect Downtown to the North Side (then called Allegheny). It is notable because it was designed by one of the most famous bridge designers, John Augustus Roebling, who moved on to construct the Brooklyn Bridge in New York City. The Sixth Street Bridge was 344 feet across and was 22 feet wide.

One of four spans to cross the Allegheny River at Sixth Street, the Sixth Street Bridge was demolished in 1892 to build yet another span, designed by Theodore Cooper, which was intended to carry electric street cars. It, too, was demolished in 1927 to construct the fourth and current bridge, which was renamed the Roberto Clemente Bridge in 1999.

Roebling's span recalls an era when foot and horse-and-buggy were the predominant mode of transportation, when bridges were supported by lithe but strong suspenders, and life moved a little bit slower.



The third Sixth Street Bridge (1892-1927)



The Roberto Clemente Bridge (1927-current)

TOP TEN BUILDINGS
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8.
**EXPOSITION
BUILDINGS**



Exposition Hall, c. 1900



Fall of the Exposition Buildings, 1952

The Pittsburgh Exposition Buildings (Machinery Hall and Music Hall) were built in 1889 to house the Pittsburgh Exposition in an area now occupied by the modern-day Point State Park. The buildings were designed by Joseph Stillburg. Machinery Hall was designed in the Parisian style.

The buildings were sponsored by the Western Pennsylvania Exposition Society as a way of showcasing the great cultural and technological advances of modern-day society. The land around the buildings also contained a roller coaster. A fire gutted the buildings in 1901, but they were rebuilt.

The last exhibition was held in 1916 and were used for various purposes. But recurring floods and the urge to create new greenspace at the confluence of the Allegheny and Monongahela Rivers immediately following World War II led to the demise of these massive but elegant structures.



Exposition Buildings in 1943



Exposition Buildings c. 1900

TOP TEN BUILDINGS
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9.
ALLEGHENY
MARKET HOUSE



Despite being a target for demolition, the Market House served a critical gathering spot for North Siders for nearly 100 years



Car outside the Market House, c. 1930s

Built in 1863, the Allegheny Market House served the rapidly growing population of Allegheny City. When Pittsburgh annexed Allegheny in 1907, the Market House remained a strong identifier of North Side culture.

The market was huge, covering an area of 200 feet on each side. It had large, arched windows which let in ample light for the vendors. The market held numerous stalls where food vendors sold meats, poultry, fish, eggs, dairy products, vegetables, baked goods, as well as plants and flowers.

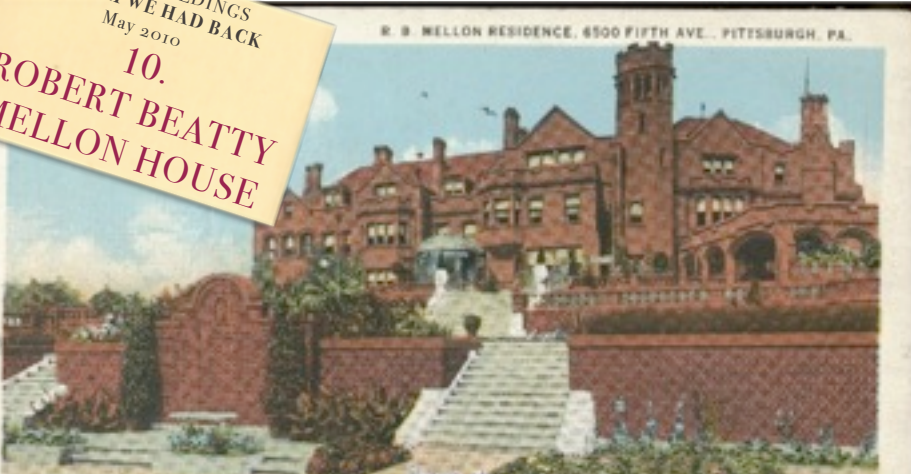
The Allegheny Market House was demolished in 1965 and replaced by grass and an apartment slab called Allegheny Center. It was innovative in construction and one of Pittsburgh's best examples of market architecture. More importantly, the market served as a critical social gathering place for North Siders, and people all around the Pittsburgh region.



U.S. MARKET HOUSE DEMOLITION 11/19/65

TOP TEN BUILDINGS
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10. ROBERT BEATTY MELLON HOUSE



The 65-room "castle" was designed for Richard B. Mellon by Alden and Harlow in 1909



Mellon Park fountain, 1956

The Robert Beatty Mellon House was built in 1909 for industrialist and banker R. B. Mellon by Alden and Harlow Architects. The house was one of the grandest estates along Fifth Avenue's "Millionaire's Row." The property covered an entire city block, from the corner of Fifth and Shady avenues to Beechwood Boulevard in Squirrel Hill. The house had sixty five rooms and extensive flower gardens designed between 1911 and 1929.

The Mellons had "Renaissance Gardens" designed for the property by the New York firm of Vitale and Geifert. Frederick Law Olmstead (son of Central Park's designer) designed the pond garden along Beechwood Boulevard, which is currently under restoration.

Following Richard Mellon's death in the 1930s, Richard King Mellon lived there for a short time. In 1941, the house was demolished, and in 1943, the estate became Mellon Park.



The Olmstead-designed pond garden in 1951



All that remains: the R.B. Mellon estate in 1956

Acknowledgements and Photo Credits

This report was researched and written by Anna Brinley and Anna Broverman, YPA interns and students at the University of Pittsburgh. Dan Holland contributed to the research and writing.

PHOTO CREDITS

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Dan Holland, 1991.

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John R. Shrader, c. October 1956. Allegheny Conference on Community Development, Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania. Historic Pittsburgh digital library, <http://digital.library.pitt.edu/pittsburgh/>.

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Classic Postcards, online at <http://freepages.history.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~classicpostcards/Parent%20Directory/usa/pennsylvania/pittsburgh/pittsburgh.htm>.



Allegheny Market House, 1914

Page 3 (Syria Mosque)

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Edward J. Shourek, c. 1913-1920. Edward J. Shourek Photographs, Archives Service Center. Historic Pittsburgh digital library, <http://digital.library.pitt.edu/pittsburgh/>.

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Unknown photographer, 1926. Carnegie Museum of Art Collection of Photographs. Historic Pittsburgh digital library, <http://digital.library.pitt.edu/pittsburgh/>.

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Gone, but not forgotten.

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William J. Gaughan, June 1951. William J. Gaughan Photographs, Archives Service Center. Historic Pittsburgh digital library, <http://digital.library.pitt.edu/pittsburgh/>.

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Dan Holland, 1989.

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Richard Saunders, 1951. Carnegie Museum of Art. Historic Pittsburgh digital library, <http://digital.library.pitt.edu/pittsburgh/>.

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Teenie Harris, c. 1945. Courtesy of Frank Bolden. Historic Pittsburgh digital library, <http://digital.library.pitt.edu/pittsburgh/>.

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Teenie Harris, 1958. Carnegie Museum of Art. Historic Pittsburgh digital library, <http://digital.library.pitt.edu/pittsburgh/>.

Page 8 (Nixon Theater)

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Nixon Theatre, undated. Pittsburgh Postcard Memories website, <http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~njml/04ppc14.html>.

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Site of Alcoa Building Construction, 1951, Aluminum Company of America. Allegheny Conference on Community Development, Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania. Historic Pittsburgh digital library, <http://digital.library.pitt.edu/pittsburgh/>.

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1928 Pittsburgh, PA Nixon Theatre Program, "What a Find Antiques and Collectibles" blog, Friday, January 23, 2009, <http://whatafind-antiques-collectibles.blogspot.com/2009/01/1928-pittsburgh-pa-nixon-theatre.html>.

Page 9 (Sixth Street Bridge)

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Trinity Court, date unknown. Allegheny Conference on Community Development, Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania. Historic Pittsburgh digital library, <http://digital.library.pitt.edu/pittsburgh/>.

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Sixth Street Bridge Entry Post, James Benney III, date unknown. F. Theodore Wagner Photographs, James Benney III Collection, Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania. Historic Pittsburgh digital library, <http://digital.library.pitt.edu/pittsburgh/>.

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Frederick Theodore Wagner, March 24, 1917. F. Theodore Wagner Photographs, Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania. Historic Pittsburgh digital library, <http://digital.library.pitt.edu/pittsburgh/>.

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Dan Holland, 2005.

Page 10 (Exposition Buildings)

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John Gates, 1900. John Gates Photographs, Archives Service Center. Historic Pittsburgh digital library, <http://digital.library.pitt.edu/pittsburgh/>.

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James Blair, 1952. Carnegie Museum of Art Collection of Photographs. Historic Pittsburgh digital library, <http://digital.library.pitt.edu/pittsburgh/>.

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Pittsburgh City Photographer, August 16, 1943. Pittsburgh City Photographer, Archives Service Center. Historic Pittsburgh digital library, <http://digital.library.pitt.edu/pittsburgh/>.

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A. Church Photographers, c. 1964-1965. Allegheny Conference on Community Development, Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania. Historic Pittsburgh digital library, <http://digital.library.pitt.edu/pittsburgh/>.

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Luke Swank, c. 1930s. Carnegie Museum of Art Collection of Photographs. Historic Pittsburgh digital library, <http://digital.library.pitt.edu/pittsburgh/>.

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Pittsburgh City Photographer, March 1, 1936. Pittsburgh City Photographer, Archives Service Center. Historic Pittsburgh digital library, <http://digital.library.pitt.edu/pittsburgh/>.

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James McClain, Nov. 24, 1965. Allegheny Conference on Community Development, Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania. Historic Pittsburgh digital library, <http://digital.library.pitt.edu/pittsburgh/>.

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Family-Images.com, <http://www.family-images.com/pa/misc/PA%20Pittsburgh%20R%20B%20Mellon%20Residence%20Fifth%20Ave.jpg>.

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Clyde Hare, c. July 1951. Allegheny Conference on Community Development, Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania. Historic Pittsburgh digital library, <http://digital.library.pitt.edu/pittsburgh/>.

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