

## HISTORICAL SOCIETY NOTES AND DOCUMENTS

### THE HUNGERFORD COLLECTION

ANNETTE GIOVENGO

ONE of the most popular local journalists in Pittsburgh was Cyrus C. Hungerford, editorial cartoonist with the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* and predecessor newspapers from 1912 to 1977. Over the course of his career Hungerford developed a remarkable following, received many awards from his peers and readers alike, and became a Pittsburgh "institution." Much of Hungerford's work has been preserved in a collection, housed at the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania, that contains nearly every cartoon he published from 1933 to 1961. The collection is a unique primary source for historians, composed principally of graphic rather than written material. Not only does it offer a daily chronology of events, but the biased nature of the editorial cartoon adds a further dimension: the human reaction to issues, personalities, and events. As a whole, the Hungerford collection encompasses local, national, and international concerns.

Hungerford's local cartoons are representative of his career: local issues received his primary attention, while additionally serving as a microcosm of his larger views. An analysis of this can be used to understand Hungerford's approach to events and his tremendous popularity, as well as to provide a clue to Pittsburgh history during these years. More is involved here than antiquarianism, however, because Hungerford's work is representative of a distinct phase of the American cartooning tradition — the Humanist school. A brief survey of the history of editorial cartooning will enhance our understanding of its functions and evolution and help place Hungerford's work in a historical context.

Cartoons and caricatural pictures appear on artifacts from many early civilizations.<sup>1</sup> They functioned as decorative art and to record

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—Editor

1 Stephen Hess and Milton Kaplan, *The Ungentlemanly Art: A History of American Political Cartoons* (New York, 1968), 14.

events and situations. But cartoons with the function of swaying opinion — attempts to interpret, and perhaps shape, events rather than just record them — began in eighteenth-century London. William Hogarth (1697-1794) started his career by drawing neutral, non-committal cartoons before advancing to cartoons with a message and later to ones that crusaded for social concerns. This further step was the first attempt deliberately to change public opinion by using cartoons.<sup>2</sup> Others followed suit, dealing with social and political issues, and exhibiting a general theme of sympathy for the less privileged of society.<sup>3</sup>

The first American editorial cartoon appeared in 1747 as an illustration in one of Benjamin Franklin's political pamphlets.<sup>4</sup> Yet they did not proliferate. Cartoons at this time dealt with general principles and were used only to illustrate major events; they were costly to produce and newsprint itself was expensive and scarce. Drawings were often reused many times under different captions.

Cartoons became more common only after the invention of lithography, a process that drastically cut the cost of production. The process was first used for political cartooning in 1829 for Currier and Ives Company prints.<sup>5</sup> The humor in these cartoons was often based on puns and plays on names, and a sports motif for elections was adopted; these devices have continued to the present.

Just after the Civil War, cartoons began reaching a wide variety of readers through general interest magazines such as Frank Leslie's *Illustrated Newspaper* (1886) and *Harper's Weekly* (1870). Frank Leslie set the stage for a rise in the popularity and frequency of cartoons, employing top-notch artists and incorporating cartoons into the lively political journalism that gave his publication far-reaching appeal and political influence.<sup>6</sup>

Thomas Nast was the most famous and most effective of all nineteenth-century American cartoonists. He wanted to "hit the enemy between the eyes and knock him down" and used exact likenesses and harsh irony.<sup>7</sup> Nast, along with the muckraking journalism of the *New York Times*, stirred up enough public indignation to drive New York City's notorious Boss Tweed out of office in 1871, gaining the reputation of reformer for himself and his profession.

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2 W. G. Rogers, *Mightier Than the Sword* (New York, 1969), 61.

3 *Ibid.*, 86.

4 Hess and Kaplan, *Ungentlemanly Art*, 53.

5 *Ibid.*, 73-77.

6 *Ibid.*, 85.

7 *Ibid.*, 94.

Nast's cartoons were so effective that Tweed was quoted as saying, "Stop them damn pictures, my constituents can't read, but dammit, they can see pictures."<sup>8</sup> Whether he realized it or not, Tweed came right to the heart of the special effectiveness of cartoons at that time. The mass public, with limited education, could grasp a message by looking at a cartoon in much less time and with greater comprehension than by reading a newspaper article or editorial column.

Prior to the 1880s, cartoons rarely appeared in daily newspapers. Then in 1884 Joseph Pulitzer began using daily cartoons in an attempt to turn his *New York World* into a national force, speaking for the working man.<sup>9</sup> Papers were becoming a big business, with fierce competition for sales and influence. This was the era of "yellow journalism," involving sensational stories and exposes of scandal, calls for reform and the causes of the common man. Cartoons were a strong weapon in the new journalism's arsenal; they were eye-catching, a neat way to explain issues to the public, and had traditionally represented American sympathy for the "underdog." Other papers followed the *World's* lead by the turn of the century, including those in Pittsburgh. Each paper had its own cartoonist, who advocated reform, stressed human and social concerns as well as political events, and stirred patriotic feeling.

During the twentieth century two identifiable patterns of daily cartoonists emerged: The Humanist school which evolved around 1900; and the *New Yorker* school, which began close to mid-century. The time periods overlap, and the boundaries are not clear-cut, but distinctions in the two styles are evident. Humanist cartoonists are steeped in the tradition of reform and its implied optimism. Their daily works treated events on local, national, and international scales, but their primary attention was focused on the local scene. They advocated the views of the "common man" on large and small issues. They often drew cartoons on "human interest" topics to gain identification with the readers. Once this identification was made, the cartoonist's opinion on the issue had an impact based on empathy with the reader.

The later pattern of cartooning, often referred to as the *New Yorker* school, is dominated by issues beyond the local scene. This group had its beginnings at a time when syndication, national newspapers, and the electronic media were growing. In order to compete with these new developments, cartoonists felt a need to treat primarily

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 119-21.

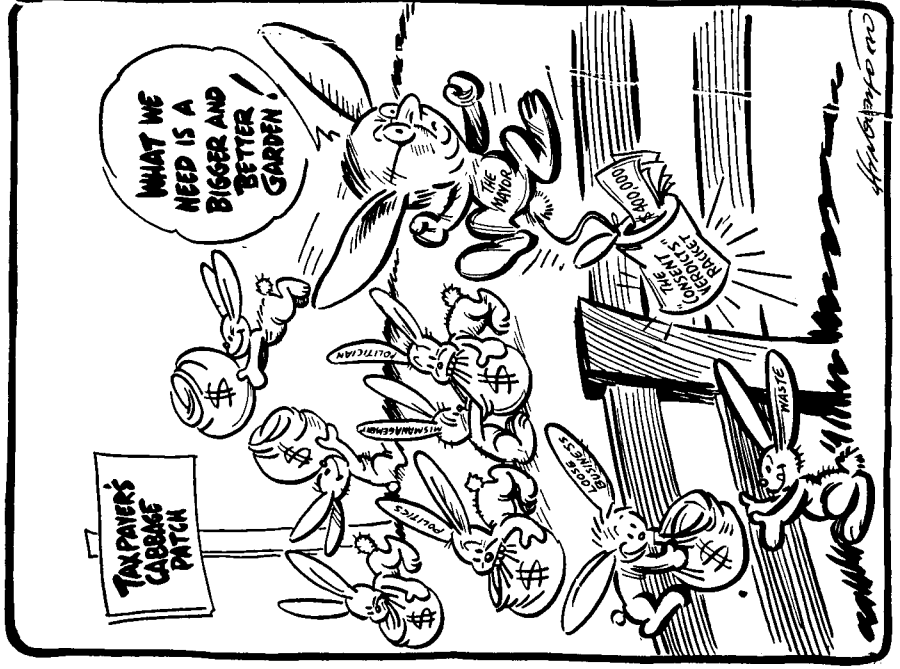
“significant” issues, preferably controversial ones. The reader’s attention was gained by eliciting a strong reaction. Commentary became more cynical and pessimistic, and reform and crusading fell by the wayside.

Hungerford best fits the model of the Humanist cartoonist, although he blended this tradition with his own personal style. He began working in 1912, relatively early in the history of local daily cartooning, during the heyday of the themes of reform and support for the common man. These ideas recur throughout Hungerford’s work. He consistently portrayed how events and situations affected the life of the individual. One of his favorite devices was to conceptualize the Pittsburgh area as an individual — “Pa Pitt,” a portly colonial who moved through and reacted to various events and situations. Pa Pitt had appeared earlier in Pittsburgh but Hungerford gave the representation a distinct form and personality. Hungerford’s caricatures were humorous and gentle, and he showed optimism for the future. He was not often controversial. Instead of repeatedly eliciting a violent reaction from the reader, he sought and gained identification with him. Thus, his influence was subtle. Over a period of time, readers became used to agreeing with his interpretations. When Hungerford did advocate a controversial view, this empathy provided a further basis which could help persuade a reader, beyond the influence of a particular drawing. The evidence of his style emerges clearly through Hungerford’s choice of topics, recurring attitudes, crusading activity, local approach to national events, and treatment of “human interest” issues.

Politics is a favorite topic for editorial cartoonists and Hungerford was no exception. During his career, local politics witnessed the fall of the Republican machine (in 1933) and the rise of the Democratic. Hungerford’s attitude toward politics can be characterized by four main themes which were repeatedly stressed over the years. First, Hungerford viewed political maneuvering as game-playing and silly entertainment. He often pictured politicians as small boys, playing with toys, staging shows, fishing in the voter’s pond, and indulging in other sports, including an occasional game of pin the tail on the Democratic donkey. Illustration 1 is a good example of this theme, drawn during the administration of Mayor William McNair, the Democratic maverick elected in 1933 who defied the Democratic machine and city council alike. In “A Continuous Performance,” Master of Ceremonies McNair clings desperately to his post in the City Hall Circus, as the city council untrained seal precariously bal-

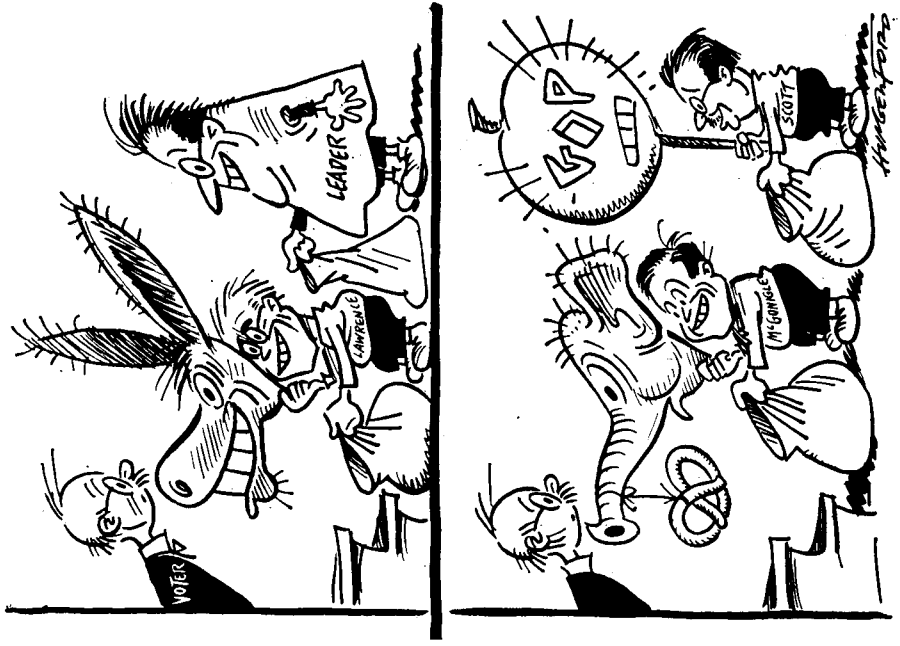


The Rabbit Family of City Hall—By Hungerford



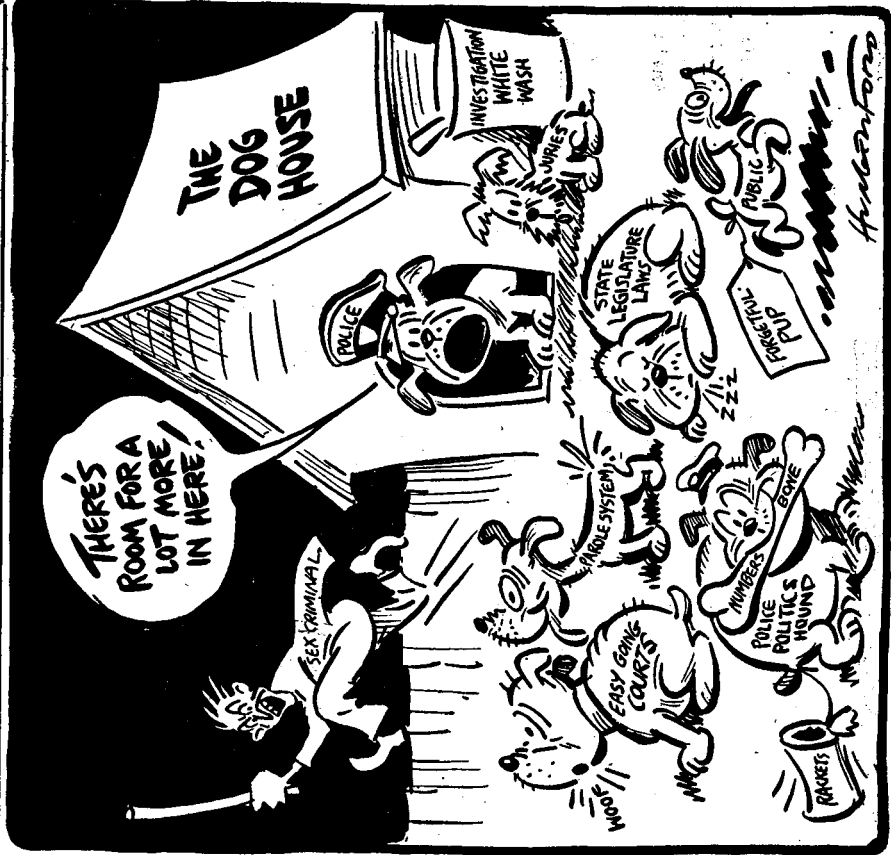
"Trick or Treat!"

—By Hungerford



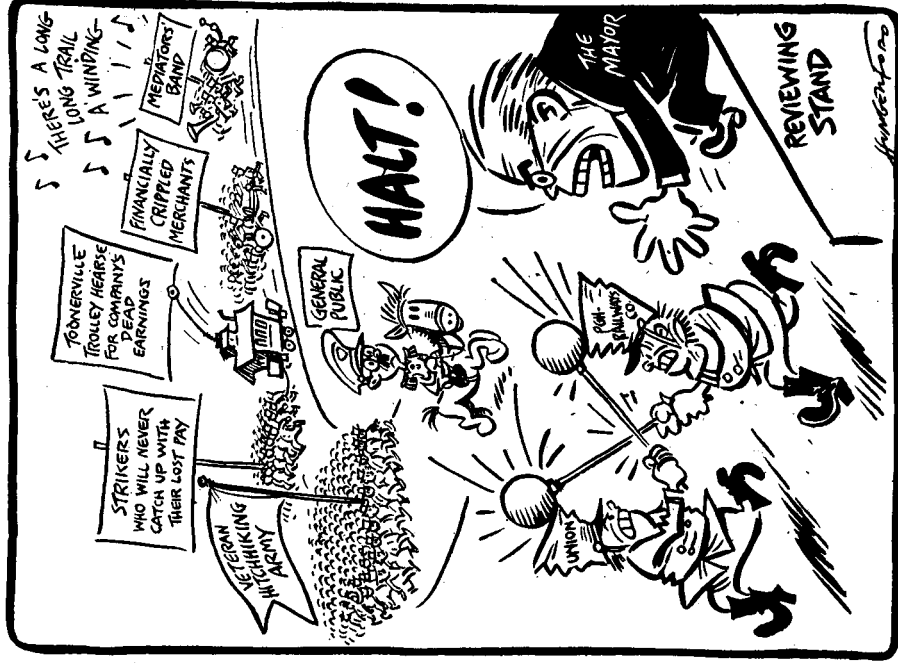
# The Public's Watch Dog

—By Hungerford



# A Four Weeks' Old Parade

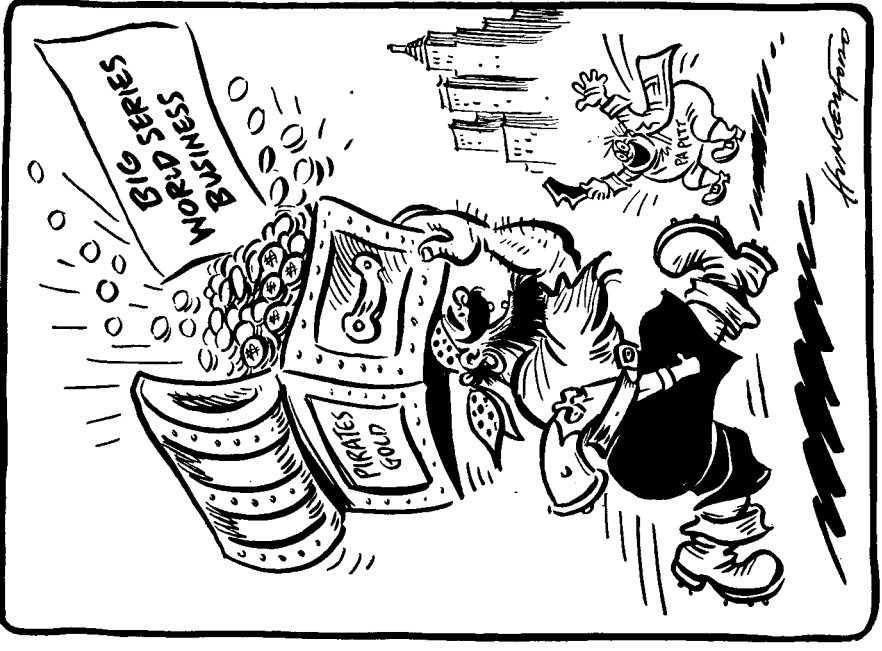
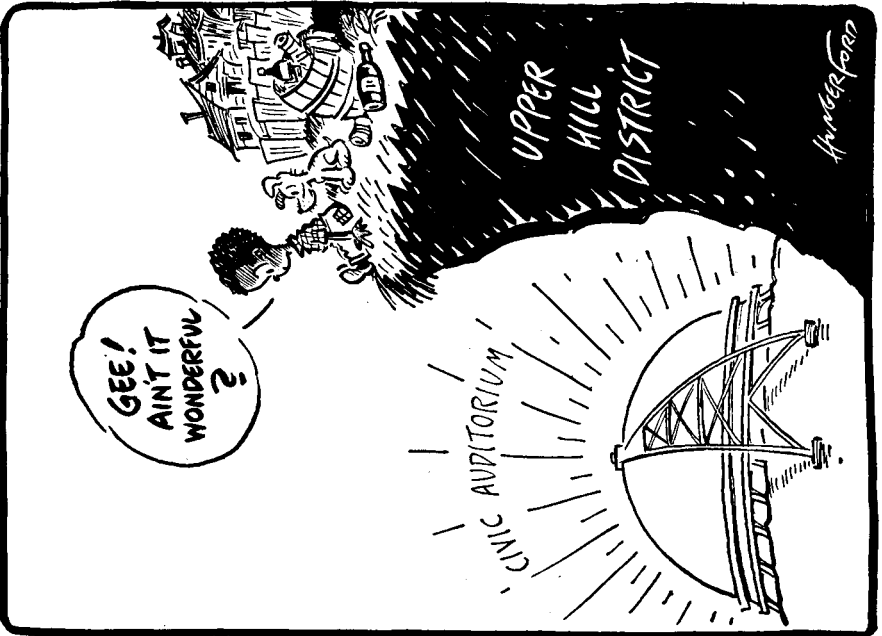
—By Hungerford











ances the mayor's cabinet and the donkey and elephant perform tricks of their own.

A second theme was that public service should be the real goal in any political job. Hungerford constantly reminded officials of this and became critical when political amusements overrode public concerns. Another McNair cartoon shows this theme clearly. In "Not Yet — But Soon!" (illustration 2) the mayor is the hit of Broadway with his performances, while a beleaguered Pa Pitt pushes through the crowd, hoping to gain the mayor's attention for official public business.

The third political theme was Hungerford's unflagging criticism of tax increases. He viewed government by its very nature to be wasteful, prone to mismanagement, and a constant, unfair drain on the individual taxpayer. This theme was emphasized any time there was a tax increase, and especially heavily elaborated on during the Depression, when city taxes rose steadily. In illustration 3, 1938's "The Rabbit Family of City Hall," hungry little rabbits named waste, politics, mismanagement, and loose business gnaw away in the taxpayer's cabbage patch. Their leader, Mayor Cornelius P. Scully, clamors for more, with a tin can of the "consent verdicts" scandal (waste and mismanagement of nearly \$400,000 of the taxpayers' money in the city solicitor's office) already tied to his tail.

Hungerford's fourth main political theme was his consistent nonpartisan stance. He showed the game-playing and scandals of Republicans and Democrats alike. In his election cartoons he represented the races in terms of who was leading, tactic versus tactic, or ideology versus ideology, but he never endorsed a candidate. He set up the choice for the voters but did not attempt to choose for them, indicating a respect for the individual and his opinions. An example of this theme is provided in illustration 4. In the 1958 gubernatorial election, Pittsburgh's Democratic Mayor David L. Lawrence successfully ran against the Republican Arthur T. McGonigle, scion of a pretzel manufacturing company. "Trick or Treat" shows each political team at the doorstep of the voter. This cartoon also incorporates the theme mentioned earlier of politics as children's games.

Aside from politics, Hungerford's cartoons emphasized three other general themes — corruption and crime, public services, and strikes.

Corruption and crime were prime targets of Hungerford's reformist ideology. He exposed vice, drugs, and the numbers racket as evils and condemned the police and political machine who ignored and implicitly sanctioned such activities. He gave maximum exposure to

political scandals over the years, making sure that in each case the public could not help realizing what had happened and who was responsible. He consistently criticized Pittsburgh's police department as inept and portrayed it as a civic embarrassment and a clear and present danger to the public welfare. He created an emblem of police twins "Too Little and Too Late" who reappeared whenever incidents of negligence occurred. Hungerford placed the blame for inadequate protection on others than just the police department, as illustration 5 shows. In "The Public's Watch Dog" he indicted police politics, state laws, the court and parole systems, and the very audiences he reached: the public itself.

Hungerford's reformist urges were also vented on public services and transportation. He emphasized their shortcomings in terms of what they meant to the individuals who relied on them. The theme was that poor services created hardships for the citizens and were detrimental to the business community and the image of the city. Services that came under fire included public utilities and their constant rate hikes, the school system with demands for raises by teachers and questionable quality of education, and poor road conditions. The Pittsburgh Railways Company was a special target for Hungerford. He criticized and commented on the firm's precarious balance on the edge of bankruptcy, frequent trolley accidents and safety concerns, and recurring strikes. The company's consistent fare increases were an issue for public opposition led by Mayor David L. Lawrence and City Solicitor Anne X. Alpern; Hungerford's cartoons supported this opposition.

The theme that Hungerford emphasized most often was his consistent opposition to strikes. During his career, Pittsburgh was beset with strikes in such diverse areas as transportation, power, refuse collection, trucking, laundry, education, department stores, hotels, building trades, beer, and of course steel. Many strikes were long and bitter, inconveniencing and sometimes endangering the citizens and wreaking havoc on Pittsburgh's economy. Not once did Hungerford produce a cartoon supporting a strike. He believed that there were other methods of settling disagreements, and that when a strike occurred, both sides were in the wrong for their failure to prevent it. He repeatedly drove home the message that there were no winners in a strike, unlike some other Humanist cartoonists who championed strikes as a weapon of the people. Hungerford showed that consumers were inconvenienced and at times endangered by strikes. The strikers themselves would never catch up with their lost pay. The company

would lose earnings and, in cases where the consumer had a choice, customers. The business community as a whole lost revenue and the city's reputation suffered, thus hampering civic growth. Illustration 6, "A Four Weeks' Old Parade," represents one of the city's frequent Pittsburgh Railways strikes. Mayor Lawrence tries to stop the fight between union and management, as the parade of losers passes by. "Pa Pitt's Eyesore," illustration 7, is a more general conceptualization of how Pittsburgh's well-deserved strike reputation appears to new industries who could help spur civic growth.

Hungerford's role as a crusader is implied by the reformist attitudes and themes displayed in most of his cartoons, but dramatic evidence for this can be seen in his activities during the fight for smoke control. Smoke had historically been an irremovable aspect of industrial Pittsburgh. Lincoln Steffens once described the city as looking "like hell, literally"; in the 1930s smoke blanketed the city and noon was often indistinguishable from midnight. By this time concern was growing about smoke's damaging effects on health, property, vegetation, population and industrial growth, and its high cost of cleaning.<sup>10</sup> In 1936 a Smoke Elimination Commission (SEC) was established, composed of politicians and prominent Pittsburghers who shared the progressive ideology of smoke control. However, the climate of opinion in Pittsburgh was steadfastly anticontrol.<sup>11</sup> Smoke meant prosperity, and clear skies indicated closed factories and unemployed workers in the minds of many residents. Thus, the primary task of the SEC was to launch a city-wide campaign to convince people that the benefits of control outweighed the costs, that Pittsburgh could be both clean and prosperous. The city's newspapers were essential in this campaign to generate a positive public attitude, disseminating information about control and urging its adoption.<sup>12</sup>

From the beginning, Hungerford supported this unpopular cause. He drew series after series of cartoons intended to educate and persuade the public. He illustrated the goals of the reformers quickly and concisely, reaching people who were not willing to study a complex newspaper account of the problem. Two examples from this campaign are illustrations 8 and 9. In "Which Is More Expensive?" he showed a "before and after" conception of the city, setting up the

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10 *The Autobiography of Lincoln Steffens* (New York, 1931), 401; Joel Tarr, "Changing Fuel Use Behavior and Energy Transitions: The Pittsburgh Smoke Control Movement, 1940-1950," *Journal of Social History* 14 (Summer 1981): 564.

11 *Ibid.*, 563.

12 *Ibid.*, 565.

question of paying for cleaning coal or cleaning smog. He was careful to include working industrial smokestacks (with "clean" smoke) in the "after" picture, emphasizing that smoke control did not mean crippled industry. The "before" picture highlighted the ugliness and danger to health and property resulting from smoke. "About Time Pa Saw the Light" focused on the example of St. Louis, a city that had successfully instituted smoke control, and in whose footsteps the progressives were determined to follow. A grimy, ailing Pa Pitt watches as a "converted and whiter than snow" St. Louis stands beside a preacher in the smokeless crusade. Although interrupted by World War II, the antismoke campaign had received enough support to begin implementation in the late 1940s. When opposing factions still caused trouble, Hungerford continued the crusade, identifying and criticizing the anticontrol groups. Smoke control ultimately did become an important component of Pittsburgh's Renaissance, and Hungerford's cartoons may have played a part in swaying public opinion and helping to shape public policy in this crucial step in Pittsburgh's growth.

Hungerford also crusaded for other aspects of Pittsburgh's Renaissance. One crucial improvement was flood control. Pittsburgh had historically been subject to repeated floods, and calls for federal aid for a flood control system had begun in the first decade of the twentieth century. On St. Patrick's Day, 1936, it became clear that the problem could no longer be ignored. The three rivers rose and flowed over city streets, cresting at 46.4 feet. The city faced disease, hunger, cold, fires, explosions, looting and vandalism, and the lack of drinking water, electricity, and telephone service. Downtown was placed under martial law, and the city was at a standstill until the waters receded. The delay of an adequate flood control program had cost \$200,000,000 in property loss, with three thousand injured and twenty-seven dead.<sup>13</sup> After this flood and pressure from the city, Congress passed the Flood Control Act, under which nine dams were built at the headwaters of strategic rivers to provide protection for downstream communities.<sup>14</sup> Hungerford chronicled the flood experiences and made strong statements urging flood control measures, such as illustration 10, "Back To Normalcy," shows.

Hungerford supported new construction and the physical transformation of the Point and applauded gifts to the city. He exhibited

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<sup>13</sup> Stefan Lorant, *Pittsburgh: The Story of an American City*, 2nd ed. (Lennox, Mass., 1975), 370, 564-65.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 370.

pride in the city and optimism for its future yet at the same time remained conscious of ongoing problems that must be solved — such as the ever-present transportation headaches and the improvement of poorer areas of the city. Illustration 11, “A Front Row Seat,” is striking in its simplicity as a poor black child views the brand-new Civic Arena from his slum in the Upper Hill District, pointing out the sharp contrast between older, deteriorating neighborhoods and the revitalization of the downtown area.

A significant aspect of Hungerford’s work was his translation of national events into local terms, outlining their effects on Pittsburgh and its residents. During the Depression, he showed the plight of the jobless and supported Mayor McNair’s perception of WPA programs as wasteful and his ideas of the improvements that could have been made had the city distributed the funds as it chose. He helped to spur patriotism during World War II, characterizing Pittsburgh as a forge of national defense work. He worried about the shortcomings, chaos, and bungling in the local air raid warning system. He put the war in human terms, of how it affected the day-to-day life of citizens: shortages of gas, meat, coffee, tobacco, liquor, and silk stockings; curfews; dim-outs; air raid drills; and censorship of weather reports. He was conscious of how war work changed women’s lives, sensing that many would not be content to leave the working world and return to the home. During the Cold War, Hungerford was strongly anti-communist and urged Pittsburghers to pay attention to what he perceived as a threat — a legacy, perhaps, from the early twentieth century when part of a cartoonist’s purpose was to highlight patriotism and condemn those espousing threatening ideologies.

The remaining component of Hungerford’s style was his treatment of “human interest” topics. He stressed Pittsburgh’s cultural and educational life, helping to publicize the accomplishments, events, and needs of these institutions. He traced the growth of the University of Pittsburgh, Carnegie-Mellon University, and Duquesne University. He celebrated Oakland as a cultural center, with the activities of the universities, Carnegie Institute, and the various music, art, and drama organizations. During the 1930s, he supported repeal of Pennsylvania’s “Blue Laws” which forbade Sunday entertainment. Twenty years later, he helped publicize the efforts to bring television to the area with expanding channels and technologies.

Hungerford’s works exhibited a strong sense of history, of growth and change. He drew commemorative cartoons, showing Pittsburgh “then and now.” He displayed affection for the city and a

respect for the individuals who figured in its history. The accomplishments of its pioneers, entrepreneurs, and philanthropists were remembered in detail.

Supporting private charity was a cause Hungerford backed absolutely. He used his cartoons to remind readers of those less fortunate, and how they could help. He emphasized where contributions were spent, and who benefited. Often, he used Pa Pitt as a means of appealing to civic pride. Organizations that benefited from Hungerford's work included Children's Hospital, Goodfellows, Christmas Seals, Community Chest, UNICEF, and World War II fund and bond drives.

Many of Hungerford's human interest cartoons over the years were comments on sports and weather — "insignificant" subjects. This preoccupation with the mundane is reflective of the Humanist school. His drawings appealed to the readers' day-to-day thoughts and concerns and helped build a rapport between cartoonist and reader. Hungerford was aware of how sports could enhance civic pride and benefit the business community. He often reiterated this theme, as in illustration 12, "Return of Prodigal Son," when the Pirates won the 1960 World Series and brought home business gold. He drew cartoons that chronicled how baseball can occupy residents' minds during pennant and World Series races, and ones that illustrated the frustrations of watching losing teams year after year. Hungerford also highlighted sports "institutions" that left their mark on the city: Forbes Field, Pitt coach John B. ("Jock") Sutherland, Pirate great Honus Wagner, and veteran radio announcer Albert K. ("Rosey") Rowswell. As for the weather, many of his cartoons were anecdotal, showing a series of individual reactions and problems. He noted extremes of snow, rain, cold, and heat, as well as daylight savings time and groundhog day.

These examples and analysis of Hungerford's work reveal that his appeal was broadly based on his concern for the individual. He gained identification with the reader and established solid support. When he felt strongly about an issue, it was likely that his readers would concur, and, while it is impossible to gauge accurately his persuasive powers, it is safe to say they were not inconsiderable on controversial issues. The personification device of Pa Pitt added to this individual identification, giving each reader a feeling of unity with the area itself. Hungerford could tell the story of an issue quickly, getting to the heart of the matter, and reaching those who were not willing to sift through a complex newspaper article.



Hungerford's popularity was not limited to his readers. He was respected by his peers and received many honors and awards. In 1946, he won a medal of merit from the National Headliners Club for "consistently outstanding editorial cartoons." Among his awards were an honorary doctorate from Washington and Jefferson College, and citations from the Sigma Delta Chi and Omicron Delta Kappa professional journalism fraternities. His cartoons were often included in *Editor and Publisher* magazine, and anthologies such as *Today's Cartoon*, *What America Thinks*, and *Editorial Cartooning*.<sup>15</sup>

The Hungerford cartoon collection reveals much about Pittsburgh during a major portion of the twentieth century. Hungerford's long-term appeal indicates that he touched nerves and captured what was important to Pittsburghers. His cartoons chronicle the city — the mayors from McNair to Barr, their problems and triumphs, the difficulties of public services, crime scares, poor transportation, the chronic headache of strikes, the gains made by smog control and the Renaissance, and the effect of national events. On the lighter side, his cartoons covered the city's cultural growth and its sports and weather. Hungerford's knack for touching the concerns of the individual made the characters in his drawings come alive. Hungerford carried on the traditions of the Humanist school, attempting to reform society and highlighting the individual. As he outlined and commented on current events for his readers, he left a unique record of the city and earned a place for himself in Pittsburgh history.

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15 Dick Spencer III, *Editorial Cartooning* (Ames, Iowa, 1949); *Today's Cartoon* (New Orleans, 1962); *What America Thinks* (Chicago, 1941).