

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Anybody crossing from Pittsburgh to the south shore of the Monongahela in the mid-nineteenth century to visit a friend who lived on Ormsby Street could have been in trouble. The area now known as the South Side had three different streets of that name. There was Ormsby Street in Birmingham (now South 13th Street); Ormsby Street in East Birmingham (now South 21st Street); and Ormsby Street in Beltzhoover (now in Mount Oliver and the city's 16th and 30th wards).

This situation arose because virtually all the neighborhoods that now distinguish Pittsburgh were formerly independent municipalities. Every time a new area was annexed, officials eliminated all the street names that duplicated those already established. Frequently the new names were similar to those they replaced and had the same initial letter. Thus, Allegheny's Chartier Street became Chateau Street, and Birmingham's Union Street is now Uxor Way. Since the city had already acquired an Arlington Avenue when Beltzhoover was annexed, a new name was needed in 1907, when Allegheny came into the fold with its version. Armandale Street filled the bill quite nicely, thank you. High on the hill overlooking the Monongahela River, Maple Street had a name that was particularly unoriginal, so it became Magnolia Street. When St. Paul's Monastery opened nearby, and the neighborhood "got religion," so to speak, it was a simple matter for Magnolia to be transformed into Magdalena Street.

Sometimes a situation evolved that was complex enough to inspire headaches in generations of historians. Sarah Street on the South Side has always been Sarah Street — but only above South 17th Street (or Harmony Street, as it used to be known). On the other side of 17th, toward the Point, it was originally Washington Street, but later became Warren. Is that clear?

When the Birminghams were annexed, almost all their main streets were named for members of the Ormsby family (as are the surviving Mary, Sarah, Jane, Josephine, and Sidney streets) or their in-laws. Since almost all were names already found elsewhere in the city, such as Oliver, Page, Meadow, Phillips, and Brown, a decision was made to take the easy way out. Thus were born South 1st through South 27th streets.

The Name Game still pops up now and then. Not long ago Fort Duquesne Boulevard was known as Duquesne Way, and Fort Pitt Boulevard was Water Street. Half of current Stanwix Street used to be Ferry Street, and the downtown section of Forbes Avenue was Diamond Street. Actually, something of a hiatus *has* occurred in the renaming business. How else could it be explained that there isn't a thoroughfare named for David L. Lawrence yet? *Ken McFarland*