METROPOLITANISM and the Genesis of Municipal Anxiety in Allegheny County

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In September 1991 the Allegheny County Department of Planning published a 16-page document entitled “Allegheny County 2001: Our Future, Our Choice.” The report was compiled by a commission of 250 community representatives and was designed to “set an agenda” for the Pittsburgh region in the next century. The study addressed seven topics of regional concern and included a “good, hard look at [government]...on the local level” with the hope of “meeting the challenge [that]...too much fragmentation” created for the efficient delivery of public services. In an effort to gauge grassroots reaction to the “visions and strategies of the resource panels,” town meetings were scheduled and a questionnaire was sent to every household in the county. In January 1992 the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette reported the results of the public survey.

According to the paper, the findings indicated a genuine interest in the future role of local governments as service providers. In particular, “metropolitanism” — a term that traditionally implied municipal mergers and consolidation of services among several governmental authorities — was discussed at “virtually every meeting.” County Planning Director Raymond Reeves perceived a “strong sentiment that the current status of municipal...government is seriously lacking.” However, despite the discussions favoring political reform, only 28 percent of the survey respondents indicated they were willing to totally relinquish local control over delivery of governmental services such as fire and police protection, even if assured of adequate, cost-efficient services. Such ambivalence was not surprising to anyone familiar with the politics of Allegheny County.

This article’s purpose, however, is not to deal with the modern-day quandaries that many municipal governments face in trying to deliver services to their constituents in the increasingly fragmented political landscape of Western Pennsylvania. Yet, the contemporary situation is a valuable back-drop to this study of how decision-makers in the metropolitan region have interacted over the last century. Such interaction is frequently referred to as “metropolitics,” and Allegheny County’s metropolitical history indicates a consistent municipal attitude toward proposals for seeking regional solutions to the common problems facing countless boroughs and municipalities.

Typically, residents of Allegheny County manifest a fear of metropolitanism, and react negatively toward any proposal that is perceived as involving any loss of an individual municipality’s autonomy or identity. Many smaller communities have especially dreaded being engulfed by the central city, Pittsburgh. This apprehension developed over a long period of time, and particular episodes were especially important in forming metropolitical attitudes within the county.

Although no single study has comprehensively examined the genesis of this municipal “metropolitan anxiety,” numerous sources have discussed the issue. The consensus in both scholarly and popular literature has been that the “forced” annexations accomplished by Pittsburgh in the late 19th and early 20th centuries were major factors in the development of resentment and distrust among many of the county’s citizens and policymakers. Through this process Pittsburgh absorbed communities in the East End and South Side, and took over Allegheny City in 1907. A closer look at the events of this annexation period is important to an understanding of current regional attitudes and policies.

Allegheny City was located at the north end of Pittsburgh, along the shores of the Allegheny and Ohio rivers. Its geographic proximity to Pittsburgh encouraged a variety of ties with the central city, but Allegheny City, along with other communities in the region, had experienced an independent genesis and a significantly detached development.

In 1788, the state legislature had set aside the area to be known as Allegheny City with the specific intent of making the community the seat of Allegheny County government. Though Pittsburgh wrested that designation away, Allegheny City flourished nonetheless, and was incorporated as a city on April 13, 1840. A variety of economic ventures including iron works, slaughter houses, and food processing plants supported the city,
and cotton and textile mills eventually emerged as the largest single industrial interest. The city’s population steadily increased from slightly more than 10,000 in 1840 to nearly 150,000 by the time of the 1907 annexation.

Originally, Allegheny City’s eight square miles contained a good deal of vacant space, and even as the number of inhabitants increased, large sections of the city were set aside for public parks. While the demands of the increased population eventually caused the subdivision of many of these open areas, Allegheny City entered the 20th century with room to grow, and was comparatively free of the territorial restraints which hampered her sister city of Pittsburgh.10

However, as early as 50 years before, demographic changes were begun which would have an important impact on the social-class character and residential sections of Allegheny City. Although the city retained some of its industrial base, employment by large industrial firms began to decline after 1850.11 At the same time, improved transportation gave upper class men a feasible way to commute to jobs across the river in Pittsburgh while maintaining residence in the less cramped and more attractive Allegheny City.12 As the century wore on, more and more Pittsburghers exercised this option. Allegheny City took on an “upper class” rather than a “working class” image. In succeeding years, more of this transplanted elite would create a civic, economic, and psychological union between the two urban centers. Some would, in fact, be in the vanguard of a political consolidation effort. However, most of Allegheny City’s citizens valued their independence from Pittsburgh, and throughout the last half of the 19th century, the cities remained in competition, as one researcher has noted, to “develop, own, and control contiguous residential and industrial areas.”13

Of the two, Pittsburgh had the more compelling need for contiguous space for growth. In 1850, Pittsburgh was a tightly packed “walking city,” so-called because most people walked to work and to conduct commerce.14 Flat land, indeed any usable open space, was at a premium, and without additional territory, the central city faced certain stagnation. In addition to the geographic limits to Pittsburgh’s expansion, there was the threat of population not rising as rapidly as other growing cities. From 1850 to 1860, Pittsburgh’s population increased only 6 percent.15 A continuation of such small gains assured Pittsburgh a progressively sinking national census ranking. It was also apparent to many that the residents who could improve the Steel City’s census ranking were being lost to the rapidly emerging districts in the East End, the South Side, and Allegheny City.16

Central city boosters touted political consolidation with these surrounding areas as the most feasible means of securing the land, people, and finances needed to assure Pittsburgh’s national and international prestige.

This concept was also enthusiastically supported by the local press, indicating the early elements of a metropolitical alliance that would continue throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. These activists indicated their intent to implement such policies even before mid-century, and had lobbied in support of annexations in 1837, 1845, and 1846.17 As time went on, they stepped up their activities to depict the industrial base of the South Side communities, the residential potential of the East End, and the geographic proximity of Allegheny City as appealing reasons for unifying these regions with Pittsburgh.

In 1854, local proponents of a “greater Pittsburgh” received concrete evidence that there was also higher-level support for such an idea. In that year, the commonwealth legislature consolidated the city of Philadelphia and its hinterlands. The legislative act added 127 square miles to Philadelphia’s corporate limits without provision for a public referendum on the issue. Sponsors of the unilateral action boasted that it made the City of Brotherly Love the world’s largest city.18 The political union of the Philadelphia area gave some added hope for a similar occurrence in the western part of the state.

State legislation to permit such an action was introduced in April 1854. The statute proposed that Pittsburgh be enabled to annex Allegheny City and boroughs on the south side of the Monongahela River. If this bold venture had succeeded, it would have doubled Pittsburgh’s population and quadrupled her land mass, thereby accomplishing the dreams of the Steel City’s boosters. Downtown businessmen who had advocated consolidation were naturally enthused about the plan. Local newspapers strongly endorsed the legislation which, in the words of the Daily Morning Post, would attract “manufacturing, skills, enterprize and capital” to the larger Pittsburgh.19

In addition to touting economic benefits, the centrist rhetoric argued that the region, though politically fragmented, was virtually a single entity in other aspects. Because numerous bridges and roads did connect the
various neighborhoods, the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* contended that even the geographic divisions did “not change the oneness of our interest as a community.”20 Consolidationists, therefore, advocated the unification legislation as a policy that would benefit all the areas included in the “new” Pittsburgh.

Many residents of the areas targeted for annexation, however, did not share the enthusiasm of Pittsburgh’s booster class. Proponents of consolidation had realized there would be considerable local opposition and had actually introduced the annexation legislation in a covert manner. It was, of course, impossible to keep such a monumental proposal a secret and when word of the pending unification reached the South Side, residents became immediately active and vocal. Civic leaders convened a town meeting on April 5, 1854. A resolution which rejected consolidation with Pittsburgh and “condemned those individuals of Pittsburgh and the South Side who were promoting their interest over the general good of the community” was easily passed.21 Shortly after this adamant public protest, newspaper support of the unification proposal weakened and temporarily became “lukewarm at best.”22

Ostensibly, the press withdrew its support because the law permitted a take-over without a referendum in the contiguous areas. The public protest indicated that thousands of citizens in the surrounding areas might have been forced into a new political arrangement against their will. But equally, if not more responsible for the newspapers’ retreat, was the issue of debt consolidation. In 1854, Pittsburgh had a higher municipal indebtedness than surrounding communities. Property owners in these communities feared they would be burdened with Pittsburgh’s debts if annexation occurred. Many of the suburban elite who favored regional unification in theory balked at its practical reality, likely to include increased taxes. This upper class used its influence on both the state and local levels to diminish support of the consolidation bill. Waning political enthusiasm caused the bill to die on the floor of the state legislature, but the hope for a Greater Pittsburgh did not die with it.23

In actuality, Pittsburgh’s booster class, comprised primarily of downtown business people, civic and political leaders, and the local press, could not afford to allow the dream of a Greater Pittsburgh to expire. For the city to become “greater” economically and in prestige, it was necessary to literally create a greater Pittsburgh in territory and political clout. It became increasingly obvious that the small financial and population gains experienced by the central city were not enough to keep pace with competing urban centers around the country.24 Certain metropoliticians, therefore, continued to view area-wide unification as Pittsburgh’s most practical hope for future glory.

The theory of employing consolidation to overcome the inefficiency of political fragmentation was evident throughout urban America,25 and, like their counterparts in other cities, Pittsburgh boosters continued to find support for their consolidation efforts from some of the area’s upper class communities.26

These former city residents had opted for the benefits of suburban habitation, yet still maintained their economic interests in the central business district. Some of these migrants surely did wish to remain politically as well as physically separated from downtown policy problems. However, many others were concerned that arbitrary boundary lines denied them their rightful influence in the political decision-making process. For this group, too, consolidation offered the solution. The extension of city corporate limits would allow them to live where they wanted but still play an active role in city politics.

The support of key groups that favored consolidation virtually assured the continuation of a Greater Pittsburgh movement, which regained momentum during the 1860s. By that time, the ongoing development of nearby communities made them even more appealing objects for incorporation.

The East End was one such area. The term was popularly used to describe the large expanse of land to the east of downtown Pittsburgh and up the hill away from the city, between the Allegheny and Monongahela rivers. Consisting of about 21.3 square miles and approximately 30,000 residents, the area was divided into Lawrenceville, Oakland, Pitt Township, Liberty Township, Collins Township, and Peebles Township.27 In many ways the settlement of the East End exemplified the street car suburbs, as historian Sam Bass Warner has described, which were developing across America. By mid-century, horse-drawn passenger cars linked the bedroom suburbs with the central business district.28 Pockets of flat land provided land for industrial and residential construction. Some industrial concerns were present in Lawrenceville and Pitt Township, and clustered working class neighborhoods grew up in these areas, but the East End’s character was predominantly shaped by the wealthier residents who could afford the daily trip away from the undesirable environment of the central city.29 These citizens established residences on large lot homesteads in the outlying townships. The absence of natural barriers (such as the rivers that divided Pittsburgh from Allegheny and the South Side) and the potential for new construction made the East End extremely attractive to consolidationists.30

The 11 communities to the south of Pittsburgh on the opposite shore of the Monongahela River (West Pittsburgh, South Pittsburgh, Birmingham, East Birmingham, Monongahela, Lower St. Clair, Temperanceville, Allentown, Mt. Washington, Ormsby, and Union Township) were also attractive.31 These towns were home to 36,000 people and occupied over four square miles. Their location and common character caused them to be perceived, and described, as a single area known colloquially as the South Side. This area had
a different geographic, economic, and social make-up than the East End, but it was no less enticing to proponents of annexation.

The South Side had direct ties to Pittsburgh, but its development was characteristic of the independent, decentralized growth common in Allegheny County. In particular, glass-making provided a strong industrial base for the area which continued to attract a working class population and to expand its financial base throughout the middle decades of the 19th century. However, limited usable flat land made the South Side far more crowded than the suburbs to the north and east of Pittsburgh. The South Side communities typified the kind of working-class neighborhoods commonly associated with the Steel City. Nonetheless, although the South Side didn’t offer the wide open space of the East End, its population and tax base made it an essential component in the regional unification formula.

As noted earlier, a strong anti-annexation attitude was evident among the middle-class on the South Side, whereas pro-unification proponents in the East End were more numerous, especially among its wealthiest residents. (This differing attitude, in conjunction with changing financial circumstances, would to a large degree account for differences in post-annexation treatment of the areas.) The independent attitude of the South Side was no doubt strengthened by the physical and psychological division provided by the Monongahela River. The natural demarcation caused many residents to think of themselves as inhabiting distinct towns, rather than as offsprings of Pittsburgh which should naturally be united with the parent community.

The issue of consolidation came to a head in early 1867. A state legislative committee had been conducting secret meetings concerning incorporation, and on April 6, 1867, the committee’s recommendation to consolidate Pittsburgh and its surrounding communities was enacted into law. The passage of the bill reflected the state level influence of the pro-annexation upper class of Allegheny City and the East End, as well as that of the metropolitical boosters of Pittsburgh. But the legislation contained some crucial compromises that also manifested the clout of the anti-consolidationist elements.

Provision for a public referendum was a major concession, even though the actual form of the referendum negated the true concept of popular vote. Rather than allowing each community within the area to make an individual choice about union with Pittsburgh, the communities were grouped into three districts. The total vote in each district determined the fate of all the municipalities in that district. The north district consisted mainly of Allegheny City. The middle district was a combination of Pittsburgh and the East End communities. And the south district was made up of the 11 municipalities of the South Side.

Interestingly, some of the East End elite who favored regional unification were willing to tolerate an independent South Side in 1867. Their logic was based upon potential ramifications of an “indebtedness” clause included in the consolidation legislation. Originally, the bill made the “new” city (i.e., Pittsburgh and all annexed areas) responsible for all the debts of the “old” and “new” neighborhoods. Some metropolitans regarded this stipulation as unfair. A specific point of contention involved the bridges over the Allegheny and Monongahela rivers. The bridges were a vital connection between Pittsburgh and her hinterlands to the north and south, but because the bridges were owned privately at the time, all traffic was assessed a toll. South Side decision-makers, backed by the downtown newspapers, advocated municipal ownership of the bridges and the subsequent elimination of user fees. The policy of “freeing the bridges” was endorsed by many in Pittsburgh, Allegheny City, and the South Side, but found little enthusiasm in the East End. Community leaders there had no direct dependence on the downtown bridges and did not wish to be saddled with additional debt caused by city government taking over the bridges and guaranteeing free crossings.

To prevent such a situation, the district method of vote tabulation was accepted, and in addition, an amendment was added to the annexation bill which permitted special indebtedness taxes to be levied upon individual areas of the “new” city. This section, which was part of the enacted legislation, gave political leaders in an enlarged Pittsburgh the option of holding each annexed neighborhood responsible for its own pre-unification debt.

As the October election day approached in 1867 the controversy over consolidation escalated. Most Pittsburgh newspapers were intensely pro-consolidation and the Pittsburgh Commercial leveled a particularly scathing attack against the opposition. The paper acknowledged that “local prejudices [were] strong” but nonetheless labeled certain opponents as “dishonorable” and claimed that these activists would circulate “bogus ballots of almost every description ... with the intention to decease” the electorate.

The separatists were no less emphatic. For instance, some residents of Oakland in the East End, a community whose continued independence seemed hopeless, maintained their adamant protests until the very end. On October 8, the day before the election, a group of antagonists led by Dr. David Hostetter met in the local school house. William Smith, secretary of the citizen’s committee, presented evidence that freeing the bridges would cost $1.5 million — about $7.50 per resident of the new city. Smith’s companions shared his disapproval of such spending and the meeting ended with a unanimous vote against the annexation proposal.

The referendum took place on October 9. Residents of Allegheny City rejected annexation by a 3 to 1 margin. The South Side inhabitants voted 2 to 1 against consolidation. But the vote in the middle district was overwhelmingly in favor of unification. The East End was brought into political union with the central city by
the 8 to 1 margin of approval in the "old" city wards, even though majorities in the East End townships were decidedly against annexation.\textsuperscript{39}

The format of the 1867 referendum enabled the communities of the South Side to avoid a take-over, but the continued independence of the area remained in serious jeopardy. Many contemporary observers agreed with the \textit{Daily Post} that it was just "a question of time" until the South Side realized the many advantages of consolidation.\textsuperscript{40} But a cadre of South Side leaders continued to try to head off such an outcome, and in January of 1872, an attempt was made to combine several boroughs into a South Side City. The plan, intended to thwart or at least to delay Pittsburgh's aggressiveness, failed. However, in March of the same year, an opposite proposal was submitted to the voters of six South Side boroughs and was also defeated. This referendum called for incorporation with Pittsburgh, and was actually approved in three communities, although combined votes in all six boroughs spelled defeat.\textsuperscript{41}

Pittsburgh newspapers, generally staunch advocates of regionalism, interpreted the results of the two proposals as an indication that the "mass of people ... have been steadily in favor" of annexation.\textsuperscript{42} The papers' comments were probably not correct. There was, in fact, no real consensus on the South Side about the area's political future.

But those individuals who saw the South Side as an increasingly important part of Pittsburgh's economic future were not hampered by such ambiguities. Shortly after 1870, Pittsburgh had begun a program of municipal reform and expansion of public services. Improvements in the police and fire departments, park programs, and water systems were obviously beneficial to the citizens, but they also greatly increased the city's debt. And, as one researcher notes: "Civic leaders viewed the industries of the South Side as a necessary tax base to assist in the funding of this debt."\textsuperscript{43}

Furthermore, consolidationists preferred not to deal with the potentially negative outcome of a public referendum to decide the issue of the South Side annexation. Instead, they focused on procuring mandatory enabling legislation from the General Assembly. The legislature had demonstrated a general acceptance of the policy of metropolitan consolidation, and in May of 1871 had passed a law permitting Pittsburgh to absorb surrounding territories. This statute, however, stipulated that annexation had to be initiated by a petition signed by at least 60 percent of the taxable residents of the area to be annexed. In addition, the union had to be approved by a majority of voters in the area requesting incorporation with the central city.

It was unlikely that a majority of South Side residents would initiate the consolidation process, so the pro-annexation forces continued their efforts on the state level in the hopes of obtaining less restrictive legislation. They realized their goal in the early spring of 1872. That March 26, Birmingham Burgess Salisbury received what he regarded as a very distressing telegram. He was informed that the state House of Representatives had passed an amended annexation bill and that the Senate would approve the legislation the next day. The proposed law in effect eliminated all provisions for local approval, rescinding requirements for local initiation of consolidation efforts or a public referendum.

Salisbury immediately called a "meeting of indignation" which was chaired by Burgess Dressel of East Birmingham. As a result of the meeting, a delegation was sent to Harrisburg to "expose the fraud" of the legislation to Gov. John Geary. The committee carried a petition signed by 700 South Side residents which urged the governor to veto the bill. Consolidationists also sent representatives to lobby the governor and the newspapers continued their support of annexation. On April 1, the \textit{Pittsburgh Commercial} printed an editorial which claimed that there was a "clear majority for annexation" and that a few active men were opposing "the mass of the people." Gov. Geary apparently agreed that the bill did not "contain an unfair provision" and enthusiastically signed it into law on April 2, 1872. Hard-core resisters took the action to court, but the point was moot. The official ceremonial union of Pittsburgh with the South Side took place on November 4, 1872.\textsuperscript{44}

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\textbf{City newspapers, whose owners wanted a larger, more powerful Pittsburgh, saw public consensus where none existed on the city's drive for new territory.}
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In 1894, 1898, and 1905, several important though comparatively minor annexations took place.\textsuperscript{45} But with the South Side and East End now officially part of Pittsburgh, Allegheny City remained the final missing piece of the "Greater Pittsburgh" jigsaw puzzle. To some it seemed that the eventual combination of the two cities was pre-ordained. State Rep. Lawrence Cook of Pittsburgh typified the logic of the consolidationists with his claim that the two cities were the "same in everything, but name."\textsuperscript{46} Later students of the annex-
ation process tended to agree with his sentiments, characterizing the separation of the two urban areas as "legal fiction." However, along with the geographic and economic ties that fostered unity, there was also a strong anti-annexation sentiment in Allegheny City. But the influence of increasing numbers of Pittsburgh’s business elite who chose to live in Allegheny City but "were denied a vote in Pittsburgh’s community affairs," as one authority has noted, "made the annexation of 1907 nearly inevitable, in spite of popular opposition."48

A major impetus for the absorption of Allegheny City came from the Pittsburgh Chamber of Commerce. This booster group had continually voiced the economic benefits associated with the creation of a Greater Pittsburgh, and each successive annexation victory fueled its enthusiasm. In 1894, the chamber created a Committee for a Greater Pittsburgh to hasten the incorporation of Allegheny City with Pittsburgh.49 Interestingly, a significant number of the members of the corruption-ridden city councils of Pittsburgh opposed consolidation in fear that a budding reform movement would keep a "machine" candidate from being elected mayor of the combined cities. Nonetheless, pro-consolidationists on the council formed their own committee to travel to Harrisburg to assist Chamber of Commerce lobbying for an annexation enablement law.50

Rep. Cook, who found it “difficult to understand how anyone, whether a resident of Pittsburgh or Allegheny [could] fail to realize the desirability of annexation,” re-introduced annexation legislation in 1905. Aided by the intense lobbying of Allegheny County’s business leaders, the bill was passed by the General Assembly and sent to the governor. Gov. Samuel Pennypacker, a supporter of metropolitanism, believed “such a course would result in a saving of expense ... and an advancement in prestige and influence” and readily signed it into law. In appreciation of Cook’s efforts, Pennypacker sent him the pen used to sign the legislation in April 1905.51

Cook himself sang the praises of the new law in an article he wrote for the locally published Index. He enumerated the advantages that would accompany the formation of a Greater Pittsburgh and promised “betterments in the police, fire and health departments ... free bridges, pure water, better light [and] new park and street plans.” In addition, he claimed that the “new Pittsburgh” would be the number one manufacturing center in the country, would rank first in rail and river transportation, and would have the fourth highest property value among U.S. cities.52

Naturally, Cook’s viewpoint had detractors. Allegheny City’s elected officials believed the consolidation would “rip” them out of office. A compromise which allowed the governor to appoint the new city mayor and the courts to redistrict the city apparently did not allay their fears. Others pointed out the unfair nature of the consolidation, which was to be determined by a referendum of the combined votes of Allegheny City and Pittsburgh. This arrangement gave Pittsburgh voters, with their overwhelming numerical advantage, the power to “force” annexation upon Allegheny City.

The validity of the law was tested in court and opponents won a temporary victory when the Pennsylvania Supreme Court declared it a “special” law and, therefore, unconstitutional. The Chamber of Commerce’s Committee on Municipal Affairs drafted a revised bill, more carefully worded to evade the “special” purposes of the law. This revised act was passed into law on February 7, 1906. The law, which was upheld by the commonwealth’s courts, was very similar to its predecessor and also left the decision about annexation to a combined vote in Allegheny City and Pittsburgh.

The referendum was scheduled for June 12, 1906. Typically, Pittsburgh newspapers campaigned diligently for the annexation. One paper sponsored a “guess the vote” contest to encourage voter turnout, and repeated earlier claims that opponents would use ballot fraud to defeat the issue. However, the outcome was never in doubt.55 Though nearly two-thirds of Allegheny City voters cast ballots against consolidation, the proposal passed easily.54 Allegheny City leaders filed one last judicial protest, but the state Supreme Court upheld the annexation process, and the union of Pittsburgh and Allegheny City was official as of December 9, 1907.

The conquest of Allegheny City marked the climax of Pittsburgh’s annexation history. Within 30 years, the central city had forcibly brought 33 square miles of land and 215,000 citizens under its political jurisdiction.55 Although 21 more independent communities were annexed between 1920 and 1931, these expansions did not match the scope or nature of the 1867-1907 annexation period. Most of these municipalities, such as St. Clair borough, Carrick and Hays, were financially

With Allegheny City's fall in 1907, the city had spent three decades forcing 33 square miles and 215,000 new residents into its domain, while piling up a $30 million debt.
troubled communities that willingly sought unification with Pittsburgh. Ironically, some Pittsburgh officials eventually complained that the cost of extending public services to these disadvantaged areas outweighed the benefits of annexing them.\(^6^0\) In total, while the territorial gains improved Pittsburgh's economic and political status, the process of involuntary consolidation also enhanced other municipalities' fears of a take-over and left a legacy that hampered future regional cooperation. Though Allegheny City was actually the last area to be undemocratically united with Pittsburgh, many communities in Allegheny County continued to believe that they, too, were threatened by Pittsburgh's imperialism.

In 1911 this apprehension was institutionalized with the formation of the League of Boroughs, Townships, and Cities of the Third Class of Allegheny County. Joseph T. Miller, a resident of propinquitous Edgewood Borough, and a long-time foe of consolidation, was one of the founders of the league. The organization's avowed purpose was to maintain community autonomy and to thwart any further take-overs by Pittsburgh.\(^5^7\) The creation of the league is often portrayed as the municipal reaction to the singular act of the Allegheny City merger. It was, more likely, a manifestation of the pent-up hostility toward all the past losses of independence.

Furthermore, developments during the post-annexation period continued the debate concerning the advantages of consolidation. Doubtlessly, the central business district of Pittsburgh benefitted greatly from the annexations, as the added territories gratified many of the hopes of downtown boosters. The enlarged city had a greater financial base to provide infrastructure and service improvements, and at the end of the annexation period Pittsburgh held its historically highest percentage of the county population.\(^5^8\) Such changes augmented the central city's economic and political clout. However, arguments continued on the question of whether advantages to the "new" neighborhoods of Greater Pittsburgh compensated for their loss of autonomy.

Disparities between the promised levels of certain public services and their actual fulfillment was a central issue. Paul Studenski, in his 1930 report on metropolitan governments, concluded that the characteristics of particular services made them susceptible to varying rates of implementation. For instance, it was easier to construct water pipes than it was to build sewers or roads, so the city's water system was one of the first utilities available to annexed areas.\(^5^9\) Other scholars have characterized urban services inequities in terms of competition between the old city and the new neighborhoods in which the consolidation areas were frequently treated as second-class citizens.\(^6^0\) In the post-annexation period, both theories were evident in Allegheny County. The history of the availability of filtered water to Greater Pittsburgh provides a case in point.

In the last quarter of the 19th century, Pittsburgh had the highest typhoid death rate of any major American city. The connection between contaminated water and this contagious disease had been suspected long before it was scientifically documented.\(^6^1\) The necessity of filtered water to combat the spread of typhoid became generally accepted, and, in fact, was part of Pittsburgh's annexation policy. The Consolidation Act of 1867 contained a provision which enabled indebtedness for the construction of a system to provide pure water for all areas of the proposed Greater Pittsburgh.\(^6^2\)

Safer water, and subsequently better health, was therefore one of the benefits associated with consolidation. But the residents of the East End (annexed in 1867) and the South Side (1872) had many years to wait before they tasted filtered water in their homes. A Pittsburgh Filtration Committee was appointed in 1896, and in 1905, the city went $5 million into debt to finance construction of the Aspinwall Filtration Plant on the Allegheny River. But it wasn't until October 1908 that the first 23 wards of the city (the central business district and the East End) were completely serviced by a purified water system. South Side residents received the utility at about the same time. Ironically, the Aspinwall plant went into operation at almost the exact time as the Allegheny City annexation. Because of its proximity to the Allegheny River-side plant, some areas of Allegheny City did receive filtered water shortly after the merger. However, service to the entire North Side was not finalized until March 1914.\(^6^3\)

The new water system dramatically reduced the typhoid menace, and Greater Pittsburgh was indeed a healthier city than her fragmented counterparts. But while consolidationists could stress the point that the region's citizens received sanitary water at cheaper rates because of the political unification of the area, antimeetropolitanists pointed out that the central city had first crack at services which were partially financed by the taxpayers of territories absorbed against their will.\(^6^4\)

Residents of the South Side considered the issue of "freeing the bridges" as another defaulted promise of consolidation. The elimination of toll charges for crossing the Monongahela River bridge was one of the perks assured to the South Side communities for sacrificing their independence.\(^6^5\) The pledge was not fulfilled for many decades. The city did not gain control of the four water spans until 1895 and 1896, and crossing fees were not abolished until 1910.\(^6^6\) Changing financial circumstances and the decision-making influence of East End residents kept the bridge tax in effect. No doubt many South Side inhabitants interpreted the delay as prioritizing one neighborhood's development over another.

In the early years of the annexation period, the East End did seem to be the recipient of special policies. Shortly before the South Side was forced into union with Pittsburgh, the city councils, in 1870, passed the Penn Avenue Act.\(^6^7\) The act provided for major street and road improvements, most of which took place in East End neighborhoods. Some East Enders protested
sharing the cost of the unsolicited development, but it was the central city taxpayers who ultimately paid for over 50 percent of the costs of street pavings during the next 10 years. The highway improvements helped make the East End the fastest growing section of the city at the end of the 19th century, and contributed to a significant increase in the area’s property values.\textsuperscript{58}

The East End neighborhoods also seemed to receive preferential treatment in the area of debt reduction. The various consolidation acts allowed differing tax rates to be levied upon distinct parts of the enlarged city. This was done to compensate for the varying degrees of debt accrued by these individual neighborhoods. In other words, during the annexation period property owners in all areas of the city were levied a uniform “current expenses” tax. However, each particular section of the greater city was also assessed a special “indebtedness” tax designed to pay off the obligations it incurred before annexation.\textsuperscript{69} These special taxes were to continue until the affected area’s deficit was eliminated. At the time of the 1867 annexation, the combined liability of the East End townships was approximately $500,000. Accordingly, a special assessment was placed on them. Almost immediately, however, the tax was rescinded and the entire debt was assumed by the “old city.”\textsuperscript{70}

Taxpayers of the South Side and Allegheny City did not fare nearly as well. South Side real estate owners were hit with a special tax in 1873 to pay off a $220,311 municipal debt and experienced such special levies until 1902. Allegheny City’s property holders endured similar levies. For example, in 1912 all residents of Greater Pittsburgh were assessed a current expenses property tax at the rate of 7.3 mills. However, the rate for residents of the central city district was only 1.5 mills, while taxpayers in Allegheny City were charged an indebtedness rate of 4.2 mills. Therefore, a property owner living in Allegheny City paid a total millage of 11.5 compared to 8.8 mills for his counterparts who lived in the old central city district. In 1915 Allegheny City residents were levied a property tax of 14.2 mills (7.8 current expenses plus 6.4 indebtedness) while inhabitants of the “old” Pittsburgh paid only 10.2 mills (7.8 current expenses plus 2.4 indebtedness). In dollar figures this meant that an Allegheny City resident owning property assessed at $10,000 market value paid $40 a year more in taxes than someone who owned similar property in central Pittsburgh. Note that this was an era when common laborers earned less ($11 per week and school teachers earned about $600 annually).\textsuperscript{71} These practices were ended in 1916 when the passage of a graded tax ordinance consolidated all the debts of all the city neighborhoods.\textsuperscript{72}

Some of the inequities could certainly be attributed to the disproportionate political clout of the East End elites. But the piecemeal process of consolidation also contributed to the disparities. If all three areas had been united with Pittsburgh at the same time, they all might have been dealt with similarly. As it was, however, changing economic circumstances during the 30-year annexation period made equal treatment unfeasible and probably unthinkable.

The annexation process had dramatically increased Pittsburgh’s revenue.\textsuperscript{73} Unfortunately, the newly acquired wealth, coupled with the needs of the expanded population, generated a tendency toward excessive spending as well. For example, in 1867 the city’s expenses amounted to $7.62 per capita, but this rose dramatically to $39.40 per capita by 1910.\textsuperscript{74} As a result, expenses outran receipts. Although the city had slightly reduced its debt from mid-century until 1867, significant deficits (nearly $30 million by the time of the Allegheny City merger) accompanied the annexation era.\textsuperscript{75}

The city was in comparatively good financial shape in 1867 and could more readily afford to acquiesce to the East End political influence and waive the indebtedness levy. Remember, too, that it was the spending debits of the early 1870s that made the acquisition of the South Side’s industrial tax base imperative. Given this logic, it would have been counter-productive for central city decision-makers to take on an added financial burden by forgiving the South Side indebtedness.\textsuperscript{76} Added liabilities, largely incurred by the Penn Avenue Act improvements and the construction of the water filtration system, were present by 1907. Thus, Allegheny City residents had no hope for tax leniency, despite their political power.

Public benefits did accompany the creation of a Greater Pittsburgh, and in some significant ways the quality of life was improved for residents in all the areas of the expanded city. But given the seemingly unequal levels of service provision, the improvements alone were not enough to quiet the anti-consolidationist forces. Economic and political logic could explain the lack of uniform policy implementation during the annexation.

\textbf{Few post-1920 unifications were disputed, but the 1867-1907 period left a bitter legacy: politicians and city boosters won out even when areas being annexed voted ‘NO’ at the polls.}
period. (The maneuvering was done principally by interest groups; individual citizens probably were only marginally interested in the metropolitical process.) But the emotional importance of community identification was (and is) a crucial factor in determining regional policies. Opponents of consolidation seized upon this emotionalism, and employed rhetoric which defined the post-annexation inconsistencies simply in terms of the central city’s ability to serve her own selfish interests at the expense of her vulnerable neighbors. These vocal leaders decried the injustices they believed were inherent in the trade off between absorption and service reform. The creation of the League of Boroughs and Townships reflected the metropolitical acceptance of such thinking. Municipal leaders were thus able to pragmatically exploit the events of the annexation era to further their interests derived from community independence. Furthermore, the unfair nature of the annexations also contributed to a renewed awareness of the realities of the political process. The ability of politicians to achieve a desired end despite outcomes at the polls was clearly demonstrated, thus heightening cynicism in the outlying municipalities about the city’s political leaders.

The adamant devotion to independence that has been the trademark of small town local governments, therefore, was solidified during the annexation period. Fear and mistrust of the central city became a fundamental basis for local political behavior, and community leaders frequently acted on the assumption that Pittsburgh would usurp the autonomy of nearby neighborhoods in order to serve the self-interest of the urban center. In addition, the consolidation activities exacerbated municipal anxiety by conclusively demonstrating that Pittsburgh did indeed possess the power necessary to engulf the hinterlands. The 1907 merger with Allegheny City was an especially poignant illustration of Pittsburgh’s strength because it was perceived as the conquest of the region’s oldest and most formidable opponent of unification. Finally, the methods used in the annexations were seen as a violation of the principles of self-determination, and thus weakened popular confidence in the protective qualities of government.

While some of the fear and suspicion in municipalities outside the city was not justified, nonetheless fear and suspicion — “anti-metropolitalism” — became entrenched in the psyche of Allegheny County community leaders during this period of rapid annexation by Pittsburgh.

1Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, Sept. 6, 1991.
4The Post-Gazette reported that a total of 500 citizens attended the 12 public meetings held throughout the country in October, November and December of 1991. Respondents numbered 1,919.
6Ibid.
7The actual wording of the survey question was as follows: “If public services are of the highest quality and are provided at the lowest possible price, do you care who provides them?” Twenty-eight percent answered “no.”
8It should be noted that some scholars use the words consolidation and annexation as distinct terms. Consolidation is defined as the absorption of one municipal government by another, while annexation involves the accumulation of unincorporated land next to an urban center. Using these connotations, Pittsburgh’s annexations should more accurately be called consolidations. However, for the purpose of this paper, the two terms will be used synonymously and interchangeably, as they are used popularly.
11Holmberg, “The Industrializing Community,” 129.
13Holmberg, “The Industrializing Community,” 76.
16Ibid., 266-267; Holmberg, “The Industrializing Community,” 2-3.
17In 1836, Northern Liberties Borough was annexed; in 1845-1846, Pitt Township was annexed.
18John Teaford, City and Suburb, The Political Fragmentation of Metropolitan America, 1850-1970 (Baltimore, 1979), 33.
20Ibid.
21Ibid., 271-273.
24Pittsburgh’s population did increase 5.1 percent from 1850 to 1860, due to natural reproduction and immigration, but other communities also competed for the immigrant populations. For instance, Bernard Sauer points out that by 1870, the South Side had a higher percentage of foreign born residents than Pittsburgh.
25Teaford, City and Suburb, 85.
27Tarr, “Infrastructure and City Building in Pittsburgh in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries,” 228. The trip from downtown to the East End took 100 minutes in 1870. See Port Authority of Allegheny County, “Monongahela, The Past Restored,” undated.
28Tarr, “Infrastructure and City Building,” 229.
29The population in the East End increased 60 percent from 1850 to 1900. See Holmberg, “The Industrializing Community,” 2-3.
30Holmberg, “The Industrializing Community,” 181, 237.


33 Sauers, “Consolidation of the South Side,” 279.

34 Christie, “Notes.”

35 Ibid.


37 Christie, “Notes.”

38 Ibid.

39 Christie, in his “Notes,” records the vote totals as follows: North District 4,131 against merger, 1,677 in favor; South District 1,405 opposed, 754 in favor; Middle District 4,978 in favor, 1,631 opposed. The vote totals for the Middle District outside of Pittsburgh were 1,243 opposed, 917 in favor.

40 Sauers, “Consolidation of the South Side,” 275.

41 Ibid., 275-276. Ormsby, Monongahela, and Mt. Washington boroughs voted in favor of consolidation.

42 Christie, “Notes.”

43 Sauers, “Consolidation of the South Side,” 273.


45 The areas annexed were: Brushton (1894), Beltzhoover (1889), and Esplen, Montooth, Mt. Oliver, Sheridan, West Liberty, Serritt Township, and part of Chartiers Township from 1905-1907. See Thompson, “Financial History of Pittsburgh,” 109.

46 Lawrence Cook, draft of article for Index, April 1905, in Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania Library.

47 Holmberg, “The Industrializing Community,” 2.

48 Ibid., 239.


51 Letter from B. Wharlow (Governor’s Secretary) to Lawrence Cook, April 20, 1905, in Western Pennsylvania Historical Society Library; Lawrence B. Cook, “Article Notes,” dated April 26, 1905, also in Historical Society Library.

52 Cook, “Article Notes.”

53 For example, as of June 1, 1907, the Allegheny City comptroller had been accepting bids for the reproduction of Allegheny City’s official records, presumably in anticipation of the need for additional copies to be kept in different areas of the consolidated city. See Pittsburgh City Records, Dept. of Public Works, Box 19, Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania.

54 The results of the 1906 referendum were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>For Consolidation</th>
<th>Against Consolidation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pittsburgh</td>
<td>Allegheny City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31,116</td>
<td>6,750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>Totals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37,866</td>
<td>17,435</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

55 Tarr, “Infrastructure and City Building,” 228, 244.

56 Teaford, City and Suburb, 94.

57 Lubove, Twentieth Century Pittsburgh, 97-98, Teaford, City and Suburb, 117.

58 Holmberg, “The Industrializing Community,” 325.


61 Tarr, “Infrastructure and City Building,” 235-236.


64 According to Robert Studenski, the central city negotiated the newly acquired neighborhoods’ water contracts. The result was a uniform and cheaper water rate for the annexed areas. See The Government of Metropolitan Areas, 110.

65 The four bridges were: South 22nd Street Bridge (built by the city), South 10th Street Bridge, Smithfield Street Bridge, and Point Bridge. See Thompson, “Financial History of Pittsburgh,” 137.

66 Ibid., 137.

67 For more details about the expansion of the Penn Avenue Act, see Tarr, “Infrastructure and City Building,” 234-235; Thompson, “Financial History of Pittsburgh,” 33-34, 178-179.


70 Ibid., 169, 189.


72 Sauers, “The Consolidation of South Side,” 2, 82-84; Thompson, “Financial History of Pittsburgh,” 169, 189; Studenski, The Government of Metropolitan Areas, 47.


74 City Revenue: 1867 — $600,000; 1879 — $3 million; 1900 — $9.3 million; 1910 — $19 million.

75 City Debts: 1850 — $2.9 million; 1867 — $2.8 million; 1880 — $12.9 million; 1910 — $30.3 million.

76 These same circumstances necessitated the continuation of the South Side bridge tolls.