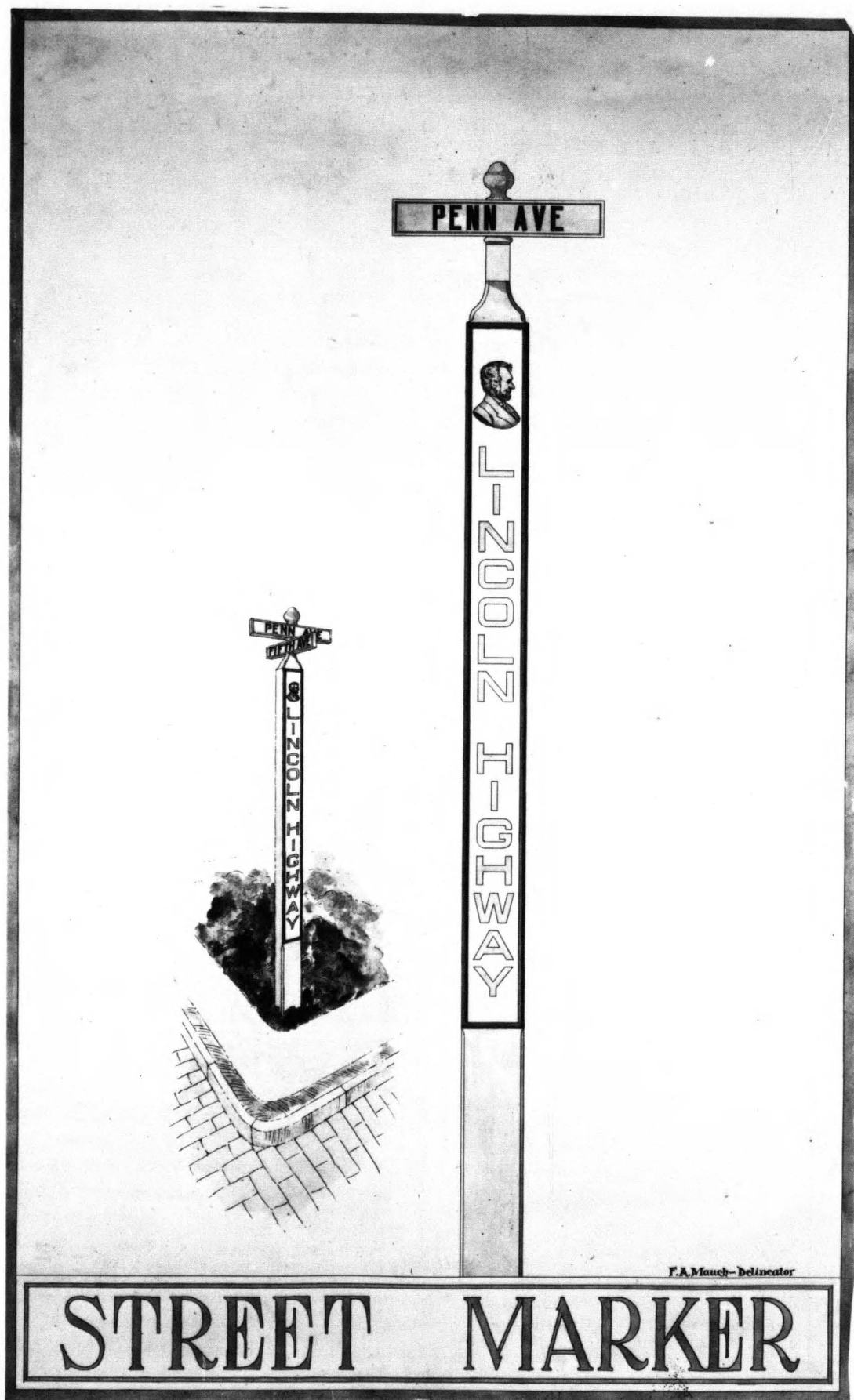
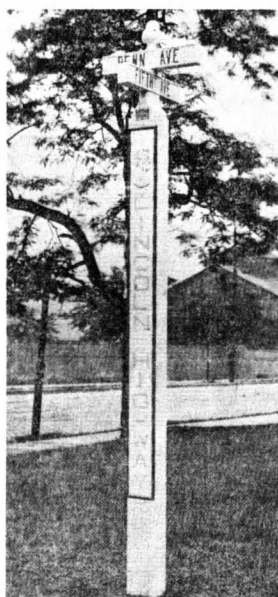


The U.S. government was not yet involved in road building when the Lincoln Highway was established by private interests in 1913. Pittsburgh's Department of Public Works planned to produce 25 of these markers to coincide with a Lincoln Highway publicity caravan passing through in 1915. *Opposite page:* Designed by U.N. Arthur and F.A. Mauch, one marker was actually produced and posted at the intersection of Fifth and Penn avenues in Point Breeze.



Pittsburgh's Lincoln Highway Marker Competition

By Brian A. Butko



WHEN THE LINCOLN Highway was established in 1913, the nation's first coast-to-coast automobile road was simply a line on a map, with no markers along the route. The road was the idea of automobile industry leaders, and it was privately funded by their contributions and \$5 memberships in the Lincoln Highway Association. By 1915, the association began painting directional signs on poles, and in May that year, a special Lincoln Highway caravan set out to promote the road by producing a motion picture of the highway. Pittsburgh prepared for its arrival by designing special route markers, but the project soon erupted into a debate between practical city officials and the desires of local architects.

Records in Carnegie Mellon's Architecture Archives document the debate from its beginning on February 25, 1915, when newspapers first mentioned the city's selection of a marker design. According to the *Pittsburgh Press*, Department of Public Works director Robert Swan "announced that 25 of the markers will be placed at intervals along the route.... The design is the joint work of U.N. Arthur, principal assistant engineer, and F.A. Mauch, the draftsman in the bureau of engineering of the department of public works. Each marker will extend nine feet above the ground. It will be made of a concrete composed of granite chips and cement."

Charles Ingham, secretary of the Pittsburgh Chapter of the American Institute of Architects (A.I.A.), contacted Swan to express his group's feeling that "the design of these markers which appeared in the daily papers some time ago might be considerably

improved if more study were given it." The city's Art Commission also asked to be involved in the project, and Swan wrote to commission assistant secretary Frederick Bigger that some of the markers had already been ordered: "I did not know that matters of this kind would come before the Art Commission at all, as it is simply a street sign modified to indicate the Lincoln Highway. I enclose you, however, a copy of the plan."

Bigger replied that the Art Commission "examined the design for the Lincoln Highway marker and cannot find it acceptable," and that Swan should "obtain studies for such markers and submit them to the Commission." A response was sent to the commission May 6 from Charles Graham, chairman of the Pittsburgh Chamber of Commerce Special Committee on Good Roads (and vice president of Graham Nut Co. on Neville Island), stating that "quick action is necessary" if any new designs were to be considered. He said the city's design was approved by the boroughs the road traversed in Allegheny County, and more interestingly, he noted it had been submitted to the Lincoln Highway Association, which found it "the most attractive on the route between New York and San Francisco."

Despite this assurance of its aesthetic merits, more members of the Art Commission now got involved. Charles Armstrong (founder of Armstrong Cork) and William L. Mellon (a president of the Monongahela Steet Railway Co. and a founder and president of Gulf Oil) visited Swan and reported that the Public Works director felt "most of the criticisms from the Art Commission have not been specially helpful to his Department" and that Swan had "already taken bids for the Lincoln Highway markers [for]... \$33.00 each."

Armstrong persisted, however, and on May 13, Bigger invited architects to submit a design based on conditions he drew up "personally (and unofficially) for a public spirited citizen," who

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was Armstrong. It wasn't to be a public competition because he was "forced to act quickly," but \$25 was offered for a design of either cement or iron. Bigger wrote Armstrong that this met with Swan's approval, and that at least four, and possibly 11, prominent men or firms would submit designs — one he was certain of was Ingham and Boyd, designers of the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania building at 4338 Bigelow Boulevard.

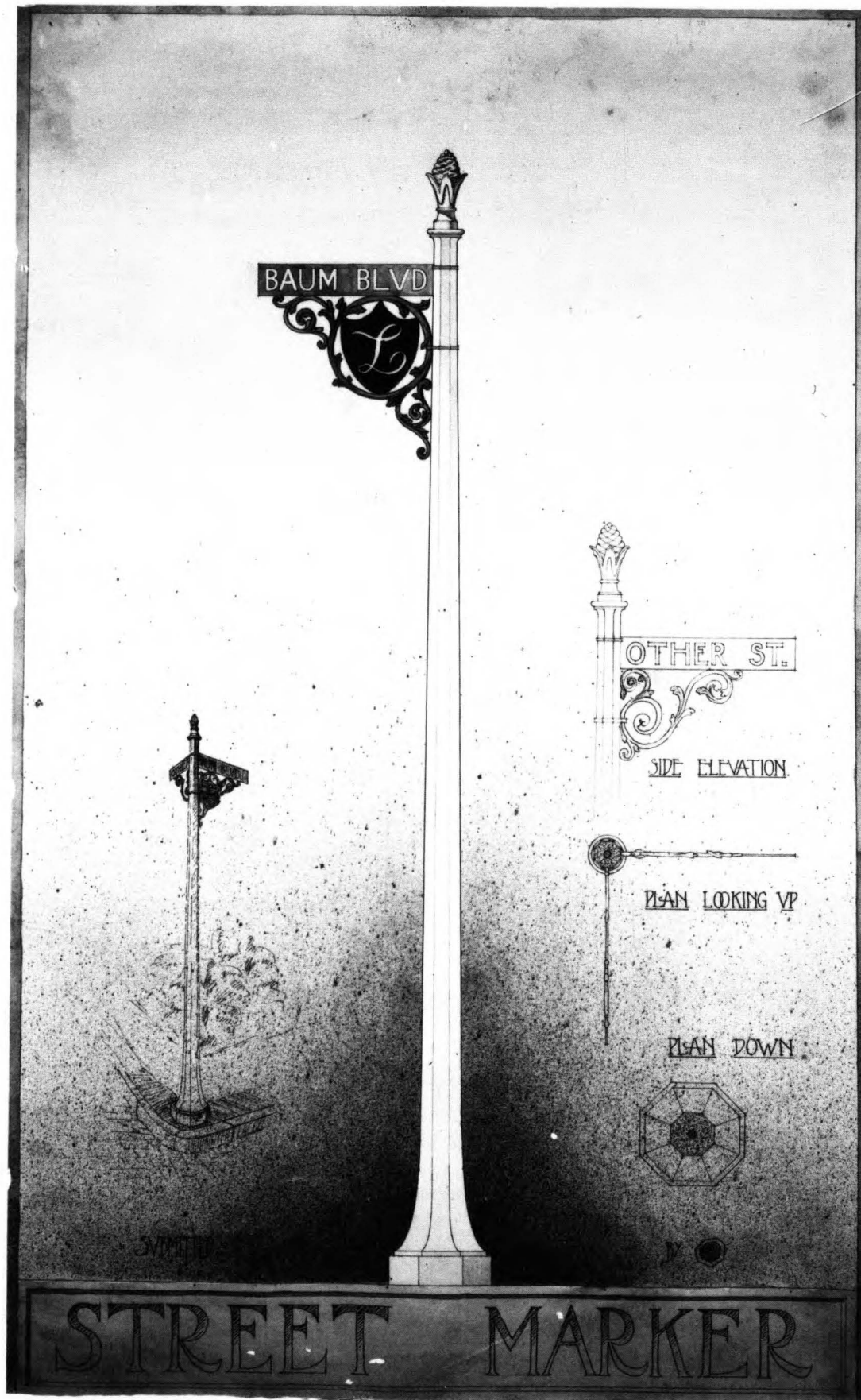
News of the debate reached New York, where Hermon MacNeil wrote Bigger, "The same question came up in our New York Commission only recently, but the designs were very poor. It is a difficult thing to select a street and increase its importance or dignity by merely adding some rather unimportant feature.... I think the idea of a prize is a good one only I wish it had been large enough to attract real talent."

On May 21, Bigger mailed a new marker proposal to over 100 members of the Pittsburgh Architectural Club and A.I.A. chapter, with Armstrong boosting the prize to \$50. Bigger, in fact, was also now acting as chairman of the A.I.A. chapter's Lincoln Highway Committee, and the proposal stated his hope that the winning design might be adopted for the route's entire length. Submissions were to be signed by pseudonym or symbol, and

were due June 3. However, a May 27 photo in the *Pittsburgh Gazette Times* showed the original city-designed marker already in place at the intersection of Fifth and Penn avenues. The accompanying story relates there was "no certainty that the other markers along the route through Pittsburgh will be of the same design, as several designs are under consideration," but that Swan wanted "a marker in position when the [Lincoln Highway] caravan arrives," a few days hence.

Nine designs were submitted for the competition, including one by renowned architect Frederick Scheibler. Another was from Sue Watson, a surprise in a male-dominated field. The designs were judged June 18, too late for the caravan's visit. The winner was #7, Raymond Marlier, who received the \$50, but ironically, no known record survives of his design and there is no indication it was ever produced. The brouhaha ended with Bigger informing Swan of his committee's decision and that if Swan's Department of Public Works approved the design, the Art Commission still wanted to restudy it for final approval. Swan was also told that if he wished "to submit a new design, it will be very gladly considered by the Commission." Four months having passed since the city's original design debuted, Swan probably declined the offer. 🌀





The only surviving entry from the Pittsburgh Art Commission competition is this rendering of a shield and vines atop a pole. Being the sole survivor, perhaps it was the winner. *Opposite page:* By 1920, the Lincoln Highway Association had begun standardizing its markers. Here, a crew posts a red, white, and blue porcelain sign in front of Carnegie Library in Oakland, accompanied by two Autocar trucks (a company founded in Pittsburgh but by then in Ardmore near Philadelphia). Five years later, the U.S. government established a road numbering system to supercede the confusion of named highways.