

One Month  
in the Summer  
of '63:  
Pittsburgh  
Prepares  
for the

# Civil War



The remains of Fort Black in the Greenfield area of Pittsburgh (c. 1895) don't convey the fact that it was the only true "fort" to defend Pittsburgh in the Civil War (see page 163). The man is standing in the trench area outside the fort's former earthen walls.

By Bill McCarthy

*Part I, presented in the Fall issue, detailed how Pittsburghers spent June 1863 preparing for a Confederate invasion. Please note that citation numbers continue from Part I.*

**B**Y JULY 1, the people of Pittsburgh sensed the threat of a Confederate invasion had passed. Reports coming back from Gettysburg, combined with excitement for the coming 4th of July celebration, calmed their fears. Completing the ring of forts around the city did not excite the same spirit that had spawned the construction. Though some of the defenses remained unfinished, the general view was that enough work had been done.<sup>98</sup>

Newspapers fell silent in their accounts of the defense-building, as public attention was riveted on the aftermath of Gettysburg and the impending first-time military draft. A raid through Ohio by the Confederate John Hunt Morgan made the papers in late July, but Pittsburgh was never seriously threatened. Also that month, Captain Craighill of the Corps of Engineers ordered a map drawn of the defenses — the main branch of the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh holds the

Bill McCarthy is a doctoral student at West Virginia University who holds M.A. degrees in history and archaeology from the University of Pittsburgh. This article is adapted from his master's thesis in archaeology, which is more comprehensive and contains complete footnotes. Anyone interested in seeing all of McCarthy's research may contact Pitt's anthropology department or visit the library at the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania, where an unabridged copy is available.

“Craighill map,” which has become the primary source for anyone looking for the forts.

By August, only a small federal recruiting command and provost guard remained in Pittsburgh.<sup>99</sup> One 20th century historian proposed that federal troops occupied the forts<sup>100</sup>, but in all war records, only the fort on Herron's Hill is said to have been manned.<sup>101</sup> It's likely, in fact, that the majority of fortifications were never even completed.<sup>102</sup>

The forts were relegated to the role of historic curiosities — returned to farmland or subjected to the needs of a growing city. By the early 1900s, “some of these grass-grown forts” were visible on the landscape, commented author Sarah Killikelly, “but many of them have been removed, because there is only room in Pittsburgh for great industries and places for the people whose vitality give it life.”<sup>103</sup> In 1908, John Boucher acknowledged the destruction of some of the fort sites, but with a preservationists' plea: “[W]ith the extensive upbuilding of the cities they have nearly all disappeared. If some parts of them could be preserved they would one day be regarded as of great historical interest.”<sup>104</sup>

Although the appeal went unheeded, the Western Pennsylvania Historical Survey still noted random scars.<sup>105</sup> In 1963, on the 100th anniversary of the fortification effort, *Pittsburgh Press* writer Gilbert Love was unable to find any trace of the works by using the Craighill Map.<sup>106</sup>

**Situated atop a ridge, Fort McKeever offered a superior position for defending Allegheny City (present-day North Side) against a river assault. (See page 159.)**

A few remnants do remain, but there is little indication of the many miles of trenches and strong-points. The best documentation of the defenses is a collection of 30 photographs in the Pennsylvania Room of the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh in Oakland, taken by a Dr. David R. Breed in the 1890s.<sup>107</sup>

In hindsight, the fortification may seem extreme, but contemporary authors Margaret Deland and Judge Thomas Mellon both considered the scare all too real.<sup>108</sup> Deland remembered, as a child, fearing that Confederate soldiers were under her bed at night,<sup>109</sup> while Judge Mellon recalled his worries about a \$30,000 investment in a fleet of coal barges anchored at McKeesport;<sup>110</sup> both also recalled people burying their valuables.

For those living through the scare, the threat was indeed imminent.<sup>111</sup>



## Fort Construction

Commentators have tended to call nearly any defensive construction a “fort,” but only one bastion — Fort Black in Greenfield — appears to have been a true fort in the system. Instead, Pittsburgh’s Civil War defenses were earthworks — redoubts supported by batteries, trenches, and defensive moats. Each of these terms describes a type of construction, and a little explanation of the terms will help avoid further confusion:

- A fort has re-entering angles along its walls or at the corners to provide for a complete field of fire.

- A redoubt is a detached outerwork near a fort without flanking defenses, generally circular or square.

- A battery was a simple defensive work for a six-gun artillery unit of men and cannon.

Additional constructions included ditches or moats around the outer area of a construction, with the whole supported by trenches or rifle pits for the infantry soldiers.

By the mid-19th century, low-profile earth forts had become the norm. Brick forts like Sumter and Pulaski were pounded into submission by new and improved ordnance, while earthworks at Vicksburg and Port Hudson abetted draws. These lessons were not lost to the military staff at Pittsburgh.

The earth walls of the redoubts and batteries stood 5 to 6 feet above the ground.<sup>112</sup> Ditches or moats at their outer base were at least that deep, providing a sloping wall up to 20 feet tall. The redoubts ranged from 65 to 90 yards in diameter.<sup>113</sup>

A final feature of the fortifications was a powder magazine. Due to the dependence on uncased powder for firing weapons in battle, it was crucial to have a secure and dry place to store it — generally underground inside the earthworks.<sup>114</sup> At least two powder magazines are believed to have been detached from their forts — both protected by what are described as brick constructions.

The building process at a fort followed a simple schedule of activity. Engineers in charge lined off a full-scale plan with pegs and string, from which workers dug moats and trenches while piling up the removed dirt for earth walls or related features. Given the hurried construction schedule, it’s doubtful that Pittsburghers employed proper military construction to reinforce the walls. This was otherwise accomplished by adding bundles of sticks (“fascines”) or wicker baskets filled with earth (“gabions”).

The fortifications were planned to include a fearsome armament, including the huge Pittsburgh-made Columbiads and other guns from the Allegheny Arsenal, but it appears the sites were never fully armed, if at all. The *Pittsburgh Gazette* of July 4 announced a meeting that morning of a committee on hauling guns to the forts, but by then, the Confederates were retreating to Virginia.

The list that follows uses the original names of the forts. Many of the works had alternate names bestowed by locals — these are shown in parentheses. The five North Side forts were also numbered during construction, but the system was never used at the other forts.

## North Side

### Fort McKee (Fort No. 1)

Type: Redoubt

Location: Colfax Street, a block from Island Avenue.

Remains: None. The precise fort site is believed to be beneath the cleaning facility of a hospital linen service.

Located on “Cemetery Hill” in the Manchester neighborhood of the North Side, the redoubt provided security for the strategically important railroad yards serving the old North Shore. The fort was remembered in the 1930s as having stood on the high ground north of Sunday Street and west of Sedgewick Street, above the railroad tracks. It disappeared with the subsequent development of the hilltop, now the California-Kirkbride neighborhood.

This fort has sometimes been called Fort Brunot in error, after its proximity to Brunots Island.

### Fort Brunot (Fort McKeever; Fort No. 2)

Type: Redoubt

Location: The grounds of the Pressley Ridge School on Marshall Avenue, opposite houses numbered 525 to 543.

Remains: The fort was visible well into the 20th century, but no trace is apparent today. A slope southwest and just behind the school grounds may represent the fort wall beneath modern fill.

The second North Side strong-point guarded the ridge running northeast from Allegheny City along Black Lane (now Marshall Avenue). It was named for lawyer and relief worker Felix R. Brunot, but was widely referred to as Fort McKeever (the landowner). Unlike the other forts, this one was square-shaped. It is also one of the few forts completed.

### (Fort No. 3)

Type: Redoubt

Location: A rise circled by Marshall Avenue, Perrysville Avenue, and Marshall Road.

Remains: None. Housing covers the area.

Another redoubt further north on the ridge from the site of Fort Brunot guarded the intersection of Black Lane (Marshall Avenue) and Perrysville Road, a critical avenue during the war.

### Fort Fulton (Fort No. 4)

Type: Redoubt

Location: A rise immediately west of the North View Heights housing project. The site is reached from I-279 North via Mount Pleasant Road and then either via an unnamed dead-end road or an access road to a radio tower.

Remains: Though the eastern half of the fort was removed for the radio tower, some of the tower’s supports are anchored into the old fort wall. The area around the wall is wooded but in

an excellent state of preservation, with the outer ditch visible.

Fort Fulton guarded Butchers Run Valley and Plank Road, east across a valley from Fort No. 3. Built on an abandoned orchard, it was said to be circular with an interior diameter of 75 yards, and a defensive moat at least 6 feet deep. In 1962, the City of Pittsburgh Housing Authority opened the 999-unit Northview Heights adjacent to the site.

How the fort got its name is uncertain, though it may have come from Reynolds John Fulton, a popular brigadier general who commanded local volunteers.

### **(Fort No. 5)**

Type: Redoubt

Location: St. Nicholas Cemetery, Reserve Township. A 20th century writer located this fort at Maryland and Logan streets, which, being a valley bottom, must be an approximate reference. Logan Street crests just below the cemetery at "Lowrie's hill," a more likely ridge-top site.

Remains: None.

The eastern reach of the North Hills' defenses ended far to the northeast above Girty's Run and the borough of Millvale. This isolated fort also guarded against a possible invasion via the Allegheny River. The fort is best known for using black labor squads from Allegheny City.

The 1985 Pittsburgh Archaeological Resources & National Register Survey incorrectly mapped this site as Fort McKeever.

## **East End**

### **(unidentified)**

Type: Redoubt

Location: Three writers earlier this century concluded the redoubt was in Highland Park, but a 1938 article in the *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine* placed it in Morningside. The Craighill Map shows the redoubt near the 62nd Street Bridge, supporting Morningside as the location. An elderly city resident recently recalled it there north of Greenwood Street as one ascends the hill from Duffield Street.

Remains: None. The above-mentioned resident remembered as a child playing on an "earthen mound" surrounded by trenches.

The northeastern-most defense of the East End faced the Morningside Valley. The area was sparsely populated, but during the building of 600 new houses in the '20s the site apparently was razed.

### **(unidentified)**

Type: Battery

Location: The works roughly followed the course of Duffield Street.

Remains: None.

This defense on the western ridge of the Morningside Valley supported the redoubt (preceding entry) but is unknown beyond a reference on the Craighill Map.

### **Fort Croghan**

Type: Battery

Location: A rise overlooking the juncture of Stanton Avenue and Morningside Street.

Remains: An earthen wall survives and an eroded trench is visible beyond, but the ground is mostly wooded. It is uncertain whether nearby depressions were part of the works.

In the 1840s, William Croghan Jr. built a residence called Picnic House for his daughter, Mary Croghan Schenley, in what was later called Stanton Heights. The battery stood in the southeastern corner of the Schenley estate. The *Pittsburgh Gazette* of July 3, 1863, observed the battery was named for Croghan.

### **Fort Negley**

Type: Redoubt

Location: Hillcrest Street, off North Fairmont.

Remains: A slope below the eastern edge of a playground may represent a remnant. Its curvature is reminiscent of ruins seen elsewhere, but a definite association cannot be made.

One of the first sites selected for fortification was described as "beyond the [Allegheny] cemetery, near Judge Mellon's," placing it near the Thomas Mellon residence on North Negley Avenue. His home became a reference point for the defenses, with this redoubt on the crest to the immediate rear (west). The fort was likely named for landowner Jacob Negley and for an adjacent settlement called Negleytown, but there also were a number of Negley men who may have been honored for their war service.

### **(unidentified)**

Type: Battery

Location: A hillside above Negley Avenue facing east, just downhill from Fort Negley.

Remains: None.

The Craighill Map indicates a battery southeast of Fort Negley, to the south and east. It may be the construction site from which workers raided the Mellon orchards (mentioned in Par I), forcing young Andrew Mellon to stand guard.

### **(unidentified)**

Type: Battery

Location: An unimproved dirt path and public stairway above Winebiddle Street at Hillcrest Street.

Remains: None. A low ridge on the northern edge of the Fort Pitt School playing field (beyond a chain-link fence) gives the appearance of being pierced for gun ports but is, instead, the result of grading for the field.

A strong-point was built on the western edge of a triangular rise behind the Mellon home to complement Fort Negley. The *Pittsburgh Evening Chronicle* of June 16, 1863, described constructions in the area: "The works thrown up on Davis' hill beyond the cemetery, though less extensive than those on Herron's Hill, are very judiciously located ... for the protection of the arsenal." Residential encroachment and construction of the school in 1906 erased the site.



**The photographer of this fort site in the 1890s reported that this redoubt was in St. Clair Township. Its exact location, however, is not certain.**

**The strategic value of Fort Croghan, its earthen walls and trenchline obvious in this 1890s image, was its overlook of a vital approach from the east — the Pittsburgh-Greensburg Turnpike (Penn Avenue). Today, this fort would defend Highland Park from the rise near Stanton Avenue and Morningside Street.**

**(unidentified)**

Type: Battery

Location: Winebiddle Street, south of Penn Avenue, in Bloomfield.

Remains: None.

This works at the southern base of Davis Hill in Bloomfield guarded the city's eastern approach by way of the Pittsburgh-Greensburg Turnpike (now Penn Avenue). Land owner Conrad Winebiddle developed a suburban community here (1870-1905), obscuring the site with brick tenements.

**(unidentified)**

Type: Battery

Location: St. Francis Hospital on Penn Avenue, Lawrenceville, where the hospital borders Allegheny Cemetery.

Remains: None.

Both the Pittsburgh-Greensburg Turnpike (Penn Avenue) and Allegheny Arsenal were protected by this battery. It sat on the north side of the road, at a bend to the southwest.



### (unidentified)

Type: Battery

Location: North end of the Bloomfield Bridge, from between the railroad tracks and 39th Street to just below the intersection of Main Street and Penn Avenue.

Remains: None.

A fortification near the foot of Herron's Hill guarded both a depression called "Skunk Hollow" and the Pittsburgh-Greensburg Turnpike. A railroad mainline reached the city through the hollow, lending this battery a critical strategic value.

## Uptown

### Fort Herron (Fort Herron Hill)

Type: Battery

Location: Herron Hill Reservoir. Coincidentally, this location figures into the defenses of an earlier day, as stone was quarried here for Fort Pitt.

Remains: None.

Considered critical to the city's defenses, this fort was one of the few completed and manned. The *Dispatch* of June 16 suggested naming the earthworks Fort Ely, after "an accomplished young lady residing in this vicinity and formerly connected with the treasury department in Washington City," but the following day's *Pittsburgh Gazette* named it Fort Herron to honor the late Colonel John Herron.

The fort was destroyed in 1872 for the reservoir, though auxiliary entrenchments survived. The *Pittsburgh Post* of September 1, 1901, ran two photos of these ruins, and the *Pittsburgh Gazette* of May 14, 1905, described them as partly washed out and holding stagnant pools of water. Rifle pits lower down the hill and facing eastward survived into the 1920s. Earlier development obliterated a line of trenches along the course of Iowa Street west toward to present-day Oakland.

### Fort Anderson

Type: Battery

Location: Along University Drive in the "upper campus" of the University of Pittsburgh in Oakland.

Remains: None.

The Oakland district of the city was a mix of farmland and expensive suburban housing when a battery was posted above Fifth Avenue, the main thoroughfare to Pittsburgh. This is believed to be the Fort Anderson mentioned by Fleming as a "smaller fort in the same view" as Herron's Hill. The *Pittsburgh Gazette* of June 17, 1863, linked its name to Colonel James Anderson, late father-in-law of John Herron (for whom Fort Herron was named).

### Fort Zug

Type: Battery

Location: Believed to be the ridgetop behind the Fifth Avenue entrance to Carlow College, but its location is not confirmed; another possibility is on the South Side.

Remains: None. Expansion of the college razed the battery.

Today's "West Oakland" section of Pittsburgh was a retreat for the city's elites when a battery was constructed above it, approximating the property of iron magnate and industrialist Christian Zug. The *Pittsburgh Evening Gazette* of June 27, 1863, noted 50 young men of Iron City College were assigned to "Fort Zug."

### (unidentified)

Type: Battery

Location: In the vicinity of Burrows Street, Upper Hill District.

Remains: None; obliterated by public housing.

This fortified peak was known as "Gazzam's Hill" for William Gazzam. A small gully (along Robinson Street) broke the cliff face of the eastern hills, which shift at that point from a south to southeast facing. The battery took advantage of this shift to guard the Monongahela River terrace approach to Pittsburgh.

### (unidentified)

Type: Battery

Location: The 1938 Western Pennsylvania Historical Survey placed this fort above Soho Street, where Allequippa Street begins, in the Upper Hill District. Modern construction has obscured this reference, but it appears to be the rise at the northern end of the Birmingham Bridge near the battery site described in the previous entry.

Remains: None.

An earthworks was built where the cliff face again turned south to guard the Soho district, a small industrial suburb on the city's fringe with iron mills and manufacturing plants crowding the Monongahela waterfront. The fort followed the angle of the cliff face, stopping short of an indentation in the hillside (Kirkpatrick Street). The Craighill Map shows two batteries completing this movement, but they are being regarded as one due to their proximity.

## Greenfield

### Fort Black (Fort Chess, Fort Lytle, Fort Squirrel Hill)

Type: Fort

Location: Bigelow Street between Parade and Shields streets in Pittsburgh's Greenfield neighborhood.

Remains: None.

The largest of the defenses, this was also the only true fort. Its regular protrusions along the walls eliminated areas where attackers could hide out of sight from defenders above; such construction permitted soldiers on top of the wall to fire at attackers along its entire length.

Fort Black guarded against a Confederate approach along the Monongahela terrace. Over the years, the fort was known by four different names. Its formal name was apparently to honor Colonel Sam Black, a wealthy socialite killed in battle the previous year.

Lytle was the landowner; Chess was a coal mine operator who closed his works to oversee production; and later development of the hilltop into Squirrel Hill added another name.

The ruins stood well into the 20th century, when kids rigged a swing from the gate post to ride out over the ditch. This pit filled with water, creating a small lake for winter skating. A photograph in the *Pittsburgh Post* of September 1, 1901, shows boys playing baseball inside the old ramparts. Legend holds that baseball great Honus Wagner planned to buy the property and convert the parade ground into a ready-made ballfield, but abandoned the idea after some old timbers fell on two boys, crushing one to death. The fort subsequently returned to something of its original intent when soldiers trained there during World War I. Afterward, the Peoples Natural Gas Co. drilled for gas with an apparent lack of success. In 1928, local residents reported the Ku Klu Klan holding rallies at the fort, with cross-burnings visible for miles. Later that year, the fort was razed for housing.

### (unidentified)

Type: Powder magazine

Location: The northeast corner of Beechwood Boulevard at Kaercher Street.

Remains: None.

A brick powder magazine was built near Fort Black on Squirrel Hill Road, now Beechwood Boulevard but then an unimproved path. Following the war, its powder was sold to local farmers to blast stumps from their fields. The magazine was destroyed for housing.

## Turtle Creek

### (unidentified)

Type: Redoubt

Location: Off Wolff Avenue overlooking the present-day boroughs of Braddock and Turtle Creek behind Braddock Cemetery on McKinney's Hill.

Remains: None. The presumed site has been altered through modern strip-mining activity.

The Turtle Creek valley was a major manufacturing and shipping center — the Port Perry sawmill achieved a measure of local fame for producing some 2 million gunstocks during the war. Also, a recruiting and training ground called Camp Copeland was set up on Braddock's Field.

Pittsburgh's defense committee ordered Turtle Creek fortified, especially to protect the Pennsylvania Railroad's yard. Andrew Carnegie, then the railroad's district superintendent, was named to the defense committee, but despite the railroad's concern, this work did not progress far. The *Pittsburgh Evening Chronicle* of July 2, 1863, complained there was no one on the grounds responsible for paying the workers' wages, thereby slowing the work. With the crisis passing by that date, it's doubtful the works were ever completed.

## South Hills

### Fort Robert Smalls

Type: Redoubt

Location: The slight rise beside Devlin Street and St. Peter's Cemetery (Arlington Heights).

Remains: None. Obliterated by World War II public housing.

The defenses on the south bank of the Monongahela spanned the rise between Saw Mill Run in the west and Becks Run in the east. A redoubt overlooking the mouth of Becks Run guarded against a raid up the south bank of the Monongahela. This was the site where Pittsburgh's black citizens primarily worked. The *Pittsburgh Gazette* of July 4 gave notice that "the colored men who had been working upon McGuire's Hill desired to have their fort named 'Fort Robert Smalls' after the intrepid Charleston pilot. It was unanimously ordered that the fort be so named."

A 1929 newspaper article described the walls as still 4 or 5 feet tall.

### Fort Laughlin (Fort Ormsby; Fort McKinley)

Type: Redoubt

Location: Arlington Park, south of the 2200 block of Arlington Avenue along the bluffs of the Monongahela River above South Side. It is bounded by Fernleaf, Salisbury, and Sterling streets and an alley appropriately named Fort Hill Street.

Remains: None. The fort was completely destroyed in building the park.

The heights overlooking the Jones and Laughlin mills were fortified by company employees who christened the works Fort Laughlin. Locals took to calling it Fort Ormsby after landowner Dr. John Ormsby. The fort has sometimes been referred to as Fort McKnight or McKinley, names which may refer to a different site.

One resident of the 1920s remembered the fort amid a "sea of green fields ... so peaceful and so beautiful." Another described the ruins as "a big circle, perhaps 90 feet across." Residents still refer to the play area as "the fort."

### Fort Jones

Type: Redoubt

Location: St. Joseph's Church, 438 Ormsby Ave., Mt. Oliver (in the South Side's "hilltop" district).

Remains: No trace of the fort survives, though its hilltop location is readily apparent on the church grounds.

The name of this defense undoubtedly indicates another construction of Jones and Laughlin employees', but a good deal of confusion surrounds the name. One 20th century historian believed it to be Fort McKinley. A 1985 archaeological resources survey mistakenly placed Fort Jones atop Mt. Washington, based on a misleading label in the Breed photographs held at Carnegie Library. Breed was apparently unaware of Fort Jones' having been razed at the end of the war. Being informed that Fort Jones was next in the sequence after Fort Laughlin, he mistakenly ascribed the name to the next visible ruins, being Fort Mechanic (listed below).



Few of the 30-odd forts in the area were completed once the Confederate threat proved to be false. Fort Brunot (page 159) on the North Side's Marshall Avenue was finished, and is the area's only redoubt known to use a square plan.



**Most fort sites, like this area off Fingal Street on Mt. Washington, are little more than forgotten urban lots today, with Mother Nature in charge. An artillery battery at the site allowed a commanding defense of the West End area of Temperanceville.**

**(unidentified)**

Type: Redoubt

Location: The site is crossed by Proctor Way, on a rise between Arlington Avenue and Amanda Street, in the Allentown section of the South Hills.

Remains: None.

The old Brownsville Road (Arlington Avenue) crossed through the eastern edge of the Joseph Allen farm, curving around the base of a steep rise. The Craighill Map indicates an unnamed redoubt overlooking the roadway. The fort was razed for residential development.

**(unidentified)**

Type: Battery

Location: The site is believed to be on a crest east of Grandview Park, roughly the course of McLain Street starting from Beltzhoover Boulevard.

Remains: None. Housing covers the approximate location.

An otherwise unknown battery is shown on the Craighill Map just north and west of the redoubt on the Allen property.

### **(unidentified)**

Type: Redoubt

Location: Grandview Park at the juncture of Beltzhoover and Bailey avenues. An alternative access is off Beltzhoover Avenue before this juncture via Tank Way.

Remains: None. The fort was destroyed by construction of water tanks.

Before late 19th century development totally dismantled the Allen farm, parcels on its fringe were sold to other farmers. A redoubt was placed on the highest point of a tract which included the rise north and east of the crossroads near the Allen homestead.

In the late 19th century, the Monongahela Water Co. of Pittsburgh purchased a small section of this hilltop and graded the site for construction of water storage tanks. The remaining 18 acres of farm were sold to the city by George T. Robinson in 1879 for a park, which today includes a concrete overlook. Some authors have suggested the park was the site of Fort McKnight (described below), but the park appears to be more westerly on the ridge.

### **(unidentified)**

Type: Powder magazine

Location: Warrington Avenue at Beltzhoover Avenue.

Remains: None.

This magazine was reported in a neighborhood history but is otherwise unknown.

### **Fort Mechanic**

Type: Battery

Location: A crest behind a current radio tower and a neighboring apartment building numbered 122 Bailey Avenue.

Remains: No visible trace is apparent. The cut of the Castle Shannon Incline provides a clear profile view of the fort site.

The completed fort was the scene of a public gathering and flag-raising on June 27, 1863. The construction of the Castle Shannon Incline in the late 19th century destroyed the eastern portion of Fort Mechanic, but remnants survived through the first decade of the 20th century. Housing developments and street grading reduced it more, and a tenement was built over the last remaining portion.

### **Fort McKnight**

Type: Redoubt

Location: The playing field behind Prospect School at Prospect and Cowan streets, Mt. Washington.

Remains: None. Dense urbanization of the late 19th century obliterated the fort.

A young boy mentioned in a 1923 citation was hired to carry water during the fort's construction, and he recalled traveling William Street (old Washington Road) and remembered a finished fort. The name may refer to Joseph McKnight or William McKnight of the Executive Committee for Public Defense, though this is uncertain. This site was later surrounded by several

streets named for Civil War battles and ships. Mt. Washington School was built on the site in 1871, and its name was changed later to Prospect School, before being demolished in 1931 for a new Prospect School.

### **(unidentified)**

Type: Redoubt

Location: The fort was in a block bounded by Virginia Avenue, and Oneida, Meridan, and Sycamore streets, just behind the upper station of the Duquesne Heights Incline.

Remains: None.

An 1852 map illustrates the Lewis estate on Duquesne Heights as a proper gentleman's retreat with a manor house and well-delineated fields. A coal mine made shipments to the South Side "flats" via one of the city's first inclines.

The Civil War intruded on this setting with an earthwork constructed to the estate's rear. It was from here that workers damaged and stole the farm produce, necessitating an armed guard and indirectly leading to "the Coal Hill shooting affair" referred to in Part I of this article.

### **(unidentified)**

Type: Redoubt

Location: The site is uncertain but is believed to approximate the short circular path of Reese Street, north of Fingal and off Rutledge Street.

Remains: None.

This works overlooking the juncture of Saw Mill Run and the Ohio River is known only through the Craighill Map. Like Mt. Washington proper, it was subjected to urbanization in the late 19th century. Today, housing and radio station WBBZ-FM occupy the site.

### **(unidentified)**

Type: Battery

Location: A wooded area west of a ballfield near the northern end of Fingal Street. The site is accessed by a track branching from Lizardi Way, off Greenleaf Street.

Remains: The battery was lost through grading for the ballfield at the head of Bradley Street. Dumping has extended the cliff face beyond its past reach, but an exposed portion of the original terrace shows what is believed to be an eroded U-shaped trench remnant, with the U's upper arms disappearing beneath modern fill.

The battery, south of the redoubt cited in the preceding entry, is likewise unknown except for the Craighill Map. The location was critical for the defense of Temperanceville (West End), a burgeoning industrial community. Access to Mt. Washington was provided by a steep, dirt track known as Old Township Road, and the fortification was placed to guard this pathway.

### **(unidentified)**

Type: Redoubt

Location: A hilltop near the south end of Fingal Street, within



the confines of the Duquesne Heights Greenway, an unimproved nature reserve of the City of Pittsburgh.

Remains: Described in 1938 as “clearly discernible,” this remains the best-preserved site of the 1863 scare. It is ring-shaped, with a rear entrance opening to the north. The earthen walls have unevenly eroded from an above-ground height of roughly 6 feet to between 3.5 and 5 feet tall. The defensive moat is seen as a shallow depression circling the rampart, largely filled but quite recognizable. Dumping has littered the site, but it is otherwise intact.

This final redoubt in the South Hills guarded against an enemy movement up the Saw Mill Run valley. One author locates the works on the end of Coal Hill (Mt. Washington), to specifically guard Washington Road (Independence Street) and Noblestown Plank Road (Noblestown Road). This redoubt was placed on the backside of the hill from the rivers, on land owned by Harmar Denny of local political fame. This was undeveloped at the time of the Civil War, and even today remains a wooded tract on the edge of a residential district.

## West End

### (unidentified)

Type: Battery

Location: West End Overlook

Remains: None.

This earthwork was south and nearly opposite Fort McKee (Fort No. 1) across the Ohio River, bringing the defenses full circle around the Pittsburgh area.

This location near the mouth of Saw Mill Run was fortified by the men of Temperanceville to command the river and Allegheny City (Pittsburgh’s North Side). The exact location of the earthwork is uncertain but the logical point would be the West End Overlook, for years ago the ridgetop extended closer to the valley floor. Railroad workers blasting the cliff face for a track bed inadvertently brought down the crest of the hill to form the terrace seen today.

### (unidentified)

Type: Redoubt

Location: A hilltop above East Steuben Street in the Crafton Heights area, bounded by Clairtonica, Round Top, and Strathmore streets. A dead-end off Strathmore called Hollywood Street stops at the approximate interior of the fortification.

Remains: None. The location is now covered with housing.

The *Dispatch* of June 16, 1863, mentioned a final work “projected for the defense of the Chartiers Valley, some five or six miles out” from the city. The work apparently was not intended as part of the proper city defenses, and it’s likely that given the work demands closer to Pittsburgh, this became a solely local effort. An undated clipping from the *Pittsburgh Leader* refers to the

redoubt as the “Crow’s Nest” overlooking the old Steubenville Pike; there is an accompanying photo of the site with a house and out-buildings on it. Slightly wooded tracts border the edges of the block, but dumping has obscured the original contours.

## Conclusion

Pittsburgh’s defense efforts received a lot of press, but little is known today about the actual fort locations. In most cases, the few details that could be patched together are all that is known on sites about which, ironically, thousands once worked or frequently passed.

Of the 30-some strong-points and miles of trench lines, there remain only a few scattered landmarks. Excavations might be undertaken for stabilization and possible reconstruction, but only stray articles and discarded waste from the defense effort might be expected. (A 1926 school field trip “to dig up the remains of rifles and side arms” at massive Fort Black in Greenfield, for instance, produced no artifacts.)

Although little physical evidence of the forts remains, their history still offers the opportunity to interpret a unique piece of Pittsburgh’s past as a 19th century industrial city that, due principally to events in eastern Pennsylvania during the summer of 1863, narrowly avoided military siege. ☀

## Notes

<sup>98</sup> *Daily Post*, July 1, 1863: 3.

<sup>99</sup> *Official Records* Vol. 29, part 3 (1902): 647.

<sup>100</sup> Henry King Siebeneck, *Pittsburgh’s Civil War Fortification Claims* (Pittsburgh, 1944), 11. His assumption that federal troops manned the forts is based on an order of Oct. 10, 1865, which stated that “the United States occupation (of these fortifications) be discontinued without delay.” However, the government wording seems not to imply a prolonged occupation — only that the government relinquished any claim to the fortified sites.

<sup>101</sup> *Official Records* Vol. 29: 647.

<sup>102</sup> George Thornton Fleming, “Fortifying Pittsburgh in 1863,” *Pittsburgh Gazette-Times*, July 1, 1923.

<sup>103</sup> Sarah H. Killikelly, *The History of Pittsburgh* (Pittsburgh, 1906): 470.

<sup>104</sup> John Newton Boucher, *A Century and a half of Pittsburgh and Her People* (Chicago, 1908): 181.

<sup>105</sup> Western Pennsylvania Historical Survey, *Guidebook to Historic Places in Western Pennsylvania* (Pittsburgh, 1938): 7.

<sup>106</sup> Gilbert Love, “Some Relics of the Civil War,” *Pittsburgh Press*, Sept. 4, 1963.

<sup>107</sup> The works are numbered P1715 - 2038.

<sup>108</sup> Margaret Deland, *If This Be I* (New York, 1936): 34-35; Thomas Mellon, *Thomas Mellon and His Times* (Pittsburgh, 1885): 10.

<sup>109</sup> Deland, 33.

<sup>110</sup> Mellon, 356.

<sup>111</sup> George Swetnam, *Thirty Days of Panic* (Pittsburgh, 1968).

<sup>112</sup> *Pittsburgh Gazette*, May 14, 1905; William G. Lytle, Jr., “Pittsburgh Civil War Fort Completed Just As Rebellion Had Been Checked at Gettysburg,” *Pittsburgh Press*, March 24, 1929.

<sup>113</sup> Marie McSwigan, “Remnants of Old Civil War Fort Can Still Be Seen on South Side,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, Feb. 14, 1929; Lytle.

<sup>114</sup> The *Pittsburgh Post* of Sept. 1, 1901 (“Photographic Section,” pg. 1) includes an illustrated identification of a shrub-covered depression of the old powder magazine at Fort McKee (North Hills). Fleming later remembered that on Herron’s Hill, inside the ramparts, was “a massive wooden door which was kept locked.”