



ARCHITECTURE AROUND US

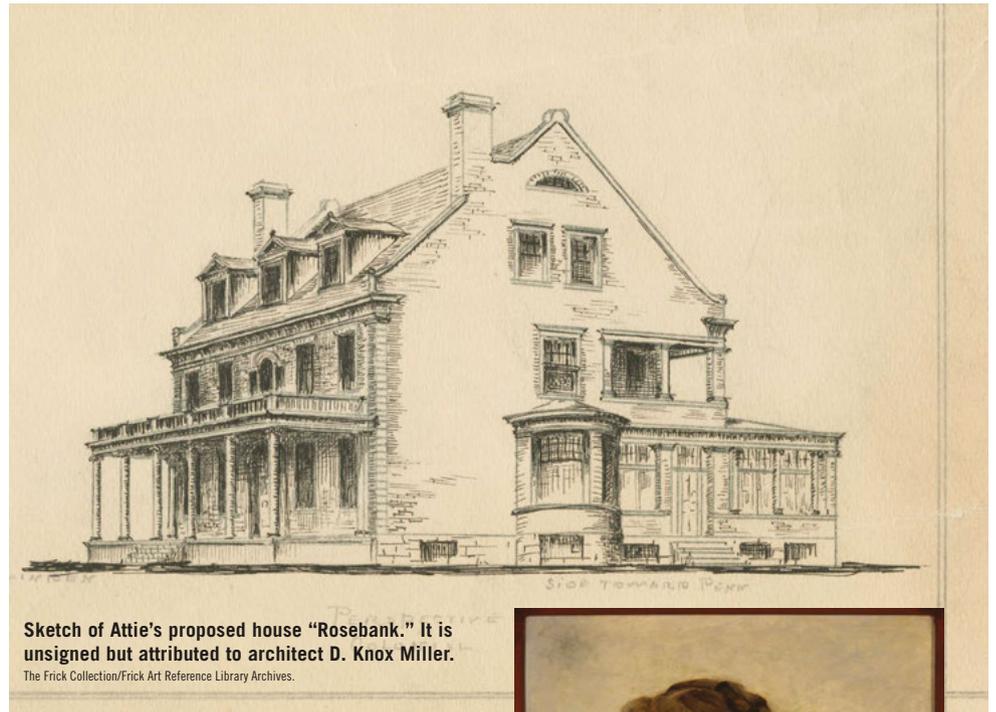
By Lu Donnelly

“Rosebank” or Attie’s House

As early as the 1840s, Boston architectural critic Arthur Gilman was writing glowingly about colonial and early federal period houses in the northeast. By the 1870s, New England architects were scouring the countryside recording surviving buildings of the late 1700s and early 1800s. These published sketches and photographs inspired new designs and, as a recent historian wrote, established “a Colonial Revival vocabulary as one of the dominant and enduring images of American architecture.”¹

The style became even more popular in the United States after those attending the 1893 World’s Columbian Exhibition in Chicago saw the Massachusetts Building designed by the Boston architectural firm of Peabody & Stearns. They based it on the John Hancock House of 1737 on Beacon Hill, which, when it was demolished in 1863, sparked a heated debate about its preservation and prompted a local architect to make a set of measured drawings that were often copied. That house inspired many similar residences across the country including one commissioned by Harvey Childs, Jr., and designed by Peabody & Stearns in 1896, a house now used by the University of Pittsburgh’s chancellor at 718 Devonshire Street. Authors Donald Albrecht and Thomas Mellins maintain that the style offers “a reassuringly familiar sense of home and community. Additionally, it was considered a sound investment.”²

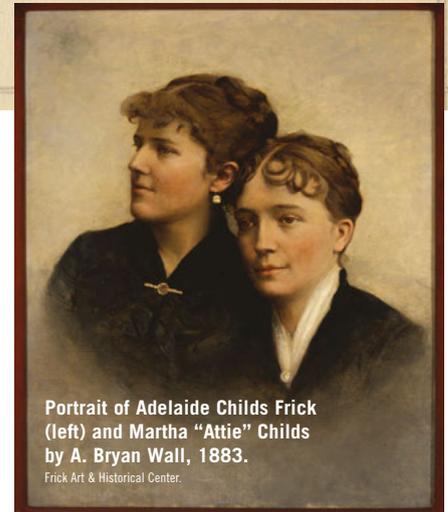
Pittsburgh’s Colonial Revival style houses have varied rooflines—from gambrel, to



Sketch of Attie’s proposed house “Rosebank.” It is unsigned but attributed to architect D. Knox Miller.
The Frick Collection/Frick Art Reference Library Archives.

hip, to gable—but each has a central entry highlighted by a small columned porch or detailed surround and a symmetrical window arrangement across the façade. They are much larger than their colonial predecessors and have all the modern conveniences of their c. 1900 time period.

What sets the house at 206 South Linden Avenue apart from the others isn’t a groundbreaking style, but the patron who commissioned it and its original resident. By 1901, Henry Clay Frick had risen to the heights of the coke and steel businesses. He had settled his dispute with Andrew Carnegie, and the Carnegie Steel Company had become a part of J.P. Morgan’s United States Steel Company. Frick and his family were spending the bulk of their time in New York City in rented space. But his wife, Adelaide Childs Frick, had roots in Pittsburgh. In fact, by 1904 three of Adelaide’s six surviving siblings lived on South Linden Avenue only blocks from H.C. Frick’s house



Portrait of Adelaide Childs Frick (left) and Martha “Attie” Childs by A. Bryan Wall, 1883.
Frick Art & Historical Center.

Clayton.³ For many of their married years Adelaide Frick’s older sister Martha “Attie” Childs lived with them either at Clayton or their summer home Eagle Rock in Pride’s Crossing, Massachusetts. Attie often traveled with the family and when Frick was stabbed at his downtown office in 1892, Attie was called to accompany him back to the house. She was described as “daringly independent and headstrong for a woman of her social standing at that time.”⁴ She never married, but traveled extensively and ultimately had a



**Harvey Childs, Jr., house,
718 Devonshire Street, Pittsburgh.**

Photo by Lu Donnelly.

UP FRONT



Above:
Current photo of “Rosebank,” 206 S. Linden Ave. Notice the shutters and a balustrade at the roofline have been removed, plus the porch supports have been simplified and a balustrade added there.

Photo by Lu Donnelly.

Inset:
Snapshot of “Rosebank” from a Frick family album. The house on the left has been demolished while the house on the right remains.

The Frick Collection/Frick Art Reference Library Archives, (PS-19).

house and an electric car of her own courtesy of her brother-in-law.⁵

In 1901, Frick hired local architect D. (David) Knox Miller to design a house in the style his wife’s cousin Harvey Childs, Jr., had earlier used on Devonshire Street.⁶ The Frick archives in New York have the floor plans and early sketches that illustrate the logic, symmetry, and proportion that are hallmarks of the style. An architectural historian claims that in a time of “strikes, riots and economic depressions” this style offered “rationality and clarity” but also “power ... self-assurance ... [and] good and urbane taste.”⁷ The entrance

hall has a coffered ceiling and a sweeping staircase with a 15-foot-wide landing. Ceilings are 10-foot-tall and the majority of rooms have crown molding. Attie named the finished house Rosebank, as she was very fond of her garden there. The house as it was built varies from the original sketch (a recessed porch on the second floor and sun porch on the first floor were never built), but it has remained remarkably similar to Miller’s original design and is a stellar example of the Colonial Revival style. ☀



Donora Historical Society and Smog Museum

Lu Donnelly is one of the authors of *Buildings of Pennsylvania: Pittsburgh and Western Pennsylvania* (University of Virginia Press, 2010), a book in the 60-volume series on American architecture sponsored by the Society of Architectural Historians titled *Buildings of the United States*. She has authored several books and National Register nominations on Allegheny County topics and organized an exhibition on the barns of western Pennsylvania for the Heinz Architectural Center at the Carnegie Museum of Art.

¹ Keith N. Morgan, ed., *Buildings of Massachusetts: Metropolitan Boston* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009), p. 29.

² Donald Albrecht and Thomas Mellins, *The American Style: Colonial Revival in New York City* (New York: Monacelli Press, 2011), p. 27.

³ Adelaide Frick was one of six surviving Childs siblings, Howard (1852-1911), Martha "Attie" (1855-1914), Asa P., Jr. (1856-1932), Marshall (1858-1916), Adelaide (1859-1931), and James Asa (1865-1916). Marshall had a career in the Army, and was often stationed overseas; in the Pittsburgh Blue Books he listed Attie's house, 206 South Linden Avenue, as his address while abroad.

⁴ Martha Frick Symington Sanger, *Henry Clay Frick: An Intimate Portrait* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1998), pp. 89-90.

⁵ The Frick Collection/Frick Art Reference Library Archives, Henry Clay Frick papers, Series: Voucher Files, include a receipt for the electric car, dated December 6, 1911, a Model 95 Waverley Electric costing \$2,500, a Christmas gift from "Clay." The garage at "Rosebank" was built after the house, probably about 1911 or 1912. Thanks to Julie Ludwig, Associate Archivist.

⁶ Department of Public Safety, Bureau of Building Inspection, City of Pittsburgh, Volume 18, September 30, 1901, p. 82, "Two story plus attic (13 rooms) brick dwelling for Miss M. Childs. Builder, G. A. Cochran, for \$16,000." Frick's name is recorded in pencil beside "Miss M. Childs" crossed out.

⁷ Mark Gelernter, *A History of American Architecture: Buildings in their Cultural and Technological Context* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1999), p. 202.

- The Donora Historical Society and Smog Museum is located in what many consider to be ground zero of the environmental movement. The museum is 25 miles south of Pittsburgh on the Monongahela River; its mission is to preserve, research, interpret, and promote Donora history through cooperative, continuing educational relationships with individuals and institutions. Dedicated to remembering the 21 people who fell victim to a smog inversion on a fateful Halloween weekend in 1948, the museum focuses on causes and effects of that smog tragedy and its impact on global environmental concerns and issues. An annual Environmental Conference with a workshop for students, teachers, and the public is held each October.
- A young Stanislaw Franciszek Musial got his start in athletics with the Polish Falcons in gymnastics and track in the 1920s. In the 1930s, he switched to baseball, leading to a legendary professional career. He earned a spot in the Hall of Fame and was forever known as Stan "The Man" Musial. Learn more about "The Man" and Donora's other favorite sons and daughters at the museum.
- Thomas Edison spent considerable time trying to solve the housing shortage for working class families, which in this area was due to the expanding steel mills. He advocated the use of concrete in housing construction, which was achieved in Donora in 1916 when 80 concrete houses were built in a planned community known as Cement City. Twice a year and by special request, Cement City Home and Walking Tours are held to recount Edison's vision from 99 years ago.
- Since 1946, the DHSSM has been telling Donora's story, in part by exhibiting the extensive collection of photographs derived from Bruce Dreisbach's glass plate negatives, and also by displaying artifacts collected by many of our original founders.
- The DHSSM is open most weekdays and every Saturday from 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. or by appointment. Please call ahead for operating hours.
- For additional information visit www.donorahistoricalsociety.org or contact the museum at donorahistoricalsociety@gmail.com, or call (724) 823-0364.

The History Center Affiliates Program, HCAP, is a membership-based network that allows local and regional historical societies and museums access to museum professionals and best practice standards through the Senator John Heinz History Center.

To find out more about HCAP or to apply for membership for your organization, please contact Robert O. Stakeley, Educator, at rostakeley@heinzhistorycenter.org or (412) 454-6359.