



ARCHITECTURE AROUND US

By Lu Donnelly

William Croghan's Pic Nic

There have been many misconceptions about William Croghan, Jr.'s Pittsburgh home Pic Nic that can now be clarified. But first, one needs to understand how such an elegant house came to be in Pittsburgh in the 1830s.

William, born 1794, grew up on a prosperous farm near Louisville, Kentucky. His father fought in the Revolutionary War and then trained as a surveyor at the College of William and Mary before moving to Kentucky.¹ William Croghan, Sr. married Lucy Clark, the sister of George Rogers Clark and William Clark, of Lewis and Clark fame.² The household was visited by Presidents James Monroe and Andrew Jackson and ornithologist John James Audubon among many others.

William Croghan, Jr. attended Litchfield Law School in Connecticut and during his trips through Pittsburgh he met young Mary O'Hara, the daughter of one of Pittsburgh's richest men, James O'Hara. They were married in 1823 and moved to William's Kentucky home "Locust Grove." There Mary bore a son William in 1824 and a daughter Mary Elizabeth in 1826.

When William Jr.'s wife Mary died in 1828, he and the children moved to Pittsburgh where his son William then died. Mary

Elizabeth Croghan, his only surviving child, was raised near her aunt, her cousins, and her mother's friends, while her father oversaw James O'Hara's vast estate. In 1834, William built Pic Nic.

Mary Elizabeth and her Pittsburgh cousins were sent to an exclusive boarding school near New York City. In 1842, at age 14, she met 42-year-old, twice-widowed Captain Edward Wyndham Schenley and eloped with him, causing a scandal that closed the school. Mary's father, William Croghan, Jr. had a mild



**Locust Grove, 561
Blankenbaker Lane,
Louisville, Kentucky.
Photo by William Gus
Johnson, April 1987.**
LoC, 071267p.



**Pic Nic house, 1934.
Photo by Charles M. Stotz.**
LoC 132863p.

stroke, but retained enough political clout to have the laws of the Commonwealth changed to protect Mary's inheritance from Captain Schenley's control. Once Mary's children were born, William traveled to England to meet them and finding them in financial distress, he bought the Schenleys a home in London. While the Schenleys did travel to Pittsburgh on several occasions, they never moved here, despite William Jr. building an addition to Pic Nic to accommodate them.

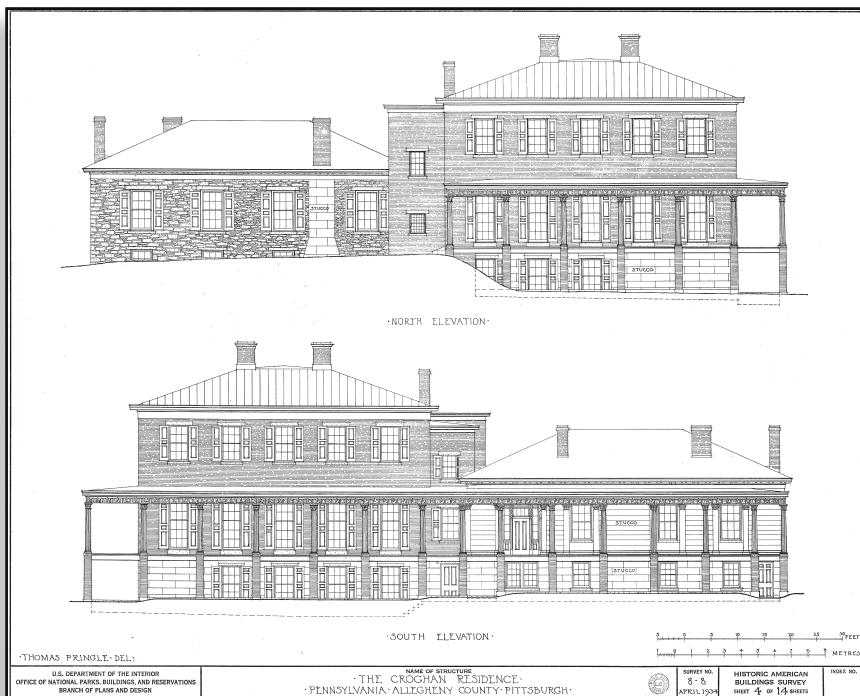
Pic Nic house was built in two parts on Black Horse Hill in the Stanton Heights neighborhood. The first part was a one-story, stone, hip-roofed structure on a raised basement; three bedrooms opened off the main ballroom, which contained elaborate Greek Revival carvings executed by Mordecai

K. Vanhorn.³ This was the house that Mary Elizabeth would have lived in from about 1830 to 1842.

A large brick addition was commissioned by her father between 1846 and 1848 after her marriage. It resembles William Croghan, Jr.'s Kentucky home, Locust Grove, which had been built for his parents, William and Lucy Croghan between 1790 and 1792. "Locust Grove" was locally designed and built in brick by the Croghan's slaves. The two-story, five-bay, gable-roofed house is five bays wide with a central entry sheltered by a five bay wooden porch. William Jr.'s mother was raised in Virginia and this style was familiar to her. It's no wonder that her son's house would harken back to it. Pic Nic as shown

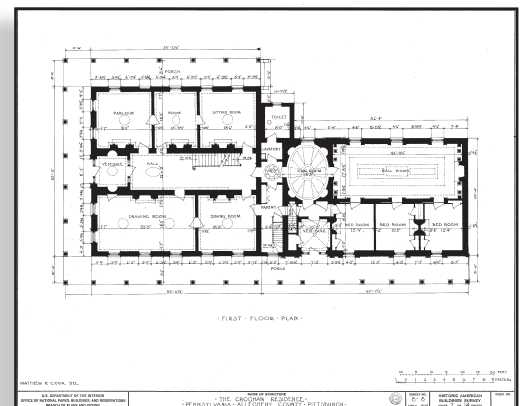
in the drawings is a bit grander, on a raised basement with floor to ceiling windows on the first floor and a hip roof. A two-story portico cleverly ties the new large addition to the smaller stone house.

Recent correspondence with a distant relative, English architect David Croghan, has carefully addressed two common misconceptions. It was assumed that Pic Nic was on the site of the c. 1763 estate of Croghan Hall, built for George Croghan, William Jr.'s great uncle. While Pic Nic was built on land once held by George Croghan, at the time of its



Elevation drawing of Pic Nic exterior showing the one-story stone section and two-story addition, both on raised basements. Thomas Pringle, delineator.

LoC, HABS PA,2-PITBU,3, sheet 4.



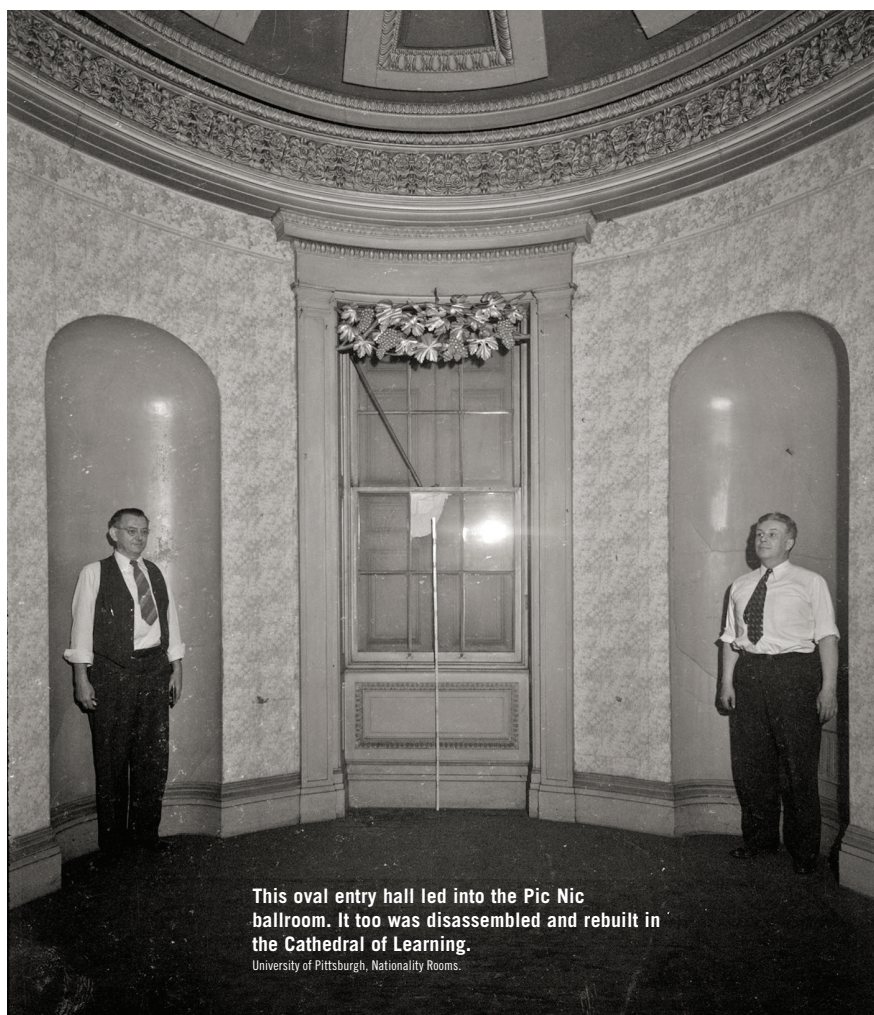
Drawings of Pic Nic's ground floor and first floor.

LoC, HABS PA,2-PITBU,3, sheets 1 and 2.

UP FRONT

In 2009, Jason T. Busch and Rachel Delphia curated an installation of the original gilded and rosewood-grained chairs and a painted cherry couch from Pic Nic in the Carnegie Museum of Art. Mary Schenley's 1842 portrait by British artist Thomas Lewis (center) has the city of Pittsburgh in the background.

Carnegie Museum of Art. Photo by Tom Little.



This oval entry hall led into the Pic Nic ballroom. It too was disassembled and rebuilt in the Cathedral of Learning.

University of Pittsburgh, Nationality Rooms.

building the land was owned by James O'Hara, Mary O'Hara's father. And, while there may have been an early stone structure on the land when William Jr. built the stone portion of his house there c. 1830, it was not George Croghan's manor house Croghan Hall.

There was also speculation in several newspaper articles that the plans for Pic Nic's 1846-1848 addition were modeled after a home Mary and Edward Schenley lived in in England. David Croghan's detailed research of the Schenley's English abodes showed that this was impossible, and that William Croghan, Jr.'s addition was most likely modeled after the home where he grew up Locust Grove.

The land surrounding Pic Nic house became a golf course in the early part of the 20th century. Luckily, detailed drawings and photos were taken in 1934 by architect, author, and early preservationist Charles M. Stotz as part of his research for *The Early Architecture of Western Pennsylvania*.

The Croghan house suffered a fire in 1950 and was scheduled for demolition. The golf course was being developed into housing when the builder, William S. Miller, donated

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Interior of Pic Nic ballroom built c.
1830. Photo by Charles M. Stotz,
March 19, 1934.

LoC, 132869p.

the disassembled ballroom and oval hallway to the University of Pittsburgh in honor of his father, master builder Herschel Miller. It was installed in the Cathedral of Learning in 1955 and refurbished in 1982.⁴

Lu Donnelly is one of the authors of *Buildings of Pennsylvania: Pittsburgh and Western Pennsylvania*, the fourteenth 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.

• Read more about Mary Schenley starting on page 22.

¹ Croghan is pronounced "Crawn."

² Revolutionary commander of the Northwest Territories: Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois. The eldest of six Clark brothers, all but William fought in the Revolutionary War, two were taken prisoner by the British with William Croghan, Sr. during the war.

³ Mordecai K. Vanhorn (c. 1790-1874) is listed as a wood carver and late in life as a toll collector. The name is found variously as Van Horne, van Horne, Vanhorn and Vanhorne, but he appears in the Pittsburgh directories from 1866 until his death in 1874. He is buried in Union Cemetery in Philadelphia.

⁴ Errors abound in the writings about "Pic Nic" house and the Croghans. It was said that the ballroom was donated anonymously, but according to an article "The Astonishing Croghans" in *The Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine* of April 1965 by Margaret Pearson Bothwell, p. 144, the donor's name was enshrined on a plaque in the Cathedral of Learning. Miller's biography is found in *The Bicentennial History of Pittsburgh and Allegheny County*, volume 2 by George Swetnam, published by Historical Record Association, c. 1956, pp. 497-499.