



Portrait of Mrs. Schenley by Thomas Lewis, oil on canvas, 1842.

Carnegie Museum of Art, Acc. 31.6, Gift of the heirs of the Mary E. Schenley Estate.



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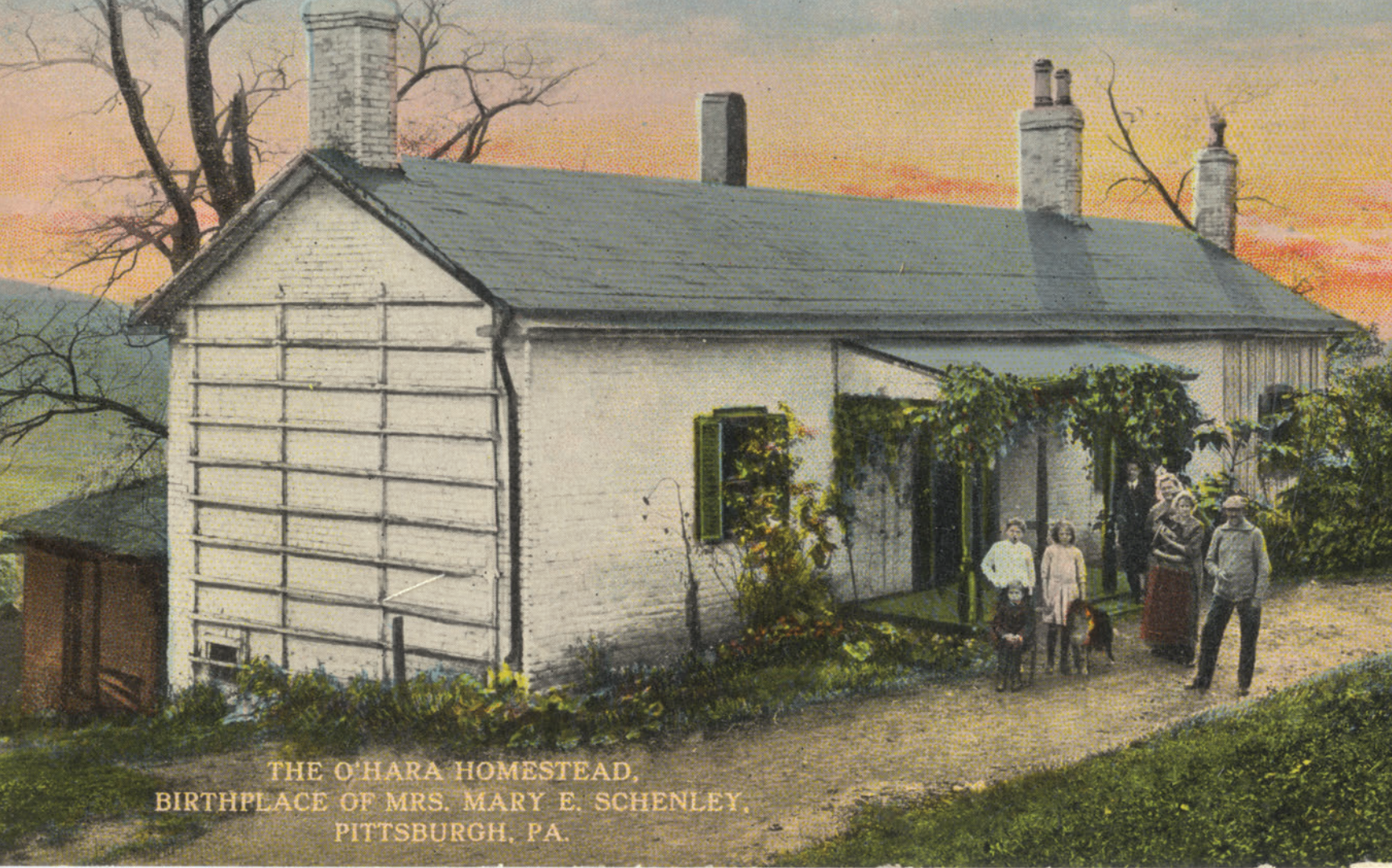


# WHAT'S IN A NAMESAKE? *Mary Schenley*

By Jake Oresick

Mary Schenley is best remembered as benevolent donor of a 456-acre public park bearing her name, but few know the details of her adolescent elopement, the horrors of her abolitionist honeymoon, or the depth of her influence in a city that—for a long time—detested her. A century and a half ago, Mrs. Schenley was Pittsburgh's landlord, and she indelibly shaped the region through her extraordinary estate. However, the Smoky City's matriarch scarcely lived here after age nine, and was utterly antithetical to the regional zeitgeist: in a working class city of immigrants and industry, Mrs. Schenley was a third-generation American plutocrat who never worked.





THE O'HARA HOMESTEAD,  
BIRTHPLACE OF MRS. MARY E. SCHENLEY,  
PITTSBURGH, PA.

Postcard of the O'Hara homestead. This was not Mary's birthplace, although it is likely that she spent much time there after she and her father moved to Pittsburgh.

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Mary Elizabeth Croghan (pronounced "Crawn") was born into an impossibly prominent family, whose tree resembles both an early American history reader (George Rogers Clark, George Croghan) and a contemporary map of Pittsburgh (O'Hara, Wilkins, Harmar, Carson, Darlington).<sup>1</sup> She owed her extraordinary wealth to the achievements of her grandfathers, James O'Hara and William Croghan, Sr.—both Revolutionary War officers, successful businessmen, and holders of public office.<sup>2</sup> Croghan was the nephew of frontier fur trader and Indian Agent George Croghan, who left far-reaching land titles. O'Hara's fortune was significantly greater: he likewise had prolific landholdings, many of his vast tracts in developing areas of Allegheny County,

and his enterprises so hurried the region's development that his obituary proclaimed he "almost created a city himself."<sup>3</sup>

Accordingly, Mary was born quite rich on April 27, 1827, and lived the first months of her life at the now-historic Locust Grove mansion near Louisville, Kentucky.<sup>4</sup> Tragedy struck half a year later when Mary's mother, Mary Carson O'Hara, passed away in October, followed by her four-year-old brother, Will, the following April.<sup>5</sup> Thus, Mary was sole heir to much of the O'Hara estate by her first birthday. In November 1827, Mary's father, William Croghan, Jr., fulfilled his wife's last request by moving the family to her hometown of Pittsburgh.<sup>6</sup> William traveled extensively on business for the next seven years, leaving Mary to be raised by her aunt and uncle, Elizabeth

Febiger O'Hara Denny and U.S. Congressman Harmar Denny, to whom she referred as mother and father.<sup>7</sup>

In 1834, William returned long enough to begin building Pic Nic house, the Croghan's iconic Greek Revival-style mansion, on a sprawling 209-acre plot in the area that is now Stanton Heights, about 5 miles northeast of downtown.<sup>8</sup> Pic Nic was located on a "commanding hilltop," then known as Black Horse Hill in rural Pitt Township, and was thoroughly a country residence.<sup>9</sup> In her later years, Mary would happily reminisce about "riding through the woods to Pic-nic" and romping in its country grounds.<sup>10</sup> In July 1835, the Croghans moved in, and, within the first year, William bragged that Mary was learning French and practicing the piano.



## The Brighton School

In 1837, Mary joined several cousins at an exclusive girls boarding school in the Staten Island village of New Brighton.<sup>11</sup> The school then had 22 students, and prepared its girls for society by requiring they speak only French, play an instrument, and obey strict dining etiquette.<sup>12</sup> Brighton's monopoly on Pittsburgh's premier family is difficult to explain, as the school had no reputation at less than two years in existence. The most likely link is Richmond Macleod, the Scottish widow who ran Brighton with her mother and sisters.<sup>13</sup>

Mrs. Macleod emigrated to Boston around 1834, where eight female relatives operated a boarding school until falling out of favor with Brahmin society.<sup>14</sup> Mrs. Macleod made a solo attempt at a school in Pittsburgh, and, by late 1836, had begun to network with James Ross—a political titan and longtime O'Hara-Croghan confidant.<sup>15</sup> Less than three months later, Mrs. Macleod had rejoined her family at their new school in Brighton, and had five families of O'Hara-Croghan cousins in her charge.<sup>16</sup>

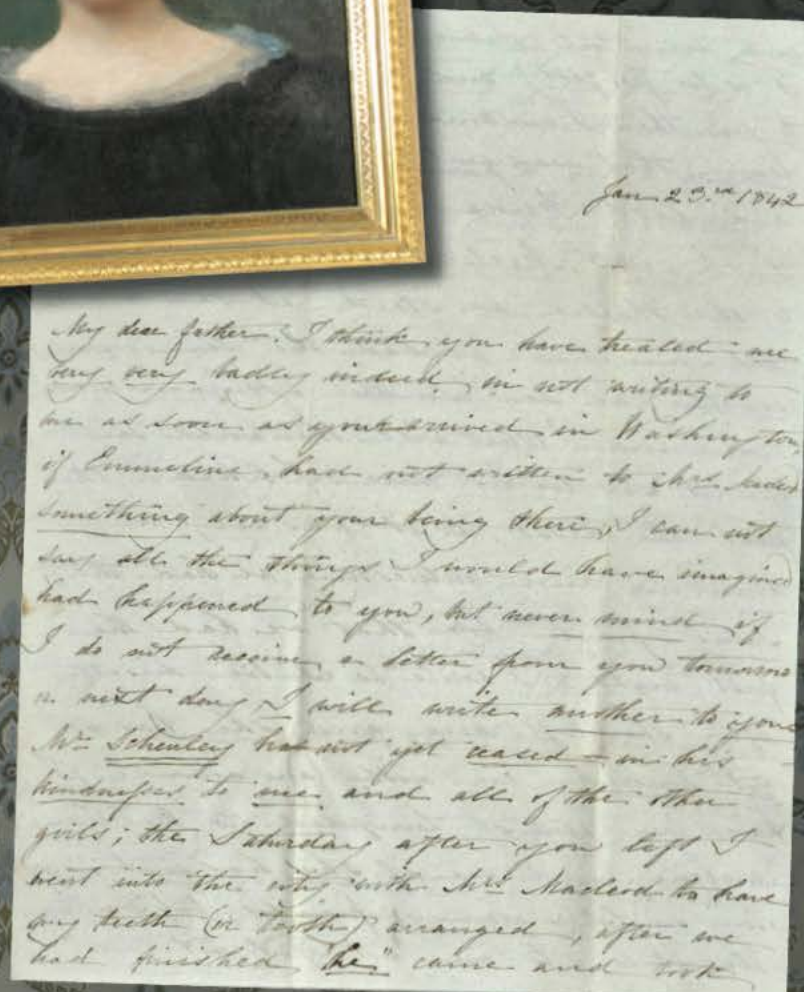
In 1842, while a student at Brighton, 14-year-old Mary eloped with Edward Wyndham Harrington Schenley, a 42-year-old British army captain. Schenley was well-traveled: a twice-widowed Waterloo veteran, he was said to have been with Lord Byron at Percy Shelley's famous funeral.<sup>17</sup> The pair met in late 1840 or early 1841, when Captain Schenley—then AWOL from diplomatic service—came to Brighton to visit Mrs. Macleod, who happened to be his former sister-in-law.<sup>18</sup> The teenage heiress was immediately infatuated, as Captain Schenley later told a friend of her early “resolution to marry [him] at all events.”<sup>19</sup>

The romance was understandably clandestine, and Mary misled her father regarding Captain Schenley's presence at Brighton. In describing group excursions into Manhattan—with Captain Schenley, Mrs. Macleod, and two classmates—she made only cursory reference to the Captain's wholesale



Left:  
Portrait of Mary Elizabeth Croghan Schenley by Thomas Lewis.  
RHC Collections, 86.1.167. Photo by Liz Simpson.

Below:  
This is the actual letter Mary wrote to her father the day after her secret wedding.  
University of Pittsburgh.



*The teenage heiress was immediately infatuated, as Captain Schenley later told a friend of her early “resolution to marry him at all events.”*



kindness (“to me and all of the other girls”).<sup>20</sup> On January 22, 1842, the couple were married by police magistrate Henry W. Merritt, notorious for his own impeachment trial, who denied “suspicion of any thing improper.”<sup>21</sup> The ceremony was likely held in secret, as the era’s preeminent heiress was wed in front of only two witnesses, including a lawyer charged with proving the bride’s legal age.<sup>22</sup> The next day, as if nothing had happened, Mary dashed off a jejune letter to her father, imploring him for a new cloak and bonnet, and adding, “am I not an excellent good ‘big’ girl I think so.”<sup>23</sup> On February 1, the newlyweds sailed for England on the *Mediator* under the name “Wynham.”<sup>24</sup>

Public reaction was predictably hysterical. Given Mary’s youth and incredible wealth, Captain Schenley was excoriated as a fortune hunter and a “juvenile lothario.”<sup>25</sup> “The wander loving part of the community” cast him as a serial debtor, and so old as “to feel the infirmities of age.”<sup>26</sup> One newspaper called the Captain “a skillful ‘maker-up’ so as to appear much younger,”<sup>27</sup> while another chided, in verse, that “His eyes had the hard glint / Of fresh dollars from the mint.”<sup>28</sup>

When the news reached William Croghan, he was staying in Washington, D.C., with his sister, Ann, and her illustrious

husband, Brigadier General Thomas S. Jesup. According to Jesup family lore, William “was so broken down by the shock” that it was Jesup instead who “rushed off to New York.”<sup>29</sup> The vast extended O’Hara-Croghan clan was livid, and it was likely relatives who prevailed upon the Pennsylvania legislature to pass a bill placing the Croghan estate in a discretionary trust, and out of the Captain’s reach.<sup>30</sup>

The Brighton School was quickly ruined as concerned families began calling their daughters home.<sup>31</sup> Unsurprisingly, Mrs. Macleod was accused of having arranged the union. Even a century later, the Schenleys’ granddaughter, Alberta McLean, believed Mrs. Macleod had written to her grandfather about “a very lovely and desirable pupil,” and suggested he woo her “before she came out” with his “polished manners as a man of the world, Waterloo medal and great charm.”<sup>32</sup> Mrs. Macleod, however, maintained her innocence in a letter to Mary’s father:

Dreadful as Mr. Schenley’s conduct is towards you it is so much worse towards Mamma and myself that I am yet inclined to doubt the truth of the whole story— Had he stabbed me to the heart it would have been a kindlier act ... my only consolation is a clear conscience and a conviction that if I was deceived no one else could ever have discovered it.<sup>33</sup>

She made a similar plea when confronted by Mary’s uncle, Mr. Jesup, who allegedly made

Mrs. Macleod bow, and replied, “Madam, I would not so insult your intellect.”<sup>34</sup> Jesup reported that Captain Schenley had sent a \$2,800 advance payment to Brighton from his post in Cuba, and that Mrs. Macleod and her mother, Jane Inglis, feigned confusion when asked to explain the money.<sup>35</sup> Mrs. Macleod had her defenders, and several wrote to William on her behalf.<sup>36</sup> Others have argued that Mrs. Macleod was not only unaware of the romance, but that, because of the age disparity, Mrs. Macleod believed Schenley and the girls would fail to excite each other’s interests.<sup>37</sup>

Despite its origins, the Croghan-Schenley romance was, by all accounts, authentic, as young Mary was said to have fallen “in love with [Captain Schenley] at first sight,” and “remained in love with him all her life.”<sup>38</sup> Mrs. McLean reported that her grandfather was just as smitten, and “desperately fell in love.”<sup>39</sup> The couple was married for 36 years, until the captain’s death in 1878,<sup>40</sup> and had nine children—six girls and three boys.<sup>41</sup>

## Abolitionist Honeymoon

When the newlyweds arrived in Mr. Schenley’s native England, he applied for an extension of his leave from the army—a bold request in that the leave he was on had never been approved. Indeed, Captain Schenley was absent without leave for the second time in roughly five years, and his superiors at the British Foreign Office,



Miniature portrait of Mary’s father, William Croghan, Jr.  
HNC Collections, 94.51.360. Photo by Liz Simpson.

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View of Pic Nic house. The house was located in present-day Stanton Heights.

HHC Detre L&A. GPC\_B17\_F255\_103

wholly unamused at his chutzpah, ordered him back to work under threat of termination. The couple stayed just long enough for Mary's confirmation at St. Paul's Cathedral in London,<sup>42</sup> then sailed for Paramaribo in the Dutch colony of Suriname, where the captain returned to his post as a judge on an anti-slavery tribunal.<sup>43</sup>

Captain Schenley was Commissioner of Arbitration for the Mixed Court for the Suppression of the Slave Trade, tasked with enforcing the anti-slavery treaty that England had imposed on the Dutch in 1818.<sup>44</sup> Under the treaty, subsequently trafficked Africans were to be freed, and given citizenship and employment by the Dutch government, but these "free laborers" remained *de facto* slaves.<sup>45</sup> Dutch governors tacitly condoned this practice, and there was little the captain could do but write to his superiors in London.

He wrote to London incessantly,<sup>46</sup> as both Schenleys were inspired by the mixed

court's charge. Mary gushed to her aunt that her husband was "the 2nd 'great man' Washington,"<sup>47</sup> and the now-15-year-old heiress took the transition to odorous, disease-ridden swamps in stride. However, Mary never adjusted to slavery, as her husband wrote to the Dutch governor L.B. Elias on November 29, 1842:

This morning about 9 o'clock my family, especially my wife, whose nervous system is easily affected, was thrown into deep affliction by the unceasing sound of the lash & the most frightful shrieks of an unfortunate female, upon whose naked person a most cruel punishment was inflicting. The yard in which this barbarity was perpetrated is immediately behind my house & we were driven from the breakfast table by the shocking spectacle.<sup>48</sup>

Unfortunately, his letters did little but enrage the Dutch, as he not only threatened their livelihood, but their empire's most

important plantation colony. The Schenleys had excrement left on their doorstep, their horses were poisoned, and Mary "lived in constant fear of being deliberately infected with leprosy."<sup>49</sup> Still, the Schenleys bore their first child in Suriname, whom her father nonetheless considered an "Englishwoman."<sup>50</sup>

Despite Dutch obstinance, Captain Schenley was able to rescue 34 Africans who had been seized in 1823 from the schooner *Snow* and held in *de facto* slavery.<sup>51</sup> The Captain bombarded London with dispatches, and his superiors, in turn, addressed the issue many times with The Hague. Quite unexpectedly, 31 denizens of the *Snow* were freed in 1843, with the captain purchasing the freedom of three more. Schenley ensured their freedom by arranging their passage by schooners to nearby British Guiana.<sup>52</sup>

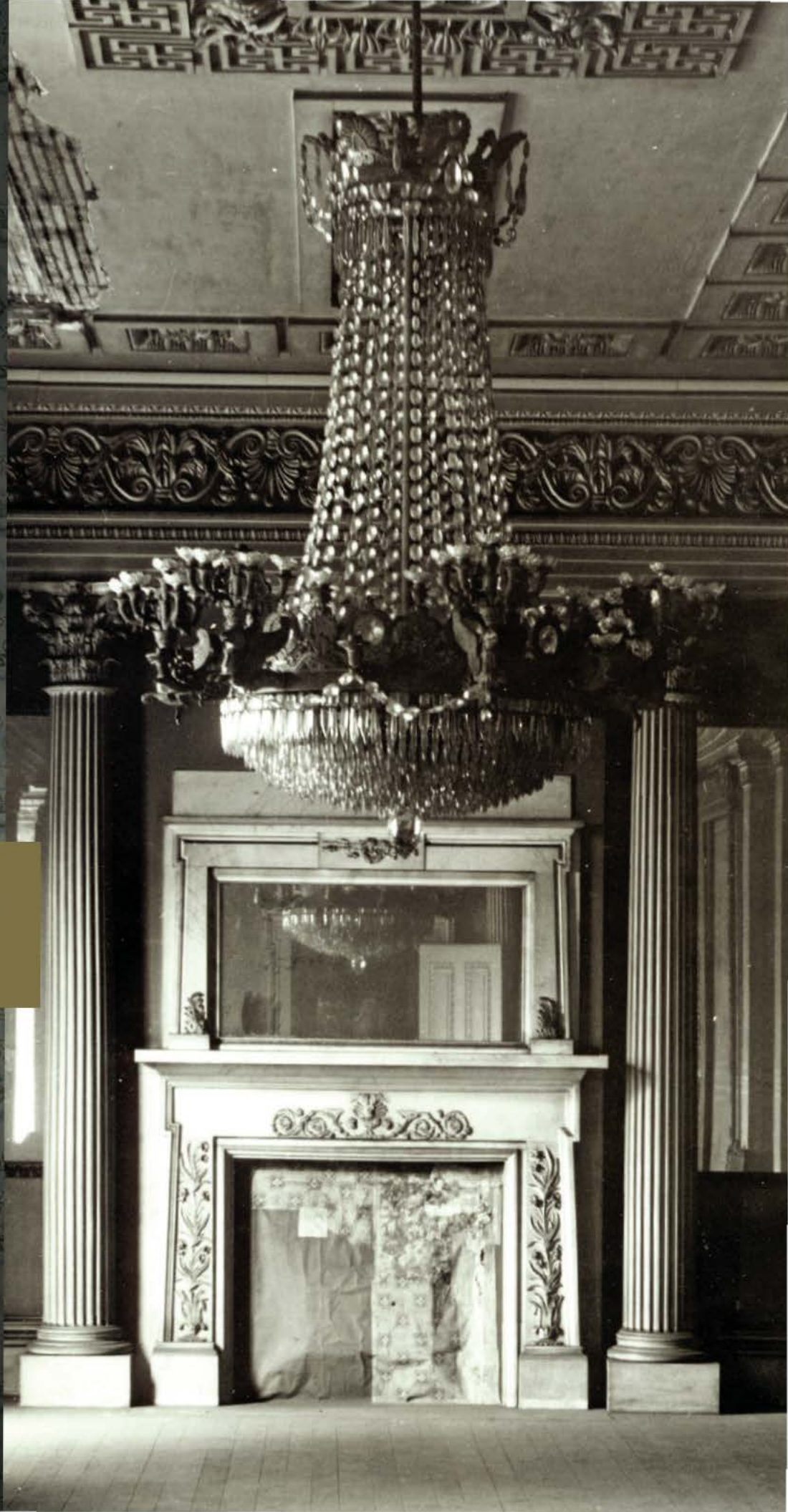
The captain had always described the cruelty he observed in his diplomatic dispatches, but he soon began including the



*The Schenleys  
continued to  
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later than 1866*

William Croghan House (Pic Nic) Interior, c. 1932-35. This is a view of the mantle end of the ballroom. The Greek Revival house was constructed around 1835. In the 1940s, this room was moved to the first floor of the University of Pittsburgh's Cathedral of Learning where it is still in use as a meeting room.

HHC Debra LAA, Charles M. Stoltz Photographs, MSP0021.B001.F10.102.





names of the offending planters, which were published in British Parliamentary papers.<sup>53</sup> Finally in 1845, the Schenleys were forced to flee to England, spelling the end of the captain's diplomatic career. He remained on duty in England through 1848, but his Suriname post was eliminated and he was unhappily forced into retirement.<sup>54</sup>

## Reconciliation

William Croghan had been devastated by his daughter's elopement, and barely communicated with her for the next seven months. In September 1842, Mary wrote to her father from Suriname lamenting his silence and begging him to visit Paramaribo:

Oh why do you not come; you will at once in this climate; be restored to the enjoyment of your health; & spirits I know; and oh I assure you what a good child I will be, (with "God's help") I will repay you all I have done to you—But oh what a climate this would be for you—Do do come—We ride every evening I read, practise, and do other things to improve my time but oh if you would come only this winter—Oh why won't you make yourself well—Schenley is still what he has always been—a devoted, kind, affectionate & every thing that's good Husband—Oh dear dear if you only knew him—Please do write to me & say you will come.<sup>55</sup>

The two eventually began to communicate, and trips were planned in both directions, though always postponed. Finally, in late August 1845, more than three and a half years since he had seen his teenage daughter,

William boarded the *Hibernia* and set sail for England.<sup>56</sup> William was racked with anxiety in the hours before the reunion—especially concerned with suppressing his anger towards the captain—but softened upon observing them together:

[H]e is verily I believe attached & devoted to her & makes her the kindest husband & equally devoted to him she does seem; Their two dear little children engross their thoughts — that is not to be wondered at, for two more lovely children I never saw & as often as I contemplate the happy group, Father, Mother and children in happy intercourse I feel subdued & from my heart silently ejaculate "God speed you."

William marveled at young Mary's maternal poise, and how the couple's balanced partnership defied his fears about Captain Schenley's motivations.<sup>57</sup> The captain's demonstrative piety—regular church attendance, and blessings before and after meals—sealed William's emphatic approval.<sup>58</sup>

William stayed approximately eight months, and returned to England again in 1847. The Schenleys visited Pic Nic in 1848 but could not be persuaded to stay permanently. William died suddenly on September 22, 1850.<sup>59</sup> The Schenleys continued to vacation at Pic Nic, and once stayed for five years, but the last trip occurred no later than 1866, as Pittsburgh's smoke and soot exacerbated Mary's asthma.<sup>60</sup> She badly wanted to again visit Pittsburgh, and several times made plans to do so. However, her physician's advice and memories of one especially torturous asthma attack always led her to renege at the steamer.<sup>61</sup>

Mary did love Pittsburgh, her

granddaughter insisted, and remained "ardently American and Pittsburghian.... Photos, papers, news of Pittsburgh were such a joy to her."<sup>62</sup> She told visiting reporters that she "always like[d] to talk to anybody from Pittsburg," and interrogated guests about Smoky City affairs.<sup>63</sup> The Captain wanted to return too, to aid the Union's Civil War effort, but Mary insisted he was too old, and that "his good wishes & donations and prayers" were just as effective.<sup>64</sup> Pittsburghers did not miss him—Captain Schenley, already unpopular from the elopement, was despised as "the Duke of Hardscrabble" for his alien landlordism in the city's poorest districts, though the properties had come from Mary's family.<sup>65</sup> Pic Nic staff described him as "haughty in carriage and manner" and said that he "lived much to himself" while in Pittsburgh. He even barred neighbors from the Pic Nic grounds—a reversal of Mr. Croghan's democratic dealings—and "none of the common herd were allowed to put foot on grounds, pick an apple or carry away a flower."<sup>66</sup> Captain Schenley was elected to Parliament in 1859, but Pittsburgh papers were "quite merry" when his win was quickly voided for a finding of bribery.<sup>67</sup>



Miniature portrait of Mary painted by her daughter H. Agnes Ridley, 1908.  
RHC Collections, 94.51.57. Photo by Liz Simpson.

*Mary remained  
"ardently American  
and Pittsburghian"*





The land Mary donated for the creation of Schenley Park is quite vast and includes many amenities.  
Created by Carol Skinger from period maps, [www.carolskinger.com](http://www.carolskinger.com).

*Her 300-acre donation for Pittsburgh's first public park is seen as a generous and forward-thinking gift to the regional landscape.*



## Saint or Slumlord?

Despite a sinking reputation in the states, the couple's later years were filled with family, luxury, and philanthropy. The Schenleys were the first residents of 14 Prince's Gate, a now-famous address in London's Hyde Park, which later housed J.P. Morgan, Andrew Mellon, and a young John F. Kennedy.<sup>68</sup> At Prince's Gate, "ceremony, silence and solemnity" confronted the frenetic reality of nine children, and eventually numerous in-laws and grandchildren. In later years, Mary often slept until noon,<sup>69</sup> and wore velvet, lace, pearls, and large diamond earrings that "flashed soft fire when light caught them in the dimness." A staff of at least a dozen served the growing Schenley clan and accompanied them on winter holidays in Pau and Cannes.<sup>70</sup>

Popular memory casts Mary as saintly philanthropist, and her 300-acre donation for Pittsburgh's first public park is seen as a generous and forward-thinking gift to the regional landscape. For context, the contemporaneous Highland Park required 120 transactions and over \$900,000.<sup>71</sup> As early as 1847, the couple donated 10 acres for the Western Pennsylvania Hospital (said to be in "the village of Croghansville"),<sup>72</sup> and later gave \$10,000 to the public subscription for Allegheny City's Riverview Park.<sup>73</sup> Although not outright

donations, Mary ceded the land for Oakland's Carnegie Institute complex<sup>74</sup> and an Allegheny City school at well below market value, plus gave \$5,000 towards the latter's construction.<sup>75</sup>

Despite her largesse, Mary was reviled at the time as a heartless aristocrat whose estate policies blighted the region, exploited the poor, and stifled development. The Schenleys refused to sell or improve any part of their enormous estate<sup>76</sup> while collecting oppressive ground rents in Bayardstown, the Point, and Hardscrabble (now the Strip District, Point State Park, and the Duquesne University campus, respectively).<sup>77</sup> Ground rents entailed leases of 5 to 21 years,<sup>78</sup> with lessees paying all taxes and making all improvements, but the dwelling still reverted to the estate at lease's end.<sup>79</sup> Middle-income tenants rejected this scheme, unwilling to construct good buildings for short-term leases.<sup>80</sup> Thus Schenley properties were let to the poor, who lacked the means to maintain let alone improve them, and they quickly devolved into tenements.<sup>81</sup> The Point was especially squalid, filled with foul odors from lack of sewers<sup>82</sup> and shaky, crowded shanties that the local priest called unfit "to house a hog in."<sup>83</sup> Schenley rentals were the place "to see wretchedness in its home," wrote a widely-reprinted letter

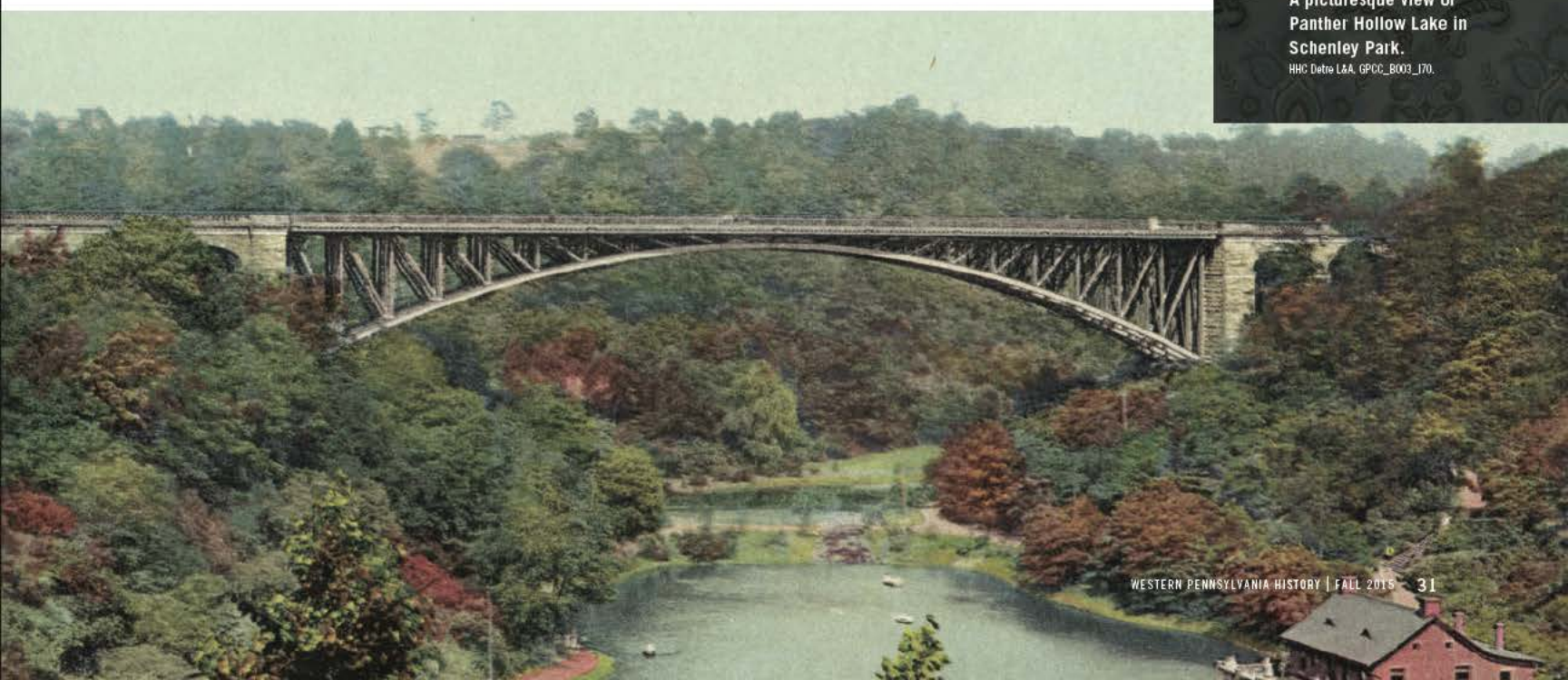
to the *New York World*,<sup>84</sup> and the Point was frequently excoriated in the press.<sup>85</sup>

Mary's tenants were born poor—the "Point Irish" were unskilled, uneducated Famine émigrés—and her leases ensured they remained so.<sup>86</sup> When a tenant could afford improvements, the estate raised the rent, yet tenants rarely moved, having invested any savings in their modest homes.<sup>87</sup> The Schenley tenements further frustrated Pittsburghers for impeding development, as each neighborhood was ideally situated for civic or commercial use but the estate would not sell.<sup>88</sup> Moreover, the estate inflated the market by hoarding hundreds of untouched acres in the burgeoning East End, and could afford to hold them indefinitely because of a reduced agricultural tax rate.<sup>89</sup>

Mary's gifts failed to sway public opinion. Her estate practices not only continued but became even more destructive as the city's population surged between 1880 and 1900.<sup>90</sup> Critics cast Mary as a shrewd opportunist and alleged that Schenley Park actually benefited the donor at the city's expense. That is, Mount Airy (as it was known) was unfit for subdivision, being full of hills and hollows, but when the city financed its scenic transformation, the adjacent property that Mary kept then soared

A picturesque view of Panther Hollow Lake in Schenley Park.

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in value.<sup>91</sup> While it is true that Bellefield realized an increase in value instantly, the city had coveted Mount Airy since the 1860s notwithstanding its topography, and it was the city who referenced Mary's nearby property to try to induce the gift.<sup>92</sup> Plus Mary's own real estate agent, Finley Torrens, lobbied for its sale to Black & Baird, a firm offering \$1,500 per acre with designs on a gated community.<sup>93</sup> Mary's attorney, Robert B. Carnahan, sat on Public Works chief Edward Bigelow's Parks Council Committee, and urged her to gift it to the city.<sup>94</sup> In October 1889, Torrens and Carnahan raced to Mary's London home, and "ran plump into" each other aboard the RMS *Etruria*.<sup>95</sup> Carnahan's travel experience triumphed, as he got off early in Queenstown, Ireland, and took a mail boat the rest of the way.<sup>96</sup> Carnahan won the race, arriving at 8 a.m., and argued with a footman until he agreed to wake Mary. "You need not worry, Mr. Carnahan. They will not have my land," she assured him before refusing payment. "[T]his is my gift to the people of Pittsburg.

I am rich enough already." The grant was 300 acres, with an option to buy an additional 100 acres at \$1,250 per acre.<sup>97</sup> Black & Baird later

confirmed the land was worth \$3,000 per acre.<sup>98</sup> Torrens arrived just as Carnahan was leaving,<sup>99</sup> and he soon severed ties with Mary, citing frustration with her other agents working in their own interests.<sup>100</sup>

It is true Mary's advisers pushed their own philanthropic projects, but it was undisputed that Mary was wholly engaged and in charge.<sup>101</sup> In 1890, after Mary resolved to donate 10 acres for the Institution for the Blind (now Western Pennsylvania School for Blind Children), a battle emerged over precisely which plot. William A. Herron, Torrens' successor as real estate agent, was on the school's board, and sought the coveted Bellefield land that the Schenleys had hoarded for decades. Mary's new attorney, Thomas D. Carnahan, insisted Bellefield was too valuable to gift, and urged her to offer the admittedly inferior Pic Nic site.<sup>102</sup> Mary favored generosity, and not only allowed the school to select its plot,<sup>103</sup> but canceled a \$200,000 fundraising requirement when the school could not pay.<sup>104</sup> After sparring with Bigelow over the Schenley Park entrance, the school settled on its present site,<sup>105</sup> making it one of the first significant developments in Schenley Farms. For Herron's other cause,<sup>106</sup> a large lot for a Newsboys' Home (for the care of indigent or homeless boys), he offered Mary \$5,000 but she insisted on donating the land.<sup>107</sup>

Mary's motives are confounding, as she spent a lifetime luxuriating at the city's expense, and then suddenly, at age 62, began a historic giving-spree that far eclipsed any Pittsburgh landowners in her lifetime.<sup>108</sup> She may have been inspired by Andrew Carnegie,

whose *Gospel of Wealth* she enthusiastically received in 1890,<sup>109</sup> albeit after her park gift. The "tiny, vivid and vital people" somehow "matched," wrote Mary's granddaughter of Carnegie's animated visits at Prince's Gate.<sup>110</sup>

It is true that Mary's sudden generosity related only to land grants for public purposes, but reversing her estate policies may not have been quite as easy. As early as 1890, Mary talked of developing the Point, and, mirroring a successful London initiative, moving the tenants to a new plan in the suburbs with "better houses, better air and less to pay."<sup>111</sup> However, tenants objected to being relocated, threatening violence.<sup>112</sup> Mary professed sympathy for her poor tenants, but was also sensitive to press criticism,<sup>113</sup> and ultimately renewed their leases.<sup>114</sup> Still, the estate slowly unclenched its fist in 1892: selling the Hardscrabble District to the Pennsylvania Railroad for \$163,000;<sup>115</sup> announcing that Schenley Farms would be developed for unprecedented 50-year leases to high-end renters;<sup>116</sup> and gifting the historic Fort Pitt Block House to the preservationist Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) after twice rejecting such offers.<sup>117</sup> Notably, Mary's Block House gift subdivided (and thus devalued) the Point, a property she was actively negotiating to sell. In 1902, she finally sold the Point to Henry Clay Frick for \$2 million.<sup>118</sup>

Mary passed away at Prince's Gate on November 3, 1903,<sup>119</sup> and was buried at nearby Kensal Green Cemetery.<sup>120</sup> Her death received national attention, and Pittsburgh's press and politicians heaped praise on the departed. Mayor William B. Hays called for a



The public memorial to Mary Schenley, *A Song to Nature* sculpted by Victor David Brenner, is located in Oakland.  
Photo by Jake Oresick.

*"This is my gift to the people of Pittsburg. I am rich enough already."*



joint session of council, the first such honor for a female, and hailed her as a “queen among women.”<sup>121</sup> However, many Pittsburghers still disliked Mary, regarding her estate as a parasite whose gifts were crumbs from a monopolist’s loaf.<sup>122</sup> When her executors sought to finance a public memorial in 1912, John W. Herron warned Carnegie to avoid popular subscription and the embarrassment of its likely failure.<sup>123</sup> Ultimately, Carnegie funded most of the memorial—a statue inside a fountain at Schenley Park’s entrance—but is oddly absent from press reports in a possible attempt to repair his friend’s legacy.<sup>124</sup>

The modern myth of Mary’s popularity developed slowly, and is likely a symptom of forgetfulness. After the 1930s, Mary’s alien landlordism was scarcely mentioned, as newspapers began to remember Mary through increasingly fanciful, ahistorical pieces on her elopement and park donation.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Margaret Pearson Bothwell, “The Astonishing Croghans,” *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine* 48, no. 2, (April 1965): 128-30; George T. Fleming, *History of Pittsburgh and Environs* (New York: American Historical Society, Inc., 1922) 6:163.

<sup>2</sup> “Croghan, William,” in *The Kentucky Encyclopedia*, ed. John E. Kleber (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1992), 242-43; William Weisberger, “James O’Hara” in *American National Biography*, eds. John A. Garraty and Mark C. Carnes (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 16:648-49.

<sup>3</sup> Charles Shetler, “James O’Hara’s Landholdings in Allegheny County,” *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine* 34, no. 1 (March 1951): 23.

<sup>4</sup> Correspondence indicates that the family was living at Locust Grove during this time, however, church records state all three Croghan children were baptized in Pittsburgh. *Baptisms, Marriages, Confirmations and Funerals: Trinity Church, 1797-1867* (Pennsylvania Society of Colonial Dames of American, 1938), 16, 23, 28.

<sup>5</sup> Samuel W. Thomas, “William Croghan, Jr. (1794-1850),” *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine* 51, no. 3, (July 1968): 218-19; Mary Elizabeth was actually the Croghan’s third child, as her older sister, Mary O’Hara (1825-1826), lived only nine months. Margaret Pearson Bothwell, “Historical Society Notes,” *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine*, Vol. 47, no. 4 (1964), 366-367.

<sup>6</sup> William Croghan, Jr., to Harmar Denny, November 2, 1827, Papers of the Denny-O’Hara Family, Detre L&A, Heinz History Center.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas, 219-22.

<sup>8</sup> The first 100 acres were purchased on January 23, 1832, for \$5,080.63. *Allegheny County [PA] Deed Book 44*, 114-17.

<sup>9</sup> Arthur B. Fox, “The Reclamation of Mary Schenley’s Picnic House,” *Pittsburgh History* 81, no. 3 (Winter 1998): 137-40; Thomas, 222.

<sup>10</sup> Alberta McLean to Charles W. Shetler, May 29, 1949, Pennsylvania Collection, Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh.

<sup>11</sup> Thomas, 223-24.

<sup>12</sup> Mary O’Hara Denny to Harmar Denny, February 28, 1837, in “Historical Society Notes and Documents,” *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine* 46, no. 2 (April 1963) 205-06.

<sup>13</sup> Richmond Margaret Macleod (nee Inglis) (1800-1866) was born in Edinburgh, Scotland, to William Inglis and Jane Stein. In 1817, she married Alexander Norman Macleod, who fell into significant debt, and died in 1834. Malcolm Deas, “Calderón de la Barca, Frances Erskine Inglis (1804-1882),” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H.C.G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford University Press, 2004) 9:512-13; Donald MacKinnon and Alick Morrison, *The MacLeods — The Genealogy of a Clan* (Edinburgh: The Clan MacLeod Society, 1968), 2:96-97.

<sup>14</sup> Mary Frech McVicker, “Calderon de la Barca, Fanny 1804-82,” in *Concise Encyclopedia of Mexico*, ed. Michael S. Werner (Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 2001) 57; Samuel Elliot Morrison, *Harrison Gray Otis 1765-1848: The Urbane Federalist* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1969), 491-92.

<sup>15</sup> Richmond M. Macleod to Harrison Gray Otis, November 17, 1836, Harrison Gray Otis Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

<sup>16</sup> Mary O’Hara Denny to Harmar Denny, February 28, 1837, in “Historical Society Notes and Documents,” *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine* 46, no. 2 (April 1963) 205-06.

<sup>17</sup> *Sacramento Daily Record-Union*, March 16, 1878, 3; Guido Biagi, *The Last Days of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1898) 107-17

<sup>18</sup> Schenley had formerly been married to Mrs. Macleod’s sister, a Lydia Inglis, “who died without issue.” Thomas, 224, fn 68; *Historical Note*, Frances Erskine Inglis Calderón de la Barca Papers with Howe and Other Family Papers, Houghton Library, Harvard University.

<sup>19</sup> Edward W.H. Schenley to W. Lynch, Darlington Family Papers, Darlington Collection, Special Collections Department, University of Pittsburgh.

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<sup>21</sup> Henry Delafield to William Croghan, Jr., February 8, 1842, Darlington Collection, Special Collections Department, University of Pittsburgh; *Journal and Documents of the Board of Assistants, of the City of New-York* (New York: Board of Assistant Aldermen, 1840) 308-315; “Failure to Impeach Justice Merritt,” *Public Ledger* (Philadelphia), June 11, 1840; “Captain Shenley’s Marriage,” *New-York Evening Post*, February 21, 1842.

<sup>22</sup> Henry Delafield to William Croghan, Jr., February 8, 1842, Darlington Collection, Special Collections Department, University of Pittsburgh.

<sup>23</sup> Mary Croghan to William Croghan, Jr., January 23, 1842, Darlington Collection, Special Collections Department, University of Pittsburgh.

<sup>24</sup> Henry Delafield to William Croghan, Jr., February 8, 1842, Darlington Collection, Special Collections Department, University of Pittsburgh.

<sup>25</sup> Bernice Shine, “Schenley Park Donated by Girl Whose Romance Shocked a Queen,” *Pittsburgh Sun-Telegraph*, September 15, 1941.

<sup>26</sup> Henry Delafield to William Croghan, Jr., February 8, 1842, Darlington Collection, Special Collections Department, University of Pittsburgh.

<sup>27</sup> *New-York Commercial Advertiser*, February 12, 1842.

<sup>28</sup> Shine.

<sup>29</sup> Mary Jesup Sitgreaves, “Grandmother’s Elopement” (prepared for Alberta McLean and furnished to Charles W. Shetler), Pennsylvania Collection, Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh.





Left:  
Pic Nic was uninhabited for many years  
and fell into disrepair. The house was  
torn down in 1955.

HHC Detre L&A.

Below:  
Portrait of Mary later in life when she  
began shaping Pittsburgh from abroad  
with gifts of her land.

HHC Detre L&A.



<sup>30</sup> Pennsylvania General Assembly, *Act 48 of 1842*, March 16, 1842.

<sup>31</sup> Adelaide Mellier Nevin, *The Social Mirror: A Character Sketch of the Women of Pittsburg and Vicinity During the First Century of the Country's Existence* (Pittsburg: T.W. Nevin, 1888), 90.

<sup>32</sup> Alberta McLean to Charles W. Shetler, May 29, 1949, Pennsylvania Collection, Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh.

<sup>33</sup> Richmond M. Macleod to William Croghan, Jr., February 3, 1842, Darlington Collection, Special Collections Department, University of Pittsburgh.

<sup>34</sup> Sitgreaves.

<sup>35</sup> Thomas S. Jesup to William Croghan, Jr., February 12, 1842, Darlington Collection, Special Collections Department, University of Pittsburgh.

<sup>36</sup> William Addison to William Croghan, Jr., March 29, 1842, Darlington Collection, Special Collections Department, University of Pittsburgh; Henry Delafield to William Croghan, Jr., February 8, 1842, Darlington Collection, Special Collections Department, University of Pittsburgh; William Whetten to William Croghan, Jr., March 5, 1842, Darlington Collection, Special Collections Department, University of Pittsburgh.

<sup>37</sup> Henry Delafield to William Croghan, Jr., February 8, 1842, Darlington Collection, Special Collections Department, University of Pittsburgh; John Newton Boucher, *A Century and a Half of Pittsburg and Her People* (The Lewis Publishing Co., 1908) 2:407; Marian Gouverneur, *As I Remember: Recollections of American Society during the Nineteenth Century* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1911), 119.

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<sup>39</sup> Alberta McLean to Charles W. Shetler, May 29, 1949, Pennsylvania Collection, Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh.

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<sup>45</sup> Joseph J. Cloud, "The Romance & Adventures of Captain Schenley," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, April 10, 1934.

<sup>46</sup> Joseph J. Cloud, "The Romance & Adventures of Captain Schenley," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, April 11, 1934; Piet C. Emmer, *The Dutch Slave Trade, 1500-1850* (Berghahn Books, 2006), 111.

<sup>47</sup> Mary Schenley to Elizabeth O'Hara Denny, August 7, 1843, Papers of the Denny-O'Hara Family, Detre L&A, Heinz History Center.

<sup>48</sup> Joseph J. Cloud, "The Romance & Adventures of Captain Schenley," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, April 11, 1934.

<sup>49</sup> Emmer, 124; Joseph J. Cloud, "The Romance & Adventures of Captain Schenley," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, April 9, 1934; "Money Market and City Intelligence," *The Times of London*, December 22, 1843.

<sup>50</sup> Edward W.H. Schenley to Elizabeth O'Hara Denny, July 9, 1843, Papers of the Denny-O'Hara Family, Detre L&A, Heinz History Center.

<sup>51</sup> "From British Guiana—Specimens of British Philanthropy," *Public Ledger* (Philadelphia), November 4, 1843.

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<sup>53</sup> Joseph J. Cloud, "The Romance & Adventures of Captain Schenley," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, April 13, 1934.

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<sup>55</sup> Mary Schenley to William Croghan, Jr., September 3, 1842, Darlington Family Papers, 1753-1921, Darlington Collection, Special Collections Department, University of Pittsburgh.

<sup>56</sup> Thomas, 225-26.

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<sup>58</sup> William Croghan, Jr. to Ann Croghan Jesup, November 3, 1845, Papers of the Denny-O'Hara Family, Detre L&A, Heinz History Center.

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