



ISAAC BROOME

AND ALLEGHENY COUNTY'S

FIRST
CIVIL WAR MONUMENT

By Nicholas P. Ciotola



In August 2011, a lucky visitor to the PBS *Antiques Roadshow* event at the David L. Lawrence Convention Center in Pittsburgh excitedly stood in front of TV cameras to share his porcelain bust of Cleopatra with antiques appraiser David Rago. According to the expert, the extremely rare bust had been made by renowned ceramic artist Isaac Broome in Trenton, New Jersey, and displayed at the 1876 Centennial International Exposition in Philadelphia. Much to the delight of its owner, Rago described the bust as being very rare and of the finest museum quality. What failed to come up in the conversation, however, was that its celebrated maker had an important (yet overlooked) career in Pittsburgh long before his famous Cleopatra bust was modeled, molded, and fired.



Formed from the same mold as the privately owned example on the *Antiques Roadshow*, this chocolate-colored porcelain *Cleopatra* by Broome is in the collection of the New Jersey State Museum.

Isaac Broome, *Cleopatra*, 1876, Ott & Brower, porcelain. Collection of the New Jersey State Museum, CH1974.73.1.

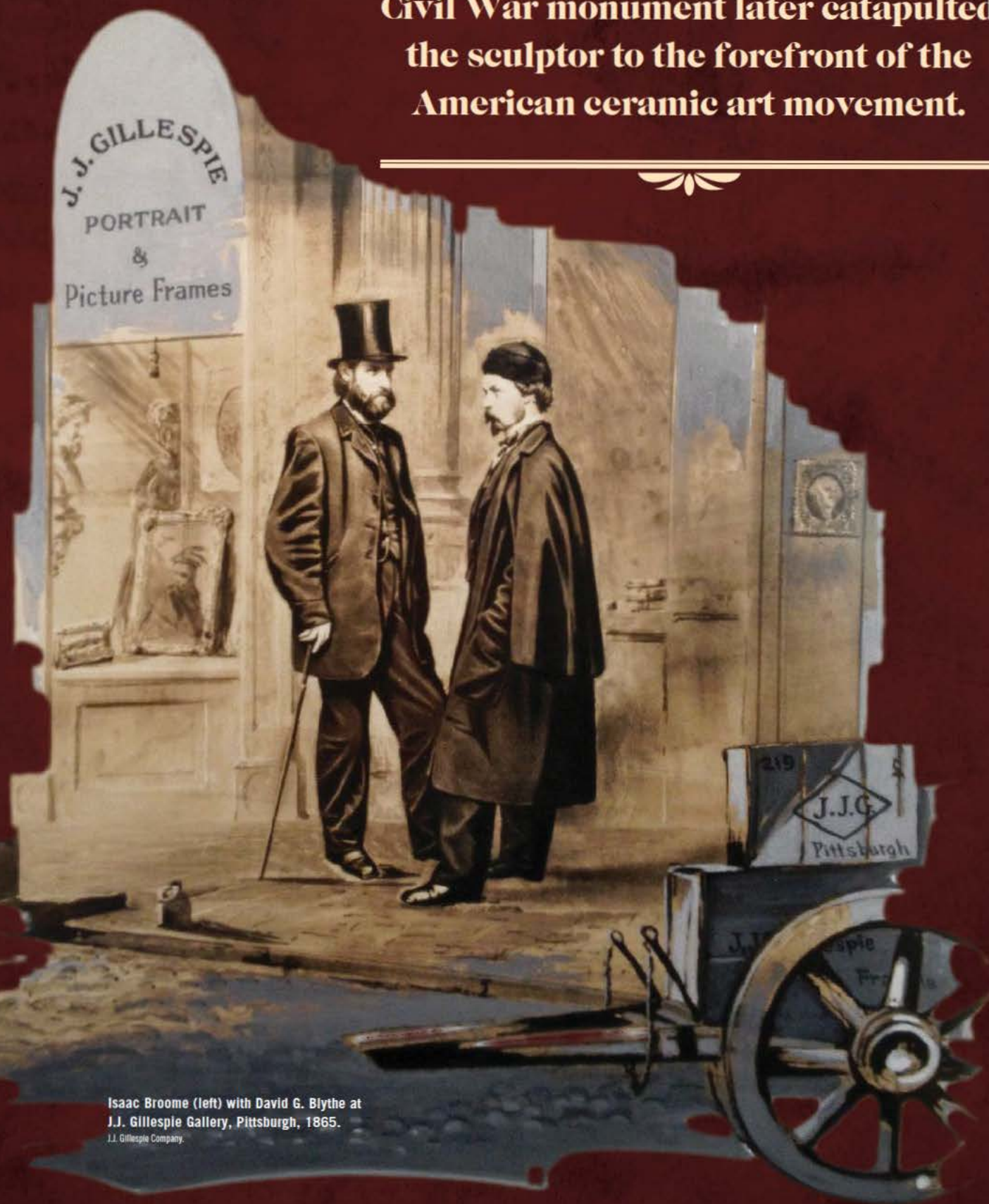
In the field of decorative arts, Isaac Broome is known for creating an array of porcelain pieces for the Ott & Brewer Company display booth at the 1876 Centennial International Exposition—pieces that included multiple Cleopatra busts, a George and Martha Washington-themed tea set, and, most importantly, a pair of grandiose, figural urns chronicling America’s newest sporting pastime known as the *Baseball Vases*.¹ Broome’s work for the Centennial came about after a six-year period in Western Pennsylvania, where the eventual master ceramist first honed his skills in other mediums, particularly marble. One of his most significant achievements in Western Pennsylvania came in 1866. In that year, Broome commemorated local veterans when he sculpted Allegheny County’s first Civil War monument in Sewickley. The classical inspiration, ornamental symbolism, and life-like figural elements that appear on Broome’s Western Pennsylvania Civil War monument

later catapulted the sculptor to the forefront of the American ceramic art movement.

Isaac Broome was born on May 16, 1835, in Valcartier, Quebec, and moved to Philadelphia during infancy. Educated in Philadelphia schools, Broome went on to study at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, where he specialized in the fine and industrial arts. In the 1850s, he married Victoria Myers of Washington, D.C. During that time he executed sculptures for the pediment of the U.S. Capitol and W.W. Corcoran’s mausoleum in Georgetown. In 1858, Broome established a studio in Rome, Italy. He briefly lived in Florence, Paris, and London so he could visit museum collections of Grecian and Etruscan vases—the designs of which he used as inspiration for his own painting and sculpture. In 1860, the 26-year-old artist returned to Pennsylvania to become one of 12 academicians at the Pennsylvania Academy, filling a vacancy brought about by the death of Rembrandt Peale.²

After a promising early career on the East Coast and abroad, Broome moved to Pittsburgh in 1865 to pursue a business venture in decorative terracotta. Though known primarily for iron, steel, and glass industries, the Pittsburgh region also became a nationally known producer of fire brick, stoneware, and other clay products. Sizable clay deposits in the region’s river valleys provided the raw material, nearby bituminous coal fields afforded fuel, and railroad, canal, and river networks offered quick and efficient transport to an array of markets.³ Drawn by the potential of the region’s budding clay industry and the post-war urbanization of Pittsburgh and adjacent Allegheny City, Broome opened a terracotta manufacturing business to produce decorative pieces for buildings, parks, and public gardens. Located in a square west of Federal Street in Allegheny City, one of Broome’s terracotta fountains took the form of a semi-colossal, partially nude boy holding a basin in both hands,

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Isaac Broome (left) with David G. Blythe at
J.J. Gillespie Gallery, Pittsburgh, 1865.
J.J. Gillespie Company.



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The same classical inspiration that defines Broome's Civil War monument can be found in his 1876 masterpiece of American ceramics: the *Baseball Vases*.

Isaac Broome, *Baseball Vase*, 1876, parian porcelain. Collection of the New Jersey State Museum, the Brewer Collection, CH354.22. Photograph by Ricardo Barros.



Classical motifs characterize Isaac Broome's art tiles, fabricated in Western Pennsylvania in the 1890s during his tenure with the Beaver Falls Art Tile Company.

Isaac Broome, *Tile Setting*, c. 1890, ceramic in wood framing. Collection of the Brooklyn Museum, H. Randolph Lever Fund, 79.173.1-5.

modestly draped in robes, and supported by a stylized tree stump on a sandstone base. Designed to provide drinking water to thirsty park-goers, the four-foot-tall fountain carried its water supply upward through the center of the figure and to the sipping receptacle.⁴

Although the prospect of a lucrative terracotta business drew him to the region, Broome realized that the city's moneyed industrialists offered great potential for artistic patronage, so he augmented his income with commissions as a sculptor. This work may have even surpassed his work in clay, as Broome's listing in the city directories for this period label him as an "artist" and "sculptor."⁵ One of his extant works, a statue of a trumpet-wielding, cloth-draped woman commissioned

in 1865, marks the graves of Lippincott family members in Allegheny Cemetery. In 1870, the city directory lists Broome's affiliation as "fresco artist," indicating yet another artistic undertaking that employed him during his Pittsburgh years. Broome and his new family appear to have moved often, with city directories and the census listing multiple residences and work addresses in both Pittsburgh and Allegheny City.⁶

On the social front, Broome developed personal relationships with members of the region's budding artistic colony. His close friend, celebrated Pittsburgh artist David G. Blythe, painted the only known likeness of Broome as a young man. Created in 1865, Blythe's self-portrait shows the artist and

Broome standing side by side in front of J.J. Gillespie's famed art gallery on Wood Street in downtown Pittsburgh, further illustrating his acceptance among the city's artistic elites.⁷

Serendipitously, Broome's arrival in Pittsburgh in 1865 coincided with burgeoning discussions among community leaders in nearby Sewickley for a monument to honor their Civil War casualties. Like many Western Pennsylvania communities, Sewickley had heeded President Abraham Lincoln's call for volunteers and witnessed the quick departure of its native sons for the battlefields of the South. Many of Sewickley's volunteers formed Company G of the 28th Pennsylvania Volunteers, a regiment that saw action in the bloody battles of Second

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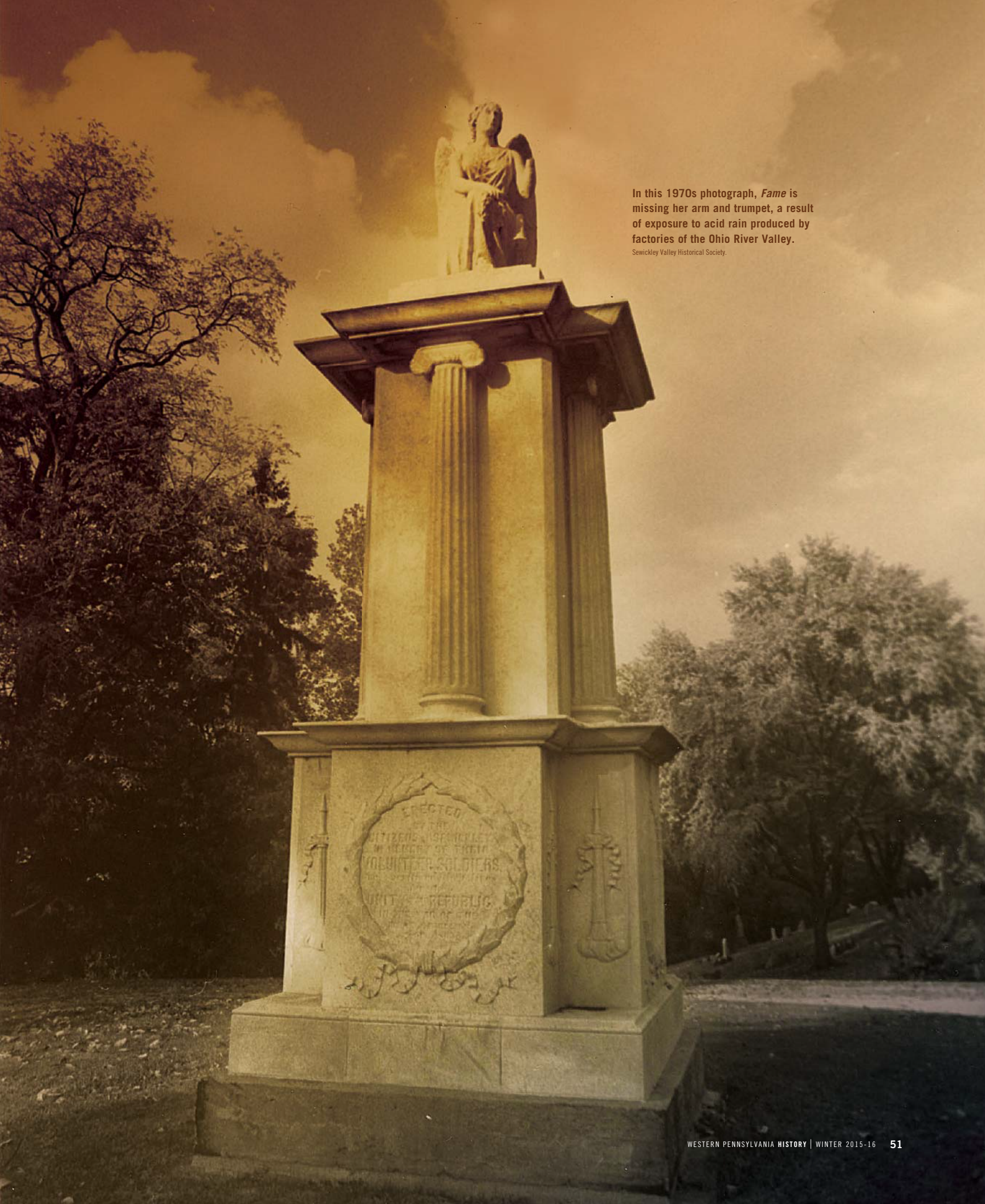
Isaac Broome, Mary L. Lippincott Funerary Monument in Allegheny Cemetery, marble, 1867.
Christopher Bailey via Pittsburgh Cemeteries; or, the Architecture of Life and Death, <https://pittsburghcemeteries.wordpress.com>.

Bull Run, Antietam, Chancellorsville, and Gettysburg. Over the course of the war, local newspapers somberly reported on Sewickley Cemetery receiving the remains of the town's Civil War dead—some killed in action, others who died from disease. As the final resting place of many of its casualties, the cemetery seemed the appropriate place for a monument to recognize those who gave the ultimate sacrifice to the Union cause. Whereas most communities placed their monuments in town squares, Sewickley leaders believed that the cemetery's bucolic setting on a wooded hillside overlooking the valley would be a more appropriate (and more peaceful) location. At a meeting on June 15, 1865, cemetery Superintendent D.N. White first proposed the monument.

Since our last annual meeting, under the blessing of Providence, peace has once more smiled upon our land, and

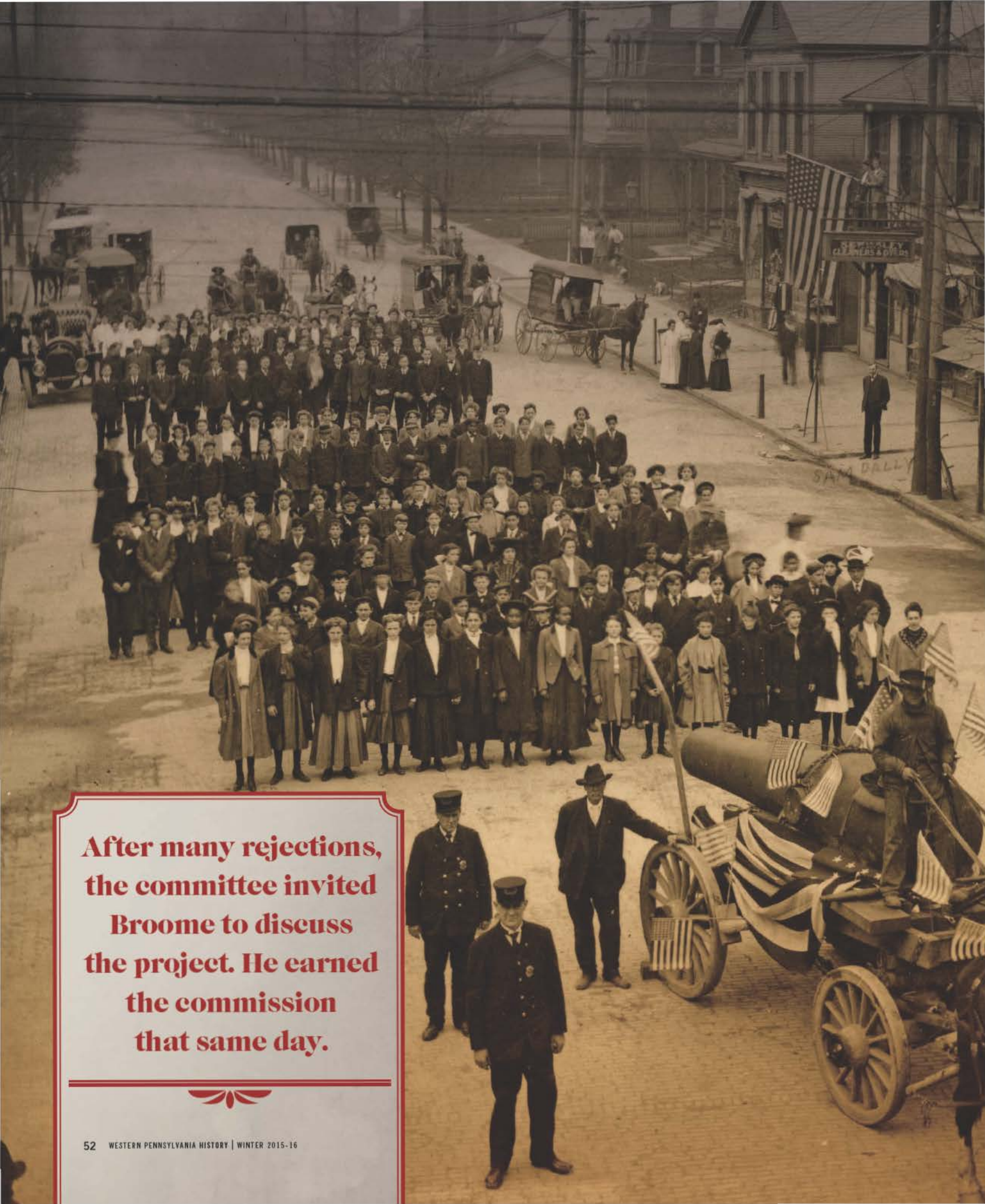
our veteran soldiers, with shouts of victory, are returning to their homes. But there are some who went out from our midst in all the pride and vigor of young manhood, who will return no more. They sleep in far-off battle fields, while others rest in our beautiful cemetery, to await the final resurrection. Do not the patriotic citizens of this valley owe something to their dead heroes? Shall their names be suffered to perish? Shall no record, imperishable as marble, be kept of their deeds and sacrifices? Shall we have no enduring memorial of the remarkable rebellion, and of those who perished in defense of union and liberty? It seems proper that this work should be undertaken by the cemetery company, as it is composed of many of our principal citizens and has an organized and corporate existence. I would therefore recommend to the Board of Managers that immediate action be taken to promote so laudable an enterprise.⁸

On the same day of this heartfelt address, the cemetery board of managers passed resolutions to take action on a monument and formed a small committee consisting of Superintendent White, T.H. Nevin, and J.W.F. White to lead the project. After establishing that they would receive no compensation for their work and that the cemetery would undertake no debt, the committee members created a fund to cover the cost of a statue, with a first public appeal taking place on July 4. Spearheaded by \$200 donations from town leaders James L. Carnahan, William Reed, and the trustees of the Economy Society, the fund grew to more than \$4,000 in a matter of weeks. As for the design, the committee first considered the use of American granite, but quickly ruled it out because the innate hardness would prevent the elaborate ornamentation envisioned for the piece. Instead, the committee agreed on

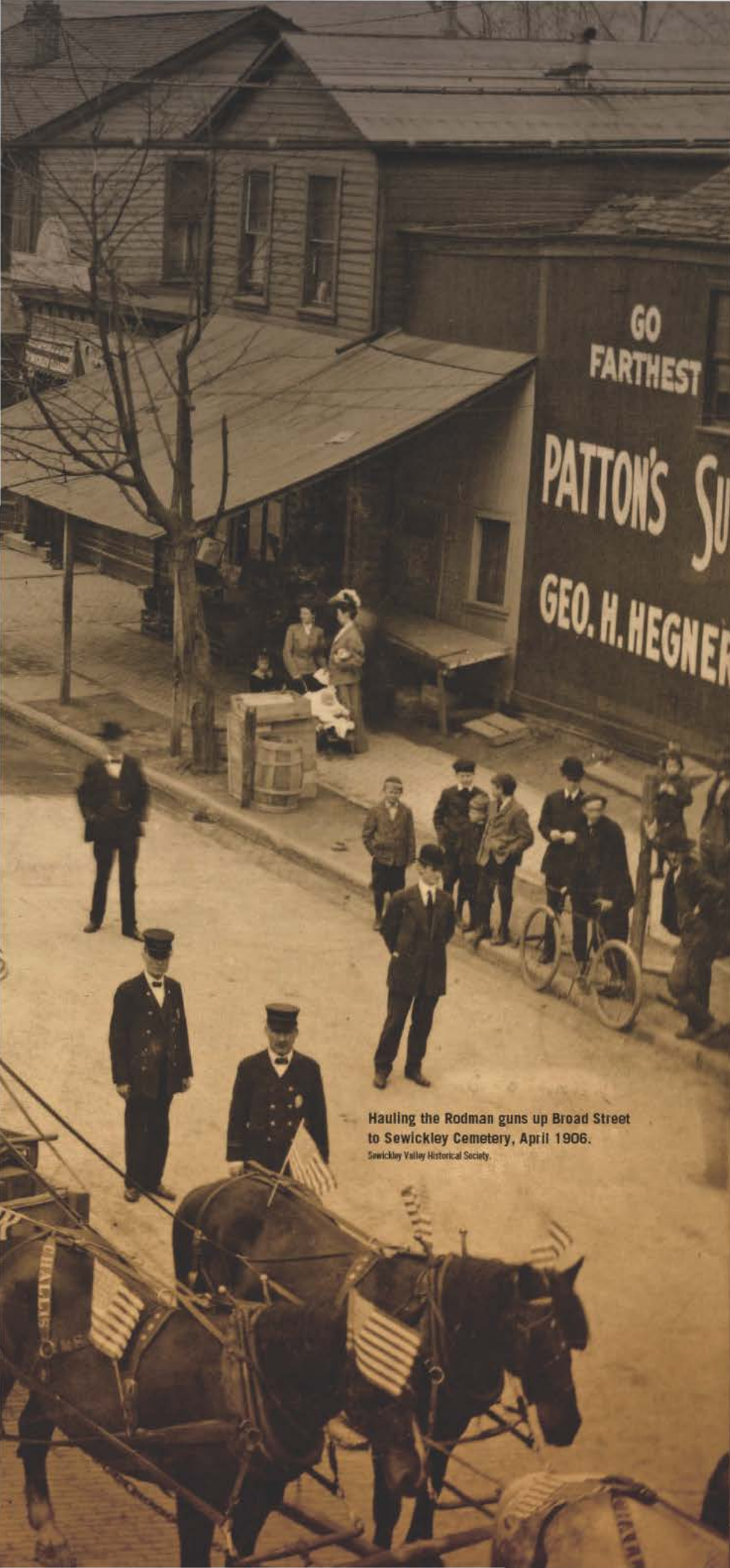


In this 1970s photograph, *Fame* is missing her arm and trumpet, a result of exposure to acid rain produced by factories of the Ohio River Valley.

Sewickley Valley Historical Society.



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Hauling the Rodman guns up Broad Street
to Sewickley Cemetery, April 1906.
Sewickley Valley Historical Society.

the use of Italian marble—a material that, “for durability and richness, and the facility with which it can be wrought into beautiful forms, has rendered it the chosen material for works of art, and monumental structures, for ages.”⁹

Once the material had been determined, the committee sent out a call for design proposals. Its excitement at a large number of design submissions quickly turned to disappointment as not a single one proved to be acceptable to the committee’s vision. “There was an almost universal sameness in all the conceptions presented,” the group lamented, “all of them including an obelisk, or column, and generally surmounted with an eagle and all of them with military emblems.” Since such monuments were already being erected in other parts of the country, the ubiquitous obelisk design capped by an eagle (or an armed soldier standing at attention) failed to inspire Sewickley’s vision for a “true work of art, expressive of the object, classical in its expression, while original in its conception.”¹⁰ After many rejections, the committee learned about Isaac Broome’s recent arrival in Pittsburgh and invited him to discuss the project. He earned the commission that same day.

Dedicated one year later on July 12, 1866, Broome’s Sewickley Civil War monument took the form of PHEME (or Fame), the feminine personification of fame and renown in classical Greek mythology. Carved from marble, Broome’s embodiment of Fame rested on one knee, folded wings behind, with a laurel wreath in one hand and a trumpet in the other. The kneeling figure was perched atop a four-sided structure made of marble and resembling a temple from ancient Greece. Fluted ionic columns constituted the core of the temple, enhancing the classical feel. The artist’s conception for the 21-foot-tall monument was the culmination of kinetic action:

Fame, flying through air, seeking to sound trumpet, espies the marble structure, which with ionic columns, represents a small Grecian temple, and



Closeup view of one of the four 10-inch Rodman cannons made at Fort Pitt Foundry that surrounded *Fame* from 1906 until 1942.
Sewickley Valley Historical Society

she finds it as being dedicated to the memory of heroes, prepares a chapel of laurels to hand upon it in their honor. Folds her wings and kneels for that purpose, holding laurel in one hand and seizes the trumpet to sound in their honor.¹¹

The public marveled at the masterful carving and lifelike detail of Broome's *Fame*, commenting on her facial features, arms, hands, fingers, and even the folds of her robes. Beneath her feet, three sides of the temple contained carved panels surrounded by low relief laurel wreaths (symbolizing victory) that listed the names of Sewickley's Civil War dead. The front panel, also encased in low relief laurel, proclaimed the monument's function as a memorial "for the unity of the republic in

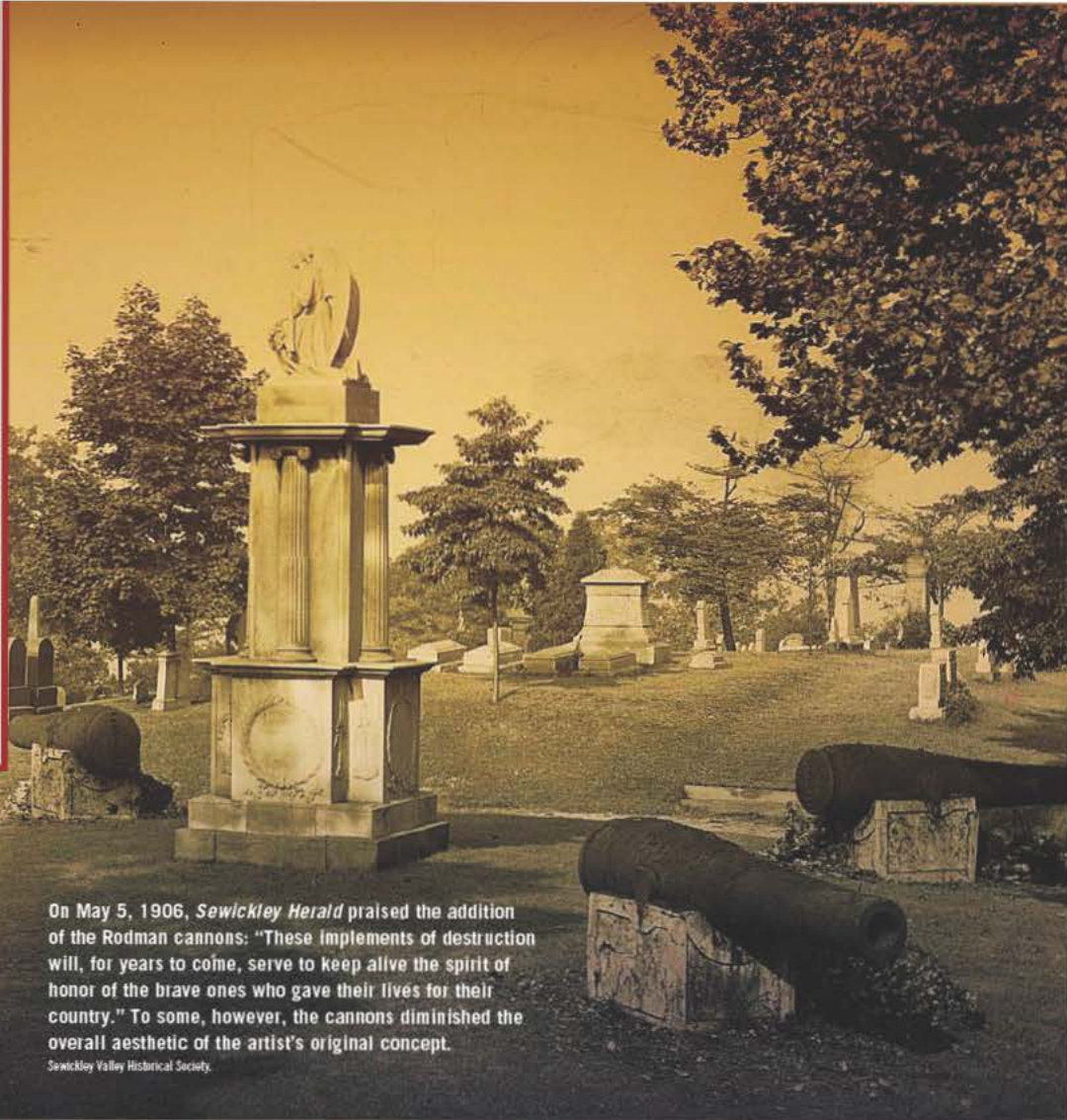
the war of the Great Rebellion." Flanking each of the panels, inverted torches symbolized the darkness faced by a community grieving over its lost sons. Pleased with the uniqueness of the design, the cemetery committee lauded Broome's artistic efforts, crediting him with "producing one of the finest works of art, of a monumental description, to be found in this region."¹² Fittingly, the statue would go on to serve as the central focus of Sewickley's annual Memorial Day ceremonies for many years.¹³

It is unclear what influenced the choice of *Fame*, but it is possible that Broome was inspired by Theodore O'Hara's poem *Bivouac of the Dead*, which includes the stanza, "On *Fame's* eternal camping-ground / Their silent tents to spread / And glory guards, with solemn

round / The bivouac of the dead."¹⁴ Although written in the aftermath of the Mexican War to honor Kentucky veterans, O'Hara's poem saw new life in the 1860s when it was used in ceremonies and public memorials mourning Civil War soldiers. The mention of *Fame* in a popular poem of the day may have moved Broome to use the figure on his monument. It is also likely that Broome was guided on his choice by his travels in Europe, where *Fame* had served as an allegorical symbol on military memorials for centuries. It is unclear if O'Hara's poem or Broome's Sewickley monument played a role in inspiring another famous Civil War statue of *Fame*: the 1897 Battle Monument on the grounds of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point.



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On May 5, 1906, *Sewickley Herald* praised the addition of the Rodman cannons: "These implements of destruction will, for years to come, serve to keep alive the spirit of honor of the brave ones who gave their lives for their country." To some, however, the cannons diminished the overall aesthetic of the artist's original concept.

Sewickley Valley Historical Society.



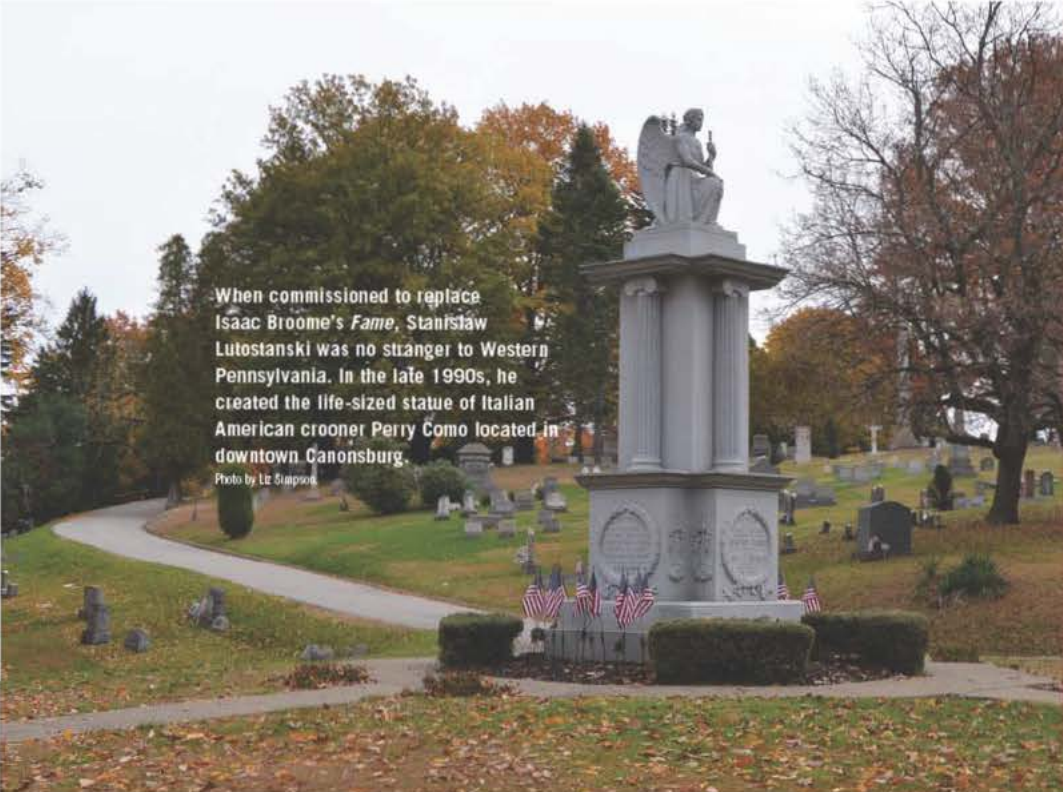
Broome left Pittsburgh in 1871 to pursue another short-lived terracotta project in Brooklyn, after which he undertook his celebrated work for the 1876 Centennial International Exposition in Philadelphia. A second chapter in Broome's Western Pennsylvania career came in 1890 when the artist (by then established as a ceramic tile designer) accepted a position at the Beaver Falls Art Tile Company. From 1890 until 1896, Broome designed decorative fireplace

and oven tiles using the same classical inspiration as his Sewickley statue. While a resident of Beaver Falls and nearby New Brighton, Broome also built a bathtub and enamel works at Ellwood City, dabbled in projects connected with the Pittsburgh Iron Works, and received patents for a number of innovative tile decorating apparatuses.¹⁵ In 1896, Broome left the Pittsburgh region for good to pursue artistic endeavors elsewhere.

Broome's second stint as a Western Pennsylvania resident ended shortly before Sewickley civic leaders embellished his Civil War monument with a cannon circle. Enlisting the support of Gilbert Hays (the son of Gettysburg hero and Franklin-native General Alexander Hays), cemetery officials acquired

In 2005, Vermont sculptor Stanislaw Lutostanski created a replacement Civil War monument modeled after Broome's original creation. Granite was selected over marble to ensure durability.

Photo by Liz Simpson.



When commissioned to replace Isaac Broome's *Fame*, Stanisław Lutostanski was no stranger to Western Pennsylvania. In the late 1990s, he created the life-sized statue of Italian American crooner Perry Como located in downtown Canonsburg.

Photo by Liz Stuprowski

Cemetery officials moved Broome's original statue to an unassuming location inside the cemetery chapel, where it still resides.



four 10-inch Rodman guns weighing 15,000 pounds each and installed them around *Fame*. Made at the Fort Pitt Foundry, the cannons had most recently been mounted on the fortifications of Fort Independence in Boston Harbor. In some respects, the addition of the cannons in 1906 ran contrary to the original inclinations of the monument committee that wanted a classical, non-military theme for its memorial. Nonetheless, an elaborate ceremony in which the cannons were hauled through town trailed by a procession of tearful veterans and schoolchildren quickly warmed the public to the new addition.¹⁶ Less than 40 years later, however, the memorial returned to its original state when a World War II metal drive in 1942 claimed the cannons for scrap. The Sewickley Valley Cot Club raised the funds for four teams of dray horses and a specially built 10-ton wagon to haul the Rodmans from the cemetery to the railroad, where they were shipped off to a scrap yard and converted into modern tools of war.¹⁷

By the 1970s, it was obvious that using marble for the Civil War monument had one severe shortcoming: susceptibility to damage from exposure. Situated on a prominent open

hillside in one of the country's most prolific industrial river valleys, Broome's statue suffered from the effects of 100 years of air pollution, acid rain, and the natural elements. Once lauded for its intricate detail, Broome's *Fame* became marred and cracked, her arm and trumpet lost, and the panels holding the soldiers' names rendered nearly illegible.¹⁸ As the damage increased with each passing year, community leaders decided that the entire sculpture and temple base should be replaced in granite, thereby ensuring greater durability for the next century. An ad hoc group named Citizens for Soldiers achieved the herculean task of raising \$300,000 to commission a granite replica of the *Fame* statue to be made by Vermont sculptor Stanisław Lutostanski. The community dedicated its new monument on July 12, 2005, exactly 139 years to the day after its original unveiling. Amid the pomp and circumstance of the event, cemetery officials quietly moved Broome's original statue to an unassuming location inside the cemetery chapel, where it still resides.¹⁹

Following his death in 1922, Isaac Broome was largely forgotten by Western Pennsylvania and continues to be overlooked

in any discussion of public sculpture in the Pittsburgh region.²⁰ Broome's formative Western Pennsylvania years, however, represent an important chapter in the early career of a celebrated American artist—an artist whose classically inspired statue of *Fame* made a lasting impact on the landscape of the Ohio River Valley and represented one of the earliest and most distinctive memorials honoring the nation's Civil War veterans. ❧

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¹ Alice Cooney Frelinghuysen, *American Porcelain, 1770-1920* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1989); Molly Randolph, "Isaac Broome: Ott & Brewer's Ceramic Artist" (unpublished master's thesis, George Mason University, 2014).

² "Isaac Broome, Pioneer Ceramic Sculptor, Dies," *New York Tribune*, 5 May 1922, 11; "Life Devoted to Art Productions," *Trenton Sunday Advertiser*, 8 October 1905, 9; Edwin Atlee Barber, *The Pottery and Porcelain of the United States: An Historical Review of American Ceramic Art from the Earliest Times to the Present Day* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1893), 371-372. For a recent study of

Broome, including biographical material on his earlier life, see Molly Randolph, "Isaac Broome: Ott & Brewer's Ceramic Artist."

³ George Henry Thurston, *Pittsburgh's Progress, Industries and Resources* (Pittsburgh: A.A. Anderson & Son, 1886), 177-178; Ronald L. Michael and Phil R. Jack, "The Stoneware Potteries of New Geneva And Greensboro, Pennsylvania," *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine* 56, no. 4 (October 1973): 365-382; Ronald L. Michael, "Stoneware from Fayette, Greene and Washington Counties, Pennsylvania," *Northeast Historical Archaeology* 6, no. 1 (1977): 33-41; W.A. Calhoun, "Early Clay Industries of the Upper Ohio Valley," unpublished manuscript, Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Society, Ohio History Connection.

⁴ *Annual Report of the Park Commission of the City of Allegheny, Pittsburgh* (Allegheny City, Pa.: W.O. Johnston & Co. Printers, 1870), 16-17. No remnants of these classically inspired fountains survive.

⁵ *Directory of Pittsburgh and Allegheny Cities, 1865-1866, 1867-1868, 1868-1869, 1870-1871; 1870 United States Federal Census, Allegheny Ward 3, Allegheny, Pennsylvania.* Pennsylvania Room, Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Walter Read Hovey, "Painting in Pittsburgh from the Frontier Settlement to the Industrial Development," *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine* 40, no. 1 (Spring 1957): 43.

⁸ "Soldiers Monument," in photocopied publication titled *Sewickley Cemetery*, vertical files, Sewickley Valley Historical Society.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ "Our Soldiers Monument," *Sewickley Herald*, 27 May 1932, 1.

¹⁴ The full text of O'Hara's poem can be found in Thomas R. Lounsbury, ed., *Yale Book of American Verse* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1912).

¹⁵ "New Patents," *Clay Record*, 29 December 1893, 12; Edwin Atlee Barber, "Recent Advances in the Pottery Industry," *Popular Science Monthly* 40 (January 1892): 310-311; "Life Devoted to Art Productions," *Trenton Sunday Advertiser*, 8 October 1905, 9; Norman Karlson, *American Art Tile, 1876-1941* (New York: Rizzoli, 1998), 57-58.

¹⁶ "The Cannon Arrive," *Sewickley Herald*, 28 April 1906, 1.

¹⁷ "Cannon Go Back to War," *Sewickley Herald*, 8 October 1942, 1.

¹⁸ "Back Into Time," *Sewickley Herald*, 14 July 1971, 14.

¹⁹ "Monumental Task Underway at Sewickley Cemetery," *Sewickley Herald*, 30 June 2004, 13; "Community Prepares to Bid Farewell to a Lady," *Sewickley Herald*, 25 May 2005, 13. "Fame's Final Day," *Sewickley Herald*, 29 June 2005, 13.

²⁰ Broome's *Fame* is not included in the "Greater Pittsburgh" chapter of the excellent reference book on public sculpture, Marilyn Evert and Vernon Gay, *Discovering Pittsburgh's Sculpture* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1983).

Today, Broome's *Fame* resides inside a chapel on the cemetery grounds.

Photo by Liz Simpson.

