

UP FRONT



ARCHITECTURE AROUND US

By Angelique Bamberg

Scriba Mansion, Troy Hill

Hidden in a wooded glade on Troy Hill stands a nearly 150-year-old house that, if its walls could talk, would probably speak in German. The Scriba mansion and the secluded lane, dwindling to a footpath, that leads to it are both named after Victor Scriba, who published the first German newspaper west of the Alleghenies in the 19th century. He and his brother-in-law would reshape the hilltop, literally and linguistically.

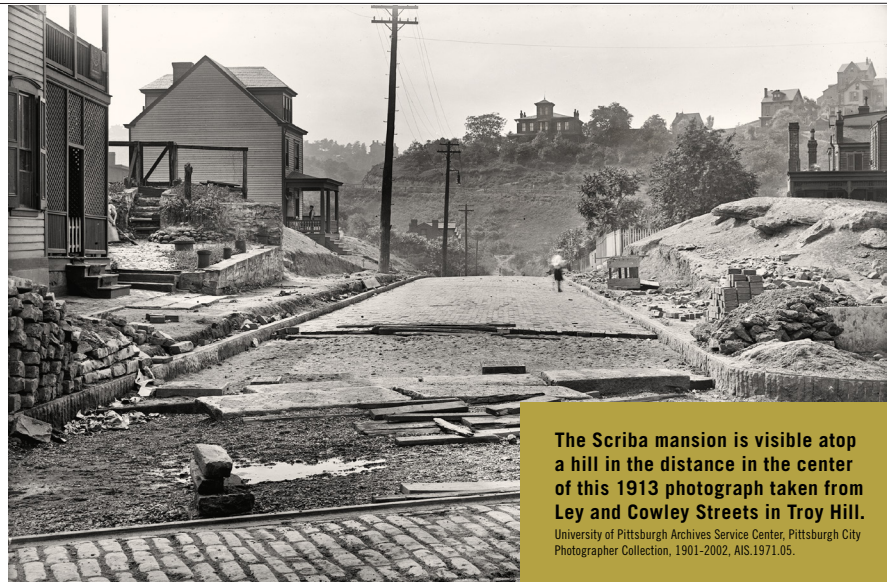
A century ago, Troy Hill was a community united by language, filled with immigrants from many German-speaking areas of Europe. Before that, the hilltop east of Allegheny City was covered in farms and orchards, but after

the Civil War, the real estate investments of Adam Reineman began to alter the landscape. Reineman, the wealthy president of the German Trust and Savings Bank of Pittsburgh, moved from Chambersburg to Lowrie Street in the 1870s and purchased a large amount of land. By subdividing and selling his property to German families over the next few decades, Reineman helped build a German community on Troy Hill. The construction of the 370-foot Troy Hill Incline in 1887 made the neighborhood even more accessible to recent

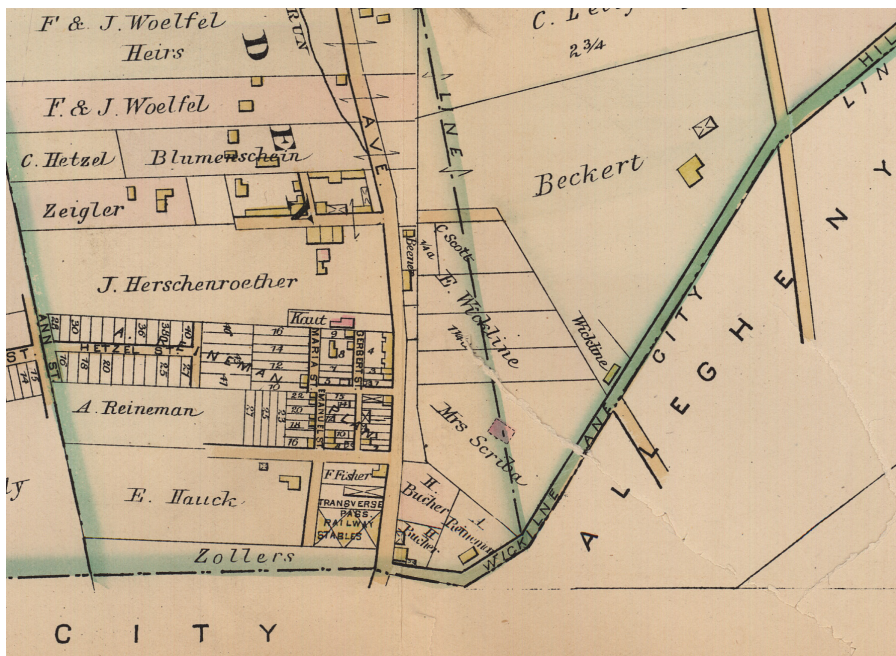
immigrants seeking to move uphill from the industrialized Allegheny flats.

Troy Hill's new residents spoke German, conducted business and worship in German, and participated in German singing, social, and cultural societies. They staged parades and festivals that recreated those from their hometowns in Hesse, Swabia, Alsace, Bavaria, Prussia, and Bohemia. Liedertafel Way, a street in Troy Hill, is named after the neighborhood's singing society, whose building still stands at the street's western end. Covered in siding, it is now a VFW hall.

Pittsburgh's German-speaking populace was so numerous during the 19th century that legal notices were required to be published in both English and German. News circulated in German via the newspaper *Freiheits Freund* ("Freedom's Friend"), the paper published by Victor Scriba, who was Reineman's brother-in-law. Scriba had edited the weekly paper in Chambersburg in the 1830s before purchasing it; in 1837, he moved the paper to Pittsburgh,



The Scriba mansion is visible atop a hill in the distance in the center of this 1913 photograph taken from Ley and Cowley Streets in Troy Hill. University of Pittsburgh Archives Service Center, Pittsburgh City Photographer Collection, 1901-2002, AIS.1971.05.



A Hopkins property atlas from 1886 shows the Allegheny City-Reserve Township line going through the Scriba property, labeled "Mrs. Scriba." Land owned by Adam Reineman, Scriba's brother-in-law, appears on this map as well.

University of Pittsburgh, Archives Service Center, G.M. Hopkins Company Maps, 1872-1940.



and in 1847, he made it a daily. Scriba lived with his wife Caroline on Progress Street in East Allegheny, but 30 years later, constructed his gracious estate on Troy Hill in 1868, just before Reineman moved here.


The mansion's central tower, tall, narrow windows, and bracketed window hoods mark the architecture as Italianate, one of the most popular of Victorian styles. Inspired by Italian villas, notable for square towers and porches, Italianate architecture was popular just before and after the Civil War, fading with the depression of 1873. The style was applied to everything from simple row houses to elaborate mansions. Brick and wood clapboard were the most common building materials. Freestanding Italianate houses were characterized by low-pitched roofs with deep projecting eaves (often with brackets), elaborate cornices, and a central tower. Scriba Mansion (which oddly straddles the Allegheny

Above:
The Scriba mansion, 2014, which overlooks (but can't be seen from) Pittview Avenue.

Photo by author.

Right:
A later owner of the Scriba mansion, John Chernosky, on the house's porch in 1944.

Chernosky Family.

City-Reserve Township line) is a beautiful survivor, unrestored but with much of its detailing intact. 

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