

UP FRONT



ARCHITECTURE AROUND US

By Angelique Bamberg

The Equine City

In the 19th century, horses helped shape not only rural farmlands but also the industrializing cities. Horses were living machines which pulled public and private transportation, hauled goods and materials, and powered the heavy equipment that built and maintained infrastructure. Their needs for shelter, food, equipment, and flat, paved streets influenced the ways that humans constructed their built environment.

Urban horses lived in a complex ecology with humans. In Pittsburgh in 1900 there was one horse for every 23 human citizens, and stables constituted five to seven percent of newly-constructed buildings. A few wealthy households had always had the means to keep horses for aesthetic and recreational purposes. These animals and the vehicles they pulled were status symbols, and their carriage houses likewise were showpieces, often ornamented in fashionable architectural styles—but sited as far from the main house as possible to separate their owners from unpleasant smells and sounds.

By far, most horses in cities and towns were working animals. Peddlers, scrap collectors, and other individuals who employed a horse or two tended to stable them in wooden shacks in back alleys. As the century progressed, fleets of horses served street rail companies, express companies, factories, merchants, and

governments. These organizations strove to protect their investment in horsepower by building large, sanitary, well-equipped stables that housed hundreds or even thousands of animals. Corporate and municipal stables tended to be built of fireproof brick construction with wooden floors—which were easiest on hooves—and to have more than one story. The largest stables accommodated not only horse stalls but spaces for vehicles, hay and grain storage, horse shoeing, harness repair, and veterinary services.

In 1910, Pittsburgh's H.J. Heinz Corporation boasted of the "equine palace" it provided for its 200 black French Percheron delivery horses. These horses were visible symbols of the company and its commitment to quality, and therefore important to maintain in top condition. The residents of Heinz's three-story brick stable enjoyed elevators; electric lights and fans for ventilation; steam

Chartered in 1859, the Citizens Passenger Railway Company operated the first street railway in Pittsburgh.

University of Pittsburgh ASC, Pittsburgh Railways Company Records, 1872-1974, 7429.0005.PR.





Now an architect's office, this Lawrenceville stable was built in 1888 for the Upperman Bros. livery and undertaking business.

Photo by Angelique Bamberg.



The cities of Pittsburgh and Allegheny maintained hundreds of horses in dozens of municipal stables. Today this stable on Pittsburgh's North Side, which served the Department of Public Works, is the only municipal one still standing.

Photo by Timothy Zinn.

heat; an automatic feeding system with electrically-controlled compartments for hay, grain, and water; and a hospital stall complete with a Turkish bath and foot bath.

Livery stables, which hired out horses and carriages, were smaller but almost as well-equipped. Much livery business came from funerals and, in Pittsburgh, livery and undertaking services were often combined. The former Upperman Brothers stable at 3441 Butler Street in Lawrenceville, built in 1888, was an example. Today the building is used as an architect's office, but the stone horse head over the main entrance speaks to its original purpose.

The first streetcar lines were horse-drawn. The efficiency of horses pulling car loads of people over flat, smooth terrain stimulated the pavement of streets, the migration of residences to "streetcar suburbs" along radial routes, and the consequent specialization of central cities as business districts. The transition from horsepower to automated engines was gradual. By the 1890s most streetcar lines had electrified, yet as late as 1928, the City of Pittsburgh maintained 25 municipal stables, along with a breeding farm in South Fayette Township, housing approximately 300 horses. These horses served a variety of city departments including police,

fire, water, parks, and recreation. Only one of these stables remains today. The three-story Romanesque structure on West North Avenue was built in 1895 for horses employed by the City of Allegheny. Along with the rest of that city, it was absorbed into Pittsburgh in 1907, and continued to serve the Department of Public Works until about 1970. It is one of a

scarce few reminders of the city's dependence on true horsepower during the pre-automobile era.

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One of the H.J. Heinz Company's purebred back Percherons receives a foot bath in the company's "equine palace," 1904.

HHC Detre L&A, H.J. Heinz Company, Photographs, 1864-1991, MSP57.B003.103.