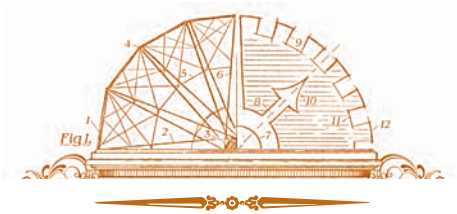


UP FRONT



INNOVATORS

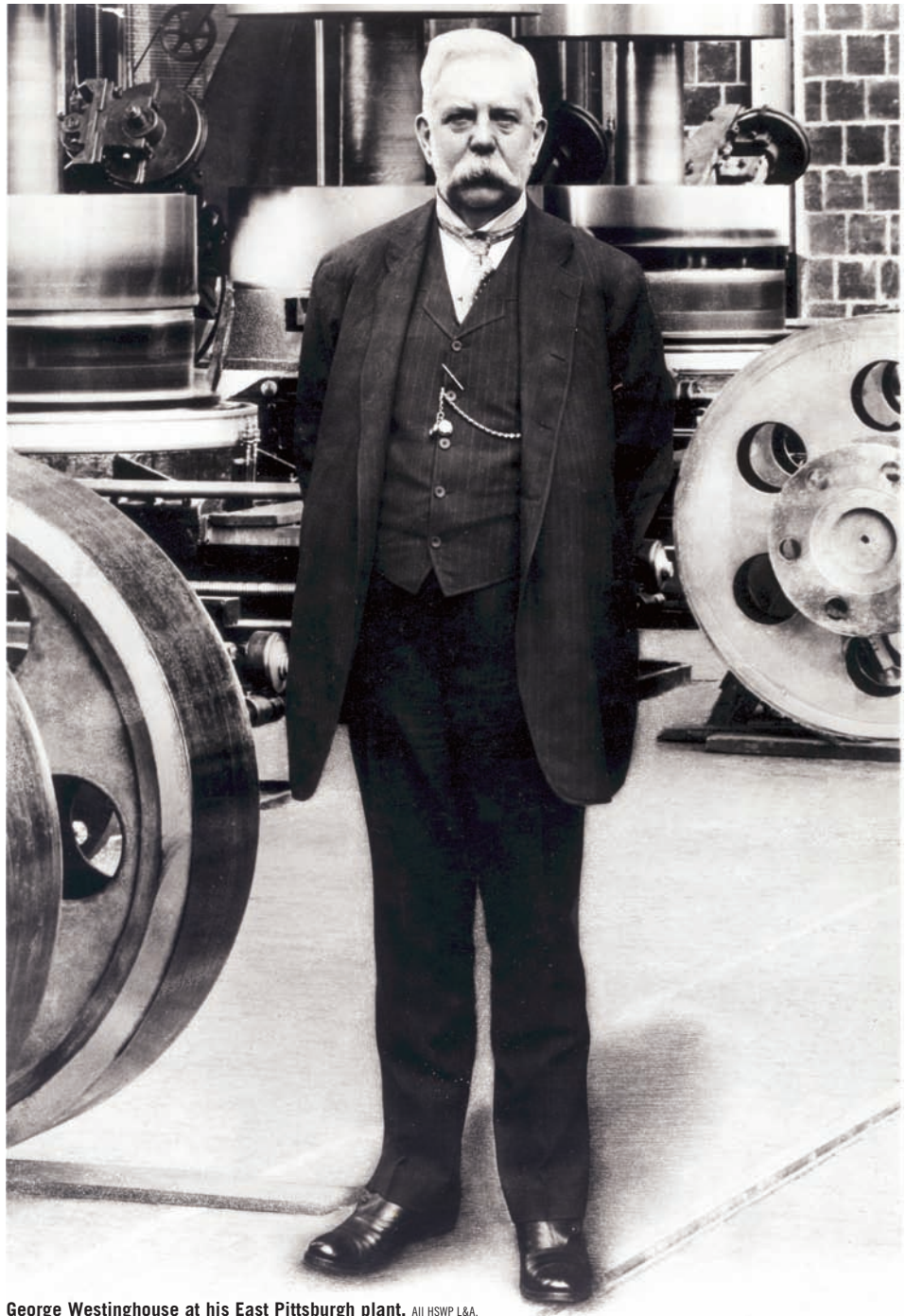
By Edward J. Reis

George Westinghouse

To some, George Westinghouse was America's greatest industrialist, to others a great inventor with 361 patents, while others revered him as the greatest engineer. He was also a successful businessman who started 60 companies before all was said and done.

Westinghouse saw the potential in ideas. One was using air to stop a train. In 1869 when the Westinghouse Air Brake Company was born, Westinghouse was just 23 years old. He soon saw potential in electricity and formed the Westinghouse Electric Company two years later. A rivalry heated up between Westinghouse, who strongly believed in engineer Nicolai Tesla's alternating current, and Thomas Edison who advocated direct current. Thus began the "Battle of the Currents." AC versus DC. The 10-year scuffle ended in 1895/1896 when Niagara Falls was harnessed by three 5,000-horsepower Westinghouse alternating current generators. After this success, the world was electrified with Westinghouse alternating current.

When others might have rested upon early successes, Westinghouse continued forward. Natural gas was discovered in Murrysville, Pennsylvania, and it caught Westinghouse's attention. He thought it might make a nice fuel for his plants. He was propelled into the natural gas business after



George Westinghouse at his East Pittsburgh plant. All HSWP L&A.



An early advertisement for Westinghouse electric lighting systems.

drilling in the back yard of his home, Solitude, in Homewood, where he struck a huge vein of gas.

Imagine George Westinghouse's working environment. In the morning he may have worked on improving his Westinghouse air brakes. Later that day he might have tackled a new method for transporting natural gas. Then again, by evening, he could have turned to creating a steam heater for railroad passenger cars (another of his successful inventions) or inventing the automobile air

spring, which is known today as a car's shock absorber.

Through all this success, there was never a strike at a Westinghouse company while he was in control (this during a heightened period of strife between "labor" and "capital"). In fact, Westinghouse was the first major employer in the country to grant workers a "half holiday" on Saturdays. Doctors and nurses provided immediate care for workers if they were injured at the plant, and there was a cafeteria for workers. Homes built by Westinghouse were sold, not rented, to workers with payments deducted

on a monthly basis from their checks. These houses were insured so wives and children had a home if the family breadwinner was killed or passed away. These precedent-setting practices did not sit well with other industrialists of the time, but gained him favor with his employees. Upon his 1914 death, Westinghouse's pall bearers were eight of his oldest workers. America and the world lost a great man and a great innovator. ☀

Ed Reis was associated with the George Westinghouse Museum for many years and became its executive director in 1998. With the recent merger of the George Westinghouse Museum and the Senator John Heinz History Center, he now serves as Westinghouse Historian.



The first Westinghouse gas derrick was built right in the back yard of the entrepreneur's home, Solitude, in Homewood.