As part of Pittsburgh's Renaissance, the walls came tumbling down, 1950.
Gift of Allegheny Conference on Community Development.
As soldiers streamed home from war, they found Pittsburgh worn and tired, bearing soot-streaked reminders of the arsenal efforts. An unusual partnership of political and corporate leaders came together to remake the city from the ground up—adding a grand entrance at the Point and new office buildings, switching from coal to natural gas to clear the air, and scrubbing away the accumulated detritus of industry. The city’s makeover, known as the Renaissance, created a sparkling model of urban renewal that benefited most, but not all, of the region’s residents.

So too, did many profit from the post war prosperity generated by the G.I. Bill and union-won wage and benefit gains. Industry boomed as it continued to service the military and produce goods for consumers hungry for something new. Great wealth, generated by industry, strengthened the area’s educational institutions and financed new facilities for medical research. Pittsburgh remained a manufacturing powerhouse and industrial leader, home to more than a dozen major corporations.
When it opened in 1940, the Pennsylvania Turnpike overshadowed the adjacent Lincoln Highway with its straighter route, easier grades, banked curves, limited access, and higher speed limits. This postcard, showing both roads at Mt. Dallas near Bedford, says of the Lincoln, at left, “The two lane road looks antiquated.”

The Pennsylvania Turnpike: America’s Dream Highway

The Allegheny Mountains provided a formidable natural barrier to travel between eastern and Western Pennsylvania. In the 18th century, the arduous wagon journey from Philadelphia to Pittsburgh took over a month. By the 1830s, the Main Line Canal reduced the trip to a few days, and in 1852 the railroad steamed across the state in a mere 20 hours.

By the 1910s, travelers preferred the automobile and lobbied for better and safer roads. On October 1, 1940, the eagerly anticipated Pennsylvania Turnpike opened. The four lane toll road provided 160 miles of smooth, non-stop travel between Carlisle and Irwin. Dubbed “America’s Dream Highway,” the turnpike pioneered design elements later incorporated into the Interstate Highway System.
By WWII Pittsburgh … was old and run down in its physical equipment and appearance. But worst of all, its people knew it and were defensive and apologetic, but no one was doing anything about it. This was the situation when the Allegheny Conference was born.

– Park Martin, first director of the Allegheny Conference on Community Development

In 1943, Pittsburgh was a pall of smoke with antiquated infrastructure and a heavy reliance on the steel industry. Carnegie Tech’s President Robert Doherty, along with Mellon Institute’s President Edward Weidlein, approached Richard King Mellon about a planning group to oversee the region’s postwar revitalization. With Mellon’s backing, they brought together heads of local businesses and industries to form the Allegheny Conference on Community Development. The Conference formed dozens of committees and planned the overhaul of everything from transportation and housing to healthcare and cultural life. Soon a model for redevelopment and urban planning, delegates from around the country arrived to see Pittsburgh’s transformation.
WQED and Early Television

The advent of television brought change to both lives and living rooms in the 1950s. Pittsburgh’s first TV station, WDTV, went on air January 11, 1949, broadcasting only a few hours a day. David Crantz, an early television personality, recalled, “They never believed people would stay up past 10 o’clock.”

As TV ownership soared, Mayor David Lawrence convened a meeting to explore educational television as part of the region’s physical and cultural renaissance. On April 1, 1954, WQED debuted—the first community-sponsored educational TV station in the country.

Pittsburgh’s industrial base had not traditionally encouraged higher education. In the mid-1950s, more than 70 percent of the people in Western Pennsylvania had not completed high school. WQED took seriously the idea of educational opportunities for all and developed programs for a variety of audiences. Daytime classes beamed into schoolrooms; afternoon programs focused on the “busy wife and mother”; evening classes targeted adults who worked during the day.
Good-Bye Shift Work: Hello 9-to-5

Following World War II, Philip Murray and the United Steel Workers of America bargained for better pay and working conditions, and as a result, wages for steelworkers tripled between 1937 and 1957. The G.I. Bill provided free college tuition to veterans and gave young men and women an alternative to entering the mines and mills after high school. College graduates embraced white collar and professional jobs with higher salaries, and low interest loans made modern suburban homes with shady new appliances more attractive and affordable. As the middle class prospered, and suburbs like West Mifflin and Monroeville boomed, Pittsburgh and surrounding mill towns like Homestead and Braddock began a slow decline.
Dr. Benjamin Spock

The postwar Baby Boom brought an unprecedented emphasis on children, and new parents turned to one man for advise on child rearing—Dr. Benjamin Spock. His 1945 book *Baby and Child Care* had a home in every nursery.

In 1951, the University of Pittsburgh appointed Dr. Spock to the Department of Psychiatry. Pediatrics had traditionally focused on diseases and abnormal behavior. Spock reversed this trend by studying children and relaying "normal" development to anxious parents. In 1953, Spock founded the Arsenal Nursery School in Lawrenceville, an innovative child care center where graduate students could observe and study normal childhood development firsthand.

Spock resisted efforts to capitalize on his success with *Baby and Child Care* until 1954 when his wife’s illness created a need for extra income. He raised his profile while in Pittsburgh by co-authoring *A Baby’s First Year*, writing a series of monthly columns for *Ladies’ Home Journal*, and hosting a weekly television show, *Parents and Dr. Spock*, on Pittsburgh’s new educational TV station WQED. The show proved so popular NBC offered him a nationally broadcast program.
Polio is Conquered: Jonas Salk

After completing his medical training, Jonas Salk spent six years at the University of Michigan working on an influenza vaccine in the laboratory of his mentor, Thomas Francis. In 1947, Salk looked for greater independence and his own lab. He found it in an unlikely place—Pittsburgh. As director of the Virus Research Laboratory, Salk oversaw construction of the lab, hired staff, directed research and, eventually, personally vaccinated the first children.

On April 12, 1955, Thomas Francis, who oversaw the evaluation of the field trial data, announced the vaccine “safe, effective and potent.” Pandemonium broke out among the reporters scrambling to deliver the news. *Pittsburgh Press* headlines declared: “Polio is Conquered.”

The National Foundation provided free shots to 10 million first and second graders in 1955. Others received shots from public health authorities or private physicians.