
Homewood-Brushton: A Century of Community-Making

by Steven W. Sapolsky
and Bartholomew Roselli

[Editor's note: The following photo essay is excerpted from the booklet and exhibit by the same title which opened February 7, 1987 at the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania. The exhibit will continue until July 1988. In addition to this chapter on the emergence of the middle class, 1890-1930, it also includes three chapters documenting the community making efforts of the many groups of people who settled in Homewood-Brushton from 1860 to the present.]

THE first areas to be settled in Pittsburgh were the river valleys near the Point. The Monongahela, Allegheny and Ohio rivers were the lifeblood of Pittsburgh and the city's early neighborhoods perched on their banks. It was vastly cheaper and easier to move goods and people by water than on land. On the crowded, narrow flatlands along the rivers, enveloped by the smoke, grit and noise of the mills, lived rich and poor, businessmen and workers, Whites and Blacks. Those were the days of "the walking city" when everyone lived close to their place of work. There were no separate, residential districts, and neighborhoods were a remarkable mix of different classes and ethnic groups.¹

The coming of the railroad in the 1850's transformed the economic and social geography of Pittsburgh. The spread of streetcar lines later in the century reinforced this change. Land transportation was now affordable to everyone. Workplaces and homes could spread over the landscape to escape the confines of the river valleys and crowded downtown. The railroad and streetcar, however, could not go every-

Steven Sapolsky is a graduate student in History at the University of Pittsburgh. He was the research associate for the Homewood-Brushton project.

Bartholomew Roselli is the assistant director of museum programs at The Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania. He holds a Master of Education degree in Museum Education from Bank Street College of Education in New York.—Editor

1 Joel A. Tarr, *Transportation Innovation and Changing Spatial Patterns in Pittsburgh, 1850-1934* (Chicago, 1978), 1-4.

where. It was too expensive to push them through the hillier parts of Pittsburgh with their narrow, steep grades and sharply curved hill-sides. These areas had to wait until the Twentieth Century before being made accessible by the bus and the automobile. The flatter districts were the areas that drew people away from the rivers in the second half of the Nineteenth Century. Foremost among them was the largest area of level land in all of Pittsburgh, the great East Liberty Valley, stretching in a gentle arc from what is now Bloomfield all the way through Wilkinsburg.²

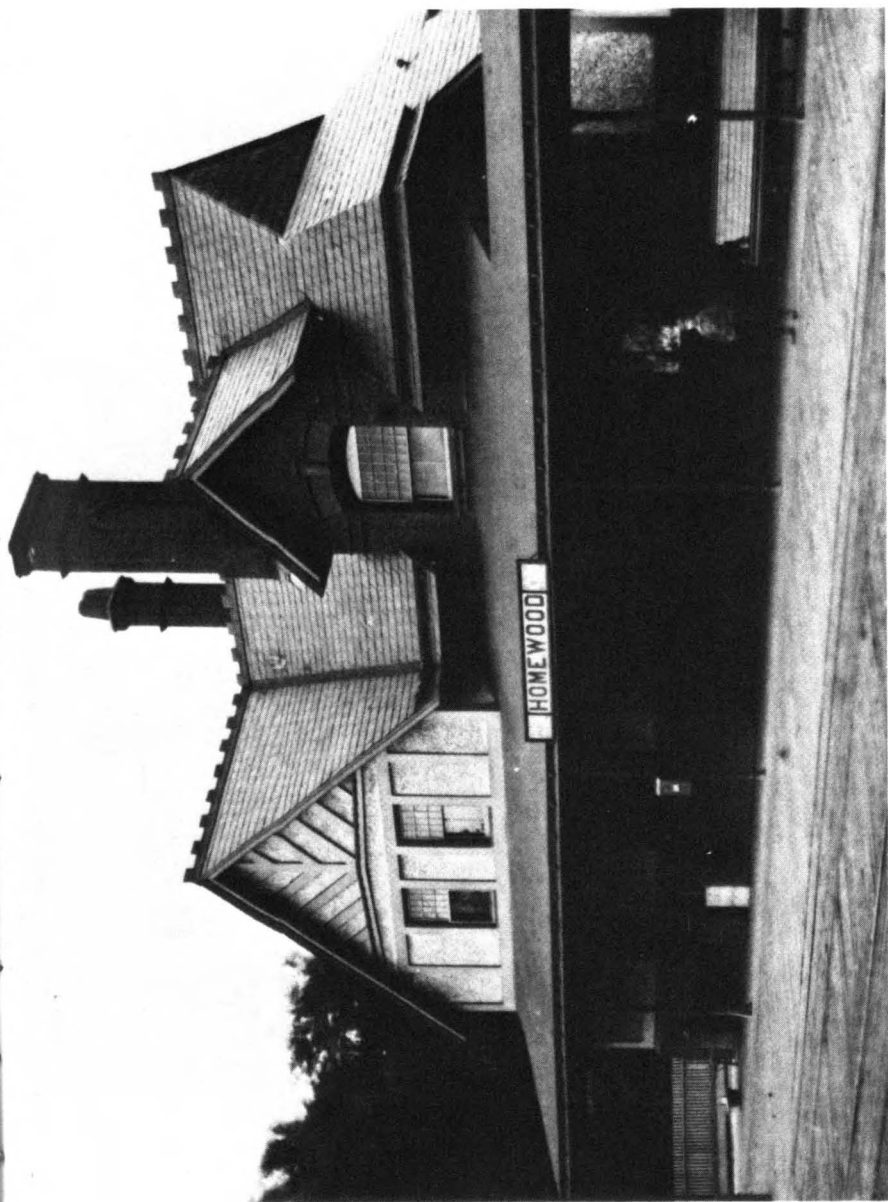
In 1852, the Pennsylvania Railroad ran its first cars into Pittsburgh. The railroad tracks ran right down the center of the East Liberty Valley on their way to the Point. Soon, trains were a common sight in the valley. A small settlement grew up around the newly built, handsome railroad station at Homewood. Homewood at its birth was a railroad station; a few farms and houses; a beautiful, broad, green valley of woods, swamps and fields. It was a pastoral paradise far away from the crowded, polluted river valleys, yet minutes away from the Point.³

Members of the new middle class of 1890 had no desire to live in the downtown area or along the rivers. They envied the ability of the elite to live in the green and pollution-free East End. They could not afford, however, to buy country land, develop it from scratch, and build elaborate homes. They could afford to commute to work and they could afford more moderate brick and detached homes. The answer to all their dreams was a new type of residential district: the streetcar suburb.

Aware of the growing demands of the middle class, capitalists invested millions of dollars in forming "traction companies" and building a network of streetcar lines from the downtown area to the East End. In 1892 and 1893, four electric trolley lines were laid down on the four main streets of Homewood-Brushton, on Penn, Hamilton, Frankstown, and Lincoln Avenues. This was an area of little development except for the country estates and several small tracts north of the railroad lines. Just like the railroad forty years before, the streetcar opened up the area to a new wave of settlement. Unlike the railroad, however, the streetcar completely changed the country character of the

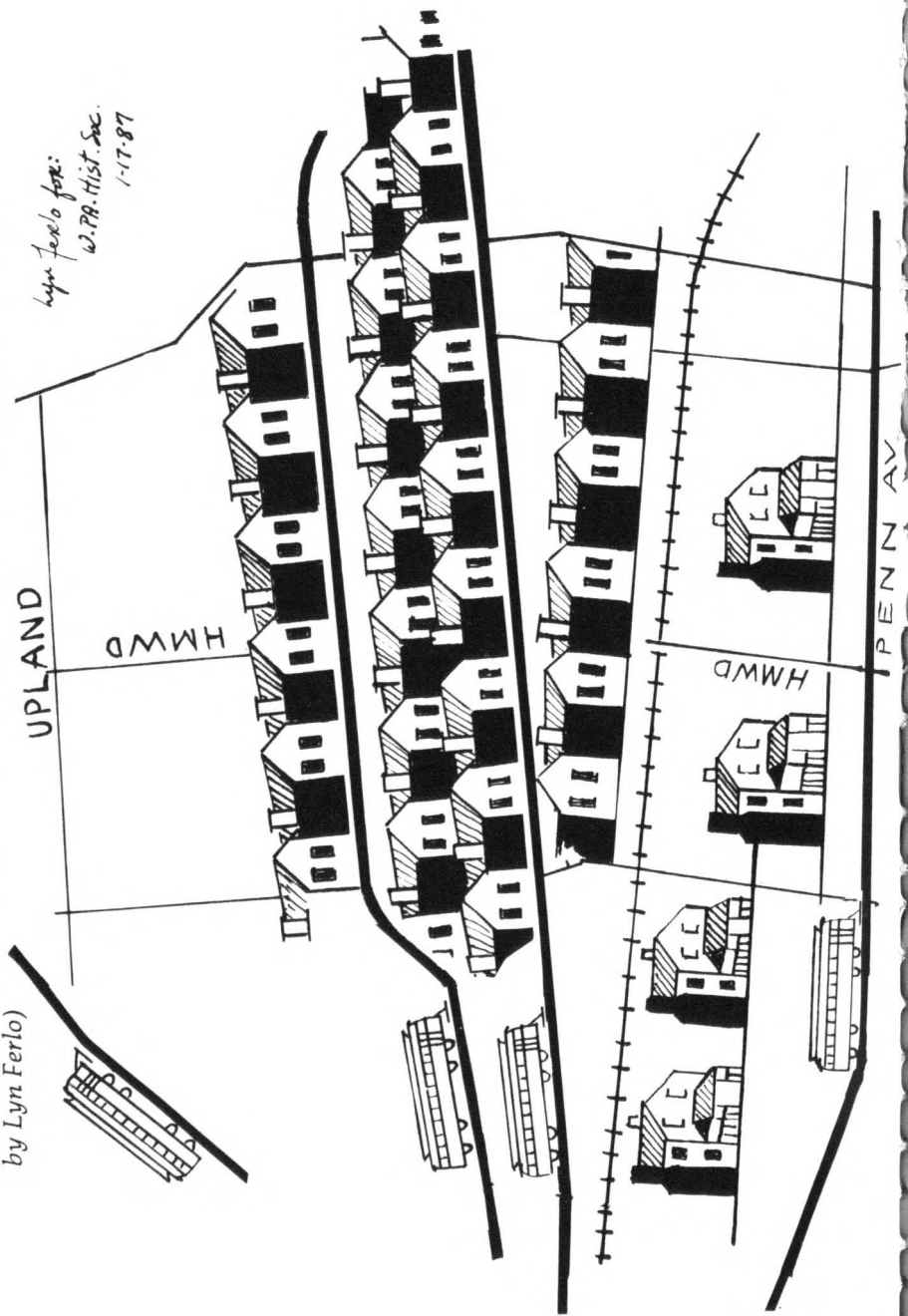
2 [E. K. Morse], *Report of Transit Commissioner to the Honorable Mayor and the City Council of the City of Pittsburgh* (Pittsburgh, 1917), 7-17.

3 Tarr, 4-6; Delmar C. Seawright, "The Effect of City Growth on the Homewood-Brushton District of Pittsburgh," M.A. thesis, University of Pittsburgh, 1932, 7-12.



Pennsylvania Railroad Station at Homewood. (Collection of the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania)

A map of Homewood (1890 to 1930) showing the four trolley lines and middle class housing developments north of the Pennsylvania railroad tracks. (Artwork by Lyn Ferlo)





Frankstown trolley, one of four lines that ran through Homewood. (Collection of Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania)

A black and white photograph of a street scene in a residential area. The street is lined with houses and utility poles. A large pile of rubble and debris is visible on the right side of the road. A sign on the left reads "FOR SALE HOUSES" and another sign on the right lists "LOTS" and "ACRES".



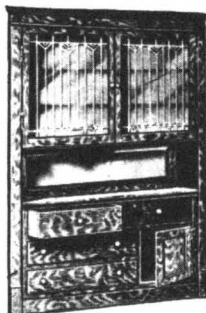
ALADDIN Built-in Buffets

Homecraft Built-in Buffet

A well proportioned "Homecraft" built-in side board or buffet has been very popular wherever offered. It is 4 ft. 6 in. wide and 7 ft. high, 14 in. deep. Has a bevel plate mirror back in opening over counter shelf, four drawers and one closet space in bottom section.

No. 2A-24—Yellow Pine, glazed, clear double strength glass	\$26.50
No. 2A-25—Yellow Pine, glazed leaded Crystal glass.....	\$8.75
No. 2A-26—Selected Oak, glazed, clear double strength glass	\$8.50
No. 2A-27—Selected Oak, glazed leaded Crystal glass.....	\$1.50

If side casing, base blocks and cap trim, as shown are wanted, add for Yellow Pine, 70c; Oak, \$1.45.



Aladdin Homecraft Buffets

are designed with the object of giving the most convenience combined with the most artistic efforts. They are made either of clear yellow pine or oak, and are sent out by us in the white, that is, unfinished. We furnish all hardware as shown. Finished glazed with leaded glass are shown or with plain double strength glass.

Size, 6 ft. 6 in. wide by 5 ft. 6 in. high; depth, 18 in. This cabinet has three large and four small drawers and two doors, three strong shelves in each side section. Best quality bevel plate glass mirror above shelf.

No. 2A-20—Yellow Pine, Glazed, clear double strength glass	\$39.75
No. 2A-21—Yellow Pine, Glazed, leaded Crystal glass	\$2.75
This case when finished to conform with the other woodwork in a home will harmonize with nearly any style of furniture. Price, F. O. B. shipping point; weight, 375 lbs.	
No. 2A-22—Selected Oak, Glazed, double strength glass	\$41.25
No. 2A-23—Selected Oak, Glazed, leaded Crystal glass	\$4.75

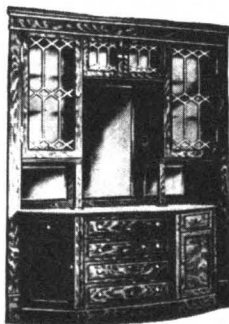


Homecraft Built-in Buffet

A "Homecraft" Buffet which is just what the name indicates. The result of a Craftsman's labor. It stands 7 ft. high and is 5 ft. wide; depth, top section, 14 in.; bottom section, 18 in. Has four large linen drawers in center of base section and two smaller drawers on the sides, suitable for silverware, etc. One large and two small bevel plate mirrors in each buffet. Weight, 300 lbs.

No. 2A-30—Yellow Pine, glazed with clear double strength glass	\$37.25
No. 2A-31—Yellow Pine, glazed with leaded Crystal glass	\$9.00
No. 2A-32—Selected Oak, glazed with clear double strength glass	\$9.75
No. 2A-33—Selected Oak, glazed with leaded Crystal glass	\$1.75

If side casing, base blocks and cap trim, as shown, are wanted, add for Yellow Pine, 70c; Oak, \$1.45.

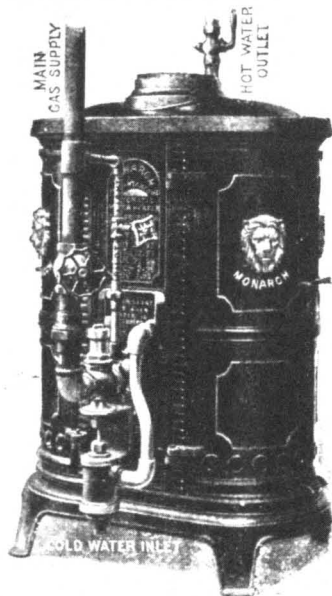


Advertisement for mass produced items used by builders of Homewood's new houses. (Courtesy of John A. Herbst)

WHY DO PEOPLE HAVE THE

Monarch Automatic Instantaneous Water Heater?

It supplies them with hot water when it's wanted.
It only burns gas when water is being drawn.
It gives an unlimited supply. 1 gallon or 1,000 gallons.
It has no storage or any boiler to connect to.
It heats water in less than a minute.



Made for **HOSPITALS, HOTELS, FLAT BUILDINGS, FIRE and POLICE DEPARTMENTS, RESIDENCES**, or any place where hot water is required.

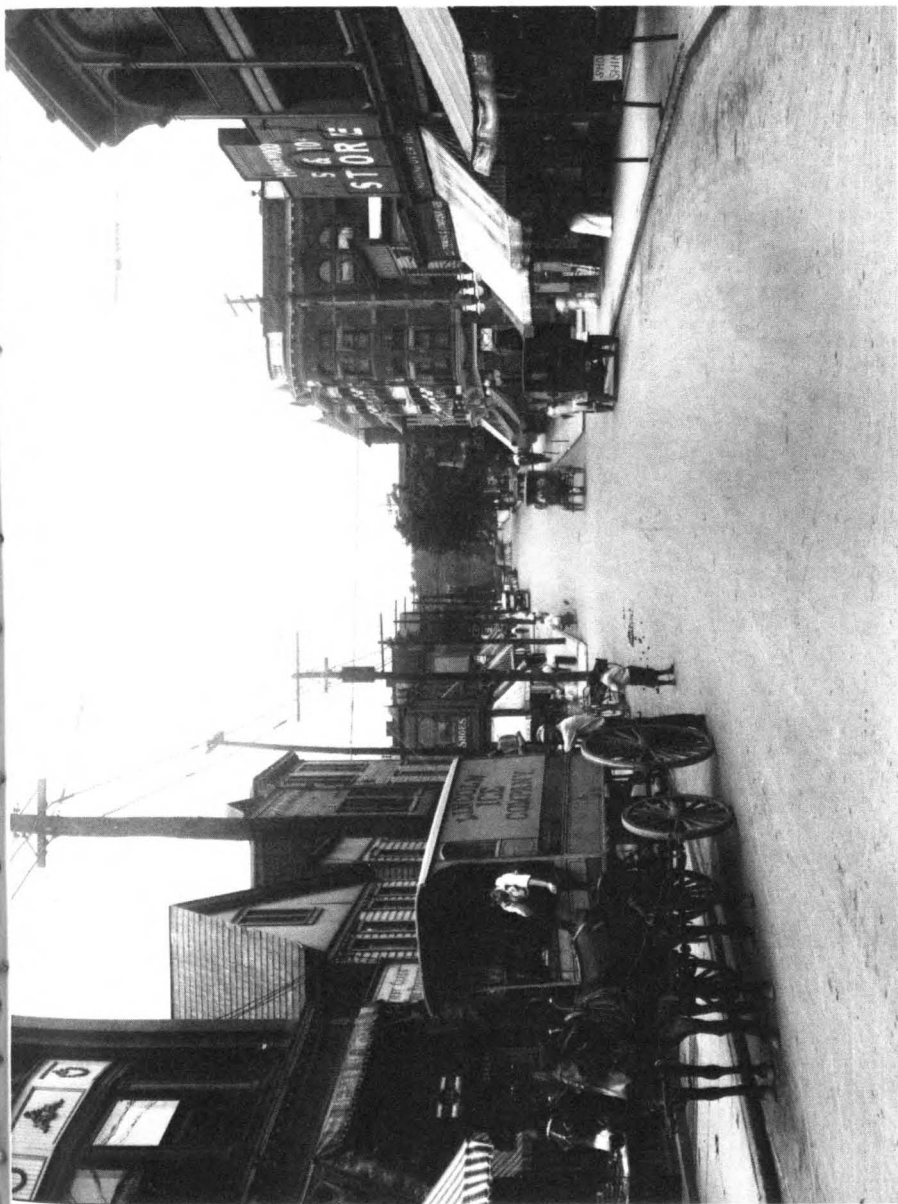
Write us for information and get new catalogue, or call at our show room.

PRICE \$25.00 TO \$200.00.

MONARCH WATER HEATER CO., 306 Wood St., Pittsburg, Pa.

Telephones: C. D. & P. 634 Court.
P. & A. 1434 Main.

Middle class residents made their homes comfortable using a wide variety of modern appliances like those advertised in the 1902 Board of Trade Carnival Program. (Collection of Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania)



View of Homewood Avenue in 1914. (Courtesy of the Archives of Industrial Society, University of Pittsburgh)

An example of the many goods and services that were available on Homewood Avenue. (Collection of Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania)

LEW DAVIS,

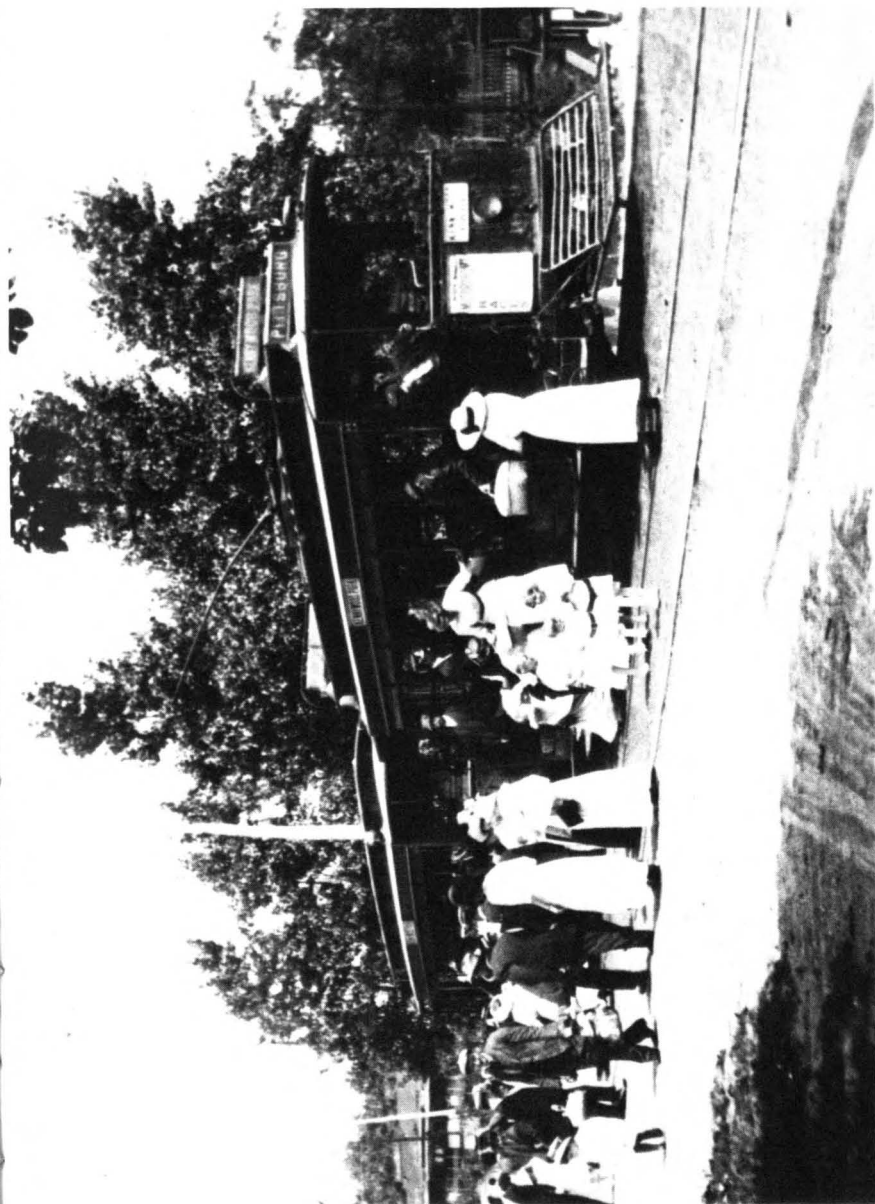
HEADQUARTERS FOR

Manhattan

SHIRTS

Stylish Hats

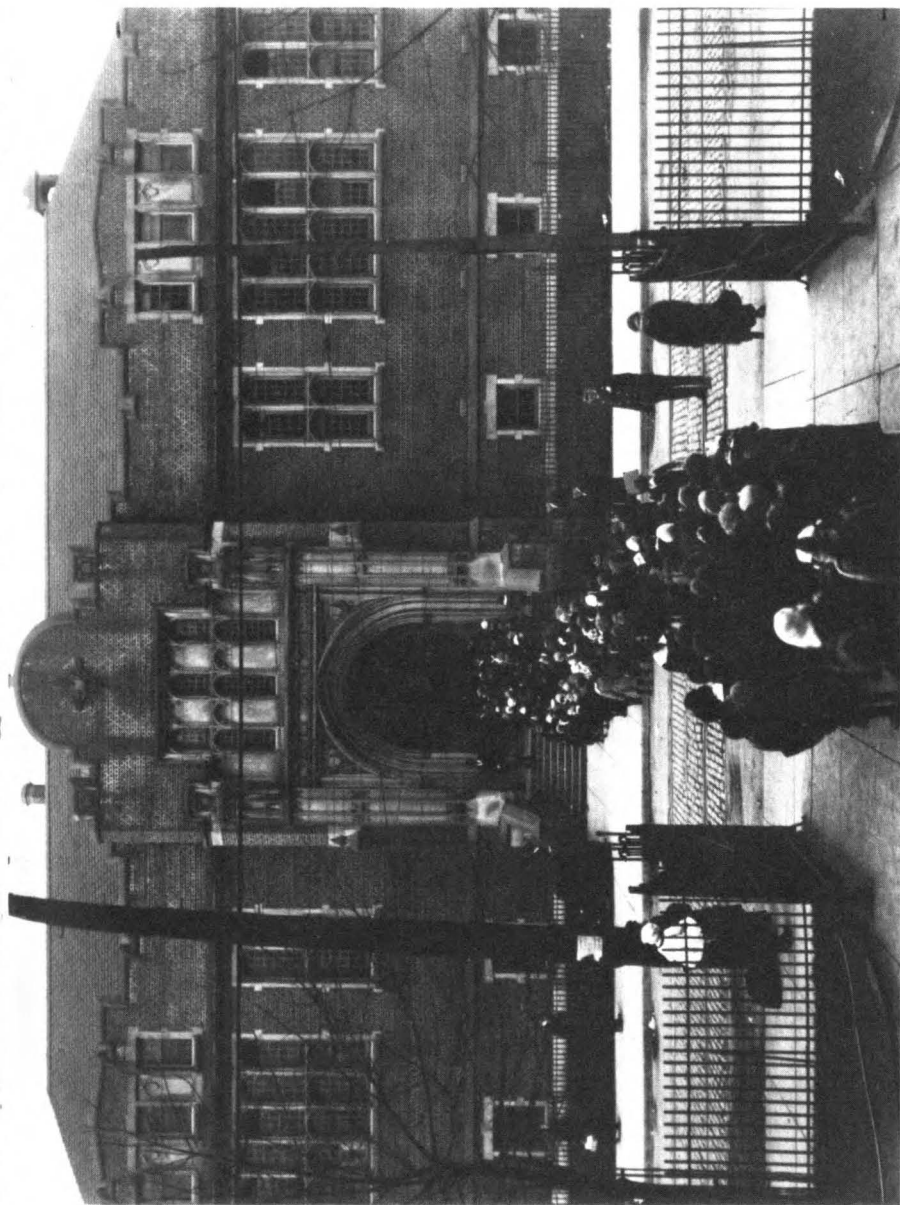
611 HOMEWOOD AVENUE.



Homewood residents rode the trolley to Kennebunk, site of many Sunday afternoon picnics (Courtesy of Carnegie Library, Main Branch)

Commuters on the Hamilton Avenue line from Homewood arrive downtown.
(Courtesy Carnegie Library, Main Branch)





Children from the Homewood schools crossing to take part in Red Cross programs held at Carnegie Library, Homewood Branch in 1917. (Courtesy of Carnegie Library, Homewood Branch)

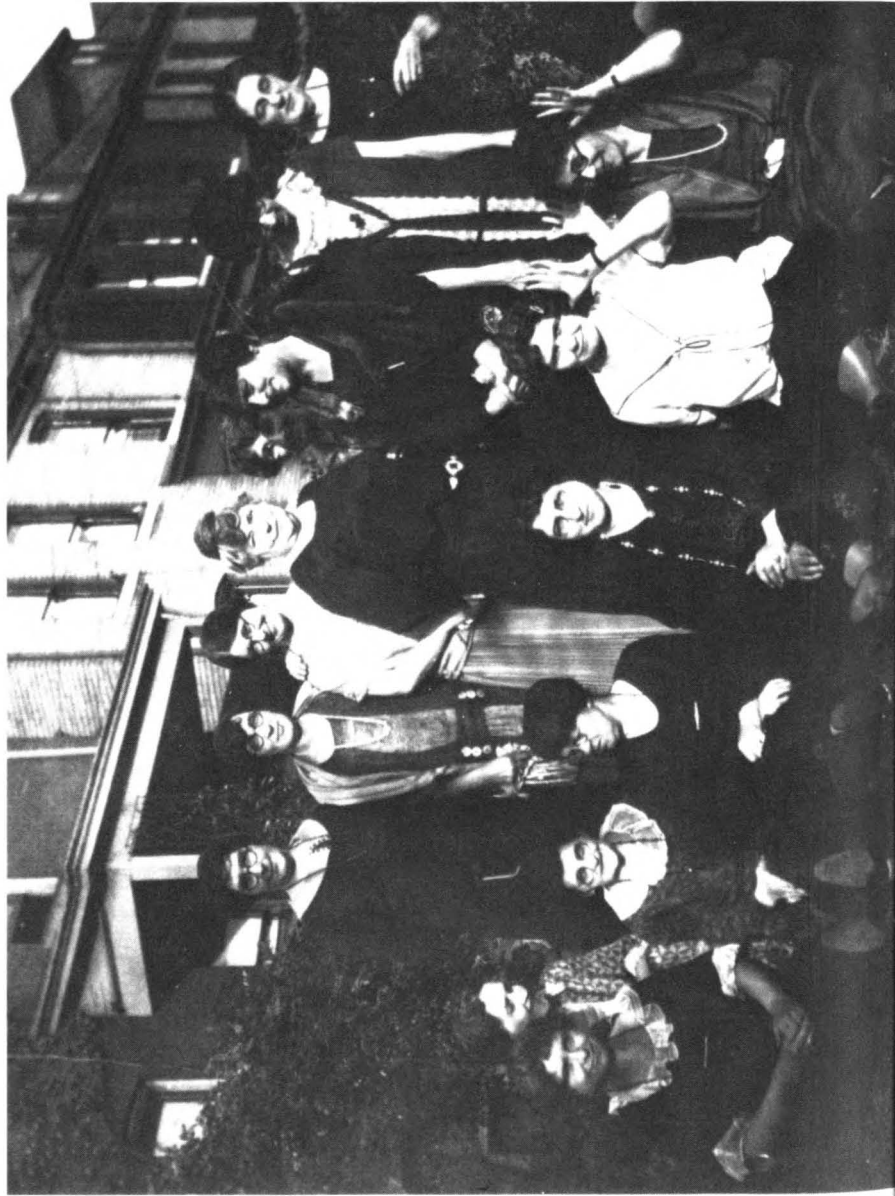
Homewood-Brushton YMCA junior basketball team. (Courtesy of Bobby Dye)





1929 Homewood-Brushton baseball team sponsored by Board of Trade member J. Scott Morgan (standing fifth from right). (Courtesy of Lawrence McCabe)

Women's Circle of the Homewood Presbyterian Church, 1924. (Courtesy of Evelyn Bailly)



area. It was the single, most important factor which changed Homewood-Brushton from country to city.⁴

With the streetcar lines in place, real estate developers rushed in to meet the demand for housing. Streets were laid out and Homewood-Brushton was quickly divided into blocks, and then into building lots. Contractors who specialized in mass produced housing with factory-made materials, covered the area with rows and rows of standardized brick and stone houses. It was a phenomenal building boom. Almost all the housing stock that exists today dates from that boom at the turn of the century. The new housing was just what the middle class was looking for. Developers and local businessmen broadcast the news that an attractive suburb was lying conveniently nearby. As new tracts were advertised widely, the music of brass bands and the engaging patter of barkers welcomed streetcar loads of eager buyers. The Homewood Board of Trade, an organization of local businessmen, sponsored annual fairs to attract prospective residents to come and look around. The lively events were great successes, thanks to the help of the streetcar company, which provided free car service, advertising and electricity for the fair grounds. The fairs were celebrations of the new Homewood-Brushton, featuring carnival amusements mixed with real estate advertising and sales pitches. "Homewood-Brushton," visitors were informed, "is the choicest residence locality in the greater Pittsburgh area. Air free from the smoke that permeates nearly every section of the city, railroad and trolley connections downtown that are nowhere excelled, and reasonable property values are the main inducements . . . to the . . . homeseeker. . . . Every street speaks prosperity, enterprise, and good taste." The middle class did not need to be convinced. Thousands rushed to buy as soon as housing was available. By 1910, some 30,000 people were living in Homewood-Brushton. In a mere twenty years, it had become one of the largest and most populated neighborhoods in all of Pittsburgh.⁵

The new houses that lined the streets of Homewood-Brushton were mass-produced. That did not mean they were not quality products. Working fast but skillfully, building craftsmen constructed solid, substantial houses with durable designs and quality materials. Although largely plain and uniform, the houses reflected the modest and respectable tastes of their owners.

The streetcar suburb was a comfortable neighborhood. The grid

⁴ Tarr, 14-24; Seawright, 13-15.

⁵ Homewood Board of Trade, *Official Souvenir Program, Mardi Gras Carnival and Fair* (Pittsburgh, 1902), n.p.; Seawright, 20-28.

pattern of streets, streetcar lines, and sidewalks made it easy to go about. The rows of trees, trim lawns, and well-kept gardens preserved a pleasant hint of the former countryside. The houses themselves were very comfortable. Porches opened onto front lawns and backyards. Most houses had from five to eight rooms, which was ample space for the average middle class family, proud of its ability to economize in all things including its number of children. Servants were not unknown in ordinary Homewood-Brushton households. They were rare, however, compared to their number on the estates. The middle class relied upon modern utilities and labor saving appliances. Gas, electric, water, and telephone lines had been put through the neighborhood the same time as the streetcar lines and the paved streets. New appliances designed for heating, lighting, cooking, cleaning and communication created a smooth running household.⁶

The trim, neat houses made Homewood-Brushton a comfortable place to live. The railroad and the streetcar network located Homewood-Brushton within a large job market and made it an easy place from which to commute. In an era when most factory workers had to live within walking distance of their jobs out of economic necessity, the residents of Homewood-Brushton had the freedom to live apart from the workplace. The commuter lines linked Homewood-Brushton with downtown as well as new office buildings in the East End, such as the growing Westinghouse plants in the Turtle Creek Valley.⁷

Living in row houses, traveling on crowded streetcars, working behind rows of desks, the middle class was accustomed to associating with a wide range of people. The respectable middle class tone of Homewood-Brushton attracted other groups to settle. Blue collar workers whose skills as railroad engineers, streetcar motormen, and craftsmen in the building trades and specialized Westinghouse Electric workers were able to afford homes in the area. These people fit in well to the largely Protestant, Northern European character of the residents.

Another large group of Homewood-Brushton residents that did not work in the new, big office buildings consisted of small businessmen who operated right in Homewood-Brushton. Real estate dealers, building contractors, building supply dealers, restaurant and saloon keepers, funeral home owners, and merchants of all sorts had no trouble doing well in a neighborhood of many, prosperous homeowners. As a result, almost all kinds of goods and services could be bought in

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Tarr, 14-24; [Morse], 57-66.

Homewood-Brushton. Homewood Avenue quickly grew to become one of the largest shopping districts in Pittsburgh, making the neighborhood a self-contained and self-reliant "town." Homewood Avenue was the icing on the cake that made the neighborhood so appealing to its residents.⁸ ■

⁸ Homewood Board of Trade, n.p.

THE SOLON J. BUCK AWARD

The first annual Solon J. Buck Award was chosen by the Society's Publications Committee and Editorial Advisory Board to honor the author of the year's most outstanding article in *The Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine*. The award was named for Solon J. Buck who, after serving as Director of the Minnesota Historical Society, became director of the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania from 1931-35. While in Pittsburgh Dr. Buck also served as director of the Western Pennsylvania Historical Survey and Professor of History at the University of Pittsburgh. He went to the National Archives in 1935 and became the Archivist of the United States in 1941. He held many government appointments and positions and was the author of numerous historical books and articles before his death in 1962.

Philip Jenkins receives the 1986 award for his article, "The Ku Klux Klan in Pennsylvania, 1920-1940." He is Associate Professor of Administration of Justice at Pennsylvania State University. He was educated at the University of Cambridge, and his publications include *The Making of a Ruling Class: The Glamorgan Gentry, 1640-1790*. He is currently working on the history of criminal justice in twentieth-century Pennsylvania. We are pleased to have his fine work in our publication and to honor him with this award which will be presented to him at a special reception on May 6, 1987.

The Solon J. Buck Award carries a \$500 honorarium which will be presented annually to a contributor to *The Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine*. The magazine welcomes articles from writers and scholars of regional history.

The Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania

is pleased to announce

PHILIP JENKINS

as the recipient of

THE 1986 SOLON J. BUCK AWARD

for

the year's outstanding article in

The Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine