

## The City of Millionaires

*Allegheny's Elite, 1890–1910*

**A**N INCREASING NUMBER of wealthy families lived in Allegheny City in the closing decades of the nineteenth century, particularly in the small neighborhood that has come to be called Allegheny West. The concentration of wealth was unprecedented in western Pennsylvania, and made it one of the wealthiest communities in America. Its legacy endures more than a century later in bricks and mortar and in neighborhood lore. Back in 1870, as Pittsburgh and Allegheny's economy boomed, Pittsburgh's East End contained the region's most significant grouping of wealthy individuals, with twenty residents with assets of at least \$500,000 (about \$8.5 million in 2010) making their homes in Pittsburgh, most in Shadyside, Squirrel Hill, Oakland, or East Liberty. Glass manufacturer Alexander Chambers, the only millionaire in either Pittsburgh or Allegheny, lived on Fifth Avenue in Shadyside. Across the river, Allegheny City, whose population was 62 percent the size of Pittsburgh's in 1870, was home to only four men with \$500,000 or more in assets. Its wealthiest citizens were the Troy Hill land baron Adam Reineman and Archibald McFarland, a lumber dealer who lived on Ridge Avenue, with assets of \$750,000 each. David DeHaven, a stove manufacturer worth \$730,000, and iron mill owner Jacob Painter, worth \$660,000, made their homes on Sherman Avenue near West Ohio Street and North Canal Street near Chestnut Street, respectively. Wealth in Allegheny City, to the extent that it was present, was more evenly distributed across the neighborhoods in 1870 than at the end of the century.

In 1892, as national media attention to wealth increased, the *New York Tribune's American Millionaires* found a whopping forty-four millionaires living in Allegheny (\$1 million in 1892 would be equal to about \$24 million in 2010). Pittsburgh, whose population was more than twice Allegheny's 105,000, was

home to thirty-five. Allegheny's wealth was also becoming more concentrated than it had been in the city's early days: thirty-six of the city's forty-four millionaires lived in Allegheny West or on adjoining blocks in Manchester. Five made their homes in the city's core, within a few blocks of the intersection of Federal and Ohio streets. Three lived in mansions that occupied the present site of Allegheny General Hospital, and one resided in Fineview.

Until 1910, as the region's core industries continued to boom, its wealthy population kept pace, with about three dozen of the area's richest families commissioning, occupying, and sometimes enlarging grand homes in Allegheny West. Brighton Road's ten millionaires in 1892 included iron and steel manufacturers B. F. Jones and Henry Phipps Jr.; iron mill owners Jacob Painter and James McCutcheon; department store partner Jacob Kaufmann; and Harry Darlington, who had made his fortune in brewing and other pursuits. Ten more millionaires lived on Western Avenue, including iron pipe mill owner A. M. Byers, soon to erect a mansion that still stands on Ridge Avenue; iron manufacturer William H. Singer; distiller Asher Guckenheimer; brewer and tube manufacturer Joshua Rhodes; and members of the Hostetter family of stomach bitters fame. Dr. David and Kate Irwin Rankin had the stone-fronted Richardsonian Romanesque mansion at 914 Western Avenue built in 1893, providing both a home for their family and an office for Dr. Rankin, a Civil War surgeon and Allegheny City medical examiner. Kate Irwin Rankin had grown up only a block away, her father, Henry Irwin, a partner in the rope walk. In 1898 the Rankins would sell their mansion to Dr. Roland Thatcher White for \$18,000. Dr. White, a homeopath and "electrotherapist," also practiced medicine in the house while living there with his wife and his mother.

Although Ridge Avenue would come to be known as Allegheny's most illustrious address, it was home to only six millionaires in 1892: H. Sellers McKee, of the South Side glassmaking family; foundryman Abraham Garrison; and members of the Denny family, whose extensive landholdings in Allegheny and Pittsburgh extended back generations. James Laughlin Jr. of Jones & Laughlin, Pennsylvania Railroad purchasing agent William Mullins, and iron-forge owner Calvin Wells occupied handsome homes on North Lincoln Avenue, while Beech Avenue's millionaires in 1892 included two branches of the Denny family and John Porterfield, a retired grocer.

These wealthy families would continue to change the shape of Allegheny West until 1910, when the neighborhood's last great mansions were built.

Some commissioned additions that transformed large post-Civil War rowhouses into palatial dwellings with fifteen or twenty rooms, or even more. Joseph Walton, for example, worked such a transformation, enlarging an 1860s rowhouse on North Lincoln Avenue into a Romanesque-influenced mansion for his daughter, Ida Walton Scully, and her husband, South Side glass manufacturer James W. Scully, in a series of incremental additions during the 1890s. The mansion's servants' wing featured an elevator from Pittsburgh's historic Marshall Elevator Company and an attached carriage entrance that faced Chapel Way. One block west, on North Lincoln Avenue, Elizabeth and William Thaw Jr. doubled the size of a rowhouse in the late 1880s. In 1899 Elizabeth Thaw, by then widowed, commissioned an addition of like size, creating a three-story brick mansion with approximately seventy-five feet of frontage. William, chairman of the Hecla Coal Company and a patron of the astronomers John Brashear and Samuel Langley of the Allegheny Observatory, was also a half brother of the notorious Harry Thaw of Pittsburgh's East End, who would murder famous architect Stanford White at Madison Square Garden in New York in 1906. Elizabeth, active in several civic groups, was a notable supporter of the Pittsburgh Orchestra Association. The house they left behind, at 930 North Lincoln Avenue, still stands, now used as offices and living space.

The southwest corner of Ridge and Galveston avenues saw the construction of what would be Allegheny's largest mansion between 1896 and 1898: the Byers-Lyon house, an enormous Flemish Renaissance-style double mansion. Ironmaster Alexander McBurney Byers was sixty-eight in 1896, when he asked the prominent architectural firm Alden & Harlow to design this L-shaped double house, whose form was unique in the area, with its courtyard facing the corner of Ridge and Galveston avenues and interior doorways connecting its two sides. The building itself, with brownstone trim, was clad in Roman (or Pompeian) brick, a long, thin, iron-flecked brick generally reserved for the homes of upper-middle-class and wealthy families. Byers was president of A. M. Byers & Company, which manufactured iron pipe on a five-acre site on the South Side and in Girard, Ohio. He was also president of the Iron City National Bank, a partner in the Girard Iron Company, and a director of three of George Westinghouse's companies and other corporations. He and his wife, Martha Fleming Byers, would live in the mansion's larger side, at 905 Ridge Avenue. Their daughter and son-in-law, Maude and John Denniston Lyon, would occupy the house's other side, at 901 Ridge.



The Thaw mansion on North Lincoln Avenue prior to its 1899 expansion. *Pittsburgh Illustrated*, pt. 11, 1889. Courtesy of Historic Pittsburgh Full-Text Collection, Digital Research Library, University Library System, University of Pittsburgh

Lyon, a young banker when the house was built, was later vice-president of the Union National Bank and president of the Safe Deposit and Trust Company. The young couple's marriage in early 1896 was probably a factor in the house's construction.

Construction began in late 1896, when Byers received a permit to build a three-and-a-half story \$80,000 brick mansion at Ridge and Galveston avenues. Newspapers later stated that the construction cost was \$450,000, an unlikely sum at nearly twice what the Allegheny County Courthouse and Jail had cost in the 1880s. On January 21, 1899, the Byers and Lyon families

threw open their doors for a housewarming party, welcoming families whose carriages brought them through the iron gates to the front entrance. "All of society," the *Pittsburgh Press* reported, "was present at the reception, both men and women being asked, as has become the custom at Saturday afternoon affairs." By the time he moved to Ridge and Galveston avenues, Byers had spent \$766,625 to assemble what was reportedly the most significant art collection in western Pennsylvania. Alden & Harlow had designed the house in part to serve as a showcase for Byers's art, and undoubtedly, guests at the family's 1899 party were invited to view Peter Paul Rubens's *Saint Andrew*; Jean Baptiste Camille Corot's *Danse des Nymphes*; and works by Van Dyke, Rousseau, Thomas Gainsborough, Adrian Lerraully, and J. F. Raffaelli.

The Byers-Lyon home was perfectly designed to host such lavish entertainments: its sloping site made room for aboveground space at the rear of the house, which held the kitchens and other support areas. Notably, the Byers and Lyon kitchens were separate but adjoining, so that both could be used for large events. The 1900 census recorded six household staff living with the Byers family—a butler, a laundress, two cooks, and two chambermaids—while a butler and three other servants lived with the Lyon family. A Richardsonian Romanesque brick carriage house at the rear of the property, approximately one hundred by forty feet, contained living space for a driver, Henry Everard, his wife, Carrie, and their teenage children.

Byers, however, occupied his palatial home for less than two years, dying in a New York hotel in 1900. The *New York Times* noted that Byers had been depressed since the death of his son a year earlier. "Life without my son," he was reported to have said, "holds no joy for me." Appraisers valued his estate at \$1,925,274.50. In 1901, Martha Byers gave Yale University \$100,000 to build a social and religious center in honor of her husband and her son, the latter of whom had studied there. Today Byers Hall still stands on the Yale campus.

The Byers, of course, were not the only wealthy Alleghenians who entertained lavishly. Pittsburgh newspapers and two Pittsburgh society magazines, the *Bulletin* and the *Index*, reported on their housewarming parties, teas, charitable events, balls, card parties, club meetings, and weddings. In January 1895, the *Bulletin* observed that at "the height of the social season . . . fashionable people were kept going from one place to another so continuously that many members of the smart set [the social elite] were likely to become comparative strangers in their respective homes." Within one week, for example, Mrs. George E. Painter of Bidwell Street in Manchester had held both

a Wednesday luncheon and a Saturday breakfast at the Duquesne Club, her guests including women from Allegheny's Semple, Watson, Chalfant, Layng, and Byers families.

The reach of the wealthy families who occupied Allegheny's Millionaires' Row stretched well beyond the enclaves of high society. The largest houses along Ridge and North Lincoln avenues and Brighton Road, for example, employed scores of servants. Census records show that the Jones family, at 801 Brighton Road, had eight live-in household staff persons in 1900; in 1910, when only Mary Jones and her daughter Mary Laughlin remained in the house, eleven servants attended their needs. The Jones servants included chambermaids, ladies' maids, butlers, laundresses, cooks, kitchen maids, a footman, and a groom. The 1900 census enumerator found five servants and two coachmen attending William and Alice Jones Willock and their only child, at 705 Brighton Road, and thirteen waiting on the A. E. and Mary Painter family in their stone mansion at 815 Brighton Road, dubbed "the Allegheny Palace" by newspapers when it was built in 1887.

Allegheny City servants were primarily of European origin or descent, more with roots in Ireland than in any other country. After 1900, the city's servants also included some Eastern European immigrants and a few African Americans. In Allegheny and Pittsburgh, most servants lived in the attics, although the largest houses of Allegheny West had rear wings with small rooms in which servants lived. Almost all servants were single women, most young, some middle-aged. Some of the wealthiest families employed men as butlers. Coachmen, typically single men, occupied rooms in carriage houses along alleys; some were African American. A small number were married, their families living with them in what were probably better living quarters than the rooms occupied by their unmarried peers.

One of the largest of these carriage houses and driver's quarters went up in 1895 at 713 Ridge Avenue. Matilda W. Denny had received a permit to construct the two-story, seventy-two-by-thirty-two-foot brick building for \$4,700, comparable to the price of a brick single-family home of eight to ten rooms at the time, replacing three smaller stables. Matilda Denny, the eleventh of twelve children of Harmar and Elizabeth F. O'Hara Denny, owned considerable property in Allegheny and Pittsburgh through inheritance from Elizabeth's father, James O'Hara. She had lived in Downtown Pittsburgh until 1892, when she bought the Ridge Avenue property, which held a brick mansion that—like the new carriage house she would soon build—spanned



The Denny mansion on Ridge Avenue near Brighton Road, Allegheny West, in the Richardsonian Romanesque style. Courtesy of Pittsburgh History & Landmarks Foundation

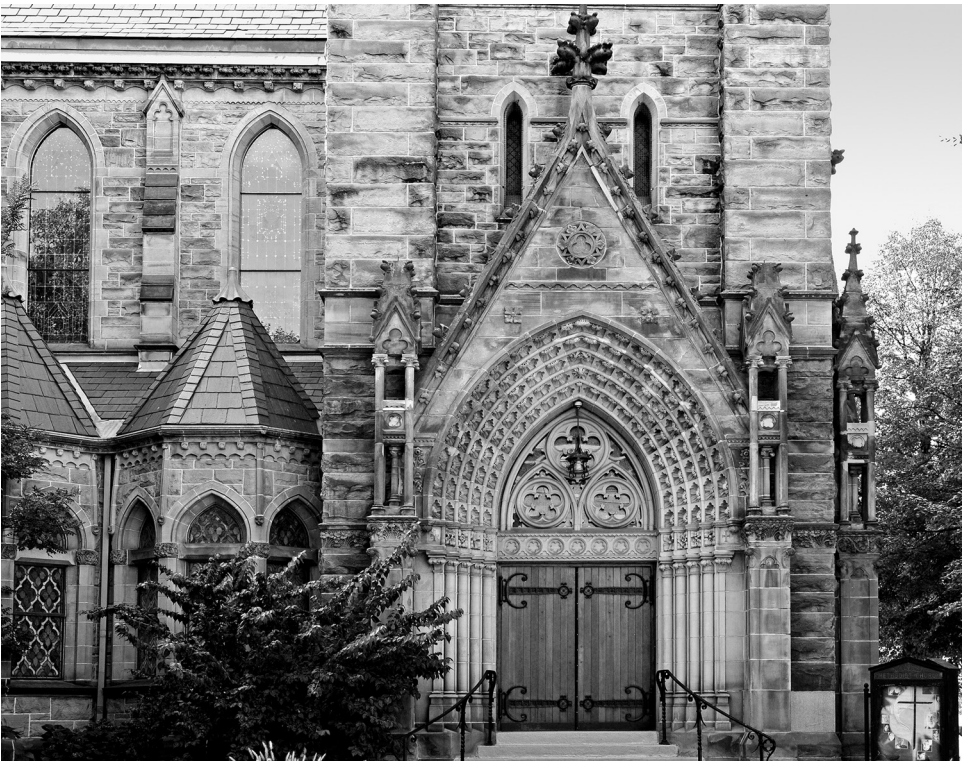
its entire seventy-two-foot width. Denny never married, giving much of her time to the Pittsburgh chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR), the First Presbyterian Church of Pittsburgh, and many society activities. She used her DAR position as a platform to advocate for transforming Pittsburgh's gritty Point into a park commemorating Fort Pitt, a dream that the DAR realized decades after her passing. She lived in her mansion, with a cook, a housemaid, and a waitress residing in its servants' quarters, until she died in 1918.

While each of the six houses in the 700 block of Ridge Avenue had a carriage house or stable at the rear of its lot, the one Matilda Denny built was by far the largest, and it would house coachman John Edelman and his family for twenty-five years. Edelman had started working for the Denny family when they lived on Penn Avenue, in or before the early 1870s. By the time the Edelmanns moved to the new carriage house in 1895, John and Mary Edelman had named two of their four children—Harmar Denny Edelman and Matilda Denny Edelman—for John's employers. John, all told, would work for the family for more than half a century, and his son Harmar Denny Edelman would be a Denny family coachman as a young man. As employees of one of Pittsburgh's wealthiest families, the Edelmanns lived better than most Pittsburgh servants. They were able to travel to visit relatives in England in the 1890s, a trip, later generations suspected, that Matilda Denny might have funded. When Matilda Denny died in 1918, her will left \$1,000 to John Edelman and \$50 to any other servant who had worked for her for more than a year. John and Harmar Edelman and their wives then moved to the Harmar and Elizabeth Denny mansion at 811 Ridge Avenue, where John, by then in his seventies, worked as caretaker and Harmar as chauffeur. John Edelman would work for the Denny family until a few years before he died in 1932, at age ninety-one; Harmar Denny Edelman would remain with the family into the early 1930s. Family members remembered daughter Matilda Denny Edelman as a woman who took care to observe correct manners and set a proper table, perhaps influenced by the trappings of upper-class life she had long observed. A member of the Allegheny City Epworth League and an enthusiastic elocutionist, Matilda Denny Edelman often gave readings at events sponsored by Allegheny's Methodist and Presbyterian congregations.

Western Allegheny City's wealthy and middle-class residents also commissioned handsome new church buildings throughout the 1890s. In 1892, the First Methodist Church of Pittsburgh amicably split into two congregations, based in Allegheny and the East End. The Allegheny group established Trinity



Methodist Protestant Church at 1018 Bidwell Street in Manchester (now Carter Chapel), designed in the Richardsonian Romanesque style by the firm of Riddle & Keirn. Their counterparts in Pittsburgh's East End founded the First Methodist Protestant Church of Pittsburgh at South Aiken Avenue and Howe Street, its building designed by Frederick Osterling. Calvary Methodist Episcopal Church (now Calvary United Methodist) at Beech and Allegheny avenues was also founded in the division of a Downtown congregation. The cornerstone of its beautiful Gothic Revival stone building, designed by architects Martin Vrydaugh and Thomas Wolfe, was set in place on May 18, 1893. The cornerstone for its sister church, Christ Methodist Episcopal (now First United Methodist Church of Pittsburgh), was placed at Centre and Liberty avenues in the East End. Calvary's stained-glass windows were produced by Louis Comfort Tiffany.



Calvary United Methodist Church, Beech and Allegheny avenues. Pittsburgh Steelers/Karl Roser