

Kingsbacher's
637 Liberty Avenue
Pittsburgh
Allegheny County
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-5151

HABS
PA
2-PITBU,
43-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
MID-ATLANTIC REGION NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA 19106

HABS
PA,
2-PITBH,
43 -

**HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
KINGSBACHER'S**

HABS No. PA - 5151

Location: 637 Liberty Avenue
Pittsburgh, Allegheny County, Pennsylvania

Quadrangle Name: Pittsburgh West/Pittsburgh East
Quadrangle Scale: 1:24,000

UTM References:

- a. Zone: 17 Easting: 584700 Northing: 4477110
- b. Zone: 17 Easting: 584690 Northing: 4477170
- c. Zone: 17 Easting: 584830 Northing: 4477220
- d. Zone: 17 Easting: 584860 Northing: 4477140

Present Owner: Penn Liberty Holding Company

Present Occupant: Vacant

Present Use: Vacant

Significance:

The Kingsbacher Building is significant as the jewelry store for Kingsbacher Brothers, established in 1873, a company which leased the premises from 1910 until 1930. Although the Stevenson family, of Joseph Stevenson's Liberty Pork, owned the property, the commission house which once occupied the site was demolished for construction of a store for the successful jewelers. The timing of the reconstruction in late 1909 is important because it clearly represents the changing character of Liberty Avenue in the early twentieth century from street produce markets to more luxurious retail and wholesale enterprises. Although the architect of the Kingsbacher Building remains unknown, the Renaissance Revival composition of the buff terra cotta facade suggests a professional's involvement.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1910

Pittsburgh Record of Building Inspection, Record Book of Alterations and Repairs, Volume 4, 29 December 1909.

From at least 1877 until 1907, J. Stevenson and Co., trading as Liberty Pork, owned and occupied the premises within a 22 by 110 foot three-story and basement brick building. In 1909 \$13,000 was expended to rebuild the Kingsbacher Building to make a modern showroom and store. At that time, the circa 1850 store, still evident in 1899 and 1906 views of the street was demolished, and a deeper and taller three story building with a handsome terra cotta facade was erected by the Stevenson estate for their new tenant.

2. Architect: unknown

Although the architect of the Kingsbacher Building has not been documented, a building permit for \$500 worth of alterations and repairs dated 15 February 1909, shows E.J. Schellentrager as builder. The city directory actually lists Schellentrager as an architect. Therefore, it is not unreasonable to suggest that the December 1909 major reconstruction also may be attributed to Schellentrager.

3. Original and subsequent owners:

Referencea to the chain of title to the land upon which the structure stands are in the Office of the Recorder of Deeds, Allegheny County Courthouse Annex, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

1866 Deed, September 12, 1866, recorded in Volume 221, pages 160 - 62.

John Moorhead to Earnest H. Meyers and Josiah Stevenson.

1936 Deed, June 13, 1936, recorded in Volume 2546, pages 83 - 84.

Sheriff Sale, suit against Elizabeth S. Abernathy and Charles N. Abernathy, to Provident Mutual Life Insurance Company of Philadelphia.

- 1949 Deed, February 25, 1949, recorded in Volume 3043, pages 203 - 04.
Provident Mutual Life Insurance Company of Philadelphia to Harry Rosenthal, half interest, and Robert Platt, half interest.
- 1955 Will, December 6, 1955, recorded in the Will Book, Volume 328, page 77.
Harry Rosenthal to Vivian Rosenthal, one third interest, and Herbert Rosenthal, Clair Rosenthal, now Hyde, and Alan Rosenthal, two thirds interest.
- 1956 Deed, January 3, 1956, recorded in Volume 3426, pages 356 - 58.
Herbert Rosenthal and Louisa S., his wife; Alan Rosenthal and Barbara, his wife; and Claire Rosenthal, now Claire Hyde and Howard Hyde, her husband, two thirds interest, to Vivian Rosenthal, their mother.
- 1962 Deed, March 20, 1962, recorded in Volume 3984, pages 194 - 95.
Vivian Rosenthal to Robert Platt and Madge, his wife.
- 1963 Deed, November 1, 1963, recorded in Volume 4110, pages 188 - 89.
Robert Platt and Madge, his wife, to Robert Platt.
- 1982 Memorandum of Purchase Option Agreement recorded in Volume 6576, pages 86 - 92. Between Joel Platt, et al, Executors of the Estate of Robert Platt, deceased, and Penn Liberty Holding Company. (Robert Platt died July 13, 1982)
- 1983 Deed, May 2, 1983, recorded in Volume 6665, pages 533 - 536.
Joel Platt, et al, Executors of the Estate of Robert Platt, deceased, to Penn Liberty Holding Company.

4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: William T. Powell

William T. Powell, contractor and builder, entered the construction trade in 1867. Among his more prominent contracts were the erection of the East End Theatre, Grace Lutheran Church, and the residence of Eugene Lappe, in addition to several schoolhouses. A native of Pittsburgh, Powell held the presidency of the Master Builders' Association and was a director and vice president of the Builders' Exchange. He received the commission to erect "Kingsbacher's" after four decades of experience in the building trade.

5. Original plans and construction:

The original plans of the 1909 building called for a three-story structure with oversized ceiling heights such that the roofline corresponded to that of its four story neighbor on the east. The building occupied all of its very long site, approximately 22 by 180 feet, and was constructed of common bond brick partywalls spanned by wood timbers. It followed the norm for Pittsburgh loft buildings, having clear span open spaces. A stair in the rear third quarter, along the east wall provided access to the upper two stories.

6. Alterations and additions:

In 1951 the original elevator along the east wall towards the front was removed. The storefront was remodeled in 1962 which was also when the interior was replastered and a door was replaced.

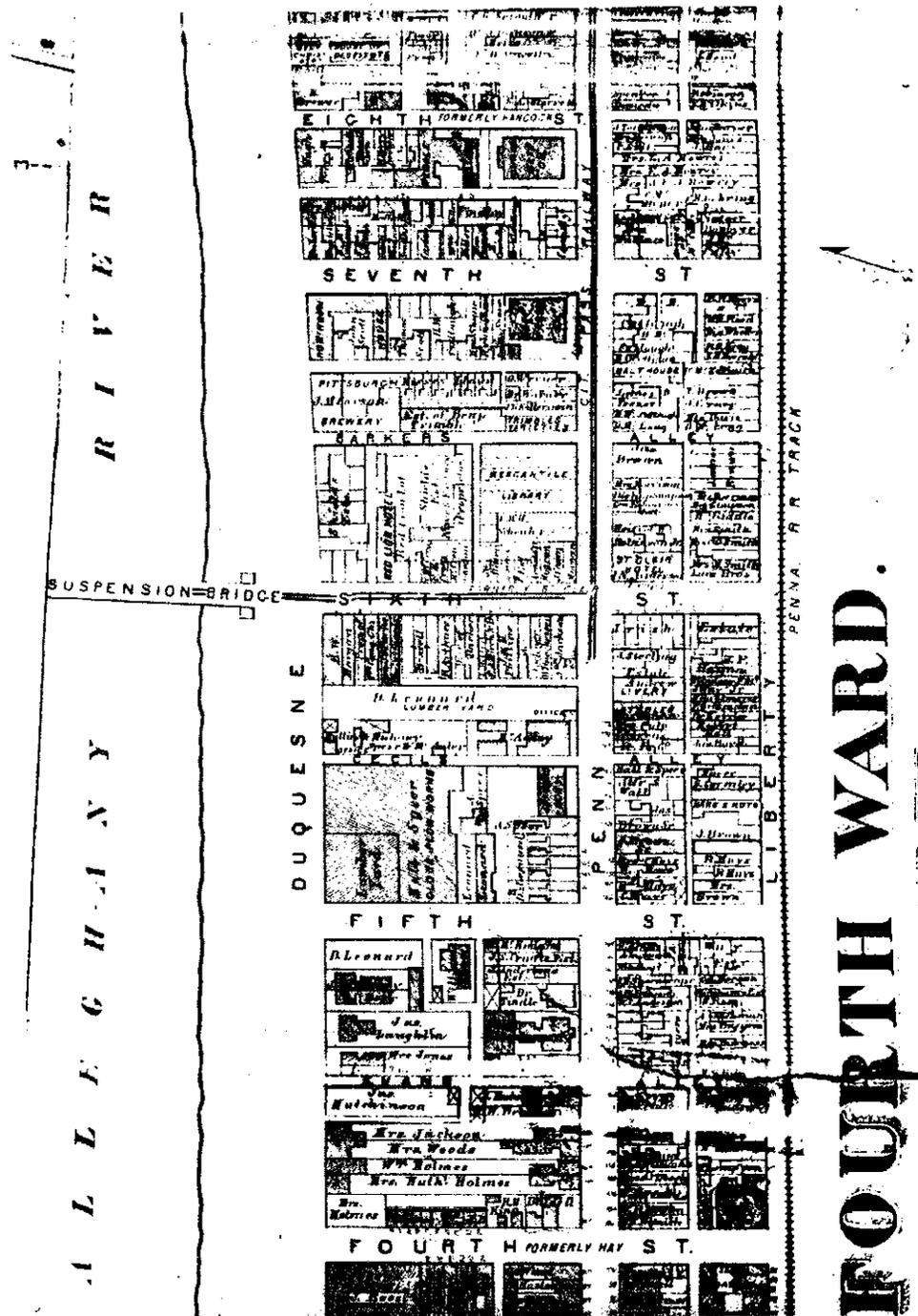


Fig. 1. Penn/Liberty area in 1872, from G.M.Hopkins, Atlas of the Cities of Pittsburgh, Allegheny and Adjoining Boroughs. Philadelphia, 1872.
Pl. 22-23.

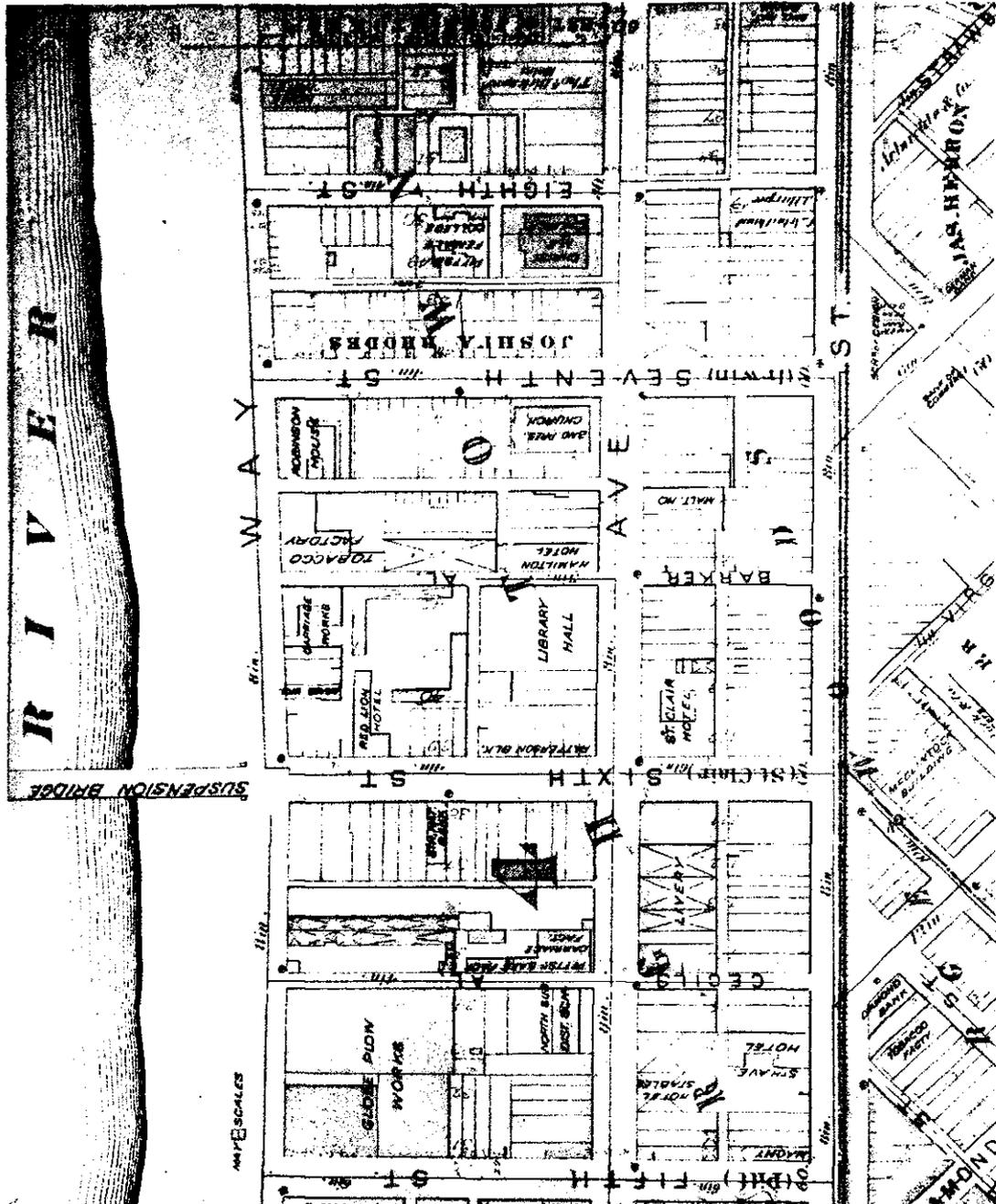


Fig. 2. Penn/Liberty area in 1882, from: G.M. Hopkins, Atlas of the Cities of Pittsburgh and Allegheny, Philadelphia, 1882, plate 1.

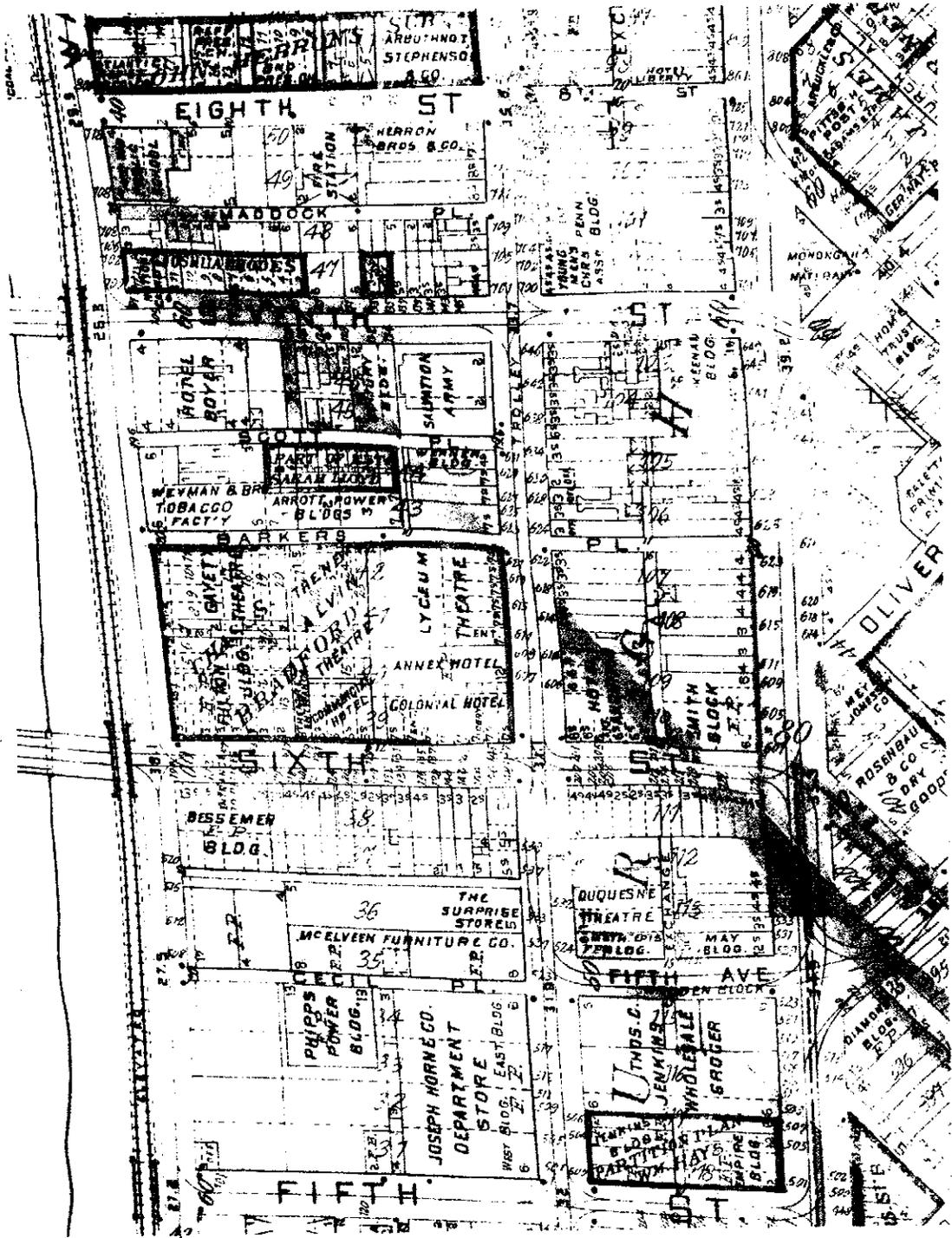


Fig. 4. Penn/Liberty area in 1910, from G.M. Hopkins,
Map of Greater Pittsburgh, PA, Philadelphia, 1910, plate 1.

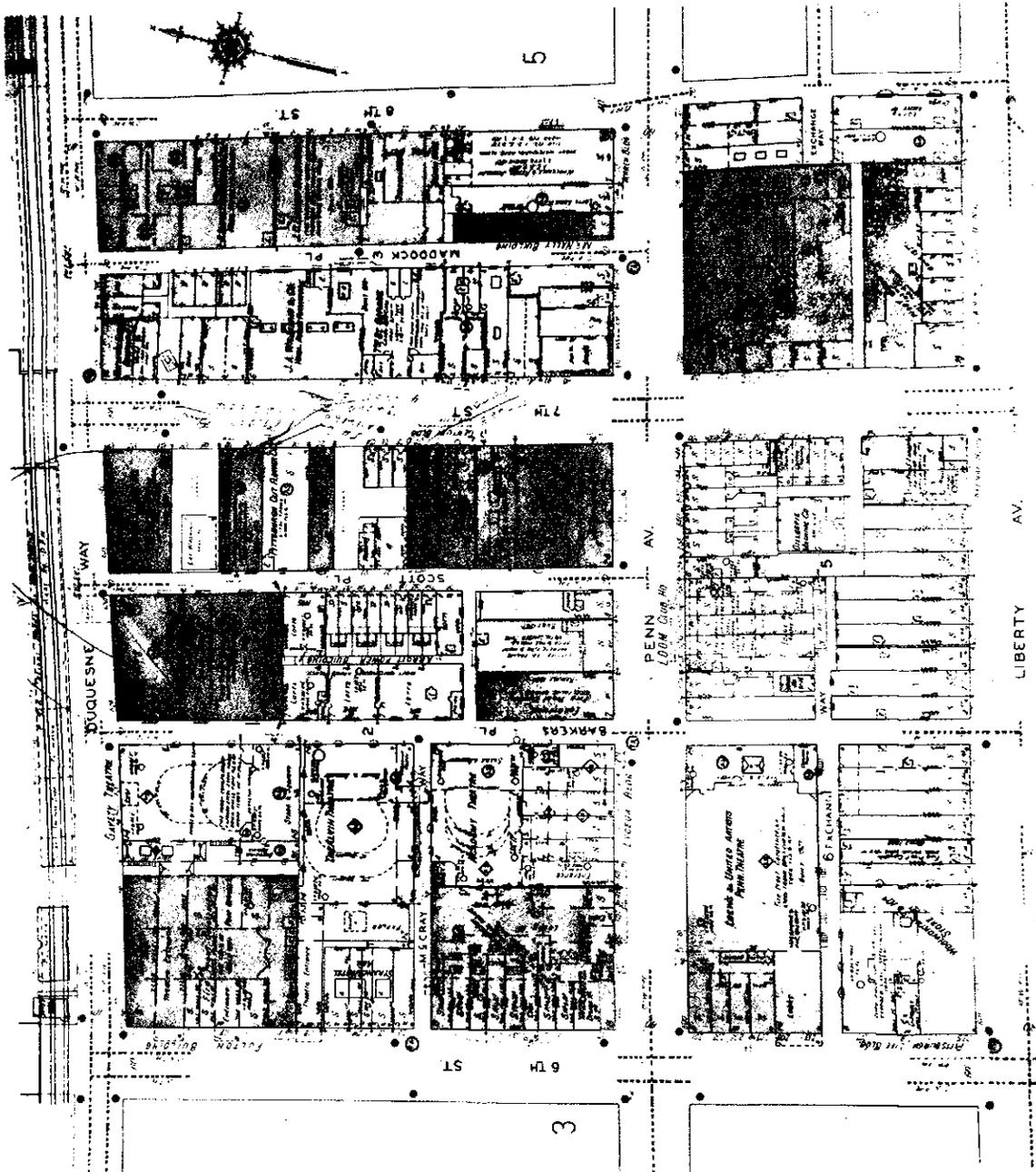


Fig. 6. Penn/Liberty area in 1927, from: Sanborn Map Company, Insurance Maps of Pittsburgh, New York, 1927, Vol. 1. plate 4.

B. Historical Context:

City industrial histories note the principal development of the commission merchant trade in the 1860s, a date which corresponds with the demolition of the city markets in 1852, and the advent of rail transportation. The Pennsylvania Railroad at Seventh and Grant street ran its Freight Division along Liberty Avenue as early as 1851 and the Citizens' Passenger Railway sbuttled up and down Penn Avenue by 1859. Shortly after 1889, tbe freight lines slong Liberty Avenue moved two blocks north to Duquesne Way, and Liberty Avenue, too, supported trolley lines that gave the general public easy access to tbe street, while proximity of the Sixth Street Bridge tbat crossed the Allegheny River provided one more important transportation artery. Tbe combined effect of these circumstances was to make the 600-1100 blocks of Liberty Avenue primary locations for commerce and sbipping. Photographs of tbe district dating from the 1880s, 1890s, and early twentieth century confirm this pattern of development. Typically, three-story converted brick dwellings, and later, four and five-story brick warehouses, roughly 18 feet wide and 100 feet deep, were dressed with signs that listed "Produce", "Cantelopes", "Fruit", "Iron City Produce", and tbe like. Shed porches spanned across tbe side walks, providing shelter for delivery, while creating the old street market ambience.

The concentration of produce commission houses on Liberty Avenue was remarkable. The 1885 city directory lists commission merchants at 605, 607, 611, 613, 619, 621, 625, 629, 631, 633, 635, 637, 639 and 641, in short, at all but five properties of the 600 block. With the growing number of commission merchants and sales throughout the 1890s, it is not surprising that thirty of the leading firms organized the Pittsburgh Produce and Fruit Exchange in 1895. The purpose of the Exchange was to increase business even further and protect the interests of both its members and sbippers. By 1905 the trade was shifting esst out of tbe increasingly congested downtown, towsrd the railroad produce depot at 21st and 22nd and Liberty; a secondary destination was southwest towards the B & O Railroad line near Ferry and Water streets. That direction is apparent in tbe number of merchants on the 600 block of Liberty; eleven in 1902, and six in 1906. In their place came tbeaters, places of amusement, offices, and more luxurious dry goods operations such as clothing, furniture, and jewelry stores that made the region an adjunct to the booming downtown. From approximately 1910 to 1940, this area of Penn and Liberty Avenues supported a tremendous concentration of both jewelry and musical instrument stores.

The Kingsbacher Building replaced the three-story produce commission house of J. Stevenson and Co., better known as Liberty Pork. Stevenson, along with his partner E. H. Myera, also owned and operated an even larger pork house at 645-47 Liberty Avenue, site of the Keenan Building of 1906. Stevenson traded at 637 Liberty from 1877 to 1907. At that time, the produce commission trade moved eastward and Stevenson built the new structure. Kingsbacher Bros. was an appropriate new tenant for the changing neighborhood. The company had been manufacturing jewelry since 1875, with their house at 516 Wood Street and then immediately prior to their Liberty Avenue location, at 505 Market Street. Kingsbacher's not only sold jewelry, but also, silverware and clocks made in America and Europe. Later tenants of the Kingsbacher Building included Cut Rate Shoe Store (1935), Mammoth Shoe Store (1940), a pizza and hot dog shop (1960), and an arcade and novelty store at the first floor and billiard room at the second floor (1965). This last tenant coincides with the general decline of the area, with Kingsbacher's, too, succumbing to arcade amusements. The cinema-style electric sign and stenciled billiard balls on the second floor windows still adorned the building in 1984.

For more information on the Penn-Liberty area, see

LOYAL ORDER OF MOOSE BUILDING	HABS No. PA-5149
WALLACE AND MCALLISTER BUILDINGS	HABS No. PA-5150
PENN AND LIBERTY AVENUES (COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS)	HABS No. PA-5152
PENN AND LIBERTY AVENUES (COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS) (McCormick Building)	HABS No. PA-5152-A
PENN AND LIBERTY AVENUES (COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS) (King Building)	HABS No. PA-5152-B
PENN AND LIBERTY AVENUES (COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS) (Whitten Building)	HABS No. PA-5152-C
PENN AND LIBERTY AVENUES (COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS) (Arbuthnot Building)	HABS No. PA-5152-D
PENN AND LIBERTY AVENUES (COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS) (Harper Building)	HABS No. PA-5152-E
PENN AND LIBERTY AVENUES (COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS) (Lipson Building)	HABS No. PA-5152-F

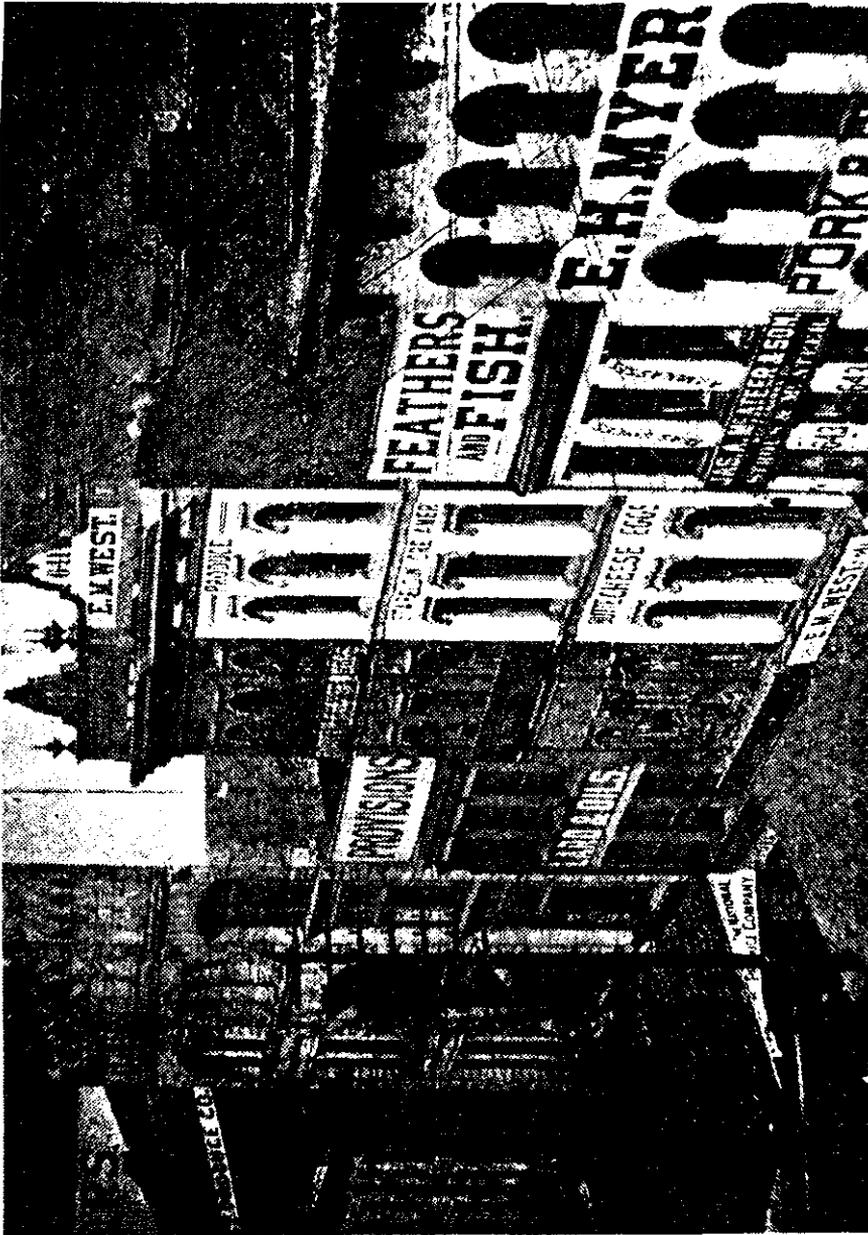


Fig. 7. 600 Block of Liberty Avenue in 1899, from: 100 Views of Pittsburgh, H. Hammond Hook and Co., 1899.

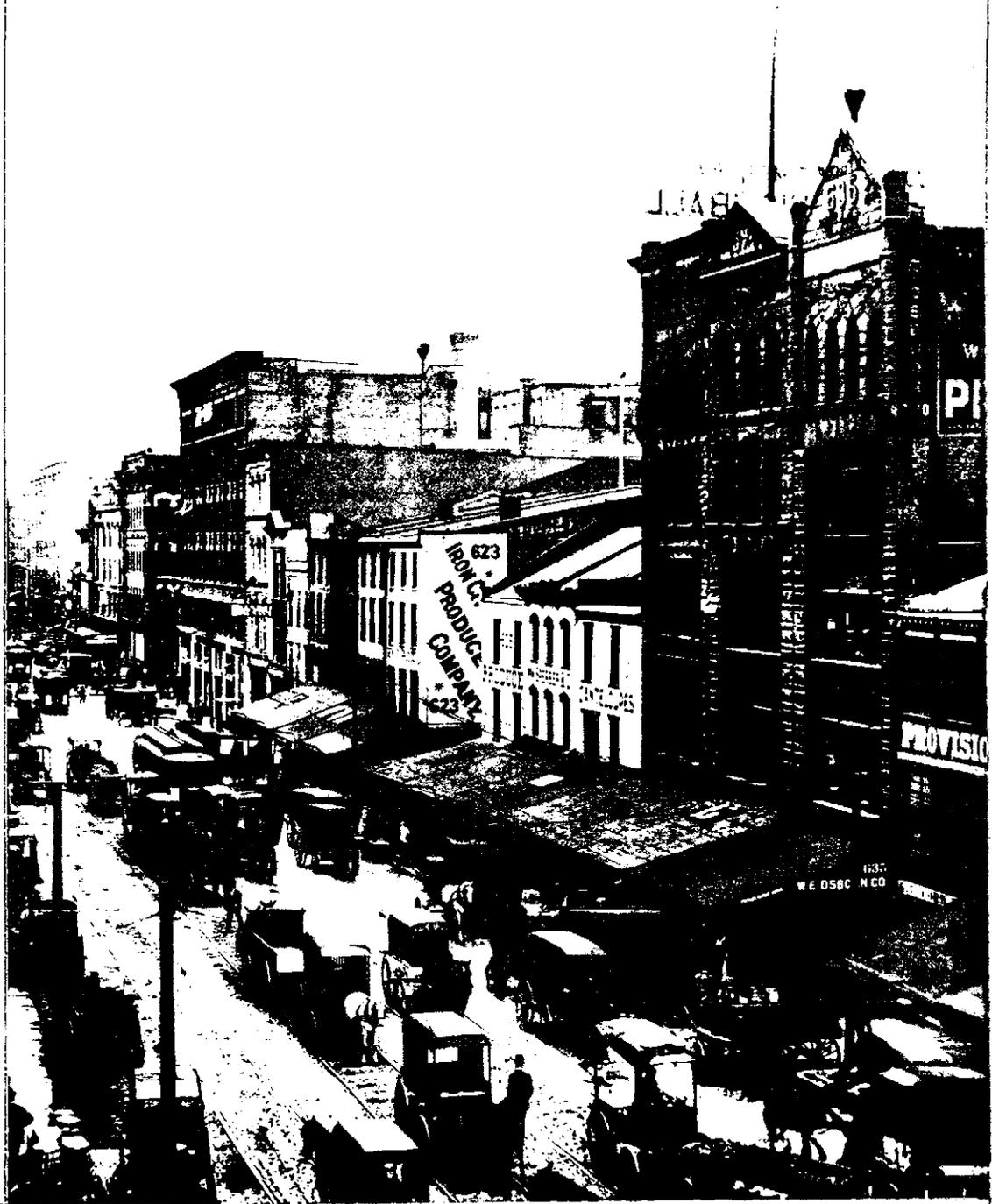


Fig. 8. 600 Block of Liberty Avenue, from: Pennsylvania Collection, Carnegie Library, Photo Archives, Pittsburgh, PA.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character:

"Kingsbacher's" was a Renaissance Revival style commercial building whose ornamental facade was composed of glazed terra cotta blocks. Although the first floor had been altered beyond all recognition of its original configuration, the upper two floors of tall round-arched windows, separated by an elaborate terra cotta spandrel, had been well preserved. Garlanded colonettes divided these arcades of three windows, each of which had a heavy keystone. The middle windows had a taller keystone and wider arch than their flanking registers, creating a central axis and symmetrical composition characteristic of Renaissance Revival architecture. Classical detail was carried out in the dentilled band of each recessed window grouping and the dentilled and modillioned cornice above the frieze that advertised "Kingsbacher's" in relief.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions:

The Kingsbacher Building occupied 100-percent of its 22 by 180 foot site, extending from Liberty Avenue to the rear wall of 636 Penn Avenue which it abutted. Interior dimensions were taken as 18' 10" by 178' 3". Notably, the floor heights were taller than would have been expected, with three stories reaching the same height as the neighboring four-story building. The Sanborn Atlas lists the structure's height as 48 feet.

2. Foundations:

The foundation presumably was rubblestone which was typical of buildings of that size, period, and region.

3. Walls:

Partywalls were composed of common bond brick. Wall thicknesses as recorded in a Sanborn Atlas were 16" for the west wall and diminishing widths of 16, 16, and 12" for the east wall. Presumably, the rear wall also would have been common bond brick.

4. Structural system, framing:

Based upon contemporary technology of terra cotta construction, the Kingsbacher Building would have been built with a frame of steel columns and girders for the facade. However, the principal structure would have been of wood timbers spanning to the partywalls. A wood beam and truss behind the cornice appears in demolition photographs.

5. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors:

The first floor was entirely masked by later alterations and hence provided no information about the original or altered door configuration.

b. Windows and shutters:

The second and third floors featured three round-arched window openings with fixed transoms above operable sash. The middle, wider windows were one over one double hung while the flanking, narrower windows appear to have been single light casements. The small section of the west side wall that faced Exchange Way alley had a square-headed double hung window at the second floor.

8. Roof:

a. Shape, covering:

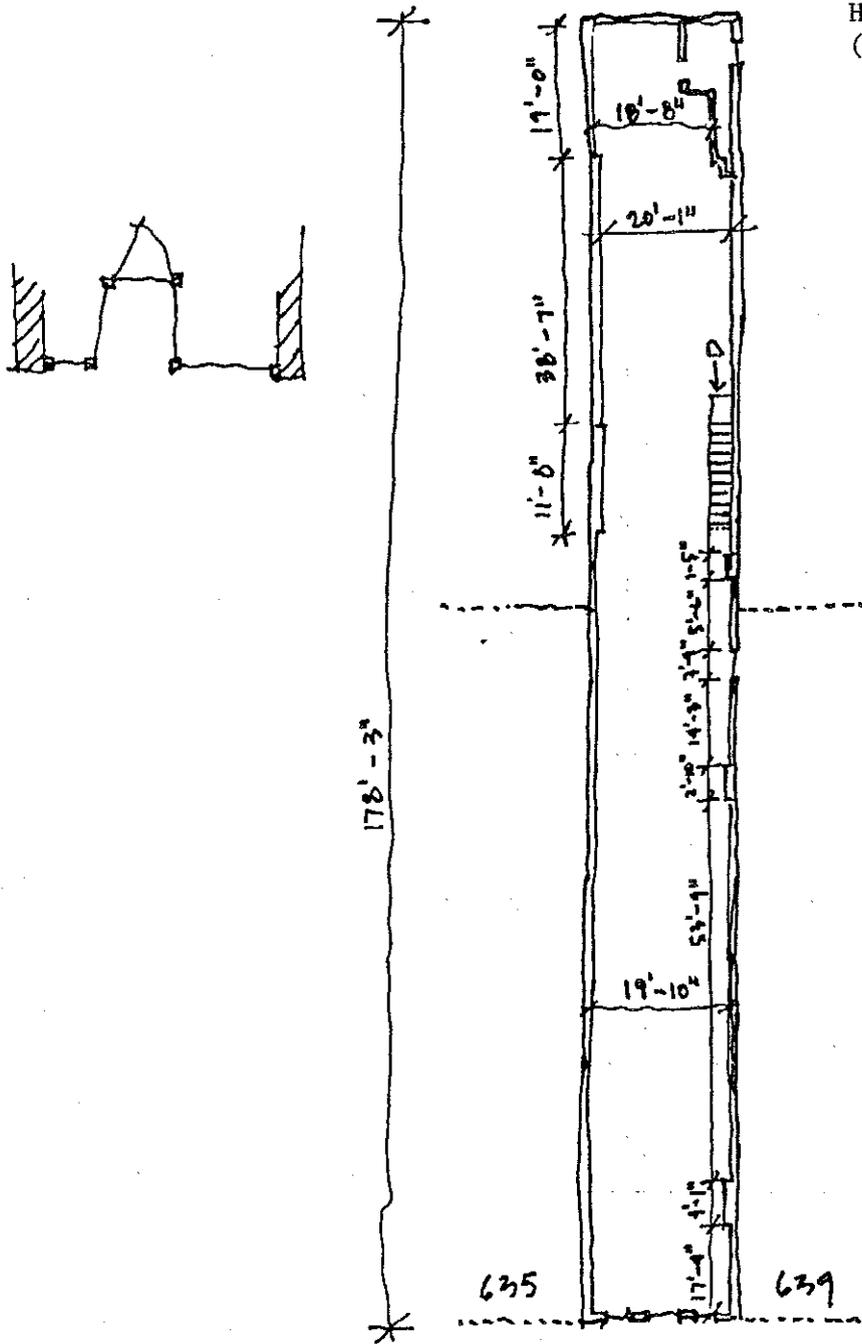
The building had a flat roof composed of built-up roofing.

b. Cornice, eaves:

The terra cotta block cornice featured dentils, modillions, and end consoles.

c. Dormers, cupolas, towers:

An elevator penthouse was situated along the east wall towards the front, corresponding to the elevator that was removed in 1951.



637 LIBERTY AVE
(*KINGSBACHER'S*)

Fig. 9. Sketch plan of first floor of 637 Liberty Avenue, by John Bertola and Philip Snyder of Kingsland, Bauer, Havekotte, Pittsburgh, PA.

C. Description of Interior:

"Kingsbacher's" consisted of ordinary clear span spaces, typical of Pittsburgh commercial loft buildings. A stair along the east wall in the rear third rose to the upper stories, as did an elevator towards the front before it was removed.

D. Site:

The Kingsbacher Building occupies 100-percent of its 22' by 180' site, abutting its neighbors on either side and extending to the building line of 636 Penn Avenue; this unusually deep property line suggests that the rear yard of 636 Penn was purchased by an early owner of 637 Liberty Avenue. This addition to the property predated the 1866 deed transfer to Stevenson.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Early Views:

Carnegie Library, Pennsylvania Division, photo archives. Pittsburgh, PA.

Lorant, Stefan. Pittsburgh: The Story of an American City. Second Edition. Lenox, MA: Authors Edition, Inc., 1975. p. 367.

100 Views of Pittsburgh. H. Hammond Hook and Co., 1899.

B. Interviews:

Carolyn Boyce, Preservationist for Pittsburgh City Planning Department. Interview with George E. Thomas. Discussion of planning issues and proposed historic district. 18 December 1984.

Richard Palucci, Mellon-Stewart Contractors. Interview with George E. Thomas. Discussion of demolition, with photographs of buildings as basis for commentary. Mr. Palucci was the supervisor and prime contractor on the job. 9 January 1985.

Frank Crown, head of Crown Demolition which handled the actual wrecking of the buildings. Telephone interview with George E. Thomas. 9 January 1985.

John Bertola and Philip Snyder, interns from Kingsland, Bauer, and Havekotte, Architects. Interview with George E. Thomas about demolition of buildings and discussion of sketch plans. 9 January 1985.

Walter C. Kidney, Pittsburgh History and Landmark Foundation staff. Interview with George E. Thomas about location of pieces of various buildings. 29 January 1985.

C. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Pennsylvania Historic Resource Survey Form, Office of Historic Preservation, PA Historical and Museum Commission, Harrisburg, PA.

Pittsburgh Bureau of Building Inspection, Building Permit Files, Public Safety Building, Pittsburgh, PA.

Pittsburgh Bureau of Building Inspection. Record Book of Alterations and Repairs, 1897-1914. Archives of Industrial Society, Hillman Library, University of Pittsburgh.

Pittsburgh Bureau of Building Inspection. Record Book of New Additions, 1896-1916. Archives of Industrial Society, Hillman Library, University of Pittsburgh.

Pittsburgh Bureau of Building Inspection. Yearly Docket of Building Permits, 1877-1916. Archives of Industrial Society, Hillman Library, University of Pittsburgh.

Recorder of Deeds, Allegheny Courthouse Annex, Pittsburgh, PA.

2. Secondary and published sources:

Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, Illustrated. Compiled by the Consolidated Illustrating Co., Pittsburgh, 1896.

Hopkins, G.M. Atlas of the Cities of Pittsburgh and Allegheny. Philadelphia, 1882. plate 1.

Hopkins, G.M. Atlas of the Cities of Pittsburgh, Allegheny, and the Adjoining Boroughs. Philadelphia, 1872. pp. 22-23.

Hopkins, G.M. Atlas of the City of Pittsburgh. Philadelphia, 1889.
Vol.1, plate 5.

Hopkins, G.M. Map of Greater Pittsburgh PA. Philadelphia, 1910.
plate 1.

Hopkins Co., G.M. Real Estate Plat Book of the City of Pittsburgh.
Philadelphia, 1923. Vol. 1, plate 4.

Mercantile Directory Pittsburgh - Allegheny. 1902-03.

Pennsylvania Historical Review. Pittsburgh's Leading Industries.
New York, Philadelphia and Chicago: Historical Publishing Co.,
1886. p. 111.

The Pittsburgh Jewish Society Book. Pittsburgh: The Jewish
Criterion, n.d.

Pittsburgh of To-day. Compiled by the Consolidated Illustrating
Co., Pittsburgh, 1896.

R.L. Polk's Pittsburgh and Allegheny Directory.

R.L. Polk and R.L. Dudley's Pittsburgh, Allegheny and Allegheny
County Business Directory.

Sanborn Map Company. Insurance Maps of Pittsburgh. New York, 1927.
Vol. 1, plate 4.

Thurston, George H. Pittsburgh and Allegheny in the Centennial
Year. Pittsburgh: A.A. Anderson & Son, 1876.

Thurston, George H. Pittsburgh's Progress, Industries and Resources.
Pittsburgh: A.A. Anderson & Son, 1886.

D. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated:

University of Pittsburgh, Photo Archives

Prepared by: Carol A. Benenson, M.S., and George E. Thomas, Ph.D.
Clio Group, Inc.
15 February 1985

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

The Allegheny International project is a continuation of the downtown redevelopment of Pittsburgh's Golden Triangle. Spurred by the success of the Heinz Hall complex, and motivated by the availability of the Stanley Theater, the Allegheny Conference for Community Development commissioned Llewelyn-Davis/Hanna-Olin to prepare the Penn/Liberty Urban Design Study which was completed in late 1979. The consultants found the region to be underutilized, and proposed three foci -- a performing arts center, a convention center, and the riverfront. Though buildings were often of high architectural character, changes in shopfronts had degraded the street level. Moreover, it was clear that as the effects of removing heavy industry from the river edge of the downtown continued to occur, the support zones that had developed to serve them in Penn/Liberty would become increasingly derelict. On the other hand, just as transportation had reshaped the region in the 1850s, it could be anticipated that the new subway would have a similar impact in the 1980s. The 600 and 700 blocks were found to have buildings of modest architectural interest -- with the exception of the Moose Hall, Kingsbacher's, and 631 - 633 Liberty, and recommendations were made that argued for the removal of many of those buildings to emphasize the area as a cultural center. It was assumed that in the end, while the Heinz Hall, Stanley Theater, and perhaps the Moose would stay, that the other buildings would be replaced by a larger office block fronting on Liberty Avenue.

Three years after the Llewelyn-Davis/Hanna-Olin study, newspaper stories reported the acquisition of property in the 600 block of Liberty and Penn avenues, by the operators of Heinz Hall, and in November of 1983 the Post Gazette reported that the Penn/Liberty project had been unveiled (19 November 1983). With Allegheny International as the prime mover two office towers would be erected, and the Stanley Theater would be restored. Land acquisition proceeded from 1980 until 1984, with the new owner being the Penn Liberty Holding Company or its subsidiaries.

In 1983 it became clear that the new project probably would cause the demolition of the Moose Hall while some concerns were expressed about the demolition of the adjacent shop buildings as well (Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, "Triangle Landmark May Affect Tower Plan" 30 November 1983). The Pittsburgh History and Landmarks Foundation dropped its opposition to the Moose Hall demolition in December of 1983 and on February 10, 1984, Louise Ferguson, Executive Director of the Foundation, announced their reasons. "Allegheny International would not go ahead with the Moose Building (in place on Penn Avenue)." The Post Gazette had already

argued editorially "No Place for Moose" (5 December 1983), "What is clear is that the city stands to gain greatly from the construction of the new headquarters for Allegheny International, which will be a center for cultural as well as corporate activity. The Moose Hall should not be allowed to block that farsighted endeavor."

The final solution was a memorandum of agreement between the National Park Service, United States Department of the Interior, and the Pittsburgh Trust for Cultural Resources (Penn Liberty Holding Company), the Pittsburgh History and Landmarks Foundation, and the Pittsburgh Historic Review Commission to record the streetscape elevation of 631 - 641 and 719 - 725 Liberty Avenue, the Moose Hall, and 636 Penn Avenue, and to provide individual elevations of 631 - 633, 637 Liberty and the elevation and plans of the Moose Hall. Sponsored by the Heinz Endowment, the drawings were produced under the direction of John Hnedak, Office of Cultural Programs, Mid-Atlantic Region, National Park Service, by Kingsland, Bauer, Havekotte, architects of Pittsburgh, PA, in the summer of 1984. Supervising architect was Roger L. Kingsland, and the buildings were measured and drafted by Philip J. Snyder and John A. Bertola. At that time, the buildings were also surveyed, and sketch plans and data on them were gathered. In the autumn of 1984, George E. Thomas, Ph.D. and Carol A. Benenson, M.S., of the Clio Group, Historic Consultants, surveyed the standing buildings, developed the research and historic background and prepared the written documentation. During this later phase of the project, Rebecca Trumball of the Office of Cultural Programs, National Park Service, assumed direction of the Penn-Liberty report.