

Altoona Mirror Building
1000 Green Avenue
First Ward Neighborhood
Altoona
Blair County
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-5814

HABS
PA,
7-ALTO,
16-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

ADDENDUM
FOLLOWS...

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

ALTOONA MIRROR BUILDING

HABS No. PA-5814

Location: 1000 Green Avenue

Date of Erection: 1912

Architect: Julian Millard

Description: The original portion of this building, which also faces on to 10th Street, had an unusual and innovative structural system. Concrete columns formed the frame of the structure, with red brick curtain walls. The floors are concrete and the interior walls are buff brick. The three-story building has a flat roof and parapet. On the Green Avenue facade, the center bay is wider than the other two bays. There are concrete plaques with the letter "M" at the third floor.

The four-bay addition along Green Avenue was designed to mimic the original, although it uses a steel frame. The bays are evenly spaced, each with paired windows.

The interior of the building is described at length in a contemporary brochure. The business offices occupied the front portion of the first story, while the press room occupied the rear. The press itself, a Goss Straightline Perfecting press, had a specially built foundation and it took five weeks to install the machinery. The second floor housed the editorial room in front and the composing room in the rear; the third floor was devoted to the job department.

History: The Evening Mirror was founded in 1874 by Harry Slep, a German immigrant, and George J. Akers. During the 1877 railroad strike, the Mirror sided with management, and as a result of a loss in readership, Slep and Akers were forced to sell the newspaper. Slep, in partnership with his son William, reacquired the Mirror in 1890. The evening Mirror and its main competitor, the morning Tribune, were the two daily newspapers in Altoona for much of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Today the Mirror is Altoona's only daily newspaper.

Slep hired architect Julian Millard to design this building; ground was broken on July 12, 1911, and it was dedicated on April 15, 1912. The contractor was Clifford Hughes. The building was later expanded, both toward the alley and also toward 11th Street. The Mirror currently also occupies the building at 1001 Chestnut Ave.

Sources: Maps: 1909, 1932. Altoona Mirror Year Book. Souvenir Booklet, 4, 70-71. Altoona Tribune (January 15, 1916). Wiley and Garner, 365. Wolf, 433.

Project Information: This report was part of a larger project to document the city of Altoona, Pennsylvania. The project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER), Robert Kapsch, chief, at the request of America's Industrial Heritage Project (AIHP), Randy Cooley, director. An overview of the history of the city (HABS No. PA-5784) and an overview of the first ward neighborhood (HABS No. PA-5788) provide context for these buildings as well as a comprehensive list of sources. See also additional HABS reports on buildings in the city and other neighborhoods.

This report was prepared by HABS Senior Historian Alison K. Hoagland, project leader and editor, in the summer of 1989. Hoagland's and other project historians' work was published as Railroad City: Four Historic Neighborhoods in Altoona, Pennsylvania (Washington, D.C.: HABS/HAER, National Park Service, 1990), edited by Kim E. Wallace, supervisory historian, and Sara Amy Leach, HABS historian.

ADDENDUM TO
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PA
7-ALTO
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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
Northeast Region
Philadelphia Support Office
U.S. Custom House
200 Chestnut Street
Philadelphia, P.A. 19106

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

ALTOONA-MIRROR BUILDING

This report is an addendum to a 1 page report previously transmitted to the Library of Congress.

Location: 1000 Green Avenue, First Ward Neighborhood,
Altoona, Blair County, Pennsylvania

Date of Construction: Building "A" 1912
Building "B" 1920
Building "C" 1924
Building "D" circa 1935

Present Owner: Grane Healthcare, Inc.
7925 Hill Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15221

Present Use: Vacant

Significance: The significance of these buildings is that they housed the printing operation of one of the largest newspaper companies in central Pennsylvania. The Altoona Mirror newspaper grew from a local publication to a regional concern within a short period of time. As the circulation expanded, so did the need for space. Over a period of years, several additions were constructed contiguous to the original building and in 1949 they purchased the existing Wolf Buck Garage building located at the corner of Chestnut Avenue and 10 th. Street.

ALTOONA MIRROR BUILDING
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Historical and Architectural Information:

The Altoona Mirror Building is actually four buildings constructed over a period of time. As the Site Plan illustrates, building A was constructed in 1912 to house the original operations of the newspaper. In 1920, they build an addition on the rear portion of that building to accommodate their expanding business. Within four years (1924) they built a second addition to the west of the original building, labeled building C. Finally, in 1949 they purchased the existing Wolfe Buick Garage building that fronts onto Chestnut Avenue and constructed a pedestrian walkway spanning the alleyway below, connecting this building to the original 1912 building. This skywalk connects the top floors of these two buildings.

Harry Slep 1874- 1922, was the founder of the Altoona Mirror newspaper business. Born in Germany, he traveled to the United States and arrived in Maryland and then traveled by covered wagon to Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania where learned English and decided that he wanted to be a printer.

At the age of twelve, he traveled to Harrisburg to seek work. A chance acquaintance on the trip made him a proposition - help drive a cow to Harrisburg and he would introduce him to George Bergner of the Vadeerlands Waechter, a German newspaper published in Harrisburg. He became an apprentice within that newspaper shop, and at age sixteen he was made foreman of Mr. Bergner's English and German job office. On October 24, 1854 he completed his apprenticeship and immediately entered into a partnership with a lawyer named McLaughlin. They purchased the Mechanicsburg Gazette. This business venture proved to be unprofitable, and Mr. Slep sold his portion of the business within six months.

He returned to Harrisburg where George Bergner owned the Telegraph. In the late 1860's he worked as assistant makeup man for the Legislative Record and as a foreman at the Patriot and Union paper.

In 1865 he took charge of the Meadville Republican for six months, but returned to Harrisburg because the oil tainted water made him sick. He then held jobs in Harrisburg, Philadelphia and Williamsport before returning to Altoona where he took a job as foreman of the Altoona Sun under the direct supervision of its owner, Daniel W. Moore.

On October 22, 1872, he opened his own job office on Thirteenth Street in Altoona. In 1873, he moved the operation to the second floor of the Bowman Building, also located in Altoona. The Evening Mirror was born June 13, 1874 from that job shop.

Will Henry and Edward J. Slep, sons of Harry Slep, were both journeyman printers. Will Slep reestablished the Mirror in 1888, resuming publication where it had been left off when his father sold the paper to Mr. Buckingham in 1878.

In 1890, Will Slep asked his father for help and the firm of J. and W. H. Slep was formed. The son retained the post as business manager and assumed the co-title as publisher. The first edition of the Altoona Mirror was printed with slugs

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set by two new Mergenthaler linotype machines, the first of their kind to be used in central Pennsylvania. Edward Slep took over as composing room superintendent in 1889 when the paper had twelve employees.

Will died in 1906 after a brief siege of Bright's Disease. After his death, the company was reorganized with, J.G. Humes, Mrs. Slep's son to a former marriage, as secretary-treasurer. Edward died in 1921, and was succeeded by his son, Harry, also a journeyman printer.

In 1912, the paper expanded to a new building at 1000 Green Avenue. Mr. Slep hired architect Julian Millard to design this new building. Ground was broken on July 12, 1911 and it was dedicated on April 15, of the next year. Clifford Hughes was the contractor for this building. The original building became the core of the newspaper's operation. The new plant was dedicated at a banquet on April 15 with a buffet supper for 200 guest on the third floor. A new annex at the rear of the 1000 Green Avenue building was added in the summer of 1920, doubling the existing floor space. This was required because circulation had grown to 23,000. The original building, facing on to Tenth Street has an unusual and innovative—structural system. Concrete columns formed the frame of the structure, with red brick curtain walls. The floors are concrete and the interior walls are constructed of buff brick. The three-story building has a flat roof and low profile parapet. On the Green Avenue facade, the center bay is wider than the other two bays. there are concrete plaques with the letter "M" on the third level. The addition of the new building along Green Avenue was designed to mimic the original building. Although it uses a steel frame construction method of construction. The bays are evenly spaced with each bay containing paired windows.

On June 16, 1922, the founder of the Altoona Mirror newspaper, Harry Slep, died at his home at the age of 86. He was succeeded by his youngest son, Daniel Neff Slep. On August 23, 1924, the Mirror published its first 48 page edition and expanded its quarters with the opening of a Green Avenue annex.

The first color advertisement was printed by the paper in 1934. The cost of the paper went to three cents per copy the same year; the first change in rates in more than fifty years. On June 13, 1949, the Mirror Printing Company acquired the Wolfe Buick Building for expansion of the company offices an as the new site for its new Goss printing press. The Goss Headliner press weighs in excess of 80 tons and is placed on a sixteen foot thick concrete slab. This press increased the capacity of the Mirror Printing Company to 48,000 copies of a 48 page paper per hour. To respond to the ever-changing needs of the newspaper publishing business, the Altoona-Mirror Publishing Company moved its printing business to another location in the City of Altoona in 1993. The current building complex has remained vacant to this date.

Given the current condition of the building's interior, it appears that vandals entered the building and caused substantial damage. Records and files are scattered throughout, walls and some windows have been damaged in addition to other interior features. Currently, the building is secure and should remain safe from further vandalism.

- No provisions have been made to secure the building after its abandonment.
- There is no heat in the building. We believe that the electricity and water has been turned-off, but it could not be determined if the water lines have been drained or properly prepared for the winter months. Some of the top floor windows are broken, allow birds to enter the building. Portions of the roof are leaking causing damage to the building's interior.

As the enclosed pictures indicate, the original Altoona Mirror Building is a simple, unadorned three story brick structure, similar in design and detailing to most commercial buildings constructed in that era. The additions constructed in 1920 and 1924 match the original building in material, scale, detailing and design. To the casual observer, this complex appears as a single building constructed at the same time.

The only feature requiring maintenance on the building's exterior are the windows. In general, the majority of the wood frame, double-hung windows are in poor condition, Photo number 4 shows their current condition. The brick has not been cleaned for several years. The mortar joints are in fair condition.

Consistent with the general lack of maintenance of the exterior of the building, the building's interior also was not fully maintained . Evidence of plaster damage and the need to paint occurs throughout the buildings.

Over a period of time, the nature of newspaper publishing changed considerably. It progressed from a labor-intensive business to an automated system. During the course of these events, the building's interior was altered. Acoustical ceilings were installed, partitions constructed and ceilings lowered; fluorescent lighting was installed throughout. The building was required to adopt to contemporary newspaper publishing standards.

The building's interior is as simple an unadorned as its exterior. It contains no interesting architectural detail. The floors are made of terrazzo. The wall ceiling junction do not contain cornices. The ceilings are made of drywall and not pressed-metal panels. All light fixtures are fluorescent.

Sources:

1. No architectural drawings were located for any of these buildings. The following sources were consulted in making this determination:
 - a. The Thompson Corporation, current owner of the Altoona Mirror newspaper, Altoona PA
 - b. Blair County Historical Society, Altoona PA
 - c. Southwestern PA Heritage Preservation Commission, Hollidaysburg PA
 - d. Railroaders Memorial Museum, Altoona PA
2. Railroad City: Four Historic Neighborhoods in Altoona, Pennsylvania by, Kim E, Wallace et.al.
no date
source location: Railroaders Memorial Museum, Altoona PA

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3. Historic American Building Survey/Historic American
Engineering Record
by, American Industrial Heritage Project
National Park Service, 1990
source location: Greater Altoona Economic Development Corp.,
Altoona PA
3. Altoona Mirror Year Book
1932
source location: The Thompson Corporation, Altoona PA
4. Altoona Mirror Souvenir Booklet
1913
source location: The Thompson Corporation, Altoona PA
5. The Altoona-Mirror newspaper
June 13, 1964
page 1
source location: The Thompson Corporation, Altoona PA

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