

ALLEGHENY RIVER BOULEVARD, OBSERVATION TURNOUTS 1,
2, & 3

Allegheny River Boulevard parallels the south bank of the Allegheny
River for nearly six miles between the City of Pittsburgh and the
Borough of Oakmont.

Pittsburgh vicinity
Allegheny County
Pennsylvania

HALS PA-12

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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY

National Park Service

U.S. Department of the Interior

1849 C Street NW

Washington, DC 20240-0001

HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY

ALLEGHENY RIVER BOULEVARD OBSERVATION TURNOUTS 1, 2, & 3

HALS NO. PA-12

Location: Allegheny River Boulevard parallels the south bank of the Allegheny River for nearly six miles between the City of Pittsburgh and the Borough of Oakmont. Pittsburgh Vicinity, Allegheny County, Pennsylvania

Turnout # 1 Lat: 40.4828 Long: -79.8674; Turnout #2 Lat: 40.4832 Long: -79.9002; and Turnout #3 Lat: 40.4894 Long: -79.8511 (Google Earth, Simple Cylindrical Projection, WGS84)

Significance: The Allegheny River Boulevard itself represents the vision of the City Beautiful Movement of the 1920s. It is a beautifully planned and landscaped riverside parkway that conveys an aesthetic of urban planning.

The Allegheny River Boulevard Observation Turnouts (1, 2, & 3) are significant as designed historic landscapes. The Observation Turnouts were carefully planned to take advantage of scenic vistas and designed opportunities to park and view the river. These structures feature sandstone walls, arched stone fountains, stone niches, and stone steps. Additionally, the turnouts are lined with granite curbing, and planting materials were selected and placed for their aesthetic value.

Description: Allegheny River Boulevard is nearly six miles in length and passes through four Allegheny County municipalities including the City of Pittsburgh, Penn Hills Township, the Borough of Verona, and the Borough of Oakmont. The Boulevard follows the northward meander of the southern bank of the Allegheny River. This picturesque roadway was submitted to the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, Bureau of Historic Preservation in 1994 for designation as a Historic District. The Boulevard has also been listed as a "Pennsylvania at Risk" property.

In 1994, Scenic America named Allegheny River Boulevard as one of America's 10 Most Endangered Scenic Byways because a lack of public or governmental stewardship has allowed some of the road's significant features to deteriorate. The report from Scenic America found that the stone Observation Turnouts have been allowed to deteriorate, becoming a public hazard. Additionally, the report states that historic trees and bridges are not being properly maintained and billboards and commercial signs are blocking some scenic views of the river.

Allegheny River Boulevard has ten contributing properties as listed in the Historic District description. Those properties include two granite pylons with

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bas-relief sculptures (which have been restored), the Shade's Run Bridge, the Plum Creek Bridge, the Sandy Creek concrete arch, the Plum Creek Branch of the Pennsylvania Railroad Bridge, the landscaped right-of-way, and the three stone observation turnouts. The two lane Boulevard is lined with granite curbing and landscaped with hundreds of trees and shrubs that were specifically selected to add scenic value to the feeling of the boulevard.

The boulevard conveys an aesthetic of early urban planning calculated to take advantage of scenic vistas by paralleling the Allegheny River and offering designed opportunities to view the beauty of river especially at the stone observation turnouts.

The Observation Turnouts are located between the City of Pittsburgh and the Municipality of Penn Hills. They were designed and constructed in an elegant architectural style by Allegheny County Engineers from the Public Works Department at the same time as the Boulevard. The stone turnouts vary in condition and feature elements such as stone parapet walls, arched stone fountains and pools, stone steps, and designed planting. Threats to these historic features include removal of trees for utilities, widening the road surface, development along the boulevard, and neglect.

Turnout 1

Located in the City of Pittsburgh, this site is situated on the land side of the road and is the first turnout one approaches when traveling east on Allegheny River Boulevard from the city.

Turnout #1 features a concrete drive lined with granite curb; a stone observation terrace with sandstone parapet walls; a fountain with pool atop the observation terrace; sandstone steps and flooring; and planting around the stone structure featuring two Chinese Elms flanking either side of the observation terrace. The fountain includes a basin stone carved to drain water down either side of it into the pool below. The detail drawings for this turnout demonstrate the planning efforts put into creating the fountain and plumbing involved for it to drain and function properly.

The stone work on the observation terrace, parapet walls, steps, and fountain all seems to be in stable condition with the exception of some loose stones. Minor cleaning and re-pointing as well as some stone work could be done to repair damaged stone steps, places where the parapet walls are pulling apart, some of the loose or missing stone capping. Original planting from this site appears to have been lost. Invasive or successional vegetation has overgrown the observation deck and the surrounding site.

Turnout 2

Located in the Municipality of Penn Hills, this second turnout is situated on the land side of the road shortly after passing the intersection with Nadine Road, when traveling east on Allegheny River Boulevard from the city.

Turnout #2 features a concrete drive lined with granite curb; a very high stone observation terrace with sandstone parapet walls, sandstone steps and flooring; and planting around the stone structure and across the roadway. The fountain for this turnout is detailed as a drinking fountain with a spillway that directs water to a drain that creates a water fall to the pool below the observation terrace. The detail drawings for this turnout demonstrate the planning efforts put into creating this fountain and the plumbing involved for it drain and function properly. The spillway is channeled under the walk to transport the water to the drain and on to the pool.

This turnout also feature “soil pockets”, which were planting beds constructed within the structure of the observation terrace. The observation terrace at this turnout was constructed into the hillside with outcroppings of rocks that were built to give the feeling of a natural setting.

There are four areas designated as soil pockets for planting beds on this observation terrace. The plans obtained for this project did not include planting details for these pockets, but it is assumed that the original vegetation is not present. The invasive or successional vegetation within these pockets and on the surrounding site is overgrown. The pocket themselves appear to have retained structural integrity.

The masonry on the observation deck, parapet walls, and steps all appears to be stable. Minor cleaning and re-pointing as well as some stone work could be done to repair damaged mortar and to replace missing or loose stones.

The back wall atop the observation terrace appears to have been reconstructed at some time. The materials used do not match the original design intention. Additionally, the stone fountain appears to have been altered, but the original detail drawings would facilitate restoration.

Turnout 3

Located in the Municipality of Penn Hills, the third turnout is situated on the river side of the road shortly after passing the intersection with Sandy Creek Road, when traveling east on Allegheny River Boulevard from the city.

Turnout #3 features a concrete drive lined with granite curb; two stone observation terraces with sandstone parapet walls; a drinking fountain with stone arch between the two observation terraces; sandstone steps and flooring; planting

around the stone structure featuring two trees flanking either side of the observation deck; and a sandstone parapet wall along the drive isle.

The pool for the drinking fountain is carved from stone to create a natural looking basin. The detail drawings for this turnout demonstrate the planning efforts put into creating the fountain and plumbing involved for it drain and run properly.

The fountain appears to be stable, as does the wall around it. The stone arch was skillfully designed and constructed and adds character to the structure. No planting plan was located during the research for this project, but the layout plan suggests that the plantings no longer exist as designed around the structure of the observation terrace. Turnout #3 also features a stone parapet wall along the drive separating the site from the river.

History: In 1925 the Department of Public Works produced the Allegheny County Major Highway Plan. This plan reflected the contemporary metropolitan tradition in American planning by maintaining the centrality of downtown Pittsburgh in the region while encouraging the decentralization of population and industry with a proposed elaborate system of highways throughout the rural or less-developed periphery. Within this plan, six riverside highways were intended to provide boulevard access through the river valleys of the region. One of these six riverside boulevards is the Allegheny River Boulevard.

Allegheny River Boulevard represents both the vision of the City Beautiful Movement and a grand concept for 1920s and 1930s auto touring. Early parkway designers faced the challenge of adapting traditional landscape architecture methods to the automobile. The influence of romantic landscape painting and picturesque park design remained strong for early parkway designers. The ability of the automobile to quickly take people to places they had never been provided the opportunity for designers to showcase new ways to create scenic views. In the case of Allegheny River Boulevard this was done through aesthetic plantings, hugging the meandering Allegheny River with the roadway, and the creation of Observation Turnouts to frame the scenic views.

The scenic Turnouts along the Allegheny River Boulevard provided travelers with the opportunity to enjoy scenic views that were in short supply in early 20th Century Pittsburgh. The Allegheny River, with its views of wooded banks and the occasional island, offered an unrivaled opportunity for local motorists to appreciate their natural surroundings. The *Pittsburgh Press* noted in 1929 “[H]alf of the Boulevard will be constructed where in some places even a footpath would have been dangerous before”. This statement strengthens the notion that early urban designers felt that it was important to have such a picturesque Boulevard along the Allegheny River.

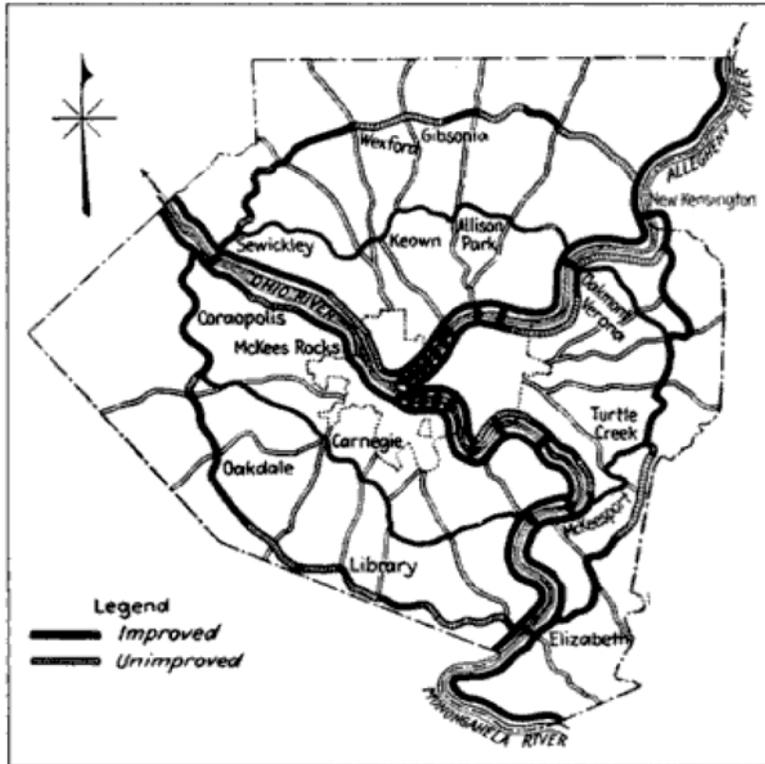
When construction was finished around 1931, an article was written in the *Sun-Telegraph* that inspired people to take in the beauty that had been created. The article read “In few places in this district is finer scenery than the river views along the new Allegheny River Boulevard. Picturesque stone stop-over platforms are situated at intervals along the boulevard where motorists may park and contemplate the river scenery.”

Allegheny River Boulevard was built to give travelers the opportunity to appreciate the natural beauty of the Allegheny River Valley. A major part of the boulevards charm results from the fact that it closely parallels the natural course of the river, and that its turnouts often afford sweeping vistas of the river valley. The elegant architectural style of the stone turnouts is a preserved example of historic properties that represent the significant transportation and planning themes of the era of their design. Allegheny River Boulevard retains the historic character and integrity and conveys the feeling of a beautifully planned riverside parkway.

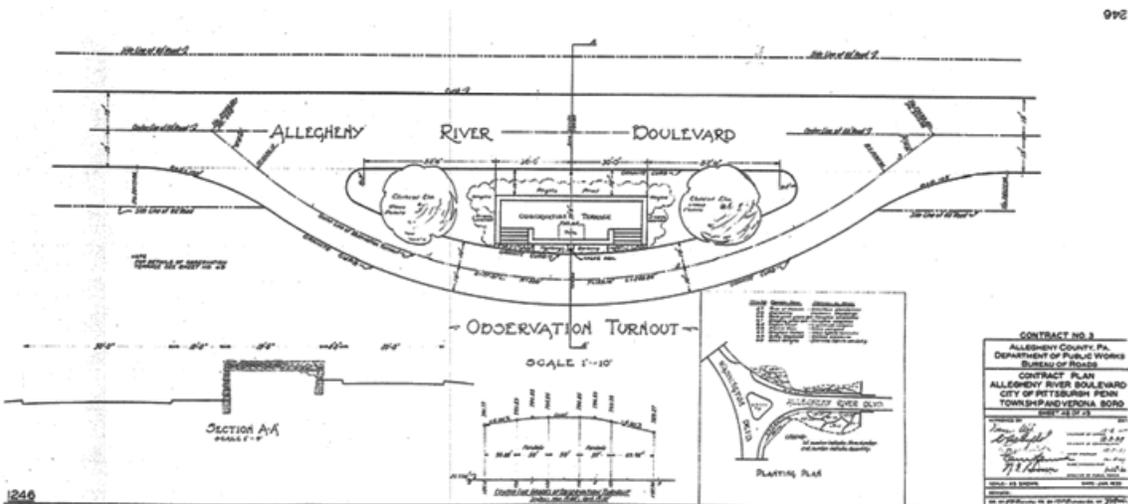
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Historian: Michael J. Kotyk, Landscape Architectural Historian, 2008

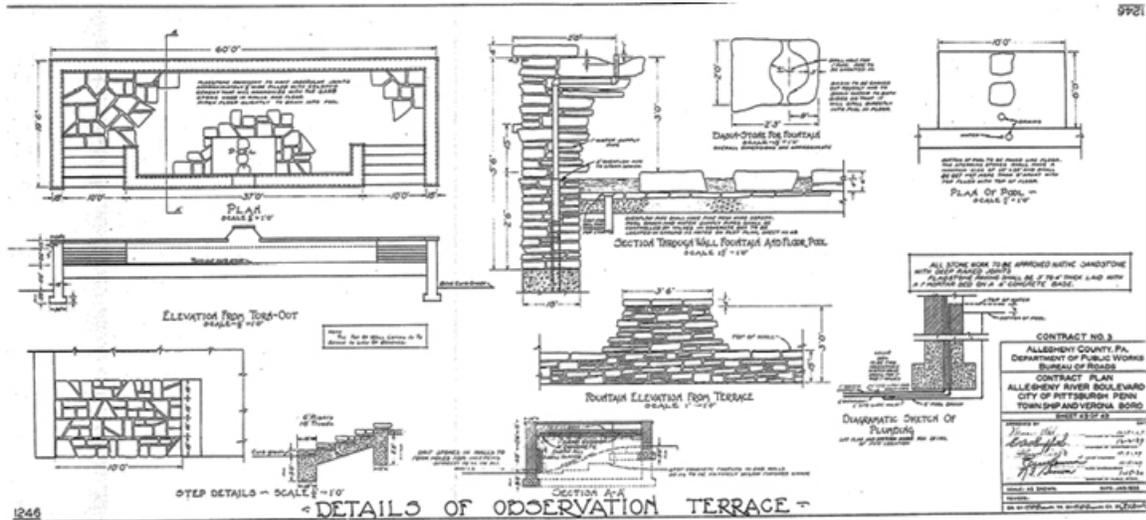


Allegheny County Major Highway Plan (Allegheny County, PA Department of Public Works, Bureau of Roads).



Layout Plan for Observation Turnout #1 (Allegheny County, PA Department of Public Works, Bureau of Roads).

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Detail Plan for Observation Turnout #1 (Allegheny County, PA Department of Public Works, Bureau of Roads).



The front of Observation Turnout #1 (Michael J. Kotyk, 2008).



The Turnout #1 stone steps (Michael J. Kotyk, 2008).



The Turnout #1 observation deck overgrown with vegetation (Michael J. Kotyk, 2008).



Left: The Turnout #1 stone steps and wall; Right: The Turnout #1 stone fountain overgrown with vegetation (Michael J. Kotyk, 2008).



Two views of the Turnout #1 parapet wall (Michael J. Kotyk, 2008).

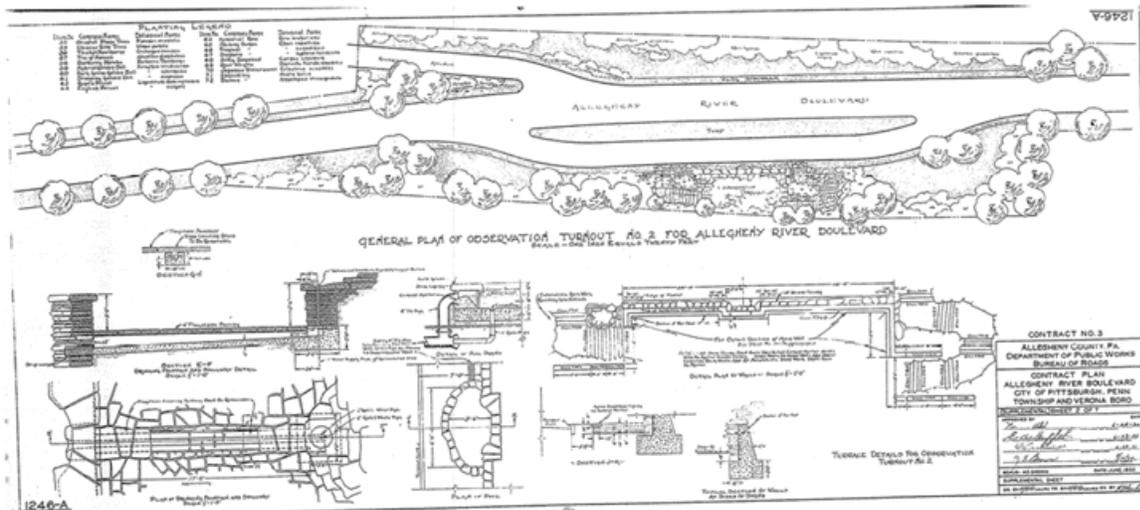
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The backside of the Turnout #1 observation deck (Michael J. Kotyk, 2008).



The view from the Turnout #1 observation deck (Michael J. Kotyk, 2008).



Layout Plan and Details for Observation Turnout #2 (Allegheny County, PA Department of Public Works, Bureau of Roads).



The Turnout #2 spillway drain to pool below (Michael J. Kotyk, 2008).

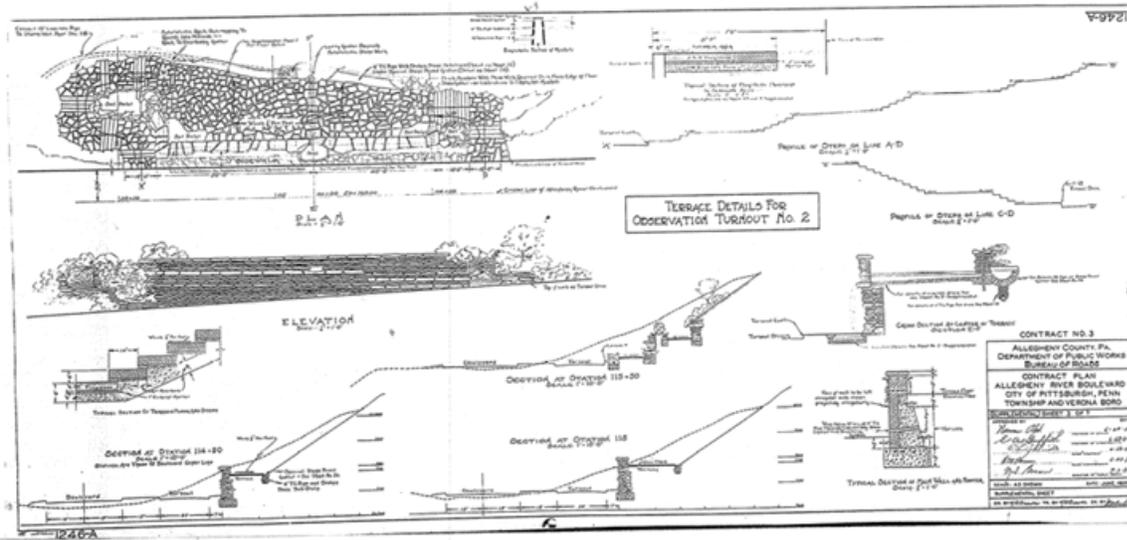


The Turnout #2 planting bed (Michael J. Kotyk, 2008).

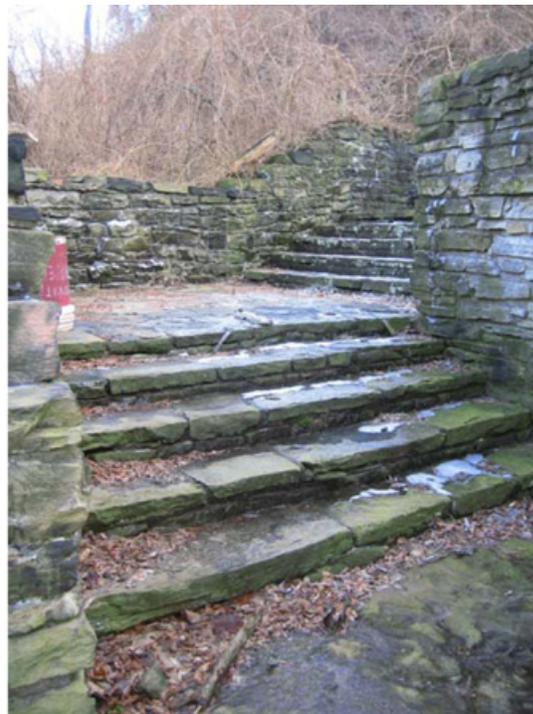


The Turnout #2 back wall (Michael J. Kotyk, 2008).

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Detail Drawing for Observation Turnout #2 (Allegheny County, PA Department of Public Works, Bureau of Roads).



Left: The Turnout #2 stone capping; Right: The Turnout #2 stone steps (Michael J. Kotyk, 2008).



The Turnout #2 stone wall and cap (Michael J. Kotyk, 2008).



The Turnout #2 stone wall and cap (Michael J. Kotyk, 2008).



The Turnout #2 steps and wall (Michael J. Kotyk, 2008).



The Turnout #2 wall (Michael J. Kotyk, 2008).

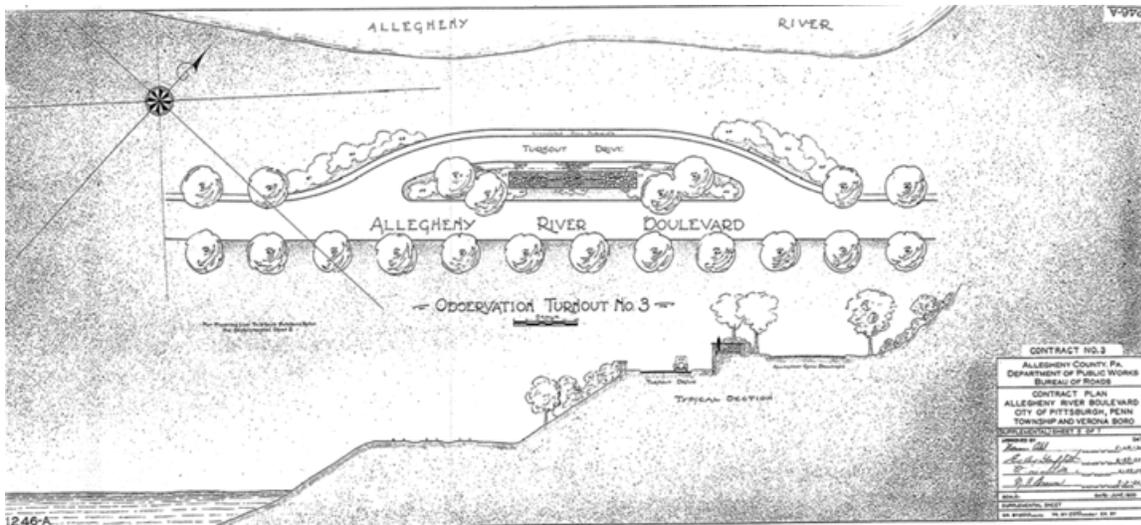
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The sweeping view from the Turnout #2 observation terrace (Michael J. Kotyk, 2008).

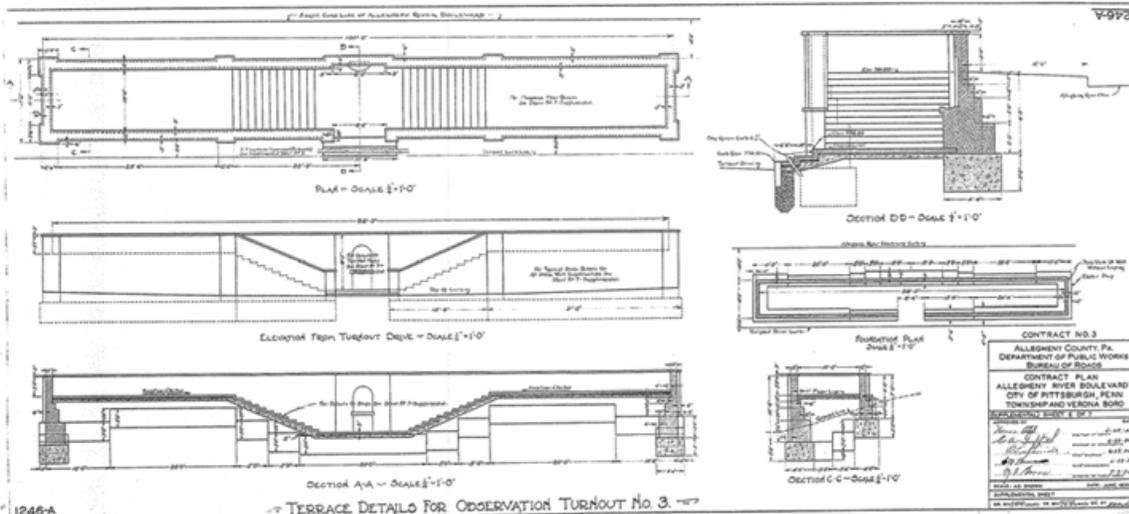


The front facade of Turnout #2 from across the boulevard (Michael J. Kotyk, 2008).

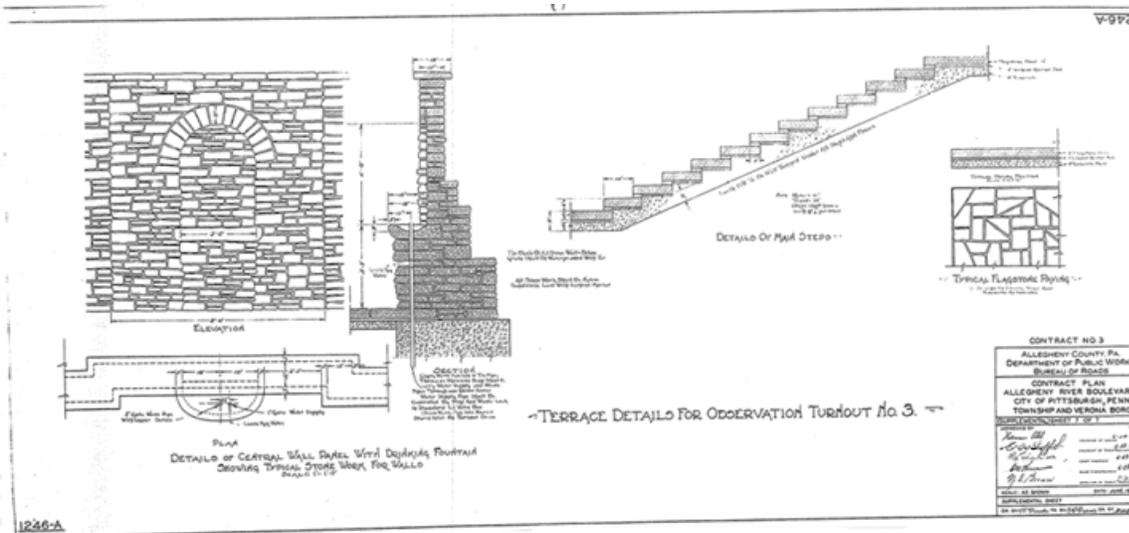


Layout Plan for Observation Turnout #3 (Allegheny County, PA Department of Public Works, Bureau of Roads).

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Detail Plan for Observation Turnout #3 (Allegheny County, PA Department of Public Works, Bureau of Roads).



Detail Plan for Observation Turnout #3 (Allegheny County, PA Department of Public Works, Bureau of Roads).

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The Turnout #3 observation turnout with stone parapet wall along drive (Michael J. Kotyk, 2008).



The view of Allegheny River and Island from Turnout #3 (Michael J. Kotyk, 2008).



The view of the back side of Turnout #3 (Michael J. Kotyk, 2008).



Turnout #3 is overgrown with vegetation, and the wall caps are in disrepair (Michael J. Kotyk, 2008).



Left: The Turnout #3 fountain with stone arch; Right: The Turnout #3 steps and wall cap (Michael J. Kotyk, 2008).



The Turnout #3 steps and wall (Michael J. Kotyk, 2008).



The stone wall front of the Turnout #3 observation terrace (Michael J. Kotyk, 2008).



The Turnout #3 stone wall with corner stone niche (Michael J. Kotyk, 2008).