

Reconstructing an Entrepreneurial Woman's Life From Family Intrigue to Water Rents

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INTRODUCTION

This case study demonstrates the resources available for urban research in the mid-nineteenth century. Two elements of the Genealogical Proof Standard (GPS) are emphasized in this study. Reasonably exhaustive research was employed to discover the lengths Mary Fassbinder, a single woman for much of her life, went to support her family to include running boarding houses, selling cigars, liquor, and shoes. Her family life was turbulent and full of intrigue. The correlation and analysis of information and evidence established kinship relationships and documented the life of a strong, independent woman—a survivor.

ALLEGHENY CITY

Allegheny City began in 1788 as Alleghenytown, grew to borough in 1828, and was incorporated as a city in 1840. In 1907 Pittsburgh annexed Allegheny City over the objections of the residents. Today it is known as the North Side of Pittsburgh. Over the course of the nineteenth century the population grew with the arrival of Irish, Scots-Irish, Germans, Swiss, Austrian, and other ethnic groups. After the Civil War, African-Americans began migrating to the City. Toward the end of the century the Croatians arrived. The city was a multi-ethnic, heavily industrialized, urban entity that was the third largest city in Pennsylvania until its demise. Like many cities of the era, labor strife was not uncommon, nor were disasters such as floods.

RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES

Allegheny City has many research opportunities and challenges. Repositories abound; records were kept early in the life of the city. However, researchers will find many challenges. Statewide vital record keeping procedures were not formalized in Pennsylvania until 1906, records have been lost, and those that have survived are widely dispersed. Shifts in the ethnic composition of the city and rapid urbanization have added to the challenges. A systematic approach beginning with the history of the city will yield success in the identification of ancestors and the discovery of the fabric of life in the nineteenth century.

KEY REPOSITORIES AND WEBSITES.

In the last few years, the online or digital resources available for research in western Pennsylvania have expanded considerably. Some examples:

- Co-located with the collections of the Pennsylvania Room of the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh (CLP), <https://www.carnegielibrary.org/research-overview/genealogy/>, is the Western Pennsylvania Genealogical Society Library (WPGS). The online catalog is at <https://wpgs.library.net/>. Together these collections are essential resources to conduct research relating to Allegheny City and western Pennsylvania. Also, researchers can order the publications of the WPGS at their website, <https://wpgs.org/>. Many are applicable to Allegheny City and some are cited in this handout.

- *Historic Pittsburgh*, <https://historicpittsburgh.org/>. This site offers a comprehensive collection of published nineteenth-and early twentieth-century works, digital maps and images, and finding aids. Surname searches will yield many valuable clues, and the collection of city directories is unparalleled.
- Senator John Heinz History Center, Library and Archives, <https://www.heinzhistorycenter.org/detre-library-archives>. holds extensive collections relating to western Pennsylvania and many that relate specifically to Allegheny City.
- ULS Archives and Special Collections, <https://www.library.pitt.edu/asc-visit>. The Archives is part of the University of Pittsburgh Library System and holds a variety of collections of interest to genealogists. The Archives maintains two reading rooms, one in Darlington Library and one at Point Breeze. Researchers should explore the webpage, *Genealogical and Family History Resources @ Pitt: Family History Resources* found at <https://pitt.libguides.com/Genealogy> . They also have guides to newspapers, ethnic and immigrant resources, and many other topics. They operate the *Historic Pittsburgh* website and have made many of their holdings available there.
- *US Allegheny County PAGenWeb*, <http://www.pagenweb.org/~allegheny/>, and *USGenWeb Archives for Allegheny County, Pennsylvania*, <http://usgwarchives.net/pa/allegheny/> .
- The Family History Library (FHL) has filmed and digitized a variety of Pennsylvania, Allegheny County, Pittsburgh, and Allegheny City records. *FamilySearch* has also filmed some records relevant to Allegheny City; note especially probate and land records. Some of the FHL film numbers and *FamilySearch* online collections are noted below. Search the catalog for both USA, Pennsylvania, Allegheny and for USA, Pennsylvania, Allegheny, Allegheny. The Pennsylvania Room of the Carnegie Library is an affiliate of the FHL. Readers may view additional records not available to the public when they are physically present in the Pennsylvania Room.

HISTORY RESOURCES

- *Historic Pittsburgh*. Among the 1,720 published works are two histories specific to Allegheny City:
 - *The Story of Old Allegheny* (#1 in the bibliography)
 - *Old Allegheny* (#3)
 - Also, of interest are various Annual Reports and Treasurer Reports published by the city government/
- *Allegheny City Society*, <https://alleghenycity.org/>
- The Pennsylvania Room of the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh (CLP), and the Allegheny City Historic Reading Room, Allegheny Branch of the CLP, https://www.carnegielibrary.org/clp_location/allegheny/
- *Images of America, Allegheny City, 1840–1907*
- *Resurrecting Allegheny City: The Land, Structures & People of Pittsburgh's North Side* (#11)
- *Allegheny City: A History of Pittsburgh's North Side* (#13)

STRATEGIES TO EXTRACT DATA FROM CITY DIRECTORIES

Chapter 8 of *The Source*, “Directories,” by Gordon L. Remington provides an excellent discussion of the types of directories and suggests strategies to employ directories. See especially his discussion of methodologies to use directories with specific types of records. Remington identifies nine different kinds of directories: city, telephone, business, law, medical, civil and military service, professional, religious, and postal. The rest of this discussion will focus only on city directories.

Generally, a city directory has two main sections, residences and businesses, plus the advertisements that make it profitable. Most directories also include sections on government, churches, public institutions, benevolent societies, schools, and a street directory. The following practices help users get the most out of a city directory.

- Note and record the publication data. Sometimes there are competing publications.
- Note the cutoff date for information.
- Note the definition of abbreviations. This information is most often found at the beginning of the residence section.
- Regardless of whether you have located the individual of interest in the residence section, if you know the occupation proceed to the business section and search for the individual.
- Check the errata or corrections page if you do not find an individual. This section may appear at the beginning or end of the volume.
- Check the index of advertisers. The individual may have been affluent enough to afford an ad for his business.
- Read the introduction for any information that the publisher thought important enough to bring to the reader’s attention.
- Take a very liberal view of potential spellings. For early directories or names beginning with letters less frequently used for surnames, consider reading the entire letter section of the directory.
- Having located an address, plot it on a map and search for nearby churches. Return to the directory to find information on the denomination, address, and name of minister. Alternatively, you may just wish to copy the church section of the directory.
- Extract the data on the individual of interest for *every possible year* that he or she could appear in the directory.
- Check the street directory for information to help locate the street.
- If you know the name of a business and you do not find it in the business section, look in the residence section. For example, the name of a hotel may not be found in the business section because of the extra cost, but the name of the hotel and proprietor maybe found in the residence section.
- Finally, take the time to scan the directory for insights into the community. Are there trends in advertising? What are the major industries? Are there ethnic newspapers?

This case study will make use of the extensive collection of city directories offered on *Historic Pittsburgh*. The holdings span the period from 1815 to 1945 and include 137 items. Most of these are city directories, but included are business directories, social registers, philanthropic and charity agencies, and descriptive guides. There are few unusual items such as a *New Negro Directory : Businesses, Churches, Organizations* that was published in 1962.

THE MAPS

There are a multitude of map resources that pertain to Allegheny City. Some useful resources and repositories include:

- The *Historic Pittsburgh* website hosts one of the most comprehensive collection of maps for an urban locality. The centerpiece of the collection is the collection of 47 volumes (1,820 plates) of *G. M. Hopkins Company Maps* covering the period 1872–1940. These highly detailed land ownership maps identify landowners at a point in time and are even more useful when correlated with other information such as city directories. Complimenting the online collection are the early maps of Allegheny County held by the Darlington Library. Others useful map collections on the website include *City of Pittsburgh Geodetic and Topographic Survey Maps, 1923–1961*; Flood Commission of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 1912; and the *Warrantee Atlas of Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, 1914*.
- Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps for Allegheny City can be found online at Penn State University Libraries at <https://libraries.psu.edu/about/collections/sanborn-fire-insurance-maps>. Also, the 1893 atlas of Allegheny City is online at the Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division at https://www.loc.gov/resource/g3824am.g3824am_g074931893/?st=gallery.
- Many of the maps held on *Historic Pittsburgh* have been incorporated into a modern GIS application, *Pittsburgh Historic Maps*. Researchers can view map layers from 1796 to 1993. The site is located at <https://www.arcgis.com/apps/View/index.html?appid=63f24d1466f24695bf9dfc5bf6828126>.
- Library of Congress, Map and Geography Reading Room, <https://www.loc.gov/rr/geogmap/> holds maps relative to Allegheny City. Five Allegheny County maps that identify landowners are available from this website. There are also several relevant panoramic maps from the last half of the nineteenth century.

THE RECORDS

For an overview of Allegheny County records review the material at the *FamilySearch* Wiki page “Allegheny County, Pennsylvania Genealogy” at https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Allegheny_County,_Pennsylvania_Genealogy.

UNIQUE ALLEGHENY CITY SPECIFIC RECORDS

- *Allegheny City*, Record Group (RG) 48, Records of the Municipal Governments, Pennsylvania State Archives (PSA)
- *Marriages in Allegheny City, Pennsylvania, 1877–1882* (#8)

VITAL RECORDS

See the *Vital Statistics Records at the Pennsylvania State Archives* webpage <https://www.phmc.pa.gov/Archives/Research-Online/Pages/Vital-Statistics.aspx> for a discussion of the holdings of the

archives. Note that Pennsylvania's 1906–1913 birth certificates and 1906–1968 death certificates are open to the public. *Ancestry* has copies of the original 1906–1913 original birth certificates for 1906–1911 and for death certificates 1906–1967.

Birth and Death

Allegheny County in 2006 turned over almost all of its death and birth records to the CLP. The Pennsylvania Room of the CLP holds the records described below:

Death Registers

City of Pittsburgh (1870–1905)

Allegheny City (1875–1907)

Allegheny County (1893–1905)

McKeesport (1887–1905)

Sewickley (1894–1905)

Allegheny Co. probated deaths (1874–1903)

Birth Registers

City of Pittsburgh (1870–1905)

Allegheny City (1885–1907)

Allegheny County (1893–1905)

McKeesport (1887–1905)

Sewickley (1896–1905)

Wilkesburg (1899–1905)

Delayed birth certificates will be found in the courthouse amongst the probate records. See also FHL films 895595–894808. However, the staff will refer researchers to the microfilm at CLP.

FamilySearch has the following death records online:

- *Pennsylvania, Pittsburgh City Deaths* (1870–1905)

FamilySearch has filmed the following Allegheny City death and birth records and they are online:

- *Allegheny City Births* (1878–October, 1907) FHL films 505894–505898
- *Allegheny City Deaths* (1876–May, 1907) FHL films 499318–499328

To fill in the gaps in official birth and death records researchers can use church records and obituaries. Obituaries are available in the Pennsylvania Room. They are indexed from 1786–1913 and 1963.

Marriage Records

The official marriage records for Pennsylvania begin in 1885. Copies may be obtained from the marriage office in the courthouse. The courthouse also holds some marriage records for the city of Pittsburgh covering the period 1870 to 1879.

FamilySearch has the following marriage records online:

- *Pennsylvania, County Marriages* (1885–1950)
- *Pennsylvania, Marriages* (1709–1940)

Ancestry has *Pennsylvania Deaths, Births, and Marriages, 1852–1854* online.

Beyond the official records researchers may consult church records and the microfilm *Ministers' returns of marriages performed in the City of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 1875–1909* available in the Pennsylvania Room. Also available are abstracts of minister's returns from 1870–1875.

PROBATE RECORDS

Probate records were kept at the county level during the existence of Allegheny City. *FamilySearch* has placed online “Pennsylvania Probate Records, 1683–1994.” The records are not indexed. Browsing records organized by the Russell index can be quite intimidating and time consuming. *FamilySearch* has established waypoints that are helpful with the search process. However, persistence will be rewarded with genealogical information recorded nowhere else. These records are not

complete in scope and time frame; research may still be required in the Allegheny County courthouse.

LAND RECORDS

The records of the original landowners are recorded at the state archives, and these records are online at <https://www.phmc.pa.gov/Archives/Research-Online/Pages/Land-Records-Overview.aspx>. The *Warrantee Atlas of Allegheny County* is online at *Historic Pittsburgh*. Subsequent transfer of title is recorded in the Allegheny County Courthouse. Researchers will find deeds, mortgages, subdivision maps, and other land records open and available to the public. The FHL has online “Allegheny County Deeds, 1778–1901 and index 1788–1904.” Mortgages were not filmed.

TAX RECORDS

A treasure trove of tax records will be found in RG 48, Allegheny City, at the State Archives. Allegheny City during its existence levied a variety of taxes such as poll, property, business, and water rents. See Darrow’s *The Genealogist’s Guide to Researching Tax Records* (#4) for tips in using these records.

CEMETERY RECORDS

There are a number of large cemeteries in the North Side that served Allegheny City. Some of the inscriptions of tombstones from various cemeteries are online. The most comprehensive published records are McFarland’s *Inscriptions from Union Dale Cemetery, Allegheny (Now Pittsburgh)* (#10). Some cemetery records can also be found in the various repositories identified above.

RELIGIOUS RECORDS

Researchers should review the *FamilySearch* Wiki article “Pennsylvania Church Records” at https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Pennsylvania_Church_Records to gain a general understanding of the records available. Listed below are some specific resources for Allegheny City:

- *Presbyterian Historical Society*, 425 Lombard Street, Philadelphia, PA 19147, ph: (215) 627-1852. Calvin, the automated catalog (www.history.pcusa.org/databases/calvin) allows researchers to search the society’s holdings of congregational records. The society holds many of the records of congregations of the Presbyterian and Reformed tradition. Before using Calvin, researchers should use *Hall’s Index of American Presbyterian Congregations*, found on the society’s website, to identify candidate congregations. *Ancestry* has digitized these records as the collection “U.S., Presbyterian Church Records, 1701–1970.”
- *Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary*, 7418 Penn Avenue Pittsburgh, PA 15208–2594, ph: (866) 778–7338. The Reformed Presbyterian History Archives (www.rparchives.org), part of the seminary’s library, provides access to downloadable files of many of the denomination’s publications.

“Mrs. Jane S. Crozier died in Allegheny, March 11th, 1880, in the 63d year her age. She was the daughter of Thomas Scott, ruling elder of the Reformed Presbyterian congregation of Ballylane, County Armagh, Ireland. Early in life she united with the church. She was married to Robert Crozier, December 22, 1842, and in 1846 came with him to this country, and became a member of the congregation of Pittsburgh and Allegheny, under the pastorate of Rev. Thomas Sproull...” [Reformed Presbyterian Covenant, 1880, p189]

- *Presbyterian Churches in Allegheny County Pennsylvania* (#2).

- *Scottish Dissenting Presbyterian Churches.*
- Tri-Synod Archives, Thiel College, 75 College Avenue, Greenville PA 16125, ph.: (724) 589-2131. The archive holds many of the records from western Pennsylvania and West Virginia disbanded congregations. More specifically, the coverage includes Lutheran synods and congregations, especially disbanded congregations. The records housed in the Tri-Synod Archives are administered by the Northwestern Pennsylvania Synod, Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod and West Virginia-Western Maryland Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Appointments are necessary.
- See the Family History Library Catalog for a listing of filmed records of nineteen Lutheran and Presbyterian Congregations in Allegheny City. They have been digitized but are only available in the library.
- Catholic Records for all Allegheny City parishes are available at the Archives and Records Center of the Diocese of Pittsburgh, 1050 Logue Street, Pittsburgh 15220. Information available about ordering records is at: <https://www.diopitt.org/archives>
- Archives of the Western Conference of the United Methodist Church were moved from Allegheny College in Meadville. For information about current access contact the archivist, John Wilson, at info@paumc.org or (724) 776-2300.

INFORMATION RELATING TO THE FAMILIES INCLUDED IN THE CASE STUDY

The subject of this study is Wilhelmina Maria [Mary] Steckel (1829–1908), a mid-century German immigrant. She first married Christian Wicht (1814–?) around 1853. The children of this marriage were Herman (1854–1904), William Harris (1858–1917), and John W. Wicht (1860–1918). Mary and her children frequently used White as their surname. Wilhelmina next married Carl Fassbinder (1818–1869). The marriage date is uncertain but their child, Charles (1861–1942), was born on 11 December 1861. Louis Fassbinder (1850–1889), the stepson of Wilhelmina, was also part of Mary’s extended family. The public tree, Fassbinder Steckel White, on *Ancestry.com* provides more information.

THE END OF ALLEGHENY CITY

Researchers should read the article “The Day the City of Allegheny Disappeared” at <https://www.post-gazette.com/local/city/2007/12/09/The-day-the-City-of-Allegheny-disappeared/stories/200712090229> to discover how 145,000 residents of Allegheny City became residents of Pittsburgh.

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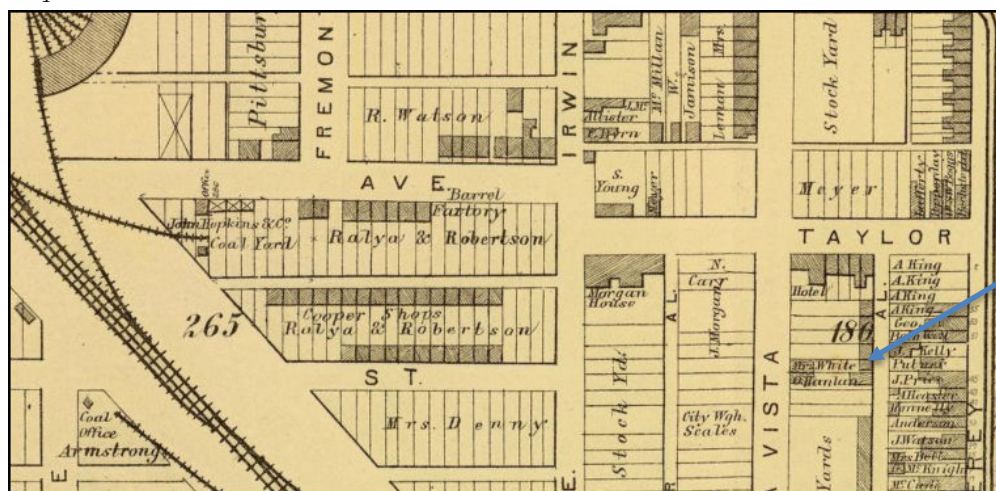


Figure 1: 2nd Ward, Allegheny City, 1872 (courtesy David Rumsey.com)