

Historic Pittsburgh

Using Historic Pittsburgh in the Classroom – Maps Collection

[Historic Pittsburgh](#), an extensive digital resource created at the University of Pittsburgh, offers both an entry point and substantive classroom resources for teachers of American History at various grade and university levels. The following example is intended as a model to demonstrate how resources on the Historic Pittsburgh website can be effectively combined so as to create connections and prospectively spark student interest.

Start with a Map

Taking the area immediately surrounding the University of Pittsburgh's Library Resource Facility at 7500 Thomas Boulevard in Point Breeze (the location of the Archives Service Center and Digital Research Library) as a starting point, one can identify from the [Maps Collection](#) a Hopkins plat map showing the configuration of the district in 1939.

[1939 Volume 2 - East End \(South\): Wards 7, 14 and 15: Plate 10](#) (G. M. Hopkins Co.)

One can then search the other components of Historic Pittsburgh for related materials and images. Much material can be found that can shed light on or at the least spark questions about history taking place within a twenty block radius of this facility.

“Clayton”: The Henry Clay Frick Home

The presence of “Clayton,” the family home of industrialist Henry Clay Frick near the bottom left-hand corner of the map, has already made this part of the city a destination for history-minded tourism. A search for “[Henry Clay Frick](#)” in the [Full-Text Collection](#) turns up several important contemporary texts describing the industrialist's role in the famous Battle of Homestead of 1892, where Pinkerton troops and later the Pennsylvania National Guard were used to break a strike of the Steelworkers Union. Frick himself was the object of an assassination attempt by the anarchist Alexander Berkman. “Clayton” was where the injured Frick convalesced. The [Archives Service Center](#) at the University of Pittsburgh, moreover, now houses the business papers and scrapbooks of H. C. Frick and is starting to make them available to the public.

Other Denizens – Homewood Avenue

To get a sense of the inhabitants of the district, the [Census Data](#) may be searched by occupation and, for the 1880 Census, by street, to learn about the individuals and families who lived in the houses lining Homewood, Lang, Meade and other streets. Census records show that [John Vandever](#), an iron manufacturer, lived on Homewood Avenue with his large family. Nearby Lang Avenue contained a multitude of petty clerks and domestic servants, many straight off the boat from Ireland. The social makeup of this neighborhood, known as “Irish Hill,” is evoked by novelist Annie Dillard in her poignant memoir, *An American Childhood*.

<http://digital.library.pitt.edu/pittsburgh>

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Manufacturing Shops in Point Breeze

By the 1930s, as the map shows, a number of manufacturing concerns had taken firm root in the area. Most if not all of the workers at [Pittsburgh Equitable Meter Company](#), [Edwin L. Wiegand Company](#), [Orefaction, Inc.](#), and [Mine Safety Appliance Company](#) did not have the advantage of collective bargaining and written contracts. In the late 1930s and early 1940s, several unions, foremost among them the United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America (UE), a founding member of the CIO, succeeded in gaining representation rights through the National Labor Relations Board or the War Labor Board elections in these various plants.

Electrical Workers Union Leaders

The impetus for the union victories came primarily from United Electrical Workers' strong presence in East Pittsburgh at the Westinghouse Electric and Manufacturing Plant (UE Local 601) and in Wilmerding and Swissvale (UE Local 610). Photographs of UE union life, online as part of the [Image Collections](#), feature UE leaders, such as [Tom Fitzpatrick](#) and [Thomas Quinn](#), full of the energy derived from their epoch-making organizing victories of a few years earlier. They also show UE's alignment with the political Left as in the role the union played in supporting the candidacy of Third Party Presidential Candidate [Henry Wallace](#) on the Progressive Party ticket in 1948.

Pittsburgh Equitable Meter -- Father Charles Owen Rice

Rumblings of discontent were heard, however, both from outside the union and within, at the perceived communist tilt of UE's leadership. Anti-communist activists like Harry Allen Sherman, an attorney who took over as Business Agent of UE Local 615 at the Pittsburgh Equitable Meter Company plant, and Father Charles Owen Rice, who influenced union politics in the big East Pittsburgh Westinghouse plant, were thorns in the UE's side.

UE Local 623

Harry Allen Sherman actually led UE Local 615 out of the union and into an "independent" meter workers union in 1945. Several years later, Thomas Nolan, an ally of Father Rice, began an anti-UE drive within UE Local 623 (later 638), Edwin L. Wiegand and Company.

Pickets in Mine Safety Strike 1948

UE leaders accused Nolan of disruptive activities especially in connection with the 1948 [UE strike](#) at the nearby Mine Safety Appliance Plant on Braddock Avenue between Meade and Thomas. Nolan in response accused UE leaders like [Walter Mugford](#) of communism and, with this as an issue, swung the Wiegand plant over to the United Auto Workers, one of a number of raids on UE organized locals made possible by passage of the Taft-Hartley Act.

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Perfect Laundries

Even an unassuming landmark of the district, [Perfect Laundries](#) at the corner of North Lexington and Penn Avenues, points ultimately to an interestingly complex narrative. In 1942, Father Rice arbitrated a minor dispute between the Laundry Workers Union and the Perfect Laundries Company over the separation of a driver at the laundry. Father Rice did much such arbitration and consequently had close ties with leaders of the Laundry workers union. In one of his earlier arbitrations, Rice ruled against a laundry worker named Caroline Hart, daughter of a left-wing UE leader in East Pittsburgh, upholding her dismissal by the company, a dismissal supported by the union. The pretext? Caroline Hart had called a meeting not authorized by the union. The real reason? Hart was a youthful Communist Party leader, whom both Rice and the Union leadership were as eager as the company to sideline.

Finding Aids

All of these various struggles for unionization and to wrest control of unions can be pursued in the Records of the UE and in the [Papers of Father Charles Owen Rice](#), both of which are at the Archives Service Center, University of Pittsburgh.

Historic Pittsburgh's various components: maps, photographs, full-text, finding aids, census and chronology of Pittsburgh history can all be connected to a defined geographical space. The game-like adventure of working with the maps may inspire students to have fun learning and sleuthing.

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