

BEN AVON AREA HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

NEWSLETTER

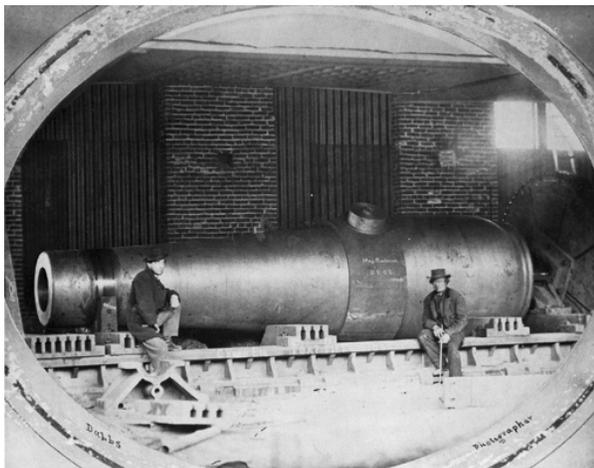
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CIRCLE THE WAGONS

The Time: June, 1863
The Place: North Side, West End, Uptown, South Hills, Turtle Creek, East End.

Two years into the Civil War, in the Spring of 1863, a message was received that spread the alarm in Pittsburgh of General Robert E. Lee's impending invasion of the North.

During the Civil War, Pittsburgh was one of the leading producers of cannons, heavy guns, lesser arms and naval supplies. The Fort Pitt Foundry (now Mackintosh-Hemphill) manufactured the Rodman cannon weighing 80 tons and capable of hurling a 1000 pound ball several miles. The City, in imminent danger of rebel attack -- or so they thought -- prompted the order of general W.T.H. Brooks to Pittsburgh from Washington D.C. to "ready a defense."



(Pennsylvania Department, Carnegie Library)

Eleven thousand citizens from near and far came to help dig 12 to 15 miles of trenches, erect batteries, and a circle of forts around the city of Pittsburgh. In the 111 degree heat of June, 1893, Robert Sprott and son William, residents of Ohio Township (later Kilbuck) helped dig trenches

above what is now Marshall Avenue, North Side, the site of Fort Bruno, also known as Fort McKeever: Fort #2.

Fighting units were formed. The Duquesne Greys of Mexican War fame were reorganized and prepared for 6 months duty. In just 30 days, Pittsburghers had come together to defend their city and prepare for a Confederate invasion.

By July 1, 1863, the realization was confirmed that the attack was not to be. General Lee's troops had by-passed Pittsburgh and turned East where they became engaged in the infamous battle of Gettysburg.

CIRCLE THE WAGONS, AGAIN

The Time: July, 1954
The Place: Ohio Township, Ross Township, North Park, Dorseyville, Rural Ridge, Elizabeth, Irwin, Herminie, Plum Creek, Robinson Township, Bridgeville, Library, Finleyville

Nearly a century later, in 1954, another threat, the result of the Cold War, prompted a second "ready of defense" for the industrial city of Pittsburgh. Around the City of Pittsburgh a ring of NIKE Missile Sites would be constructed and armed with missiles designed to seek out and destroy enemy aircraft. Once one of the nation's most vital industrial areas, Pittsburgh was considered a prime Soviet target by the U.S. Defense Planners. In other words a sitting duck for intercontinental bombers and ICBM's. The Second World War gave birth to Civil Defense in 1942 with sirens, blackouts, and civil air patrols. In 1949, under the threat of nuclear war, was when the Nike Air Defense System was first conceived. Later, in 1957, NORAD (North American Defense) an early warning system was organized by the United States and Canada.

In 1954, the U.S. Government quietly acquired farm and woodland sites on vantage points 20-25 miles from downtown where the Pittsburgh District Corps of Engineers would supervise construction (1954 style) of 12 NIKE

sites designed by Michael Baker Inc., architect-engineer from Rochester, PA.

A 20 acre parcel of the John Ruehl farm, situated on a high hilltop in Ohio Township, adjacent to the J. H. Crawford farm, was chosen to be a NIKE-AJAX missile launcher site. Joseph's Lane was extended and paved, water and sewage facilities were put into place, and barracks for 50 "Nikemen" were constructed. Silos were built underground. Except for the actual launching racks, the launching installations were underground in three concrete chambers. This is where the missiles were contained and brought to the surface by elevators.

The IFC (control center) was situated off Gass Road on a hilltop across from the launcher site. Originally Headquarters and Battery "A" for the 74th 90mm AAA (Anti-Aircraft Artillery) Gun Battalion, and in operations since June, 1952, it then became HQ and Battery "A" for the 74th AAA Missile Battalion, operating the NIKE-AJAX (MIM-3) missile. This Ohio/Ross Township NIKE site was designated as PI-93 -- PI standing for Pittsburgh.

Named for the Greek Goddess of Victory, the NIKE-AJAX missile (MIM-3) was described as a two stage, liquid fueled supersonic guided anti-aircraft missile able to hit a target 25 miles away up to 65,000 feet in altitude with a top speed of Mach 2.25 (2.25 times the speed of sound).



AJAX missile before raising to launch position
(www.redstone.army.mil/history/archives/)

The NIKE-AJAX missile cost \$19,300 and the NIKE-HERCULES cost \$55,200 per missile -- 14,000 NIKE-AJAX and 25,000 NIKE-HERCULES were built. The more advanced HERCULES version was a two stage, solid fuel missile with a

maximum altitude of 150,000 feet and range of 75 miles. These missiles occupied bases in 300 sites in the continental U.S., Alaska, Hawaii, and Overseas. The NIKE sites in the U.S. were operated by the Army Air Defense Command, ARADCOM.

NO PRACTICE SHOTS ALLOWED

Here is an account of what was expected to happen if a NIKE battery picked up word from the air warning network that an enemy aircraft was approaching Pittsburgh:

"The NIKE, 20 ft long and 1 ft in diameter, will be raised from its vault by an elevator and loaded in a sheltered area formed by two earth mounds which are called reverters. Inside its structure, the NIKE will carry an explosive warhead rocket propulsion unit and guidance equipment. Two sets of outer fins will provide additional steering aid.

"Given its additional launching impetus by a booster rocket, the NIKE will be fired from its launcher by remote control. The electronic system of which the NIKE is an integral part will have been picking up and tracking the target during the time the NIKE missiles will be readied in vertical position on their launching racks." As a safety feature, the NIKE warhead is built so as to explode only in flight.

The missile will be fired and roar off to meet its target at the moment the target crosses NIKE's distant and invisible deadline. Designed to ride smoothly on its own rocket engines, the NIKE will have passed through to sound barrier within seconds. At that point, the NIKE and target converge, NIKE intercepts target and explodes."

From 1956-1959, the 708th 90mm AAA Gun Battalion of the PA Army National Guard operated its HQ and Battery "A" here at PI-93 with the 90mm guns still on site. Then changes started to occur. One major change was that the 74th was redesignated as the 5th Battalion from 1958 to 1961. Another change was that the PA Army Guard 90mm guns left the site, and the 30 NIKE-AJAX missiles were replaced by 18 more advanced NIKE-HERCULES missiles. The transition period took place between June 1958 and June 1959.

During the 1960's, drawdowns took place in the Army Air Defense Command and many NIKE sites were turned over to the Army National Guard. In October 1963, HQ Battery 2nd

Battalion, 176 Artillery, PA Army Guard was activated at PI-93. It remained there until April 1974 at which time the NIKE missile program was phased out.



NIKE-HERCULES missile
(www.redstone.army.mil/history/archives/)

To some it appeared that PI-93 had nuclear weapons on site due to radiation signs posted in the area at the time. The U.S. Army's policy of "It's a military secret" would neither confirm or deny this matter. The more likely explanation is a combination of a ruse to keep the curious away and a real warning with respect to high power radar and similar equipment.

The IFC site is now the home of the PA Army Guard's 28th Signal Battalion.

The Ohio Township launcher site is a housing plan called Avonworth Heights developed in 1976. One of the homes there was built using the silo as a foundation, giving the home owners a very generous basement.

The Penn Hills site is where the A.E. Oblock Jr. High and Adlai Stevenson Elementary School were built. The Elizabeth Twp. site is used by the Twin Rivers C.O.G. as a police firing range. The Robinson Twp. site is used as a public works department.

As we approach the next century, one wonders if Pittsburghers will ever again have to "ready a defense" or "circle the wagons".

Researched and written by:
Darlene Phillips, Ohio Township Historian

The Reineke family had a Millinery Store on Beaver Avenue in Manchester and lived in Ben Avon at the corner of Dickson and Church Avenues. The property is presently the home of Lou and Jody Redman. They also built the home next to it on Church Avenue and the Dickson Avenue Apartment building just south on Dickson Avenue. The apartment building was originally the Reineke and then the Wintermantel Apartments.

Elsie Reineke was one of the nine children and married Claude Henry, a first cousin of my grandfather, Thomas G. Henry. The family built the home on Church Avenue for Claude and Elsie. I visited both homes frequently with my family as child and treated them as of 1949.

Claude Henry was in the insurance business with William Unverzagt, Sr. Claude also was Treasurer of Ben Avon Presbyterian Church for many years and he was on the first of seven committees (1932) to explore the consolidation of the two Presbyterian churches in Ben Avon. Judge Cohill and I chaired the final committee in 1987 (52 years later) when we welcomed success.

When the Reineke parents passed on, the Will left the three buildings to eight of the nine children. Carl Reineke was left out of the will because he drank beer.

A recollection by W. Creighton McClintock III, M.D. a 1st cousin, thrice removed of Claude Henry.

This 'n That

If you liked Tick McClintock's story, someone else will like your recollection. We'll listen and write it up for you, if you would rather not write it yourself.

Watch for announcements on the visits of the sternwheeler river boats to the Pittsburgh area. We hope to join in festive crowds at the passage through the Emsworth locks by opening the log house -- and maybe more.

Plans for clean up and improvement of landscaping around the log house are moving forward. Take the Western and Forest Avenue route from time to time to check on progress.

Dick Herchenroether

Memberships and Contributions

February through May 2000

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Betty Jane Robertson	Emsworth
Ed and Jan Steinhauser	Ben Avon
Bill & Sharon Trimble	Auburn, AL
George & Linda Wible	Ohio Twp

Petey Hager donated a sales brochure from the Cookland Land Company which was used in the development of Ben Avon. House styles are shown and building lots are indicated on a map of the area.

We appreciate the support from all of you who made monetary contributions in excess of your membership.

Ben Avon Area Historical Association
c/o 136 Dickson Avenue
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Pittsburgh, PA 15202