

BEN AVON AREA HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

NEWSLETTER

Vol. XXVII - Number 1, August, 2011



www.benavon.com/BAAHA/
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The Ohio River Boulevard Pylons

by David Henderson

Driving Ohio River Boulevard requires concentration, especially when the roadway is strewn with orange cones and barrels. So drivers focused on the road may not have given much attention to the large stone pier-like structures hugging the curbs on both sides at the Lowries Run bridge. Blackened by eighty years of carbon exhaust, one held together with metal strapping and its capstone knocked askew, they had been largely ignored and allowed to deteriorate.



http://www.pghbridges.com/tours/tour_orb/tourframe_orb.htm

Then they disappeared.

The year was 1928. Pittsburgh's economy was booming and, in tune with the "City Beautiful" movement of the time, Allegheny County voters approved a bond issue to build four grand

boulevards, Allegheny River Blvd, Saw Mill Run Blvd, Mossy Side Blvd and our Ohio River Blvd. The boulevards were to be extensively landscaped and three of the four were to receive a pair of monumental pylons at either end, a total of twelve. Frank Vittor, a prolific Pittsburgh sculptor, perhaps best known now for the Honus Wagner statue at PNC Park, was chosen to design the pylons, including low relief panels illustrating the region's early history. Ohio River Boulevard was to begin at Emsworth and travel over ten bridges to end in a landscaped traffic circle at the McKees Rocks Bridge. Construction began in 1929 and was completed in 1931. In a *Description of Ohio River Boulevard* written for a souvenir booklet at the boulevard's dedication, the Chief Engineer of the county's Bureau of Roads, Edward L. Schmidt rhapsodized:

Special attention is called to the immediate landscaping of all cuts and fills, the planting of all islands, circles and parking strips with grass, shade trees, shrubs and vines, delighting the thousands of persons who have availed themselves of the uses and beauties of this highway.

Nowhere in Western Pennsylvania is there a scenic route comparable to the Ohio River Boulevard. For pleasure and ease of driving, the grades are ideal; the elimination of cross streets gives a feeling of security and the numerous feeders are so located and protected as not to create a hazard.

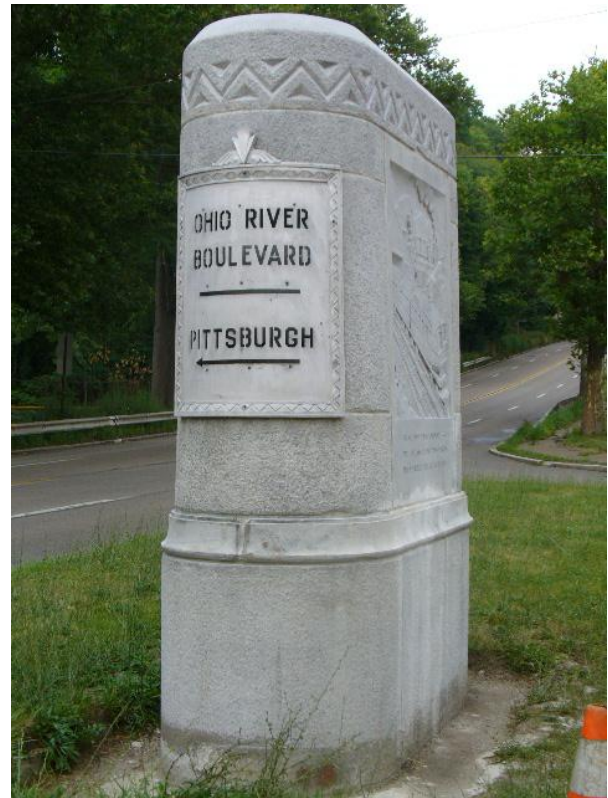
Time was not kind to the ORB. By the early 1980's from the fast food joints of Bellevue through the weeds of Avalon, most of the great plane trees which lined the roadway had been cut down, the original brick pavement was covered and the road was carrying far too much traffic. Engineer Schmidt's scenic route had become "a wretched eyesore and a deathtrap", the "Killer 65" of bumper stickers.

The state took control of the highway from the county in 1941. The traffic circle at the McKees Rocks Bridge and the two pylons at that end of the boulevard disappeared in the early seventies when the Beaver Avenue Expressway extended the boulevard into the North Side. Construction of I-279 relieved the traffic load and various incremental widening, turning lane projects and bridge repairs and replacements have improved safety.

Among the most recent projects was the replacement of the bridge over Lowries Run. The work required removal of the pylons forming the northern entrance to Ohio River Boulevard. When the Lowries Run project began, only one other pair of the original twelve pylons remained, those at the Oakmont end of Allegheny River Boulevard. All the others had been destroyed in collisions or removed in widening projects. Of these missing eight, only one fragment survives. From Saw Mill Run Boulevard, it is now in the collection of the Pittsburgh History and Landmarks Foundation. The Oakmont pair, though, has been restored and this precedent, with a more enlightened attitude from PennDOT, has led not only to the preservation of our pylons, but to their restoration.

They were dismantled with the onset of construction and with their original location now untenable, no place could

be found nearby to install them together. In consultation with officials of the borough of Emsworth, sites were found about eight tenths of a mile apart, at either end of the borough, for their reinstallation. The southern pylon now stands opposite the ball field in a grassy triangle formed by Western and Herron Avenues and the boulevard; and the northern pylon has been rebuilt at Emsworth's western edge on a traffic island bounded by Huntington and Hazelwood Avenues and the boulevard. It is unfortunate that they are no longer together to frame the original entrance to the boulevard but they seem to work well as individual freestanding monuments.



Southern monument:
**THE ALLEGHENY PORTAGE RAILROAD FIRST
GAVE CANAL AND RAIL TRANSPORTATION
FROM PITTSBURGH TO THE EAST
MARCH 24, 1834**

They look great! The granite, blasted free of eighty years of grime, looks fresh

from the quarry and their green settings, impossible in the old location, give them room to breathe and to be seen from all sides. Each has, at either end, a curved metal plate with cut out letters and arrows to Pittsburgh and Beaver. The cartouche on the long side facing the boulevard contains the obligatory names of long-forgotten politicians and engineers (including Mr. Schmidt), and on the reverse are Frank Vittor's bas relief sculptures. The southern monument shows us a canal boat and locomotive of that remarkable system for hoisting boats over the Alleghenies. On the northern monument's sculpture we see a stylized family preparing to board a steamboat.



Northern monument:
THE FIRST OHIO RIVER STEAMBOAT, NEW ORLEANS, WAS BUILT AT PITTSBURGH IN 1810-1811, AND SAILED DOWN THE RIVER ON ITS MAIDEN TRIP, OCTOBER 20, 1811

At the time of writing some work remains. The metal directional plates,

with their cutout letters and arrows, will again be lighted from within and these plates, like those at Oakmont, may be given a bronze finish. The rusted access doors to the electrical system will be replaced. All work on the project is scheduled for completion by November 11 of this year.

It is worth noting that *Discovering Pittsburgh's Sculpture*, an excellent survey and a source for this article, lists 182 examples of sculpture in the region. Other than Vittor's pylons, which are treated as a group, only one of these, Moretti's World War I memorial in Bellevue's Bayne Park, is in the North Boroughs, all the more reason to applaud their preservation.

Credit must go to PennDOT, to their contractor Lane Construction, and to the borough of Emsworth for preserving and restoring these monuments from a time when civil improvements were a source of civic pride.

BAAHA Links: History and Landmarks
 by John Warren

"You had yourselves a magnificent setting for a park, but you ruined it. You folks made some bad decisions many years ago, and now you are stuck with the consequences."

He didn't put it in those words, but that was the essence of a report presented by the nation's most prominent urban planner to Pittsburgh's civic leaders.

The year was 1939, and the urban planner was Robert Moses, who had become famous for his work on major public projects in New York City, including the World's Fair which opened in that year. The Pittsburgh Regional Planning Association had contracted with Moses

for a study on the possibilities for redeveloping the Point.

must be the decisive factor in the reconstruction of the apex of the Pittsburgh Triangle and in the establishment of Point Park.



In the 1936 aerial photograph, you can see the Point as Robert Moses saw it, with the Manchester Bridge spanning the Allegheny to meet the Point Bridge, which crossed the Monongahela. In addition to all the streets and trolley tracks that were necessary for the bridge connections, much of what is now the Golden Triangle was covered with railroad buildings and tracks, and a number of derelict structures.

Faced with this scene, here is what Moses wrote:

At the risk of being charged with lack of historical perspective and enthusiasm, we must say that the relics and historical association [of the Point] should be regarded as comparatively unimportant in the solution of present and future city planning problems. Construction of the Point and Manchester bridges at the site of old Fort Pitt has determined that traffic rather than history

It is useless to bemoan the bad planning which brought these bridges together at this point, or to adopt the fantastic suggestion that they be torn down and reconstructed elsewhere. They are there to stay.

Try to imagine what Pittsburgh would look like today if “traffic rather than history” had prevailed at the Point!

Charles M. Stotz

In 1945, a man who spent most of his life in our local community (Ben Avon and Ben Avon Heights) decided that relocating the bridges and creating a park at the Point was not merely a “fantastic suggestion.” Working with several gifted colleagues, he actually made it happen, and thus created the view of our city that people around the world can recognize.

Charles M. Stotz (1898 - 1985) was a native Pittsburgher who graduated from

Cornell and returned home in 1923 to join his father and his brother in the city's oldest architectural firm. He already has appeared in this series of articles. In November, 2010, we recounted Marj Simonds' memory of magical evenings in the Twenties when Bob Schmertz (banjo), joined his fellow architect Charlie Stotz (accordion), in dropping by for an evening of music with her dad.

In a single newsletter article, we cannot do justice to Stotz's impact on Western Pennsylvania, so for now we'll set aside Fort Pitt Museum, Fort Ligonier, Old Economy, Drake's Well, the Compass Inn, the documentation of the pre-1860 buildings in the region, and other significant projects. Instead, we will focus on the work that made Point State Park the focal point of our city.

It was July of 1945 when Charlie Stotz began his collaboration with landscape architect Ralph Griswold on the design of the park. Working closely with engineers and civic leaders, Griswold and Stotz developed a sweeping vision for the park, and saw it through to completion. Imagine how they must have felt in August 1974 – after 29 years on the project – when the waters of the great fountain shot skyward for the first time!

You'll find the definitive account of the development of Point State Park in a 1980 book by Robert Alberts, [The Shaping of the Point](#). Alberts wrote the book when many of the key figures in the project, including Stotz and Griswold, were still living. The book is readily available in local libraries, including the Avalon Library.

For the most authoritative explanation of the vision for the park – as it stood, 19 years into the project – be sure to check out an article by Charlie Stotz in the

January 1964 issue of Carnegie Magazine:

http://www.clpgh.org/exhibit/neighborhoods/point/point_n711.html

“Those Damn Bridges”

The key moment came in the summer of 1945, soon after the Griswold-Stotz collaboration began. As Griswold related to Robert Alberts, “One day Charlie threw down his pencil in disgust and burst out, ‘We’ll never get anywhere with those damn bridges where they are!’” Both men agreed that, if the bridges were left in place, they could do little more than create a landscaped traffic interchange at the Point.

Stotz and Griswold obtained permission from Wallace Richards of the Regional Planning Association to prepare two park proposals for consideration by the governor of Pennsylvania – one with the old bridges left in place, and one (much more expensive) with replacement bridges built closer to the base of what would become the Golden Triangle. To assist Stotz and Griswold with the proposal for the new bridges, George Richardson (a civil engineer) and Don McNeil (a traffic engineer) joined the design team.

In early October 1945, Wallace Richards took the two proposals to Harrisburg for a meeting with Governor Edward Martin. He began by explaining that he had brought two proposals with him. Instead of the question that Richards expected (“Which proposal will be less expensive?”), Governor Martin simply asked him, “Which one do you recommend?” Richards replied that he recommended the proposal that included replacement of the two bridges. Governor Martin responded by telling Richards to set the other proposal aside:

“Put the other one away. I don’t want to see it.”

With that endorsement from the governor, Point State Park – in the form we know it today – was born.

As a sidebar note, there is an “urban legend” to the effect that Frank Lloyd Wright had something to do with the decision to relocate the bridges. This is demonstrably wrong, as Robert Alberts documents in his book. Edgar Kaufman, for whom Wright had built Fallingwater in the Thirties, paid Wright \$10,000 in 1945 for a study of the Point. Wright’s drawings, produced in 1946, did show the relocated bridges, but they were delivered months after Governor Martin had approved the Stotz-Griswold proposal.

The Wright drawings, incidentally, showed both bridges disgorging all of their traffic into a gigantic 13-level “Grand Auto Ramp” building covering most of the Point. When asked where the cars would go, Wright replied, “Let the engineers worry about that.” When asked what the building would cost, Wright replied that he did not care. Edgar Kaufman was so appalled by what he had received that he kept the Wright drawings rolled up on the floor under his desk. Three years later, in 1949, he allowed them to be exhibited in public for the first time, in a show at Carnegie Tech.

Designing the Portal Bridge

Having secured approval for relocation of the bridges, the Stotz-Griswold-Richardson-McNeil team had to figure out how to handle the traffic that would flow across them. Richardson developed the scheme for two double-deck bridges, with one-way traffic on each deck. This greatly simplified the routing of the traffic and allowed the highway crossing Point State Park to be configured as a single 8-lane band.

Now think about that. How on earth can you carry 8 lanes of interstate highway traffic across a major urban park – safely, and even inconspicuously? Working with his brother Edward, an engineer, Charlie Stotz reached out to professional colleagues for ideas.

Gordon Bunshaft (of Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill) suggested a long, flat arch built with pre-stressed reinforcing rods in concrete. Beginning with that suggestion, the Stotz brothers designed the Portal Bridge. Remarkably, instead of being a barrier across the middle of the park, the bridge that carries 8 lanes of high-speed traffic also serves as the gateway to the downstream end of the park. As you stroll through the park on your way toward the fountain, you are most conscious of the bridge as a portal to the Point.

The Portal Bridge was unique. Because nothing like it had been built before, the world’s leading authority on pre-stressed concrete construction, a French engineer named Eugene Freyssinet, came to Pittsburgh and verified that the design by the Stotz brothers was sound. When it came time to submit the bridge proposal to the state for approval, the design was too complex to be effectively portrayed on engineering drawings, so a 5-foot-long model was submitted.

Construction of the Portal Bridge began in 1961 and was completed two years later. Having reached that milestone, Stotz and Griswold headed into their final decade of work on Point State Park, which included construction of the fountain and completion of Fort Pitt Museum. They created the setting that everyone now associates with Pittsburgh.

Resources

Details about the Portal Bridge, and more than a dozen photographs, can be found on a remarkable website: www.pghbridges.com created by a local man named Bruce Cridlebaugh. The site includes descriptions and photographs of 433 local bridges and 65 tunnels. To reach the Portal Bridge page, click ‘List

by Name' in the menu on the left to bring up an alphabetical list of major bridges documented on the site. Cridlebaugh has also created a 'Tours' section, where he pulls together information on topics ranging from stone arch bridges to Ohio River Boulevard, including more photographs of the pylons in Emsworth.

For several more good photographs, check out the Portal Bridge page on the Bridge Mapper website: http://www.bridgemapper.com/bridge_detail.php?ID=2075.

The photographs accompanying this article came from the Images section of the Historic Pittsburgh website: <http://digital.library.pitt.edu/images/pittsburgh/>.

We'll wrap this up by mentioning a splendid book published in 1999 by Walter Kidney of History & Landmarks (see May, 2011 issue). The title is Pittsburgh's Bridges: Architecture and Engineering. In addition to 200 pages of text and historic photos selected by Kidney, the book includes a 32-page photo collection put together by the acclaimed Pittsburgh photographer, Clyde Hare. At least three dozen copies are available at local libraries, including Bayne Library in Bellevue.

This article is the fifth in a series spotlighting websites which focus on local history, and thus might be interesting to readers of this newsletter.

As you may know, each issue of the newsletter can be found at the BAAHA website <http://www.benavon.com/BAAHA>. Thanks to Jeff Cieslak (our webmaster), you can read the newsletter online as an HTML page or display, print or download it as a PDF file.. Share it with friends, and convince them to join BAAHA!

War comes close to Ben Avon

By Len Barcousky
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

When the Civil War opened, the "South" began just 30 miles west of what would become Ben Avon.

In June 1861, what is now the northern panhandle of West Virginia still was part of Virginia, a state that had recently joined the Confederacy. Many residents of the state's northern and western counties, however, were pro-Union.

In Grafton, an important railroad town on the Baltimore & Ohio line, western Virginia men had formed a militia unit, called the Grafton Guards, to protect their town and oppose the Rebels. One of their number, Thornsby Bailey Brown, died of a gunshot wound on May 22, killed by a Confederate sentry. Brown is often described as the first Union soldier to die in battle.

Facing a much larger Confederate force commanded by Col. George Porterfield, the Grafton Guards soon fled by rail to Wheeling, a stronghold of anti-secessionists. Porterfield was able to hold the town for about a week. He withdrew further south to Philippi as Union forces advanced. Those troops were mostly from Ohio and Indiana, but they also included a regiment of western Virginians.

The Pittsburgh Gazette and Commercial Journal reported on June 8 that Pennsylvania cavalry from Fayette and Greene counties also had helped clear the "ruffians and marauders" out of Grafton.

The source for what the newspaper called a "most interesting narration of the expedition" was Col. Daniel R. Davidson, a businessman from Connellsville.

"Everywhere along the road, from the Pennsylvania line to Grafton, the Pennsylvanians were received with the most cordial and enthusiastic welcome," the Gazette said.

"[T]hey were met by a band of little girls, dressed in red, white and blue, preceded by a band of music," Davidson told the newspaper. "No secessionists were to be seen."

The militiamen found one exception: an elderly man on horseback whose saddlebags contained 11 clean shirts. A neighbor identified the rider as "an old Secessioner."

When the cavalry reached Grafton with their prisoner "a lot of pretty rough fellows came up and were for pitching in and taking summary measures with the old man," the Gazette told readers. Davidson, however, stepped in.

"The next thing was to institute a military court, which gave him a regular and fair trial," the paper said. "It was clearly proven that he was a Secessionist; that he had two sons in the rebel army; and that he was on his way to see them. Of course he was found guilty."

His punishment, however, was mild. "It was proposed to the old gentleman that if he would solemnly swear to support the Constitution of the United States they would set him at liberty." He agreed.

"Tears ran down the old man's cheeks while he took the solemn pledge," the Gazette reported. "Everybody shook him by the hand, and even the 'roughs,' who a little while before were going to kill him, now clustered around him in boisterous kindness."

Even before Virginia's secession had been ratified, western Virginians had met

in Wheeling in May to debate formation of a new state that would stay in the Union. In June delegates assembled again in Wheeling and declared themselves to be the real government of Virginia. In October, a West Virginia statehood referendum passed, and a new constitution was drawn up and ratified in 1862. West Virginia was admitted to the Union in 1863.

In those early days of the war, supporters on both sides were confident that the war wouldn't last long and their position would prevail.

Speaking on the day that Fort Sumter fell, LeRoy Pope Walker, the Confederate secretary of war, predicted the secessionists' flag soon could wave over Washington, D.C., as well.

Walker warned that occupation of Washington would follow if the Lincoln administration didn't recognize Southern independence. His remarks were published in the April 15, 1861, edition of the Pittsburgh Daily Gazette.

The Confederate attack on Fort Sumter, located in the harbor of Charleston, S.C., began early on April 12. The fort's commander, Robert Anderson, surrendered the next day, but the story was not confirmed in Pittsburgh until the afternoon of April 14. News that the federal fort had been given up "produced a painfully depressing effect upon all classes," the Gazette reported the next morning.

"Here and there were to be found a few madcaps (to use no harsher term) -- men who sympathize with the rebels and traitors of the South and quietly cackle over the disgrace which robbery and treason have brought upon the flag of our glorious country!" the newspaper said.

"Such men, thank heaven, are very few in this community ..."

The Gazette urged Pittsburgh residents to attend a City Hall meeting that night "to confer together upon the state of the country."

All the chairs were removed from the assembly room to allow as many as 5,000 people to crowd into the building, the newspaper reported the next day.

"The venerable Judge WILKINS -- a gentleman perhaps as old as the Constitution itself -- was called from his retirement to preside over the meeting," the story said. "The appearance of this venerable citizen and ardent patriot elicited the loudest applause, and he advanced to respond amid the wildest enthusiasm."

Blaming crowded conditions, the Gazette's reporter apologized for not being able to provide a transcript of Wilkins' remarks: "Having no facilities for reporting, we could not take notes and must content ourselves with presenting one or two thoughts from memory."

Regarding the age of Judge William Wilkins, the writer did not exaggerate. Born in December 1779, Wilkins turned 8 in 1787, the year the U.S. Constitution was written. A former federal judge, congressman, senator and U.S. secretary of war, he was 81 when he addressed the City Hall crowd.

While Wilkins and other speakers emphasized defense of the union, former Allegheny County Judge Peter Shannon raised the issue of slavery as a cause of the war. Referring to "the miserable attempt of the Southern traitors to build up a republic on the basis of slavery," he said that "they might as well attempt to build a fire upon the snow-capped summit of the Alps."

The Gazette that day also sought to reassure readers about the loyalty of a local militia unit called the Duquesne Greys. Some of its members had fallen under suspicion, in part because one of their officers, Capt. David Campbell, was "a consistent Democrat," the newspaper said.

It reported, however, that Campbell had proved himself "an ardent patriot," and that the evidence could be found in his having volunteered his military skills to Pennsylvania's Republican governor, Andrew Curtin. "Those who were disposed to cast suspicion upon the Greys as a company will undoubtedly have their minds disabused by this cheering announcement," the paper concluded.

Note: Ben Avon resident Len Barcosky is the author of "Remembering Pittsburgh," a book that looks at how historic events were covered in the pages of the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette. A version of this story appeared previously in the Post-Gazette.

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Annual Report

from

Dick Herchenroether

Each volume of our newsletter designates a fiscal year for BAAHA running July through June. With each first issue, or number 1, we give you a report of BAAHA as a business. Familiar names continue to serve on our association board. It meets most months of the year, usually skipping December and one or two others. I am grateful for their time, counsel and general support. That would be enough but they also all spend considerable time working to move us forward. Rather than repetitiously print their names in the lists below this one time recognition is for all they do. Board members are:

Dick Herchenroether, President
 Jean Henderson, Vice President
 Trudy File, Secretary
 Darlene Phillips, Archivist
 Tracy Ferguson
 Bob Kiser
 B. J. Robertson

More and more people help with individual projects, and are needed. Some projects are ongoing and some are of a one time nature. If you would like to offer your time and talents please contact us. Access is easy by sending email to baaha@benavon.org. If you want to see us, or our archived material we are available by appointment to open the office.

Our June, 2011 financial position is little improved from a year ago. Rebuilding our savings to be again ready as major repairs or maintenance to the Dickson Log House are essential. We put other projects on hold during the past year as donations were slow.

Nevertheless we participated in two public programs. We hosted one concerning the history of Neville Island. This was a lecture with discussion following. It was led by Dan Holland, author of the Arcadia Publishing book on Neville Island history. Dan is also president of Young Preservationists. The other program was to honor the local people who built and manned the LSTs of World War II. This took place at the Emsworth Locks and Dam when LST 325 visited Pittsburgh a year ago.

Our Wish List

Our refurbished "all in one" printer, scanner, copier and fax machine continues to function and we find it essential. But it IS quirky and a unit with a bit more reliability would be great. By the way, we have ZERO need for fax

capability since we have no phone line. And we have other scanners. If you have a laser driven copier/printer, but might not have or work for fax or scan, we want it.

We also have "job list" which is a work in progress. Some jobs can only be done after others have been started or finished. It is too long to print here. We may try to put it on the web site.

Financial Report

Ben Avon Area Historical Association
 July 1, 2010 through June 30, 2011

	INCOME/EXPENSE	
	Year ending <u>6/30/2010</u>	Year ending <u>6/30/2011</u>
INCOME		
Interest	\$ 81	\$ 14
Mailing list dues	1,530	1,220
Donations	4,580	3,220
Items for sale	<u>270</u>	<u>219</u>
TOTAL INCOME	<u>\$ 6,461</u>	<u>\$ 4,673</u>
EXPENSES		
Postage/supplies	\$ 443	\$ 233
Rent	3,600	3,775
Maintenance	5,575	0
Electric service	100	100
Publishing	180	848
Program/Education	315	320
Fund raising	70	65
Preservation	162	441
Property Insurance	<u>809</u>	<u>799</u>
TOTAL EXPENSES	<u>\$11,254</u>	<u>\$6,581</u>
NET DECREASE	<u>\$ (4,793)</u>	<u>\$ (1,908)</u>
BALANCE SHEET		
	<u>6/30/2010</u>	<u>6/30/2011</u>
Cash	\$127	\$157
Checking/MM	11,231	9,293
TOTAL	<u>\$11,358</u>	<u>\$ 9,450</u>

Certified by:
 Dick Herchenroether, President & Treasurer

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July, 2010 through June, 2011

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