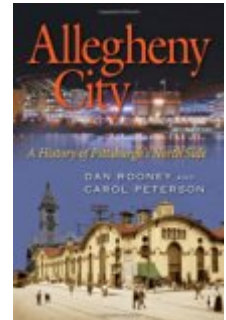


Dan Rooney, Carol Peterson. *Allegheny City: A History of Pittsburgh's North Side.* University of Pittsburgh Press, 2013. 264 pp. \$24.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8229-4422-5.



Reviewed by Joseph Cialdella

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Commissioned by David T. Benac (Western Michigan University)

Allegheny City may not be a familiar name to the newest generation of residents who call Pittsburgh home today. After all, it ceased to exist as an independent jurisdiction as of December 9, 1907. Yet the area it became, Pittsburgh's North Side, has played an important role in shaping the region. For this reason, Dan Rooney and Carol Peterson's *Allegheny City: A History of Pittsburgh's North Side* should be of interest not only to professional historians, but moreover to a general audience interested in learning more about the past from which Pittsburgh's North Side grew into the place it is today.

Rooney, a long-time North Side resident and chairman of the Pittsburgh Steelers, and Carol Peterson, an architectural historian, tell a history that is both thoroughly researched and highly accessible. Their narrative gives a long view of the city's past from the late eighteenth century to the present, not unlike the approach of other urban-focused works familiar to environmental historians, such as Ari Kelman's *A River and Its City* (2006) and Matthew Klingle's *Emerald City* (2009).

Each of the eleven chapters in *Allegheny City* covers key moments across this broad time span. Because of its breadth and depth, the book is an excellent reference on the North Side's history, particularly with regard to the social history of the populations and individuals who called Allegheny City home, the organizations and institutions they created, as well as the built environment that was made and remade to suit the needs of successive generations of residents.

Allegheny City begins in 1783, when the future site of the city was nothing more than a confluence in the wilderness, home to a dirt path and a "few hardy white squatters and an uncertain number of American Indians" (pp. 1-3) who lived where the Allegheny and Monongahela rivers meet to form the Ohio. Then, with the end of the American Revolution, the Pennsylvania General Assembly created a three-thousand-acre "reserve tract," plots of which were intended to be compensation to veterans for their service. Although the land was not surveyed and divided into plots in 1787, it was from these origins that Allegheny

Town, as it was called then, began to develop. From a home to many Scots-Irish and Irish immigrants and modest log homes and manufacturers, the area was transformed by industrial leaders into an area with formidable factories and ornate residences that rivaled those of Pittsburgh across the river. The authors take readers through the Great Depression, through urban renewal projects that dramatically altered the neighborhood, and right up to the revitalization efforts visible in the sports stadiums and museums that now define the North Side.

Within each chapter, Rooney and Peterson do a commendable job of presenting readers with a sense of the varied people and institutions that gave Allegheny a distinct sense of place for those who lived there. In addition to describing how companies such as H.J. Heinz and Lutz and Schramm, which processed food, as well as heavier industries, such as manufacturers, were attracted to properties along the river, Rooney and Peterson also give equal attention to structures of everyday life, such as the neighborhood's changing housing, commercial, and entertainment districts. For example, one of Allegheny City's "more unusual attractions" during the late nineteenth century was the Cyclorama Building, which housed a painting of the Battle of Gettysburg, in addition to dances, political rallies, boxing matches and religious services (p. 95). Throughout, there is a balanced approach to examining Allegheny's elite, middle-class, and working-class populations from varied ethnic backgrounds.

The book is also richly illustrated, with numerous photographs and renderings appearing in each chapter. These images help convey a sense of the visual changes in the landscape instigated by urban development, changing architectural styles, and environmental changes, such as several floods that altered the area. For a work with such an intimate focus on the details of how specific streets, buildings, and blocks changed over time, however, the book would have benefited from

having more maps, or at least a general map in the introduction. The only maps included are two from the late eighteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries, which are not specific enough to help orient readers to the spatial changes (often down to street-level descriptions) the authors describe throughout the text. Maps would be particularly helpful to readers not familiar with Pittsburgh's geography.

Perhaps the most compelling element of Rooney and Peterson's narrative is that it tells the story of how Pittsburgh developed from the perspective of a city that was annexed. Chapter 7, which discusses the campaign for annexation, is one of the strongest in the book because of the depth of analysis given to the debates and decisions that transformed Allegheny City into Pittsburgh's North Side. Because of moments like these, it is likely that urban, social, and architectural historians will find *Allegheny City* a useful text to assign to introductory undergraduate courses in urban history.

With an urban focus, however, the work does leave something to be desired for environmental historians expecting more depth about how environmental conditions shaped the city. For example, aside from discussing how buildings were raised, the analysis of floods and their ramifications in the early twentieth century is somewhat limited. Other environmental components, such as parks, disease, land use, and pollution, familiar to other urban-environmental histories, are not placed in the foreground. There is little discussion of how the place itself was shaped by the environment or how planners responded to environmental circumstances. Historians looking for a deeper analysis of specific moments in the city's history--such as the floods--will likely find that the book's broad chronology does not provide the space to be immersed in specific topics for long.

That said, *Allegheny City* is a well-told history of how a place has changed. It allows readers to grasp the large transformations, as well as indi-

vidual characters and buildings, that shaped Allegheny City into Pittsburgh's North Side. As the authors write in the afterword, "Politicians in Pittsburgh and Harrisburg must know more about the city than its topography if a feasible plan that takes the city as a whole into account is to be devised. We must work together to educate our politicians and to make our region strong" (p. 228). This book is certainly a step in that direction.

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