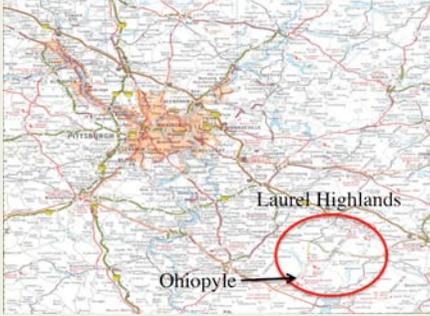


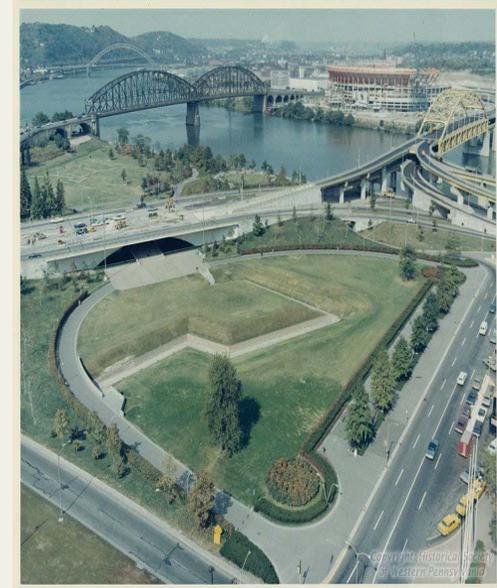
From Renaissance to Region: Pittsburgh, the Laurel Highlands and the Remaking of Rural Pennsylvania



The Laurel Highlands had long been a vacation destination for wealthy Pittsburghers

When we brag about our area's growth, we mean white oaks and mountain laurel, too.

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Pittsburgh's Point Park under construction, ca. 1969-1970
Photograph is from Allegheny Conference on Community Development collection, Senator John Heinz History Center.



In 1962, state Secretary of Forests and Waters Maurice Goddard announced his intention to "create a full scale state park here at Ohiopyle - one which will be almost unmatched in natural scenic beauty anywhere in Pennsylvania."

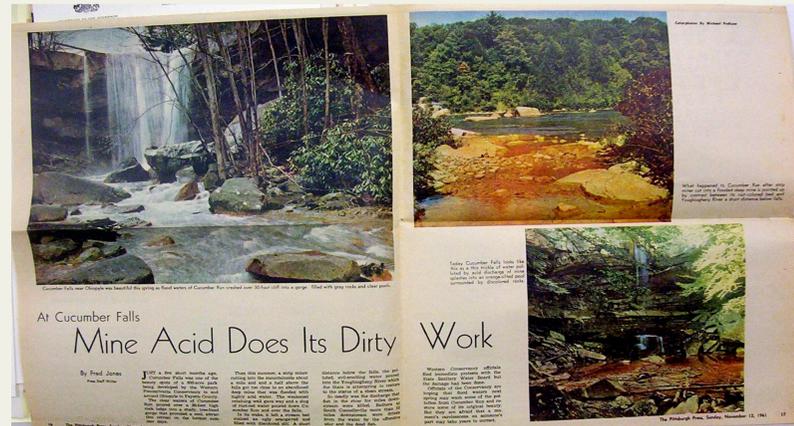
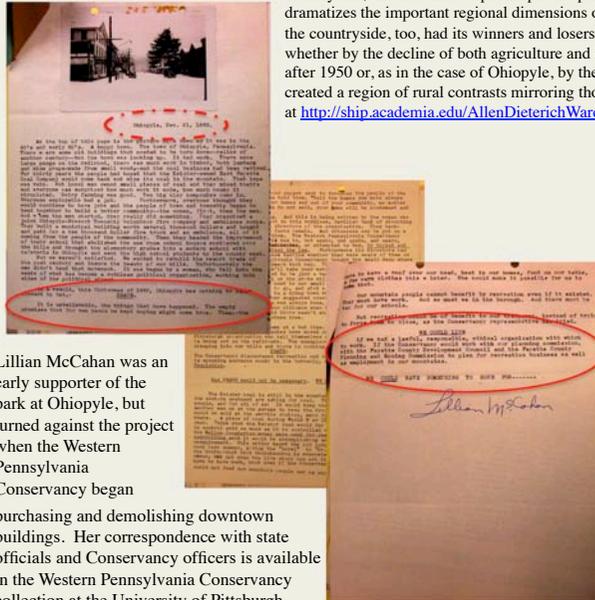
Abstract: My research explores the relationship between the economic, urban and symbolic development of the Pittsburgh "Renaissance" and the transformation of the region's rural hinterland. Beginning in the mid-1940s, Pittsburgh's business and political elite reinvented the city, first as a center of corporate administration and later as a "post-industrial" hub of the high-tech and service sectors. With the downtown "Golden Triangle" firmly established as an administrative center by the late 1950s, business and political leaders expanded the scope of their economic development efforts beyond downtown to the region's rural and suburban communities. I focused on the rise of the recreation and tourism industries in the Laurel Highlands, a rural area fifty miles southeast of Pittsburgh. Much of the early postwar development of the region was overseen by the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy, one of Pittsburgh's celebrated public-private partnerships with an explicitly regional agenda. The Conservancy was particularly active in the development of Ohiopyle, a scenic area along the Youghiogheny River famous for whitewater rafting and Fallingwater, an estate designed by Frank Lloyd Wright for retail magnate Edgar Kaufmann.

By 1982, attendance at Ohiopyle State Park reached more than 1.5 million, the third highest in the state, with whitewater activities alone producing multi-million dollar revenues and well over 100 jobs. Ohiopyle's transformation from a depressed mining and lumbering town to a tourist hotspot thus presents an excellent opportunity to study the role of urban capital in reshaping rural Pennsylvania. While urban historians have not fully expanded their metropolitan framework to include the postwar countryside, the activities of public-private partnerships, such as the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy, dramatizes the important regional dimensions of the Pittsburgh Renaissance. Just as in the central city, the countryside, too, had its winners and losers as older communities were depopulated and displaced whether by the decline of both agriculture and industrial employment, the growth of surface mining after 1950 or, as in the case of Ohiopyle, by the creation of new "wilderness areas." This process created a region of rural contrasts mirroring those of the metropolitan core. The full paper is available at <http://ship.academia.edu/AllenDieterichWard/Talks/>

The idea of creating a park for aesthetic consumption in the very heart of a metropolis known long for heavy industrial production formed the very essence of the regional vision of Pittsburgh's postwar Renaissance even as it pointed to the limits of postwar redevelopment. Park creation was important both symbolically and materially in remaking the image of the "Smoky City" and attracting middle-class residents. In both Pittsburgh and the Laurel Highlands, however, the growth of recreation and tourism only partly made up for declining employment in mining and manufacturing.



Lillian McCahan was an early supporter of the park at Ohiopyle, but turned against the project when the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy began purchasing and demolishing downtown buildings. Her correspondence with state officials and Conservancy officers is available in the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy collection at the University of Pittsburgh.



The issue of coal surface mining near Ohiopyle also divided park supporters in Pittsburgh from local residents dependent on mining employment.