

Battle of Homestead Site

Source: NHL Designation Application

STRUCTURAL REVIEW

Location

(1) Homestead Steel Works wharf/landing site; (2) pump house for Homestead Steel Works; (3) water tower for Homestead Steel Works; (4) Five Piers for the Pittsburgh, McKeesport, and Youghiogheny Railroad Bridge connecting Munhall on the south bank of the Monongahela River and Swissvale on north bank

Current:

(1) Site has been filled over with slag up to the first floor level of the pump house. An almost 40-foot high concrete retaining wall, extending from the river level to first floor level of pump house, was built in 1941. The historic landing site is underneath the retaining wall and the slag fill. Wooden pilings, believed to have been part of the original wharf, have been recently observed at the base of the concrete wall.

(3) The water tower, though not in use for water storage, is a historic icon which serves as an aid in identifying with the 1892 labor/management confrontation.

Architectural Classification (1) & (7) N/A

(2) Industrial design by Carnegie Phipps & Co. Ltd., drawing No. 26, October 29, 1891; (3) Industrial design by Carnegie Steel Co. Ltd., drawing No. 32, July 28, 1892.

(1) The Pinkerton Landing Site was located in Mifflin Township (incorporated as the borough of Munhall in 1901), Allegheny County, on the south bank of the Monongahela River, approximately seven miles upstream from the city of Pittsburgh. It was the northernmost point of the vast 90-acre Homestead Steel Works. The landing site was at the base of a steep slope that consisted of three primary levels composed of slag and cinder: the upper level was relatively flat at essentially the same elevation of the first floor of the pump house which had recently been built into the slope; the next level extended from the mill level at a forty-five degree angle to the base of the pump house, where a lightweight rail line which ran along the slope connected with a similar rail line which ran along the bottom, just above the river level.

Wooden pilings were located at the water's edge for slope stabilization and to facilitate the docking of vessels. The pilings extended a long distance along the edge of the river, as evidenced in historic photographs taken at the time.¹ The western most end of the landing was in a direct

¹ Randolph Harris, "Photographers at Homestead in 1892," in David P. Demarest, Jr., General Editor; Fannia Weingartner, Coordinating Editor. "The River Ran Red;" Homestead 1892 (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1992), 96-97, 160-161. Mr. Harris was, until recently, the photo archivist and community organizer for the Steel Industry Heritage Corporation, Homestead, Pennsylvania. The photograph which became a symbol of the Pinkertons' defeat was taken by prominent Pittsburgh photographer Benjamin L.H. Dabbs. The photograph, taken from the north bank of the Monongahela River in Swissvale, shows the landing site along with the pump house and

line with the eastern end of the pump house. A cut in the steep slope provided access between the landing and the mill yard at a point near the upriver end of the pump house. It was through this cut that the Pinkertons were led up the slope after their surrender about 6:00 pm on July 6, 1892.

While the historic drawings make the wharf/landing site appear extensive, in reality it was as a New York Herald reporter wrote, a “little landing.”² Although there had been a simple wharf constructed of “piles and old ties” at this site as early as 1883,³ a landing at this location was not critical to the operation of Homestead Steel Works, because most of the movement of raw materials and the finished product was by rail.

The landing site of 1892 was covered over before 1911 by slag fill and the construction of a wall of unidentified construction, bringing the area between the river and the north side of the pump house up to the general level of the Homestead Steel Works. The existing concrete river wall dates to 1941.⁴ While the original appearance of the 1892 landing site is no longer visible, it is strongly believed that the site still exists underneath all of the fill, based upon the recent discovery of pilings where historic photographs suggest where they likely would have been located in 1892.⁵ The site still retains strong historical associational values.

(2) Pump House #1. The pump house as the time of the July 6 battle was still relatively new; it had been designed in late October 1891, but the machinery had not yet been installed.⁶ It was a vital component of the water system which provided the 7,000,000 gallons of water per day needed for mill operations.⁷ Featured prominently in the photographs and drawings relating the historic event, the pump house, though altered from its original appearance, continues to be a strong visual reminder of the events of July 6, 1892. It was designed with carefully proportioned features, with details from Classical architecture.⁸ The building was constructed of a reddish brown, crudely shaped, common brick with wide joints pointed with grayish-tan mortar, with visible particles of coal or cinders. It was built with three bays of two arched window openings in

a large portion of the Homestead Steel Works. The timing of the photograph is after the Pinkertons had surrendered and the barges had been set on fire. This photograph shows the pilings extending a considerable distance up and down the river.

² *New York Herald*, July 7, 1892 in Demarest, “The River Ran Red,” 77.

³ Charles H. Uhl, “Draft Historic Structures Report, Pump House and Water Tower/1892 Pinkerton Landing Site” (Pittsburgh: Historic Preservation Services, 1995), 5.

⁴ Uhl, “Draft Historic Structures Report,” 21.

⁵ August Carlino, Interview with John W. Bond, March 20, 1995. Mr. Carlino is the Executive Director, Steel Industry Heritage Corporation, Homestead, Pennsylvania; telephone conversation between Charles H. Uhl, Historic Preservation Services, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and John W. Bond, July 14, 1995.

⁶ Charles Mansfield, Testimony, July 14, 1892, U.S. House of Representatives Report No. 2447, February 1893, in Demarest, “The River Ran Red,” 82.

⁷ Harry B. Latton, “Steel Wonders,” *The Pittsburgh Times*, June 1, 1892, in Demarest, “The River Ran Red,” 13.

⁸ Uhl, “Draft Historic Structures Report,” 10.

each of the two long sides, and four arched windows in each of the shorter gable ends. The original structure measured 42 feet long and 37 feet wide. The most unusual feature of the pump house was its very deep foundation. Even in 1892, the main level was very modest compared with the almost forty vertical feet below that level, with the floor of the pump room being only slightly above the level of the Monongahela River. Today, all but the main level is underground. When constructed, the pump house connected with the river by the installation of twenty-inch intake pipes laid in a trench cut through the 1883 river landing. Water for the operation of the mills was brought through the pump house and pumped to the nearby water tower which distributed water to the works. From the level of the intake pipes, four stepped tiers of concrete substructure integrated with the visible brick structure to provide the building's unusual foundation, so prominent in photographs and drawings of the period.

The south elevation (land-facing) of the main level differed from the north (river-facing) side by the placement of a six-foot wide round arched door opening in the center bay. All of the other bays on the long sides had two tall round arched 9/9 double hung windows framed by a simple entablature of brick pilasters. The east and west elevations were framed by brick pilasters and a two-step corbelled brick cornice following the gable.

The roof of the 1892 pump house was constructed of wooden trusses and sheathing and covered with slate. In 1944 this roof was replaced with steel trusses supporting corrugated asbestos sheets, the present roof covering.

The pump house was doubled in size in 1898, with the addition mirroring the 1892 structure, including the pump room level. In the interior of the main level, the southern window of the original eastern wall was converted to a door to connect the two sections. The 1898 addition had a steel truss system and apparently had a slate roof.⁹ The 1898 extension, representing a doubling of the 1892 building in all respects, and a total integration of the functions of the two sections, is regarded as contributing to the historic setting. Because of the structural integration of the 1892 and 1898 portions, it is not practical to remove the 1898 addition be retained.¹⁰

Besides the various additions made over many years, the most apparent change has been the infilling with brick all of the masonry openings, replacing the original windows with small rectangular aluminum-sashed windows. The original placement of the windows and doors is quite apparent upon visually inspecting the building and comparing what is there today with historic photographs. The 1892-1898 architectural character of the building is still discernible in the two main sections of the pump house.

The walls of the pump house appear to be sound and straight on their deep foundation. "Nineteenth century components of the surviving pump house include sections of brick, mortar, and cast iron window sills. The brick and mortar vary from good to poor condition. Uncontrolled water run-off has deteriorated brick and mortar in several locations."¹¹ Overall, the building is in stable condition.

⁹*Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 26.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 19

(3) Water Tower. Plans for the existing water tower were dated July 28, 1892, during the lockout/strike. The structure was completed in 1893. The first section consists of an octagonal red brick base twenty-three feet high on a concrete substructure. Terra cotta coping was used to cap the base. Each of the eight sides of the base is framed on the sides and top by stepped-out brick entablature. Every other wall section has an arched masonry opening filled with a steel plate door with riveted strap hinges set flush in a steel jamb. Two brick walls pass through the octagonal base to provide support for the 3/4" thick steel plated bottom of the water tank. The original water tank, forty feet tall and forty feet in diameter, was made up of eight five-foot high rings of iron, riveted together. Each ring has thirteen ten-foot sections. The tank has never had a top.

Two additional five-foot rings were added to the tank in 1912, bringing the height of the tank to fifty feet and the total height of the structure to seventy-three feet. An open set of steel stairs was attached to the tank's southern side in 1913. The tank and stairs are painted black.

The condition of the brick base of the water tower is generally good. Some deterioration exists in the bottom few courses of brick due to splashing water runoff. The tank is, for the most part, in good condition, except the top two bands which have deteriorated from rust.

While the existing water tower was designed during the lockout/strike, but not built until 1893, it is regarded as contributing for National Historic Landmark nomination for the following reasons: At an early date, it replaced a water tower, consisting of two wooden tanks, which featured prominently in the events of July 6, 1892, and the iconography connected with the events of that day; it is functionally a companion to the pump house, part of which existed at the time of the battle; the age of the structure and the nature of its design warrant its consideration as a historic structure in its own right.¹²

BATTLE OF 1892 SUMMARY

The bloody confrontation on July 6, 1892, between an industrial giant of world proportions and one of America's strongest labor unions was known at the time and until today as the Battle of Homestead. The Battle raged around the Homestead Steel Works of the Carnegie Steel Company, Limited, located on the southern bank of the Monongahela River in Mifflin Township, Pennsylvania, seven miles upstream from Pittsburgh. The mill was situated just over the boundary between Mifflin Township and the Borough of Homestead. Participants in this world-wide news event¹³ were 280 members of Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers and Steel Workers and the remainder of Steel Work's total labor force of 3,800, most of whom were non-union, and 300 guards from the Pinkerton National Detective Agency, hired by the company to protect the property and those workers which the company planned to hire as strikebreakers.

¹²Uhl, "Draft Historic Structures Report," 26.

¹³ Russell W. Gibbons, "Dateline Homestead," in Demarest, "The River Ran Red," 158-159.

While trouble between the union and the steel company had existed from the time Andrew Carnegie had acquired in 1883, the earlier company, the Pittsburgh Bessemer Company, it escalated to a lockout/strike in 1889 and to the more serious lockout/strike during the last two days of June, 1892. It had become increasingly obvious that a major showdown between the world's largest steel company and one of the country's most powerful union was imminent. The union considered the 1889 settlement a victory for the skilled workers and fully expected that a renewal of the contract at the end of June 1892, would result in a similar victory through negotiations between the union and the company. The company, under new leadership of Henry Clay Frick, known as the "most implacable foe of organized labor within the industry," was determined that the union would not win in 1892, as Frick's predecessor William Abbott had allowed in 1889.¹⁴

With the retirement of Abbott in April 1892, Frick became the head of Carnegie, Phipps & Company, which operated the Homestead Steel Works, while retaining his position as chairman of Carnegie Brothers & Company. When the long planned merger of these two companies occurred and Carnegie Steel Company, Limited came into being on July 1, 1892, Henry Clay Frick was chosen to be the chairman of the reorganized steel giant, "the largest steel company in the world, capable of producing more than half of the total steel production of Great Britain. The flagship of this fleet of steel plants, iron mills and blast furnaces was the ... plant at Homestead." In 1886, only three years after acquiring the Homestead plant of The Pittsburgh Bessemer Company, Carnegie Brothers and Company, consisting of Andrew Carnegie and his brother Thomas, and other partners, converted the Homestead plant into an open hearth mill. At the time of the battle, the Homestead plant was "America's largest open hearth steel mill."¹⁵

In the early morning hours of July 6, 1892, the anticipated clash between labor and capital became a reality when 300 Pinkerton guards attempted to land at the wharf at the foot on which pump house #1 was located. What followed was approximately twelve hours of off and on fighting between the workers and the Pinkertons. The Pinkertons who had been stranded on two barges throughout the day were allowed to surrender about six o'clock that evening, but then were subjected to having to run a gauntlet of attackers as they were moved to temporary jails. While the fatalities, amounting to seven workers and three Pinkertons were numerous considering the extent of the fighting, the trauma of the event was so profound the message it carried to other workers and to people in general in this country and abroad was so provoking that it made headlines in the major papers and was a major topic talked about in the churches and in the halls of government.

The workers experienced victory on July 6. But, their victory was short-lived, because on July 12 the Pennsylvania National Guard came to Homestead, assuming total control over the area and staying until October of that year. In the meantime the company had reopened, with the protection of the military, and workers were becoming destitute from lack of income. The major

¹⁴Joseph Frazier Wall, "Carnegie, Frick, and the Homestead Strike," in Demarest, "The River Ran Red," 4-5; Joseph Frazier Wall, Andrew Carnegie (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1989. Originally published by Oxford University Press, 1970), 539 Demarest, "The River Ran Red," vii-viii.

¹⁵Wall, "Carnegie, Frick, and the Homestead Strike," in Demarest, "The River Ran Red," 4.

defeat for the workers came on November 21, when they agreed to return to work on company terms, the most devastating one being that they could not belong to a union.¹⁶

The long range consequences of the lockout/strike and the Battle of Homestead were the demise of the Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers at Homestead and the virtual halting of unionism in the national steel industry for almost forty-five years.¹⁷ It also meant total control by the owners of the work place, including working conditions to which the workers were subjected. Because of the level of company control, the townspeople's civil liberties and their influence upon local government were sharply curtailed.¹⁸ When Carnegie Steel Company, Limited was purchased by J. P. Morgan in 1901, and U.S. Steel was created, there was no improvement for the workers. The steelworkers would not regain their collective bargaining rights for over four decades until the passage of the Wagner Act in 1935 and the establishment of the Steel Workers Organizing Committee the following year (SWOC). In late 1936, through efforts of SWOC, the first lodge of the Amalgamated to be chartered since it had been abandoned in Homestead in 1892, was called to order in the SWOC hall on East Eighth Avenue in Homestead. On March 2, 1937, an agreement was signed by John L. Lewis and Philip Murray of the recently formed Committee for Industrial Organization, and U.S. Steel, making the Homestead Works once again unionized.¹⁹

¹⁶The New York Times, November 22, 1892, in Demarest, "The River Ran Red," 189.

¹⁷Paul Krause, *The Battle of Homestead, 1880-1892: Politics, Culture, and Steel* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1992), 4.

¹⁸David Montgomery, "Afterword," in Demarest, "The River Ran Red," 226-227.

¹⁹Russell W. Gibbons, "SWOC and the Homestead Legacy," in Demarest, "The River Ran Red," 216. Also see Robert H. Zieger, *American Workers, American Unions* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1994, Second Edition), 44-55 for discussion of the work of the Committee for Industrial Organization and the organizing efforts of the Steel Workers Organizing Committee (SWOC). The Committee for Industrial Organization became the Congress of Industrial Organizations at its first convention at Pittsburgh, November 14-18, 1938. See *Encyclopedia Britannica* (Chicago, London, Toronto: Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., 1955), vol. 6. p. 254.