

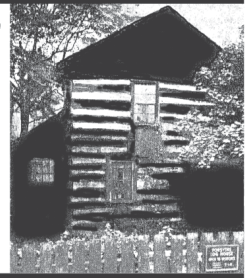
A BIT OF HISTORY about Pittsburgh's EAST END

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Franklin West: The Walk

By Alfred Mann

In October 2004, just months before his death, The Post-Gazette's Joyce Gannon wrote a compelling feature about the life work of Frank West that was appropriately titled, "West Went the East End."

Frank West (1932-2005) was a prominent real estate developer active in Pittsburgh's East End for more than 40 years. One of his major accomplishments was transforming shabby Victorian homes into hundreds of chic apartments in - what has become in large part through his efforts - one of the city's toniest neighborhoods.

After completing degrees in architecture and city planning at Carnegie Mellon and Yale universities and a tour in the US Army, West worked for three years for the Pittsburgh Regional Planning Association. That was followed by a new career: purchasing rundown Shadyside properties and converting them into rental units for young professionals. Despite the decrepit condition of the properties, West saw the long-term potential in the neighborhood, with its mix of large, formerly grand Victorian residences along with treelined streets and strong community support.

On a trip to London in the early 1960s, Frank met Sara, a Pan Am flight attendant who became his wife. They raised two daughters. Caroline, the elder, is an attorney who has managed Franklin West Inc. since 2004 with her husband, civil engineer Antonio Castracani. The younger daughter, Rebecca, is a curator for the Plains Indian Museum at the Buffalo Bill Historical Center in Cody, Wyoming. Sara West holds a Ph.D from the University of Pittsburgh and is an artist. All of them sit on the board of the family business.



John Beale, Post-Gazette

The late Frank West, his wife Sara, daughter Caroline West, and her husband, Antonio Castracani, in front of their property at 513 Shady Avenue.

In the mid-1960s, West invested in his first properties; two crumbling 3-story Second Empire homes located at 513 and 517 Shady Avenue. Built in the 1870s, the years were hard on them and they had been used as boarding houses for decades. By gutting and totally rebuilding the interiors, West was able to

provide 14 apartments featuring high ceilings, hardwood floors, fireplaces, patios and balconies ... all classic features that West kept intact. These projects were followed by many other restorations in the neighborhood, including Highland Towers, a 36-unit apartment at 340-342 South Highland Avenue, described in *A Bit Of History No.13-08*. This classic structure, designed by noted architect Frederick Scheibler (1872-1958), was built in 1913 and has been called one of the most beautiful buildings in Pittsburgh. Franklin West Inc. and the related companies now own and manage nearly one thousand rental properties in Pittsburgh and the suburbs (www.franklinwest.com).

In addition to his accomplishments in upscale housing restoration in Shadyside and suburban development, West was a strong proponent of education and international travel. He served on the advisory board for the Center for International Legal Education (CILE) at the University of Pittsburgh School of Law. For the past 10 years, the "Franklin West Fellowship" has provided, on a financial need basis, a fully-furnished two-bedroom apartment to CILE to house international students pursuing a Master's degree in law. Over the years, Franklin West Fellows have come from around the world: Vietnam, Kenya, Cote d'Ivoire, Ukraine, China, among many others. At the time of his passing, Caroline West said, "He had encouraged and mentored so many people, including tenants, relatives, friends and employees."

The last project developed by Frank West is at 521 Shady Avenue, next to his first projects at 513 and 517 Shady. Completed in 2008, this new construction features 12 chic one-bedroom loft-style apartments, interior garages, and an elevator. Frank West died on March 6, 2005 - just two weeks prior to the final zoning hearing approving the complex development project envisioned by West when he bought the property more than 20 years before. He was 72.

In recognition of West's contribution to the community, a bronze sculpture, entitled "The Walk", representing the essence of Frank West has been erected in front of 521 Shady. The sculptor is James West, Frank's cousin. Dedicated on what would have been Frank West's 79th birthday, March 13, 2011, the sculpture shows a figure striding purposefully, with one arm and leg reaching forward into the future and the other grounded in the past. In discussing the sculpture's meaning, James West says that "Franklin West left a great legacy: the balance between the past, present and future... He always looked at the impact upon the present day and of the future while keeping traditions alive."

James West is also the highly-regarded sculptor of another piece of historic significance, entitled "Point of View", showing

a meeting between George Washington and Seneca leader Goyasuta in 1770 to discuss issues regarding white settlement in Western Pennsylvania. Both leaders are depicted as communicating earnestly, respectful of each other's ideas. Washington asserted that he and Goyasuta parted from this meeting as friends. This dramatic sculpture, located on Pittsburgh's Mount Washington, is shown on page 10 of *Pittsburgh's East Liberty Valley*.

At the dedication of the sculpture, several friends and family members offered tributes, including The Hon. Justin M. Johnson and Molly Stahlman, founder of Molly's Trolleys.

Marilyn Evert, a Board member of the East End/East Liberty Historical Society, said at the dedication, "We all know that historic preservation is an important component of understanding ourselves as people. No one knew this better than Franklin West. In the last 20 years or so we have moved from saving old buildings to a new broader based idea for revitalization contributing to the economy of an area. But beyond the physical built object another idea came into play – that of using history to renew awareness of our past in order to strengthen our future.

"Frank partnered in the establishment of the East End/East Liberty Historical Society, which he saw as a means in the use of history in improving society and influencing contemporary revitalization programs....I was impressed with Frank's gentle strength, his ability to get at the root of issues, his passion for history and his innovative approach to problems. I am proud to have known him and now -- equally as proud of Jim who has created a perfect reflection of Frank's being."

Although no longer with us, Frank West's vision continues to shape not only Franklin West Inc.'s continued development, but the lives of those who live, work and "Walk" in this historic East End neighborhood.



Sculptor, James West (www.studiowildwest.com)

Jim West's thoughts about the sculpture, "The Walk":

"The process started when the Frank West family asked me to do a sculpture of him, not of his likeness but of his essence.

At first, this was very hard for me, as I was very close to Frank. After a while, I stood back and tried to look at him from a distance, and I came to the conclusion that he left a great legacy. What we could learn from that legacy was the balance between the past, present and future.

Frank would look at a neighborhood and talk about how you could build a new structure different from the existing structures. But that the new structure had to be harmonious and fit into the scale of the neighborhood. Many city planners and architects that came out of that time period went in the opposite direction. Frank however always looked at the past and was respectful of it. Any changes he made were methodical, as he always looked at the impact upon the present day and of the future while keeping traditions alive.

My hope is when people look at the sculpture in the future they will learn from him. There is a balance, not just in community and architecture, but in our life."



More than 200 people attended the March 13, 2011 dedication.



Jim West's wife, Jill West, reads Molly Stahlman's letter (see page 4).



The Hon. Justin M. Johnson gives a moving invocation and tribute.

Included on page 3, is a proclamation sponsored by Councilman William Peduto declaring March 13, 2011 "Franklin West Day" in the City of Pittsburgh.

Included on page 4, is the letter from Molly Stahlman .

Pittsburgh City Council



Proclamation



WHEREAS, on March 13, 2011, “The Walk”, a sculpture honoring pioneering Pittsburgh architect and real estate developer, Franklin West, will be dedicated at 521 Shady Avenue on what would have been his 79th birthday; and

WHEREAS, “The Walk” was sculpted by James West, Franklin’s cousin, and sculptor of “Point of View” on Mount Washington; and

WHEREAS, Franklin West dedicated his life to restoring the historic beauty and character of scores of homes in Shadyside, taking a blighted, declining area in the 1960s and transforming it into the thriving, highly-desirable neighborhood that it is today; and

WHEREAS, Franklin West has left a lasting legacy on the City of Pittsburgh both through his urban redevelopment efforts and his service in local organizations, including the Board of Directors of the Center for International Legal Education at the University of Pittsburgh School of Law.

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the Council of the City of Pittsburgh does hereby honor the life and work of Franklin West; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Council of the City of Pittsburgh does hereby declare March 13, 2011 “Franklin West Day” in the City of Pittsburgh.

Sponsored by Councilman William Peduto

Co-Sponsored by Council President Darlene M. Harris and Councilmembers Rev. Ricky V. Burgess, Patrick Dowd, Bruce A. Kraus, R. Daniel Lavelle, Natalia Rudiak, Douglas Shields and Theresa Kail-Smith

Darlene M. Harris
President of Council

Attest: Linda Johnson-Wasler
Clerk of Council

In Council, March 8, 2011



Molly's Trolleys of West Palm Beach

March 10th 2011

Dear Mrs. West & Caroline West:

Just a short note to thank you for the invitation to the Dedication and Reception of "THE WALK" commemorating Frank West's Legacy. I would LOVE to attend, but unfortunately, I am in Florida right now managing my business and just cannot break away.

Of course, I am sure you know, how much I admired Mr. West (Sorry- I could never get used to calling him Frank!). I loved Mr. West's good humor, hard working nature and sense of justice. I think of Mr. West - of course- when I walk past beautiful apartments, but I also think of Mr. West when I see Western Wear (especially blue denim long sleeve shirts), come across Pistachio Nuts, or when I read about an injustice (because Mr. West hated injustice). Quite an eclectic list! But I guess memories of people are often made of eclectic lists.

I loved working for Franklin West- my first full time job out of college. I loved the quality of the people I worked with. Even after I went on to another job and graduate school, Mr. West always welcomed me to stop by and have lunch. Mr. West loved to talk about business- his experiences in work as well as strategy. In Mr. West- especially during the early years of my own business- I had someone I could go to for business and life advice.

And of course, Mr. West was an original investor in my company 15 years ago. Mr. West helped me buy my first trolley in Pittsburgh. He didn't have to help me. I was \$10,000 short. If Mr. West had not helped me, I would not have been able to start my business at that time, and start the walk of my own entrepreneurial path. Mr. West took a chance on me, and I will never forget the day, that moment.

I know Mr. West has many legacies- his company, his charities and his daughters. And now, this beautiful sculpture, THE WALK, which is just amazing.

I also hope that when you see a red and green Molly Trolley going by- even though I don't own the Pittsburgh company anymore (sold it this past January)- I hope it makes you think of another Frank West Legacy, the encouragement of entrepreneurship and young people, manifested in form as a trolley motoring all thru the streets of Pittsburgh.

Thank you again for the invitation to the Dedication and Reception. Thank you so very much for thinking of me. I am very sorry that I am unable to attend, but I can't wait to see the sculpture in person next time I am in Pittsburgh.

Warmest Regards,

☺ M [redacted] S [redacted]

Molly Stahlman,
Molly's Trolleys of West Palm Beach