
Henry Hornbostel (1867-1961) was a New York architect who opened a Pittsburgh office when he won the competition to design the Carnegie Technical Schools (Carnegie Tech; now Carnegie Mellon University) in Pittsburgh. Hornbostel obtained the commission for the Pennsylvania Building while working on Oakland City Hall (1910-1914) and other commissions in California’s East Bay area. E. W. "Arch" Boyer was Hornbostel’s right-hand man in San Francisco between August 18 and October 22, 1914. His diary records his efforts to find office space, his work to revise and complete drawings and specifications, his interactions with suppliers, contractors, gardeners, artists, and especially James J. O’Brien, the fair’s Superintendent of Construction, and his struggles to contact Hornbostel by telegraph and get enough money to live on. Boyer’s wife Louise was with him on this trip, and they took the train through the Canadian Rockies on their way back to Pittsburgh as a belated honeymoon.

The Pennsylvania Building consisted of an assembly hall, a cinema, and a vault for nighttime storage of the Liberty Bell in one wing; and a reception room, men’s and women’s parlors, and a post office in the other wing. The cinema featured motion pictures depicting cultural and industrial sites across the Commonwealth.

The central loggia penetrated through the entire building, an idea that Hornbostel used when designing subsequent buildings. Hornbostel relied heavily on Pittsburgh colleagues for artwork throughout the building. Edward Trumbull, then residing in Pittsburgh, whose commissions included murals for the H.J. Heinz Company Administration Building and prominent buildings in New York and Chicago, painted murals that were installed high in the side walls of the loggia: Penn’s Treaty with the Indians and Pennsylvania Industries. Sue E. Watson, a young sculptor who had recently graduated from Carnegie Tech, and was associated with Hornbostel’s Carnegie Tech Building Bureau, designed relief panels depicting an iron puddler and a coal miner. August Zeller, who taught sculpture at Carnegie Tech and exhibited work at other early twentieth-century expositions, and Earl B. Kinney each designed urns for the approaches to the building. Charles J. Taylor, Professor of Illustration at Carnegie Tech, painted rural scenes that one commentator said were "as typical of rural life as a dozen eggs." Giuseppe Donato of Philadelphia contributed statues of rural figures in the formal garden around the building.
Pittsburgh was the only city represented by its own building at the Sesquicentennial International Exposition. The Pittsburgh Building, designed by Pittsburgh architect Edward B. Lee (1876-1956), was located on axis with the Pennsylvania State building, designed by Philadelphia architect William L. Price, near the main entrance to the fair. Lee, a sometime associate of Henry Hornbostel, designed many institutional projects throughout Western Pennsylvania.

Lee designed an Art Deco pavilion for an exposition that opened only a year after the famed Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes in Paris, which gave birth to the Art Deco style. This up-to-date building was accompanied by a replica of the 1764 Fort Pitt Block House at Pittsburgh’s Point. The building was dedicated on July 24th, 1926; and on Pittsburgh and Stephen C. Foster Day, September 25th, 1926, dignitaries from Pittsburgh and Philadelphia celebrated Pittsburgh’s presence at the fair and witnessed the surreal spectacle of a sham battle from the French and Indian War.

The building’s interior rooms included a main hall, a lounge, an auditorium, a Stephen Collins Foster Room named for the Pittsburgh-born songwriter, and a Samuel Pierpont Langley Room, named for the famous Pittsburgh astronomer and physicist. The main rooms featured elaborate Art Deco detailing and varieties of exhibits that “set forth the civic, educational and industrial progress of Pittsburgh.” Motion pictures addressing the same themes were shown in the auditorium. The named rooms were modestly detailed and featured historic paintings, furniture, and artifacts.

The General Chairman of the planning committee described the building and its contents as “an index to western Pennsylvania’s relative importance in world affairs today, just as in 1776, Pittsburgh was one of the bulwarks of the Colonies in their defense of the frontier.” An inscription on the exterior of the building read:

1758 Pittsburgh 1926

*AS LONG AS THE MONONGAHELA AND ALLEGHENY SHALL FLOW TO FORM THE OHIO AS LONG AS THE ENGLISH TONGUE SHALL BE THE LANGUAGE OF FREEDOM IN THE BOUNDLESS VALLEYS WHICH THESE WATERS TRAVERSE PITTSBURGH SHALL STAND AS THE GATEWAY OF THE WEST.*