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CITY OF PITTSBURGH



HISTORIC REVIEW COMMISSION

NOMINATION FORM FOR HISTORIC STRUCTURES, SITES, OBJECTS, AND DISTRICTS

1. **HISTORICAL NAME OF PROPERTY** Allegheny County Morgue
(If applicable)
2. **CURRENT NAME OF PROPERTY** Allegheny County Mortuary
(If applicable)
3. **LOCATION**
Street 604 - 4th Avenue, Downtown
City, State Pittsburgh, PA
Zip Code 15219
4. **OWNERSHIP**
Name Allegheny County
Street 604 - 4th Avenue
City, State, Zip Code Pittsburgh, PA 15219
5. **CLASSIFICATION**

<u>Category</u>	<u>Accessibility</u>	<u>Ownership</u>
<u>X</u> structure	<u> </u> private	<u> </u> private
<u> </u> district	<u> </u> private, open to the public	<u>X</u> public
<u> </u> site		
<u> </u> object		
6. **NOMINATED BY**
Name Pittsburgh History & Landmarks Foundation
Street One Station Square, Suite 450
City, State, Zip Code Pittsburgh, PA 15219

7. DESCRIPTION

Provide a narrative description of the structure, district, site, or object. If it has been altered over time, indicate the date(s) and nature of the alteration(s). (Attach extra pages if necessary.)

The Allegheny County Morgue imitates in many of its exterior details, the details of the work of H. H. Richardson, the Allegheny County Courthouse and Jail. In the front, the building is 2-1/2 stories, with gables at the sides. The entrance is recessed, with steps rising beyond an archway imitated from the rear entrance of the Courthouse. To either side is a two-part window, with a mullion imitated from the first floor of the Courthouse; There are two other such windows in each end wall, with a narrow window between.

The central window of the second floor is tripartite with colonettes serving as mullions; the Glessner house in Chicago may have suggested this detail. Two pairs of windows on each side are divided by sections of the rock-faced stonework found in the wall. Three single-compartment windows are found in each end wall.

The roof has three dormers imitated from those of the Courthouse, approximately, though they have transoms and mullions, and the central and largest dormer a colonette. The gables have one triple window, with colonettes, under a round arch; to either side is a narrow window, with courses beneath the lintels projecting as corbels.

The first-floor wall extends rearward flush with the front and rear portions of the building. A second-story wall is recessed, suggesting a clerestory.

To the rear are 3-story towers, imitated approximately from the Jail tower over the springing of the Bridge of Sighs. These flank a rear gable with three round-arched windows. The masonry of the rear elevation toward Third Avenue is stone in its upper half; the lower half is observed with plaster and/or paint, and is probably of brick

8. HISTORY

Provide a history of the structure, district, site, or object. Include a bibliography of sources consulted. (Attach extra pages if necessary.) Include copies of relevant source materials with the nomination form (see Number 11).

The Allegheny County Morgue, completed in 1903, originally stood on Diamond Street (today, Forbes Avenue), opposite the old Jail and about 100 feet east of Ross Street. The corner was occupied by the yard of the South School, built in 1841. Construction of the present County Office Building, however, required removal of both buildings in 1929; the school was demolished, but the Morgue was moved downhill to the south side of Fourth Avenue. The Kress-Orvitz Company accomplished the 297-foot move on rails over three weeks.

The architect, Frederick John Osterling (1865-1934) was a Paris-trained practitioner whose office produced a number of notable Pittsburgh buildings: the Times Building, the Arrott Building, and the Union Arcade downtown, as well as a proposed heightening of the Courthouse and additions to the Jail. His office also gave "Clayton" its final appearance, and designed the house of H. J. Heinz. His style was a rather heavy one, and the notable exception, Union Trust, has been attributed to another designer, Pierre A. Liesch, working for him.

Sources

Allegheny County Coroner's Office website,
<http://www.county.allegheny.pa.us/coroner/index.asp> (April 2, 2001).

Allegheny County Historic Sites Survey, *Resource Survey Form* (Pittsburgh History & Landmarks Foundation (March 24, 1980).

Walter Kidney, *Pittsburgh Landmark Architecture: The Historic Buildings of Pittsburgh and Allegheny County*, (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh History & Landmarks Foundation, 1997), pp. 64, 88, 218, 221, 244, 247, 249. (The last page has an entry on the Morgue itself.)

Pittsburgh City Paper online (Chris Potter, writer),
<http://www.pghcitypaper.com/ya8900.html> (April 3, 2001).

Franklin Toker, *Pittsburgh: An Urban Portrait* (State College, Pa.: Penn State University Press, 1976), pp. 72, 78, and 158.

9. SIGNIFICANCE

The *Pittsburgh Code of Ordinances, Title 11, Historic Preservation, Chapter 1: Historic Structures, Districts, Sites and Objects* lists ten criteria, at least one of which must be met for Historic Designation. Describe how the structure, district, site, or object meets one or more of these criteria. (Attach extra pages if necessary.)

The Allegheny County Morgue meets Criterion 5, because of

5. Its exemplification of important planning and urban design techniques distinguished by innovation, rarity, uniqueness, or overall quality of design or detail;

In its original location, the Morgue picked up details from the Jail and Courthouse, and through these, and its proximity to these other buildings, identified these as a County group.

10. NOTIFICATION/CONSENT OF PROPERTY OWNER(S)

Attached

11. NUMBER AND SUBJECTS OF PHOTOGRAPHS INCLUDED WITH THE NOMINATION FORM

1. South School, with the Allegheny County Morgue on the left, 1910 (photo courtesy Pittsburgh Photographic Library, Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh).
2. Allegheny County Morgue, c. 1920's; view of façade now covered by parking garage (photo courtesy Pittsburgh History & Landmarks Foundation).

8 Slides Attached – (reproduced as copy photos)

12. LIST OF SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS SUBMITTED WITH THE NOMINATION FORM

Pennsylvania Historic Resource Survey Form "Allegheny County Morgue"

NOMINATION FORM PREPARED BY:

Name Walter C. Kidney, Pittsburgh History & Landmarks Foundation

Address One Station Square, Suite 450, Pittsburgh, PA 15219

Telephone 412-471-5808

ALLEGHENY COUNTY MORTUARY

542 Fourth Avenue

Historic Structure Nomination

Issues Paper for Preliminary Determination of Eligibility

Nomination Information

Owner:	County of Allegheny
Nominated By:	Pittsburgh History & Landmarks Foundation
Date of Nomination:	February 1, 2002

Building Information

Date of Construction:	1903; moved 1928
Architect:	Frederick John Osterling
National Register Status:	Eligible

Zoning Information

Ward:	1
Neighborhood:	Downtown
Block and Lot Number:	002-J-044
Zoning:	GT

DESCRIPTION

The Allegheny County Mortuary is a three-story Richardsonian Romanesque building located at the corner of Ross Street and Fourth Avenue in the southeast section of downtown Pittsburgh, which is dominated by municipal and county government buildings. The front and rear façades face Fourth Avenue and Third Avenue, respectively, and are built to the sidewalk, while the Ross Street façade is set back behind a parking lot. The building's eastern facade has been obscured by an abutting parking structure. The Mortuary mimics the materials and many of the exterior details of H. H. Richardson's own Allegheny County Courthouse and Jail.

The building is rectangular in plan but varied on its facades. There is a front "wing," three bays wide, three bays deep, and two and a half stories high beneath a side-gabled clay tile roof. The front façade has a central entrance recessed behind a broad archway that is copied from the rear entrance of the Courthouse. Above this arch, the central window on the second story has three double-hung sash divided by colonettes. A pair of double-hung windows flanks the central bay on each side. On the third floor, three front-facing dormers with arched openings, colonettes, and stone coping and finials also imitate those on the Courthouse.

The gable ends of the front wing have double-hung windows on the first and second floors. On the third floor, a trio of double-hung windows divided by colonettes is topped by a stone band, a

corresponding trio of arched openings, and a large arch containing the entire composition. This is flanked by a double-hung window on each side.

The central wing of the building consists of two stories beneath a gabled roof perpendicular to the main roof. The second floor has five round-arched window openings on each side and is set back into the center of the property. The first floor walls are built out to a plane flush with the east and west side walls of the front wing and have three widely-spaced double-hung sash.

At the rear of the building are a pair of 3-story corner towers with pyramidal clay tile roofs flanking a gable containing three round-arched windows. The towers are approximate copies of the tower on the Allegheny County Jail at the Bridge of Sighs. The masonry on the rear facade of the Mortuary, which faces Third Avenue, is parged from the springs of the window arches down.

The mortuary building originally stood across Forbes Avenue from the Allegheny County Jail. It was moved to its present location in 1928.

HISTORY

When it was completed in 1903, the Allegheny County Mortuary completed a complex of county government buildings begun 20 years before with the commissioning of H.H. Richardson's Allegheny County Courthouse and Jail. In 1882, the second Allegheny County Courthouse burned to the ground, and the County Commissioners and County Engineer held a competition for a replacement. In selecting the design of H.H. Richardson, the County bought the services of America's greatest 19th century architect, whose designs would influence and transform architecture not only in Pittsburgh but across the country. The Allegheny County Courthouse and Jail was completed in 1886 and dedicated in 1888. Richardson did not live to see the completion of the buildings, however; he died on April 27, 1886, at the height of his career. His assistants, organized as the firm of Shepley, Rutan, and Coolidge, oversaw the completion of the work. Richardson himself considered the Allegheny County Courthouse and Jail to be the culmination of his career, belittling his other works as "pygmy" in comparison.

Richardson's work was based on medieval European prototypes and was known for its emphasis on the mass and texture of its masonry construction. His designs employed massive, rock-faced stone walls, emphasized by recessed entrances and window openings; broad round arches; stubby columns; and medievalistic ornament frequently featuring stylized plant and animal forms. These became the hallmarks of his work and of the style he influenced, with which he was so strongly personally associated that it bore his name: the Richardsonian Romanesque. Richardson combined these stylistic features with simple building plans and masses, often composed of elemental shapes and forms.

As in other places where he designed buildings, Richardson's work was profoundly influential in Pittsburgh and western Pennsylvania. For a period of approximately a decade, from about 1885 to 1895, Richardsonian Romanesque was an architectural style that swept the neighborhoods and

commercial districts of Pittsburgh. Both local and nationally-known architects designed buildings in the style. Although the style went out of fashion in the late 1890s, superseded by the revival of interest in Classical design that followed the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893, the County continued to use it for additions to the county administration complex that Richardson had begun.

In 1901, the County prepared to build a mortuary on land opposite the jail at Forbes Avenue and Ross Street and commissioned architect Frederick J. Osterling to design the building. Osterling was a Paris-trained architect whose office was responsible for a number of notable Pittsburgh buildings, including the house of H.J. Heinz and the expansion and redesign of Clayton for the Frick family in then-suburban Point Breeze, and the Arrott Building and the Times Building, the latter also in the Richardsonian Romanesque Style, downtown. Osterling was also the official architect for the Union Trust building, although the design has been attributed to another architect, Pierre A. Liesch, who worked for him.

When the County awarded Osterling the contract to design the new mortuary building, they presumably gave him instructions to make it fit in as seamlessly as possible with the original Richardson County buildings. Osterling obliged with a design that imitates and, in parts, copies Richardson's earlier work. After the Mortuary was complete, the County tapped Osterling to expand the Allegheny County Jail, which he did with more precise adherence to Richardson's use of materials and detail. The execution of these additions to the County complex demonstrates that County administrators – and their architect, Osterling – clearly knew they had a treasure in Richardson's Courthouse and Jail, and regarded imitation as the sincerest form of flattery, even after the Richardson Romanesque had gone out of style.

By the 1920s, styles had changed, and Pittsburgh's fashion for the Richardsonian Romanesque gave way to the Classical Revival and then the Art Deco, a modern style characterized by simplified geometric forms. The stylistic and spatial integrity of the County complex was interrupted by the construction of the County Office Building in the late 1920s. The location of this new building on the full block bounded by Ross Street and Fourth and Forbes Avenues necessitated the removal of the Allegheny County Mortuary. Another building on the new County Office Building site, the 1841 South School, was demolished, but the Mortuary was moved 297 feet away to its present site. The Kress-Orvitz Company hoisted the building onto a causeway, where it was dragged on rails by a team of horses. Though the trip was mostly downhill, it took three weeks to complete.

ORDINANCE

1. HRC's Determination of Reasonable Cause: Section 1.3(c)(2)(A) of the Pittsburgh Historic Preservation Ordinance reads: *"The Commission shall decide if there is reasonable cause to determine that the nominated district, structure, site, or object will meet the definitions in Section 1.2.... Listing (or eligibility for listing) in the national Register of Historic Places may be considered as evidence of the reasonable cause described above, but it shall not be considered determinative."*

2. Definition of Historic Structure: Section 1.2(a) of the Pittsburgh Historic Preservation Ordinance reads: *"Historic Structure" means anything constructed or erected, the use of which requires directly or indirectly, a permanent location of land, including walks, fences, steps and sidewalks, which meets one or more of the criteria for designation as listed in Section 1.4."*
3. Criteria for Designation: According to Section 1.4, a building must meet at least one of the following criteria in order to be designated a historic structure, district, site, or object:
 1. Its location as a site of a significant historic or prehistoric event or activity;
 2. Its identification with a person or persons who significantly contributed to the cultural, historic, architectural, archaeological, or related aspects of the development of the City of Pittsburgh, State of Pennsylvania, Mid-Atlantic region, or the United States;
 3. Its exemplification of an architectural type, style or design distinguished by innovation, rarity, uniqueness, or overall quality of design, detail, materials, or craftsmanship;
 4. Its identification as the work of an architect, designer, engineer, or builder whose individual work is significant in the history or development of the City of Pittsburgh, the State of Pennsylvania, the Mid-Atlantic region, or the United States;
 5. Its exemplification of important planning and urban design techniques distinguished by innovation, rarity, uniqueness, or overall quality of design or detail;
 6. Its location as a site of an important archaeological resource;
 7. Its association with important cultural or social aspects or events in the history of the City of Pittsburgh, the State of Pennsylvania, the Mid-Atlantic region, or the United States;
 8. Its exemplification of a pattern of neighborhood development or settlement significant to the cultural history or traditions of the City, whose components may lack individual distinction;
 9. Its representation of a cultural, historic, architectural, archaeological, or related theme expressed through distinctive areas, properties, sites, structures, or objects that may or may not be contiguous; or
 10. Its unique location and distinctive physical appearance or presence representing an established and familiar visual feature of a neighborhood, community, or the City of Pittsburgh.

In addition, the ordinance specifies that "Any area, property, site, structure or object that meets any one or more of the criteria listed above shall also have sufficient integrity of location, design, materials, and workmanship to make it worthy of preservation or restoration.

EFFECT OF PRELIMINARY DETERMINATION

The Commission's preliminary determination about this nomination does not necessarily predict how the Commission will vote in its recommendation to City Council. The immediate effect of this vote will be the continuation or the lifting of the Commission's regulation of the building during the nomination process. A negative vote in the preliminary determination does not stop the nomination from proceeding; the Commission will still have to make its recommendation to Council, and Council will still have to vote on the designation.

STAFF EVALUATION

On preliminary review, Staff finds that the Allegheny County Mortuary is likely to meet two criteria for designation: (2) identification as a distinctive work of architecture, and (4) identification with the work of a significant architect.

The Allegheny County Mortuary is important for its exemplification of the Richardsonian Romanesque style, used in this case not only for the sake of architectural fashion but to expand the County office complex that Richardson himself had designed, quoting Richardson's own architectural signatures. The Mortuary is also significant for being designed by Frederick J. Osterling, one of Pittsburgh's most prominent and versatile local architects of the turn of the twentieth century.

Therefore, Staff recommends that the Historic Review Commission find that there is reasonable cause to believe that the Allegheny County Mortuary meets the definition of "Historic Structure" under the Pittsburgh Historic Preservation Ordinance.

John DeSantis, Chair
Thomas M. Schmidt, Vice Chair
Ronald S. Graziano, Secretary
William Barron
Michael Eversmeyer
Howard K. Graves
Susan Golomb

CITY OF PITTSBURGH



HISTORIC REVIEW COMMISSION

March 14, 2002

Mr. Walter Kidney
Pittsburgh History & Landmarks Foundation
One Station Square
The Landmarks Building
Pittsburgh, PA 15219

**Re: Nomination of 542 Fourth Avenue – *The Allegheny County Mortuary*
To be a City Designated Historic Structure**

Dear Mr. Kidney:

As you are aware, on March 13, 2002 the Historic Review Commission made a preliminary review of the nomination of 542 Fourth Avenue, *The Allegheny County Mortuary*, to be a City Designated Historic Structure.

The members of the Commission determined that there is reasonable cause to believe that the nomination will meet the definition of "Historic Structure" as set forth in the City's Historic Preservation Ordinance.

As a result of the preliminary finding that the nominated structure is eligible for designation, the Commission's regulation of any exterior renovations that are visible from a public way will continue during the designation process (for a maximum of eight months).

The Historic Review Commission will hold a Public Hearing at its regular monthly meeting on Wednesday, April 3, 2002 to take testimony from the public concerning the appropriateness of the proposed designation. This hearing will be held after 1:00 PM in the Commission Hearing Room on the first floor of the John P. Robin Civic Building at 200 Ross Street, Downtown. All members of the public are invited to attend. A copy of the agenda will be sent to you.

The Historic Review Commission may make its recommendation to City Council concerning the designation of the nomination at its May 1, 2002 meeting. This recommendation, together with the recommendation of the City Planning Commission in May 2002, will be transmitted to Council for its review and for Council's final decision.

If you have any questions, please feel free to call my office at 412-255-2243.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Angelique Bamberg".

Angelique Bamberg
Historic Preservation Planner

cc: Norman B. Mekelsen, Director, Allegheny County General Services Department
Cathy McCollom, PH&LF
Dan Holland

(HRCNOM/ALLEGHNEYCOUNTYMORTUARY/PRELIMINARYYES.DOC)