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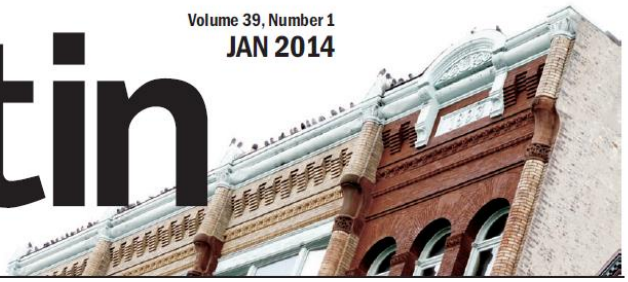
Serving Bloomfield, Friendship, Garfield, East Liberty, Lawrenceville and Stanton Heights Since 1975



Stairway to Pittsburgh

Lawrenceville and Bloomfield Steps

A Photo Essay by Adam Eisenstat
Bulletin Contributor

Ella Street stairs (late summer abloom)

Pittsburgh is a steep city, a city of hills. No wonder it's home to more public stairways – 700-plus – than anywhere else in the country. These picturesque, often dilapidated stairs – etched into hillsides, ranging over and under freeways and streets – are unique exemplars of "local color" and vivid expressions of the city's unique topography.

The stairways of Pittsburgh are relics from another time, when they were mostly used by industrial workers, moving between their hilltop neighborhoods and the factories below.

The first Pittsburgh stairways were built around 200 years ago (though none from that period still exist); many others were built through public works projects during the Depression.

Bloomfield and Lawrenceville boast more than a few public stairways, which like those in other neighborhoods take on the distinct character of their surroundings. The Ella Street stairs are sublime – at the edge of Bloomfield, sticking up from the pall of greenery draping the hillside; carving a path down to the hollow, where nature and the built world continue their struggle, tussling on the pavement and beside the railroad. The overgrown stairway and its surroundings form an interstitial space, a limbo – neither street nor road nor urban woodland, but an odd nexus where all three merge at some points and diverge at others.

Stairways offering passage through otherwise treacherous hills are Classic Pittsburgh, taming nature with industry; yet they're also emblems of entropy, conveying nature's dominance and inevitable victory. ♦

Adam Eisenstat's work can found at I-Vortext.com. On January 16, he'll be giving a multimedia presentation at the Lawrenceville Historical Society (for more details: www.lhs15201.org).

Stairway up to the bottom

The same staircase (late winter gloom)

Obsolete stairs fade into nature like Aztec ruins