

# O'HARA TOWNSHIP

## Comprehensive Development Plan

### Chapter 2 - Early History

The O'Hara Township History Committee has assembled a significant volume of historical data from primary and secondary sources, about persons, places and events which have provided the community with a rich heritage. In 2008, a book entitled "Portrait of an American Community: O'Hara Township, PA" was published with the support of the History Committee. Written and edited by Tom Powers and other committee members, this history book is an invaluable source of information and photographs unique to the Township as it evolved from one of the Country's early frontiers to an eclectic community of some nine thousand (9,000) residents.

Significant dates and periods with commentary are provided here courtesy of the O'Hara Township History Committee.

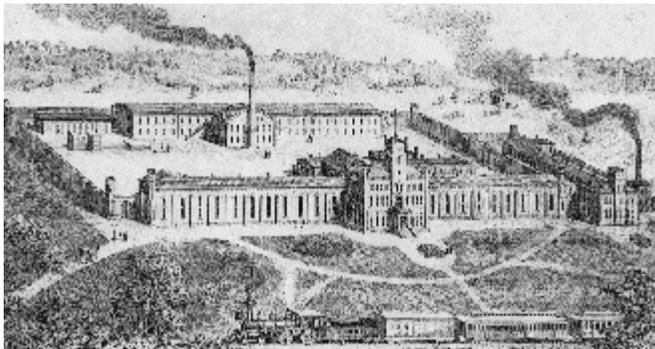
- 1750's- Seneca Indians (also known as the Mingos) inhabit the region. Virginia and Pennsylvania claim the territory. The dispute is not resolved until after the Revolutionary War.



- 1784- The State of Pennsylvania purchases land north of the Allegheny River.
- 1788- Allegheny County is formed. Present-day O'Hara Township is part of Pitt Township which included what is now the Greater Pittsburgh area.
- 1794- James O'Hara purchases land in present day O'Hara at a sheriff's sale. The tract included land between what is now the Boy Scout Camp and the Allegheny River.
- 1797- The area's first settler, James Powers, who probably arrived in the area around 1785, purchases a Depreciation land lot along with his brother Thomas in order to stake a legal claim. His decedents continue to live in the area.
- 1803- U.S. Senator James Ross acquires lands extending from present-day Aspinwall to the former County
- 1837- Workhouse in O'Hara. In 1820, he establishes his estate the "Meadows" where Get-Go now stands.



- 1805- Pitt Township is divided. Indiana Township is created and included lands which will become the following areas: Aspinwall, Blawnox, Fox Chapel, O'Hara, Harmar, Indiana, Shaler, and portions of Sharpsburg, Hampton, and East and West Deer.
- 1829- Pennsylvania Mail Line Canal helps settle the northern side of the Allegheny River, including our area, by sustaining grist mills, logging camps, and farms along the canal.
- 1850- The Western Division of the Pennsylvania Railroad purchases the canal rights. Trains begin to replace the  
1870's- canals spurring further population growth by allowing easier transportation to the "countryside."
- 1860- The Allegheny City Poor House, County Workhouse and farm are erected in the area. Oil storage and an  
1870's- oil refinery plants are established along the Allegheny River during the Pennsylvania oil boom.



- June 8, Allegheny County divides Indiana Township, resulting in three municipalities: O'Hara, Indiana, and  
1875- Harmar. O'Hara includes present-day O'Hara, Aspinwall, Blawnox, and Fox Chapel.
- 1892- Aspinwall separates from O'Hara.
- 1902- The City of Pittsburgh constructs a water filtration plant on the former site of an H.J. Heinz cabbage  
1908- farm and sauerkraut factory. It annexed the land for "water supply, distribution, and filtration plant purposes." The Waterworks Mall, St. Margaret Hospital, and the water plant currently occupy this area.



1910's- Our community strengthens through the growth of John F. Casey construction company and Blaw-Knox manufacturing company. Oil drilling booms in Western Pennsylvania, and several area residents try their luck with moderate success.

Trains, and later streetcars, bring picnickers to the "country." They enjoy strolls through Ross Grove, now Fox Chapel Plaza, and the carousel at National Park.

May 1911- John Kowalsky of Verona is the first local to build and fly an airplane. His experimental flights took place on the future site of Rodgers Field. A more successful flight took place later that year in September.



1925- Blawnox separates from O'Hara.

June 5, 1925- Rodger Field (near Fox Chapel Area High School) is dedicated and was Pittsburgh's municipal airport until the Allegheny County Airport was opened in 1931.

1928- National Park opens featuring the "Thunderbolt" roller coaster and many other amusement rides. It was located between Oak Hill Manor and the County Workhouse.

1930- In response to a proposed dog track and water park near National Park, the Fox Chapel District Association, a citizens group, petitions O'Hara Township to enact a zoning ordinance.

Apr. 7, 1931- A zoning committee is formed and the ordinance is passed.

May 29, 1932- The charismatic radio priest, Fr. James R. Cox, opens "Coxtown" a planned community built to house victims of the Great Depression. It was located on Calmwood Road. The venture failed and the property was sold by 1939.

Jan. 1933- The Fox Chapel District Association recommends the formation of a separate borough.

Aug. 9, 1934- Allegheny County Court orders the incorporation of Fox Chapel Borough.

1940- In the midst of the post-World War II suburban boom, various areas petition to be annexed into Fox  
1951- Chapel. The result is O'Hara's unique present-day configuration : five noncontiguous sections.

1960's- The Allegheny Valley Expressway, Route 28, and local interchanges provide quicker access to Pittsburgh and neighboring employment centers.

O'Hara Township's Municipal Building, two Junior High Schools and the Senior High School are dedicated.

1964- RIDC Park opens in O'Hara Township, on the site of the County Workhouse and farm, and again, spurs population growth.

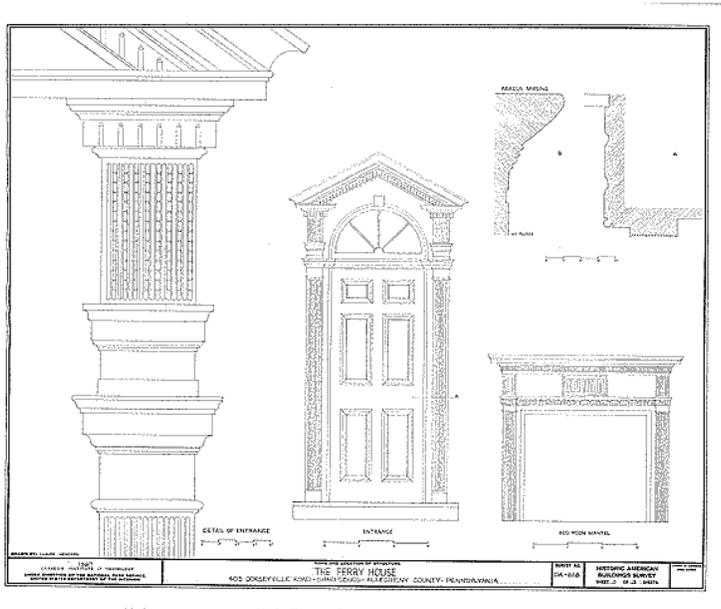
1970's- In spite if the decline in average family and household sizes, housing units in the Township continue to increase.

1980's- St. Margaret Memorial Hospital opens its 267 bed facility and the Waterworks Mall opens on City property.

RIDC park expands and is home to over 100 companies employing over 8,000 people.

2000's- Waterfront development is initiated and a major expansion of the VA Hospital is completed.

**BUILT IN AMERICA**



The Library of Congress, American Memory Home, Built in America series, has named three (3) buildings in O'Hara Township as part of this series.

**Ferry House, 403 Dorseyville Road (O'Hara Township), Sharpsburg vicinity, Allegheny County, PA**

**VA Medical Center, Aspinwall Division, 5103 Delafield Avenue (O'Hara Township), Aspinwall vicinity, Allegheny County, PA**



VA Medical Center, Aspinwall Division, Infirmary Building, 5103 Delafield Avenue (O'Hara Township), Aspinwall vicinity, Allegheny County, PA





The center of attention in the Montrose area was the Montrose Hotel, located for eighty (80) years at the docks for the ferry to Verona, a rail center on the opposite eastern shore of the Allegheny River. There were indications as far back as the 1850's that there had been a ferry service between the two (2) shores and that a tavern or hotel had been there to service the traffic.

## SUMMARY

O'Hara Township's early and more recent history and that of the region have continually shaped the Township's present character, assets, and unique municipal boundary configuration. The Township's History Committee has compiled a publication entitled "Portrait of an American Community: O'Hara Township, PA," which is a tremendous resource. Major benchmarks in the early history of the O'Hara region, include the County Workhouse and farm property, which was developed into the Regional Industrial Development Corporation Park. In addition, the incorporation of adjoining municipalities from land originally included in the O'Hara Township subregion to form the present configuration of O'Hara Township's boundaries represented the diversity of early industrial impacts on areas being settled.