

Our "Window" in This Issue Is

The Oculus through which Such Beautiful Light Comes Down from the Sky

The sun moved into an interesting place in the sky one day in early August, about two weeks before the solar eclipse. It was midway between "Kennywood Day" and Ferragosto, when some of our Monongahela ambassadors were in the small town of Ono San Pietro, in Brescia, Italy, completing the Sister Cities process. The light was cast onto Monongahela's beautiful church steeples, but it came down from the sky in a hue that spoke more of October-November than of August vacations, swimming pools, or sweltering heat.

Thankfully, I was standing outside the Monongahela Area Library, with my phone-camera on hand, enabling me to bring this experience onto this page just in time for Fall.

These are beautiful buildings. Their architecture is exquisite and has been very well maintained. The bell towers and needle-like spires draw our eyes up toward God in His heaven as He watches over us.

The church now known as St. Damien's was built as the Church of the Transfiguration in 1906. It is the work of a highly regarded Pittsburgh-based architect who specialized in Roman Catholic churches, John T. Comès. A native of Luxembourg, Comès designed similar sized churches in Pittsburgh, Butler, Johnstown, McKeesport, and Homestead, and some that were further away, such as the Roman Catholic Cathedrals in Atlanta, Georgia, and Salt Lake City, Utah, as well as parish churches in St. Paul, Minnesota; Shrewsbury, Missouri; Victoria, Kansas; Rochester and Oswego, New York; and Cleveland, Toledo, and Cincinnati in Ohio. He also designed St. Jerome's in Charleroi. While the Charleroi church has a massive, off-center tower/steeple that rises out of the tapestry of Charleroi's modest sized houses and store buildings, like a needle passing through a plush piece of fabric, St. Gertrude's in Vandergrift, overlooking that model town which was built to empower a community of steel workers, has two symmetrical towers and alternating stone and brick colors to create bold horizontal stripes like those on a gondolier's shirt. Yet the three are similar in age, style, and relationship to the surrounding community.

From the time the Transfiguration building was built, it has housed what I believe may have consistently been the city's largest religious congregation. In certain decades, it had a couple of Protestant rivals for the title of largest, but there have also been extended periods of time in which the Roman Catholic membership in the Monongahela area (including St. Anthony's) was approximately equal to the combined size of all the Protestant and Orthodox churches located within the city limits put together, including 12-14 Protestant congregations and three or four of the Orthodox/Eastern Catholic affiliations.

The Transfiguration building was built with two spires (i.e., steeples), but they were removed after being struck by lightning in 1925. As much as there was a mania to build steeples between the 1860s and about 1910, there was a mania about 1925 to remove them. The steeple at St. Paul's Episcopal was increasing leaning by that time, and it perhaps had to be removed. The tallest of all steeples in town, at First Methodist, was removed in 1925 in a decision that was almost immediately and almost universally regretted until Charles Stephens donated eleven bells that are now mounted in its belfry.

Behind Comès's Church of the Transfiguration in our image is Bethel AME, one of Monongahela's most revered institutions of any kind. Bethel AME has been historically one of the smaller congregations in terms of numbers of members, but one with an impact on community activities that has always rivaled (or, by any "per-capita" standard, surpassed) any other church in town.

Bethel AME was designed and built by local architect John Blythe who used a similar but more complex pattern in building First Presbyterian Church, one block up West Main Street. John Blythe was on the building committee for First Methodist Church, designed by Philadelphia architect Joseph C. Hoxie, which was constructed over a nine or ten year period, 1864-1874. In the latter half of that period, Blythe had three churches under construction, the third one being the former building occupied (until the early 1980s) by First Baptist, which was frame and originally had wood siding cut with vertical lines to make it look like stone. First Baptist was similar in layout and detailing to Bethel AME, except built of wood frame and having a tower but no spire.

Photo by Terry A. Necciai, RA

October 2017

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
Noon-6PM, Sat., Oct. 1st, Spaghetti Dinner benefit Deacon Al Poroda's medical costs, Madonna School 2-7PM, Oct. 1st, Spaghetti Dinner, benefit Jan Zenobi, Donora Social Hall 5PM, Bingo, Bunola Fire Hall	11AM-7PM, Spaghetti Dinner, New Eagle VFD Social Hall, benefits Monongahela Area Library Save The Date Sunday, 12:30, 5 Nov.—John Barbero Memorial Scholarship Auction, Mon Valley YMCA	7PM, New Eagle Borough Council 11AM, Coffee & Chess, Little City Coffee 11AM, Story Time, Monongahela Area Library 7PM, BSA Roundtable, First United Methodist Church	6PM, Library Board, Monongahela Area Library 11AM, Story Time, Monongahela Area Library 5:30, Writers Group, Monongahela Area Lib. 6PM, Keep Cursive Current, Monongahela Area Library 7PM, Blessing of the Animals, at True Vine Church	Noon, Mon. Rotary Club, Hills Restaurant 6PM, Girl Scouts at First United Methodist Church 4:30, K'Nex Club, Monongahela Area Library (also on 19 Oct.) 5:30, Color Me Happy, Monongahela Area Library	Brian Anselmino Memorial Golf Outing, Lindenwood, Canonsburg 8AM-2PM, Rummage Sale at St. Nicholas Orthodox Church, Candlelight Ghostwalk tours: 6, 7, 13, 14, 20, 21, 28 October 7:15PM, Chess Park	8AM-3PM, Fall Fleatique-on-the-Mon, 12-block long event, Including: Indoor Fleatique at First United Methodist Church; Knights of Columbus Barbecue Dierkens Pharmacy Parking Lot; Indoor Flea Market at St. Mary's Orthodox Church; Bazaar at Bethel AME
5PM, Bingo, Bunola Fire Hall 10AM-6PM, Saturday & Sunday, Spookley Weekend events at Triple B Farms, Bunola	OBSERVED 8AM-3PM, Bethel AME Bazaar There are 104 events listed on this month's calendar, of which 85 are in Oct. & in Monongahela. That's a lot of reasons to come into town.	11AM, Coffee & Chess, Little City Coffee 11AM, Story Time, Monongahela Area Library Suggestion: Schedule future Oct. events: for the 1st Friday, 2nd Monday, or final Sunday.	7PM, Monongahela City Council 6PM, Chamber of Commerce, Hospital 11AM, Story Time, Monongahela Area Library 6PM, Keep Cursive Current 7-10PM, Country Dance, American Legion, Dunkirk	12 Ministerium , 1st UMC Noon, Mon. Rotary Club, Hills Restaurant 5:30-6:30, Color Me Happy, Monongahela Area Library 7PM, Boy Scouts Troop 1448, 1st Christian (every Thursday)	13 6PM, Game Night, Little City Coffee 6-7:30PM, Dance through the Decades, Mon Valley YMCA Candlelight Ghostwalk tours: 6, 7, 13, 14, 20, 21, 28 October 7:15PM, Chess Park	9AM, Halloween Fun Show at SydMor Arena, Park Avenue Star Party at Mingo Observatory Candlelight Ghostwalk tours: 6, 7, 13, 14, 20, 21, 28 October 7:15PM, Chess Park
10AM-6PM, Saturday & Sunday, Mad Science & Magic events at Triple B Farms, Bunola 1-4PM, Columbiettes 6th Annual Penny Bingo, Madonna School Hall 7PM, Prize Bingo, Bunola VFD Cement City Walking Tour, Donora New Shop: Faith's Curiosities, 219 W. Main, Tentative Opening Date,	5PM, Girl Scouts, First United Methodist Church 5-6:30PM, Art of the Month, Monongahela Area Library 7PM, MARC General Membership mtg., Sunday School Parlor, 1st Presbyterian Church	11AM, Coffee & Chess, Little City Coffee 11AM, Story Time, Monongahela Area Library Saturday, October 28th 7-11PM, "The Apple Pie Alternative" - Free Coffee and dessert while supplies last, First United Methodist Church	118 11AM, Story Time, Monongahela Area Library 5:30 Writers Group, Monongahela Area Library 6PM, Keep Cursive Current, Monongahela Area Library	Noon, Mon. Rotary Club, Hills Restaurant 1-2 PM – Book Bites Book Club, ("Holly Spring," by Jan Karon), Monongahela Area Library 4:30, K'Nex Club, Library 5:30-6:30, Color Me Happy, Monongahela Area Library	Fri. 20th & Sat. 21st Monongahela Area Historical Society Ghost Walk Tours, Chess Park 5-6PM, Boy Scouts Troop 1352, St. Damien's (every Friday) 7PM, Friday Praise at 1st United Methodist Church	2 1 3-6PM, Spaghetti Dinner, 1st U. Methodist 7PM, concert "River Rising," First Baptist Church At Dusk, Adult Trick-or- Treating, by Monongahela- Donora Lions Club Mounds Park,
10AM-6PM, Saturday & Sunday, Fun & Mad Science Weekend at Triple B Farms, Bunola 5PM, Bingo, Bunola Fire Hall	6PM, MonDonora Lions Club, Mtg., Donora Library 5-6:30PM, Spooky Science, Monongahela Area Library Forward Twp. "Trunk"-Or-Treat at Gallatin-S.S. Park, Hours: 6-8PM, Wednesday, October 25th The Monongahela Main	11AM, Coffee & Chess, Little City Coffee 11AM, Story Time, Monongahela Area Library 6-8PM, Gerrymandering ad You, Monongahela Area Library Street Program's Second A.	25 11AM, Story Time, Mon. Area Library 6PM, Keep Cursive Current, Monongahela Area Library Monongahela Halloween Parade, 6PM line-up, starts at 6:30 7-10PM, Country Dance, American Legion, Dunkirk	Noon, Mon. Rotary Club, Hills Restaurant 5:30-6:30, Color Me Happy, Mon. Area Library Monongahela Area Historical Society Annual Banquet, Dean Helfer speaking on the history of Channelcraft, Hospital Conf. Ctr. g Jack-O-Lanterns" display a	9PM, 27 "Creepy Tales" Walking Tour of Mt. Zion Cemetery, Ginger Hill 6PM, Game Night, Little City Coffee 7PM, Movie night at 1st U. Methodist, showing: 90 Minutes to Heaven	9AM, Prayer Walk starting at First United Methodist Church 7-11PM, Prayer Vigil, First United Methodist Church 6-8PM, Trick-Or-Treat Hours In Monongahela and New Eagle, 5-7PM in Carrolll Twp. 3-10pm, Witch Festival, Aquatorium
29 10AM-6PM, Saturday & Sunday, Halloweekend at Triple B Farms, Bunola Union Twp. "Trunk"-Or-Treat at Mingo Church, Hours: 6-8PM, Wednesday, October 29th	30 4PM, Nookworms Teen Book Club, Asylum by Madeleine Roux, Mon. Area Library Forward Twp. Trick-Or-Treat Hours: 6-8PM, Tuesday, October 31st	31 HALLOWEEN 11AM, Story Time, Mon. Area Library "Save The Date" 17 Nov 5-9PM Light-Up Night-style Festival & Parade, and legend has it that "Santa Claus is Shopping in Town"	Save The Date November 11th The Washington County Veterans Day Parade will be on West Main Street in Monongahela this year	Save The Date The Monongahela Main Street Program is sponsoring a Bus Tout to participate in the Brownsville Feast and Wine Tasting known as "A Taste of Italy," and to see BARC's many revitalization projects underway downtown	The Bethel AME Bazaar for this year will be on October 7th during the Fleatique-on-the-Mon, 8AM-3PM & on Mon. Oct. 9th, thru Supper Novelty Items, Household Goods, and Free Clothing! & on Monday, Corn Fritters Breakfast & Pot Pie Supper	Check out our "Monongahela Main Street Program" Page on Facebook & "Like Us" if you do (Please!)

\$2 Suggested Donation

The whispers of a steamboat organ playing somewhere around the corner, not far from Main Street....

by Terry A. Necciai, RA, Preservation Architect / Architectural Historian (703) 731-6266

Vol. 4, No.10

Check out the "Monongahela Main Street Program" Facebook Page,

and "Like Us" (if you do).

Officers/Members of the Monongahela Main Street Program
President: Dan Tregembo Vice President: Tobias Provan
Secretary: Paula Pro Treasurer: Christopher Grilli
City Representative: Ken Kulak

At-Large Bd. Members: Anthony Bottino, Randall Rodriguez, Dorothea Pemberton, Scott Frederick, and Margaret Brown.

Executive Director: Terry Necciai

The Monongahela Main Street Program is a charitable corporation incorporated under the laws of Pennsylvania and has been designated by the U.S. Internal Revenue Service, as of August 2017, as a 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation.

Brownsville, Pennsylvania - Saturday, November 4th A Tour of the Town, plus Feast and Wine Tasting THERE STILL MAY BE SOME SEATS AVAILABLE! An opportunity to see the amazing transformation that

is underway in the Mon Valley Town of Brownsville

The Monongahela Main Street Program has scheduled its fall bus tour, which this year will be a visit to Brownsville to attend an event known as "A Taste of Italy," a suppertime feast with the opportunity to sample homemade wine made by local families. At least one of the winemakers who participates each year, Tom Hultz, lives in the Monongahela Area.

Departing at 1PM from the Aquatorium, and returning about 8:30PM, after the 6PM dinner.

Our guide will be Norma Ryan, former mayor and a board member of the Brownsville Area Revitalization Corporation (BARC) which owns almost a dozen downtown buildings where rehabilitation projects are either completed or in the planning.

The tour will include visits to:

- the Flatiron Building Heritage Center.
- St. Peter's Church, one of the most amazing pieces of architecture in the Mon Valley.
- The Rose House, originally an 1873 bank, which will one day be a bed-and-breakfast.
- Brownsville's two National Register-listed historic districts
- The Thompson House (now Twelve Oaks restaurant), an "architect's tour" of the building as restored in 1995.
- The Cast Iron Amphitheater, a project designed by local high school students, led by a teacher who has recently been hired by Ringgold School District.

Make your reservation today. Contact the Monongahela Main Street Program at mainstreet15063@gmail.com, or stop in the Monongahela Area Chamber of Commerce Office at 212 West Main Street for more details.

(continued from the from the calendar side)

The Bethel congregation ambitiously set out, about 1868, to build a church that cost several times as much as First Baptist, although less than First Methodist and First Presbyterian. Before the work was completed, part of the congregation decided to change affiliations and build a Baptist church. The result was that the determined members who remained at Bethel took a little longer to complete the work. The sanctuary was plastered and dedicated in the 1890s, about 25 years after the exterior was completed.

Bethel AME's steeple also suffered from lightning, not once but twice (who says that never happens?). The first lightning strike, at some point in the mid-twentieth century, resulted in the steeple being re-clad in asphalt shingles. These may have contributed to the second strike that occurred during a heavy storm in September 1987. After the 1987 storm, the building had no steeple for about one year. Yohe Roofing fabricated the current steeple in stages at their shop, duplicating the original appearance as seen in an 1876 atlas drawing.

Monongahela's number of churches rose to seven by the 1860s. This number eventually more than doubled, and some buildings have seen a shuffling of names and affiliations more recently as congregations have split, merged, or otherwise redefined themselves. However, the total number of churches within the city line has remained at about 17. Some parts of the larger story are reminiscent of the old joke sometimes relayed in church sermons: "Our town used to have two churches, but they merged, and so now we have three."

These congregations maintain impressive buildings that help to make our Main Street area an "inspiring" architectural composition. Two or three of them represent real estate that is insured at a value of over \$1million per building. Some have endowments that are equal to that number, allowing them to carry out consistent programs of maintenance and repair. I don't know if anyone has ever added up the attendance statistics of all these churches to get one number. And it varies, of course, from week to week in today's busy and eclectic world. But it is my guess that the weekly attendance of all the churches combined is at least 1,000. I know that in a secular sense, these churches add to our community's civility and well-being, and the Good Lord must look down favorably on a community where so many work so hard and so consistently, but in so many different ways and styles, to love one another and to make their community excel as they accept His generous blessings as the resources by which they sustain their lives.

In the mid-1870s, Maj. Hazzard, our newspaper editor, used to quote out-of-town newspapers when the editors of

those newspapers had run a description of our thenburgeoning and newly chartered city. About 1873, he picked up a piece from a paper called the *Elevator* (probably the San Francisco *Elevator*, an African American paper of that era) in which the writer sang the praises of this little, - but rapidly maturing, - city along the banks of the old Monongahela River:

"Seventy five years ago Monongahela City was in its infancy. Slowly and steadily it has advanced, till it has now become one of the finest and wealthiest cities on the Monongahela river. Its mineral resources are almost inexhaustible. This valley is considered one of the finest this side of the Mississippi. But its wealth alone is not its greatness. Its progressive, Christian, Political, and Commercial enterprises is what strikes the traveller with such astonishment as he surveys its ever widening borders: as he casts his eye upward he beholds with admiration the magnificent spires shooting up from the domes of four magnificent churches which the inhabitants look upon with pleasure; and Main street alone can boast of her seven churches as Rome did her seven hills."

"Conspicuous among these stands the new and beautiful brick A.M.E. Church which for style and beauty is without rival this side of the Allegheny mountains. Surely the spirit of elevation has pervaded the hearts of the ...people.... But don't let the traveller expect, when visiting this place, that he will meet with an excess of fashion and haughtiness, that generally characterizes such advancement. The contrary is true, they are plain, quiet, courteous and religious people."

Monongahela is doing well these days. What I find to be remarkable is how many people now share the load to keep it that way.

Not long before sitting down to write this, I was speaking to George Stasko, a contractor who is also a great social commentator and someone who can give us his "take" on things from an international point of view. (George is working on the building at 211 Second Street, one of the projects underway as part of the Monongahela Facade Grant Program; George is also the building owner in this case). Although some of George's family lived in this area before he was born, he was raised in Slovakia. George tells me that he knows what it was like when the government owned everything, when the Soviet-style Communism dominated Eastern Europe. "You couldn't even repair a pair of shoes. You had to ask the government to do that. And it didn't work, just didn't work in the end."

I remember a time when it was common to hear people complain before and after any kind of a board meeting or work party occurred. Whether you were an insider to the clique, or an outsider, the same complaint was heard: "The same five (or three) people always end up doing everything around here." We have finally reached the point where that complaint is as far from the truth as one can get.

There was a time when Monongahela prided itself on making mergers. First National Bank merged with First National of McKeesport, forming WPNB. With more mergers, this became Equibank, builder of a large office tower in Downtown Pittsburgh in the 1970s, and then, in time, more bank mergers and name changes came like an avalanche, so that it is now hard to remember all the names in the string. The schools merged from seven different municipalities and the name Ringgold was chosen because it can be an acrostic of one letter from each name (with the "g" for Monongahela doubled, I guess for emphasis; and yes, it was the surname of a military hero from Maryland adopted by a local nineteenth century cavalry unit that formed during the Mexican War, - named for Maj. Samuel Ringgold, the father of modern artillery, the first officer to die in the Mexican War). The local newspaper was sold to a chain, which ultimately led to its demise. Our hospital merged with Charleroi's which itself was a merger of a couple of other Mon Valley Hospitals, and this led to a new building in Carroll Township right on the Monongahela line. Our YMCA merged with Charleroi's, and this led to a new YMCA facility closer to Charleroi. The gas companies merged, as did lots of other groups, and my old time friend, Eugene W. Gibbons (1896-1987), a gas company executive, prided himself on having been on many of the boards of these organizations as they came together.

But about 20-30 years ago, what we needed was more decentralization, to get more people involved in everything, not fewer. In that era, assets like the Aquatorium often fell by the wayside because hardly anyone in the smaller cliques governing everything had the time or ability to focus on one more thing of that scale, even though it had the potential to be one of the best known attractions outsiders might associate with our community.

But things change. Over the years, the cliques apparently split, like organisms that split and become reformed as a pair, whether just a nucleus or an ameba or the formation of a set of identical twins. Those "same five people" are now five people in this group, seven in that one, three in this other one. And all this occurs with some overlap, but the overlap is not enough to pull the system back into one perhaps unhealthy hegemony. For better or for worse, our community may have hit the optimal paradigm of decentralization without descending into confusion, chaos, or a drift toward the kind of power struggles seen in any war that takes place in the Balkans.

A couple of months ago, I remarked at a town hall meeting called by Bud Cook that I believe at least 20 organizations are now making the event side of Monongahela percolate in ways that are definitely drawing the attention of other communities around us and across the region. I was quoted on this in a Facebook post by another individual, and it was interesting

seeing the kind of debate that ensued. Some people actually see this shared effort as a disadvantage. That is not my assessment of things, but it is worth mentioning as shorthand for one side of the debate. Meanwhile, a group of people rose up, from that post I think, and decided that they wanted to work for their community without attending any meetings, except perhaps for a few leaders to meet as minimally necessary to make the plans to proceed. This led to hundreds of hours of volunteers time, and hundreds of dollars donated or allocated for materials so a fresh coat of paint could now encapsulate all the playground equipment, benches, and the huge pavilion at the City's Mounds Park.

Ok. So I thought there were 20 groups that keep this town ticking. But when I sat down to make a list, I came up with almost forty. This is my effort to thank these groups, on behalf of the Monongahela Main Street Program and the other organizations I try to work with, to thank them for making this town, not exactly what it was years ago, but for today the most amazing place I could have ever imagined.

At the risk of forgetting a few, here are some (in somewhat random order) of the ones I have been able to track by posting their events in this calendar:

The City of Monongahela – City Council and City staff do many things that make our community events and downtown programs work well. These are probably too many to list here. But one should begin with the fact that Chess Park and the Aquatorium are City property. Most remarkable, though, is that the City staff goes the extra mile, many times over, in providing "service with a smile" to get things to happen. More than just paving streets, they mount banners and take them back down and store them. They haul refuse from facilities like the Library when the shrubs and trees get trimmed. They hang jack-o-lanterns. They cut grass and trim things back when the weeds start to rise up. They keep the street lights operating. The code enforcement staff enforces the rules that give neighbors a basis for agreeing on what should be done and what has to be done to keep things safe and in relatively equal good repair from property to property. The City's office staff handles many questions, processes paperwork for things like the military banners, pays bills, and does some of the administration on grants and similar programs. Our police force keeps our community safe, and confident about that safety, while also being a model of courtesy.

The Monongahela Fire Department – Not only fights fires as needed, but provides us with our largest downtown meeting space, renting it out for private events, while making it available for those key activities that affect the community as a whole when they need a space for a larger meeting. And don't forget that this is just one local fire department. There are others at New Eagle, Valley Inn, Carroll Township, Gallatin-Sunnyside, Bunola, Elrama, Finleyville, and other places surrounding these, and all sponsor events.

The Monongahela Area Chamber of Commerce – The Monongahela Chamber carries out an amazing palette of community events, fundraisers, and publicity campaigns that maintain our community's most beloved long-time traditions and the area's public image. This includes an annual Purse Bash, Annual Dance Events, the Easter Egg Hunt, the Fleatiques, the Fourth-of-July Fireworks, Light-Up Night, and the Santa events around the holidays. They also host a monthly roundtable where business people can make one another aware of what their business has been up to lately.

The Monongahela Area Library – Sponsors about one-third of the events listed on our calendar each month, including story-times, clubs that focus on children's building toys, two book clubs and a writers' club, weekly classes in cursive handwriting, an adult coloring program, and many others. A couple times a month the library hosts programs on special learning topics (like Native Americans, or the biology of bees) or topics of public interest (e.g., how the reassessment was set up). Their community room serves as a meeting place for several independent organizations or social services. The library participates in community events, like the Fleatiques and Light-Up Night, and never forget that the library is always there when you're doing a research project, or want to ask an odd question no one else can answer, or want to read a book, or need to use a computer, or would like to read today's newspaper.

The Monongahela Area Historical Society – Holds 7-8 monthly meetings with informative speakers each year, plus holds walking tours of several kinds, offers a brochure for visitors who would like a self-guided walking tour, operates a downtown museum with a gift shop that sells souvenirs and locally oriented merchandise, and so many other things. This year and last, they held an old-fashioned auction at Chess Park. Over the years, they have taken a strong position in favor of preserving historic buildings when possible, and the idea of having a Main Street Program was first discussed among some of their committees when searching for ideas for the most appropriate way to preserve the community's heritage and celebrate its unique qualities..

The Monongahela Area Revitalization Corporation – Is a 501(c)(3) organization creating to be a developer of new projects that benefit the community and a catalyst for other developers. This includes development of events like the Pooch Parade and 5K Run, as well as building projects. [to be continued]

"For a Thriving Downtown and a Fully Engaged Community"
The Monongahela Main Street Program