

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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DATE ENTERED

# NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

## 1 NAME

HISTORIC

ALLEGHENY OBSERVATORY

AND/OR COMMON

## 2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

159 Riverview Avenue

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Pittsburgh

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

VICINITY OF

STATE

Pennsylvania 15214

CODE

42

COUNTY

Allegheny

CODE

003

## 3 CLASSIFICATION

### CATEGORY

- DISTRICT
- BUILDING(S)
- STRUCTURE
- SITE
- OBJECT

### OWNERSHIP

- PUBLIC
- PRIVATE
- BOTH
- PUBLIC ACQUISITION**
- IN PROCESS
- BEING CONSIDERED

### STATUS

- OCCUPIED
- UNOCCUPIED
- WORK IN PROGRESS
- ACCESSIBLE**
- YES: RESTRICTED
- YES: UNRESTRICTED
- NO

### PRESENT USE

- AGRICULTURE
- MUSEUM
- COMMERCIAL
- PARK
- EDUCATIONAL
- PRIVATE RESIDENCE
- ENTERTAINMENT
- RELIGIOUS
- GOVERNMENT
- SCIENTIFIC
- INDUSTRIAL
- TRANSPORTATION
- MILITARY
- OTHER:

## 4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

University of Pittsburgh

STREET & NUMBER

Cathedral of Learning 5th Avenue & Bigelow Blvd.

CITY, TOWN

Pittsburgh

STATE

Pennsylvania 15219

VICINITY OF

## 5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,

REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. Allegheny Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

436 Grant Street

CITY, TOWN

Pittsburgh

STATE

Pennsylvania

## 6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

Pennsylvania Inventory of Historic Places

DATE

July 21, 1977

FEDERAL  STATE  COUNTY  LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS

Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission

CITY, TOWN

Harrisburg

STATE

Pennsylvania

# 7 DESCRIPTION

## CONDITION

EXCELLENT       DETERIORATED  
 GOOD             RUINS  
 FAIR              UNEXPOSED

## CHECK ONE

UNALTERED  
 ALTERED

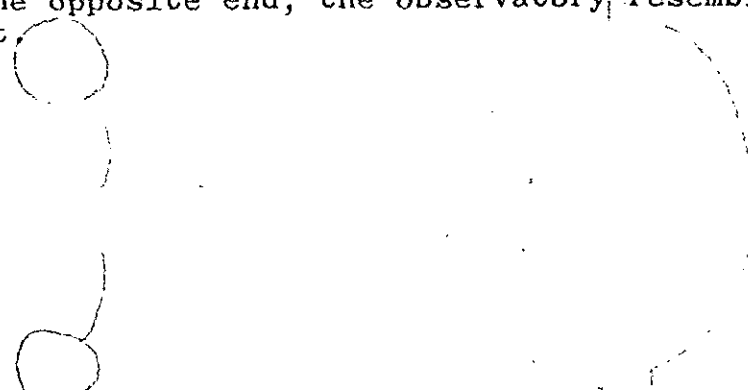
## CHECK ONE

ORIGINAL SITE  
 MOVED      DATE \_\_\_\_\_

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Designed to house three large telescopes, the three large circular sections and domes dominate the appearance and layout of the Allegheny Observatory. Mr. T. E. Billquist, the observatory's architect, was concerned that the new observatory be large enough to accomodate new discoveries and equipment in the field and worked closely with Professor James E. Keller and Dr. John Alfred Brashear in its design.

The layout of the observatory is classical in floorplan and decoration. A large rectangular block with the two smaller domes flanking the entranceway and a long hallway leading to the largest domes set in the opposite end, the observatory resembles the basic basilica layout.



The flat temple like roof, pedimented entranceway and simple columns add to its classical appearance.

The main entrance is covered by a pedimented porch supported by two doric columns. Double windows with plain flat frames and raised stone lables are located on either side of the doorway. The two smaller domes lie at the ends of this front facade. The left dome is surrounded by a stone porch supported by doric columns. Large plain windows line the walls of this section and smaller square eye-brow windows are located directly under the dome.

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The right is plain and has only small rectangular slit-like windows. Decorative cut-out stonework forms a border along the roofline as well as the carved names of famous astronomers make up the only other decorative features.

**8 SIGNIFICANCE**

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES

1900

BUILDER/ARCHITECT T.E. Billquist

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The appearance of Donate's Comet in 1858, inspired an association of Pittsburgh men of means interested in astronomy to establish the Allegheny Observatory. A rooftop in the central part of town served as their first observatory. But even in 1858 the downtown lights proved too bright for star gazing. A committee was formed to select a new site. While negotiations were in action for rental of an area on Seminary Hill, Mr. Washington McClintock and Mr. Ferguson offered, free of cost, a tract of land on the Northside. So successful was the association in raising funds for the proposed observatory that it was decided to purchase a 13 inch telescope instead of an 8 inch as originally planned. The first observatory was built in 1860 the architects were Barr and Moser. In 1865 the Allegheny Observatory was transferred to the Western University of Pennsylvania now the University of Pittsburgh.

On August 8, 1867 Professor Samuel Pierpont Langley was appointed as director of the Allegheny Observatory. Professor Langley's research in absorption of solar energy brought notoriety and interest to the observatory. In 1887, Professor Langley went to the Smithsonian Institute to continue his research in aviation.

In 1891 Professor James E. Keller was elected Director and began expanding the equipment and capabilities of the observatory finally necessitating the need for a larger building.

As a result of 1896 competition, Thorsten E. Billquist was awarded the contract to design and build a new observatory. Mr. Billquist studied architecture at the University of Gothenburg, Germany, before leaving for America in 1892. He was employed by the office of McKim, Mead and White during the Boston Public Library. He then moved to Pittsburgh and for several years worked with the firm of Longfellow, Alden and Harlow. Following the award of the contract for Allegheny Observatory he established his own office and engaged in designing many hospitals, schools and private homes.

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On October 20, 1900 the corner stone of the new observatory was laid. Designed in the classical style by the architect, T. E. Billquist the new observatory was to be not only extremely functional but the beautiful focal point of the surrounding Riverview Park.

The new observatory site was donated to the city by David E. Parks.

During the interim years between the directorship of Dr. Keller and Dr. F. L. O. Wadsworth, the famous Dr. John Alfred Brashear directed the fund raising for the new observatory and the addition of two new telescopes.

John Alfred Brashear, famous for his perfection of lens grinding in telescope production and other astronomical inventions was an important figure in the scientific world. He also served as chancellor of the University of Pittsburgh in its early days.

Installed in the new observatory were the 13" Fitz-Clark refractors, the original telescope of the Allegheny Observatory, the 30" Thaw astrometric refractor which was designed and built by Dr. Brashear and the Keller Memorial Telescope with its thirty inch mirror, silvered by Dr. Brashear process.

The new observatory has continued to serve the University of Pittsburgh and the City of Pittsburgh as training area for student astronomers as well as professional research and tours are offered to the public at various times during the year.

*Langdon -  
Stack and fine*

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Gaol, Harriet and Rudy Eisman. John Alfred Brashear, Scientist and Humanitarian. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1940, p.184-187.

Pittsburgh and the Pittsburgh Spirit. Address at the Chamber of Commerce of Pittsburgh, 1927-28, p. 325.

# 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 1.0

UTM REFERENCES

A	17	5 83 0 00	4 4 8 1 5 7 0
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C			

B			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
D			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

# 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Susan M. Zacher

ORGANIZATION

Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission

DATE

STREET & NUMBER

Box 1026

TELEPHONE

CITY OR TOWN

Harrisburg

STATE

Pennsylvania 17120

# 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE

LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

TITLE

WILLIAM J. WEWER, Executive Director  
Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

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ALLEGHENY OBSERVATORY  
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Starting at a point on northside of Riverview Avenue, moving northeast for 1250 feet then west for 250 feet then north for 250 feet then west for 375 feet then northwest for 500 feet then west for 635 feet to street then along east side of street for 2375 feet then southeast for 1375 feet then west for 500 feet then south for 1000 feet then east for 750 feet then north for 125 feet then east for 130 feet then south for 255 feet then east for 1025 feet then east for 1625 feet to west side of Perrysville Avenue then north for 250 feet then east for 200 feet then north for 100 feet then east for 125 feet then north for 200 feet then east for 300 feet to west side of Perrysville Road then along west side of road for 750 feet then southwest for 200 feet then northeast for 250 feet then northeast for 310 feet to west side of Perrysville Road then along west side of road for 2050 feet then west for 1250 feet then north for 250 feet to starting point.

A.	583	340	4481	960
B.	583	240	4481	560
C.	583	590	4481	760
D.	583	730	4481	260
E.	583	600	4481	020
F.	582	940	4480	880
G.	582	660	4480	900
H.	582	640	4481	220
I.	582	590	4481	600
J.	582	620	4481	860
K.	582	840	4482	110
L.	583	030	4482	140



FHR-8-300A  
(11/78)

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Allegheny Observatory  
Allegheny County

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### #10 Justification of Boundaries

Due to the interference of city lights, the Allegheny Observatory group moved the location of their observatory from downtown Pittsburgh to a donated site on the Northside in 1858. This tract of land was donated for the express use of an observatory site. It was hoped that a clear and darkened viewing area could be maintained for the proper observation of the stars. This area is maintained today for the same justification.

PITTSBURGH WEST QUADRANGLE  
 PENNSYLVANIA—ALLEGHENY CO.  
 7.5 MINUTE SERIES (TOPOGRAPHIC)

5065 III SW  
 (GLEN SHAW)

582 583 1370 000 FEET 584 80°00' 40°30'

ALLEGHENY OBSERVATORY  
 Pittsburg West, PA., Quadrangle

A.	583	340	4481	960
B.	583	240	4481	560
C.	583	590	4481	760
D.	583	730	4481	260
E.	583	600	4481	020
F.	582	940	4480	880
G.	582	660	4480	900
H.	582	640	4481	220
I.	582	590	4481	600
J.	582	620	4481	860
K.	582	840	4482	110
L.	583	030	4482	140

