

Welcome to Historic Westinghouse Park

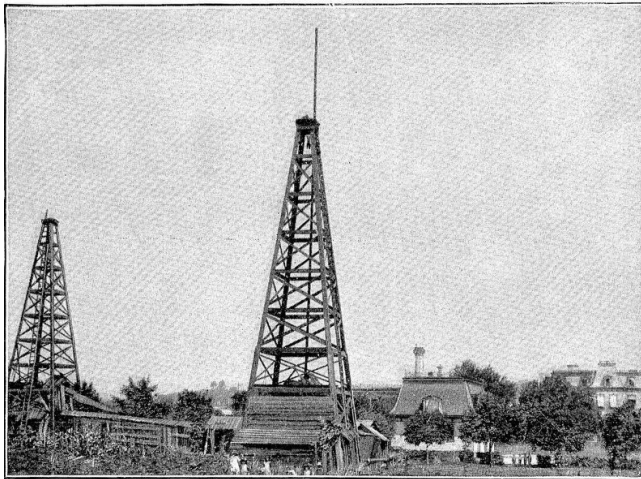
Situated in the heart of Point Breeze North, today's Westinghouse Park was the site of "[Solitude](#)," the home of George Westinghouse from 1871 to 1914.

Westinghouse was already a wealthy, self-made man at age 25 when he purchased a house and 5-acre parcel along the Pennsylvania Railroad's mainline 6 miles east of Pittsburgh, between Murtland and Lang streets. The railroad was Westinghouse's primary customer. He and his wife Marguerite expanded the house over the years, and when he acquired the adjacent 5-acre parcel, Westinghouse expanded his estate up to Thomas Boulevard. He had a workshop built and a tunnel dug from the house to his workshop and another to a private railroad siding near the Homewood Station.



During the four decades Westinghouse lived and worked at Solitude, numerous notable politicians, industrialists, and scientists were regular visitors, including [William McKinley](#), [Lord Kelvin](#), and [Nicola Tesla](#), as well as neighbors like [H. J. Heinz](#) and [Henry Clay Frick](#).

But by far, the most spectacular event that occurred at Solitude was the discovery of a large supply of natural gas in two wells Westinghouse had drilled in his backyard. Early in the morning of May 22, 1884, drillers pierced a significant pocket of natural gas at a depth of 1600 feet. The ensuing gusher spewed gas unchecked for over a week before Westinghouse devised a method to cap it.



At that time, natural gas was considered too unsafe and dangerous to use. Over the next two years, Westinghouse patented dozens of inventions for the safe distribution, use, and metering of natural gas. His initial customers included the mansions in the Point Breeze area, including those of Heinz and Frick.

His innovations were instrumental in making natural gas an important new energy source. The rapid development of natural gas both resulted cleaner skies over the Pittsburgh area and attracted new industries.

Westinghouse assigned these natural gas patents to the Philadelphia Company, an inactive utility he controlled and used it to acquire gas wells in Western Pennsylvania and West Virginia. By 1889, it was the nation's largest natural gas producer. Both Equitable Gas and Duquesne Light were once part of the Philadelphia Company.

After Westinghouse died in 1914, Solitude was bequeathed to his only son, who in turn sold the property to the Engineers' Society of Western Pennsylvania (<https://eswp.com/about/overview/>) in

1918. The society deeded the now 10-acre estate to the city as a public park and memorial to Westinghouse. Solitude was razed during the summer of 1919 and the park was developed over the ensuing months. Other than stone columns at old entrances, the only vestiges of Solitude that remain are several copses of magnificent red oak trees and the disused tunnels from the house to the laboratory and the nearby railroad tracks.

If you'd like to read more:

1. SOLITUDE AND THE NETHER DEPTHS: THE PITTSBURGH ESTATE OF GEORGE WESTINGHOUSE AND ITS GAS WELL James Van Trump

<https://journals.psu.edu/wph/article/viewFile/2641/2474>

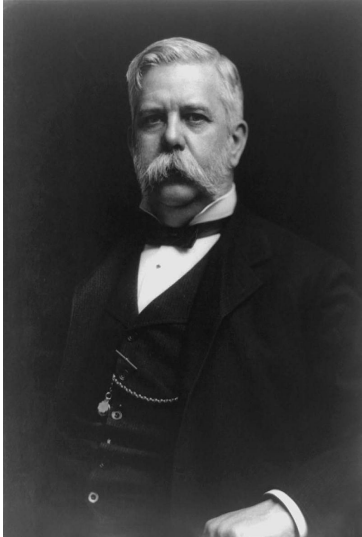
2. THE EAST END 1898 – 1915

Hartley Fleming www.regentsquare-rsca.org/history/MoreFlemingHouse.pdf

3. HOMEWOOD AT THE TURN OF THE CENTURY Donald C. Scully

<https://journals.psu.edu/wph/article/viewFile/3446/3277>

The Legacy of George Westinghouse



[George Westinghouse](#) was born on October 6, 1846 in the town of Central Bridge near Albany, New York. Son of a machine shop owner, from his youth, he demonstrated talent at both machinery and business. At the age of fifteen, as the Civil War broke out, Westinghouse enlisted in the New York National Guard and served until his parents urged him to return home.

In April 1863 he persuaded his parents to let him re-enlist, whereupon he joined Company M of the 16th New York Cavalry and rose to the rank of corporal. In December 1864 he resigned from the Army to join the Navy, serving as Acting Third Assistant Engineer on the gunboat USS *Muscoota* and served through the end of the war. After his military discharge in August 1865, Westinghouse returned to his family and enrolled at Union College in Schenectady. However, he quickly lost interest in the curriculum

and dropped out. He had other ideas to pursue.

Westinghouse was 19 years old when he patented his first invention, the rotary steam engine, quickly followed by the Westinghouse Farm Engine. At age 21 he invented a "car replacer", a device to guide derailed railroad cars back onto the tracks, and a reversible "frog," a device used with a railroad switch to guide trains onto one of two tracks. But the Westinghouse invention that revolutionized the railroad industry was the air brake, which finally gave engineers a quick, reliable way to stop their trains. His automatic signaling devices greatly improved railroad safety and efficiency.

Westinghouse's creative genius found many, many other outlets.

- His vision for alternating current (AC) for delivering electricity was eventually adopted nearly worldwide. Lighting the 1893 Chicago World Fair with the new incandescent bulb and harnessing Niagara Falls for the generation of electricity were other major visionary achievements of Westinghouse in engineering and manufacturing.
- His conceptualization and inventions for the production and distribution of natural gas unleashed a whole new form of energy.
- During his illustrious career as inventor extraordinaire, he obtained 361 patents, an average of one every seven weeks.

The Elon Musk of his day, Westinghouse was as much a visionary entrepreneur as he was gifted inventor. He founded the Westinghouse Air Brake Company in 1869 at age 23, Union Switch and Signal in 1881, the Philadelphia Company in 1884, Westinghouse Electric in 1886, and more than 50 additional companies over the years.

Always a progressive thinker and humanist, Westinghouse was the nation's first employer to implement nine-hour work days, 55-hour workweeks, and half-holidays on Saturdays. He was ahead of his time in providing educational and cultural opportunities for his employees and paid higher wages to get better craftsman and engineers, and he hired the first female engineer.

Westinghouse died March 12, 1914. As a Civil War veteran, both he and his wife are buried in Arlington National Cemetery.

About him, historian James Van Trump has written, "There is no doubt that Westinghouse was a great man, possibly the greatest who ever lived in Pittsburgh, and certainly greater than the business or financial "wizards" who manipulated other men's ideas. He was sharp enough to manipulate his own ideas during most of his career and astute enough to be able to find assistants who could help him. No ivory-tower theorist, he was eminently interested (like his friend, Lord Kelvin) in the application of pure science to everyday life. He was at once a dreamer and a very practical man, a sound solid American of his place and time who could make those dreams come true. Perhaps he might better be called an "inspired" mechanic of almost divine proportions, a Messiah of the mechanistic 19th century. What was in his mind and what emerged from his hand has turned miraculously into many devices that have helped transform the world."

We'll leave the last words to Westinghouse himself:

"If someday they say of me that in my work I have contributed something to the welfare and happiness of my fellow man, I shall be satisfied."