



A Brief History of the YWCA Building

The YWCA is located at 424 North Main Street, Greensburg, Pennsylvania, at the corner of **O'Hara Street. A large portion of the grounds extend to Pennsylvania Avenue, covering nearly an acre.**

The house was designed in 1900 for Mr. and Mrs. William Huff by the noted architect, Ralph Adams Cram. Mr. Cram designed very few houses and is known mainly for his ecclesiastical buildings. St. Thomas and the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City are two of his **best known works. Greensburg has two of Cram's buildings: the Huff house now owned by the YWCA, and the First Presbyterian Church on South Main Street.** The comparatively small scale of the Huff house makes it somewhat of an architectural rarity.

According to legend, Huff was a friend of the architect. There are letters in existence confirming the plans by Mr. Huff and Mr. Cram, dating back to 1888. Originally, there were lovely flower gardens, statuary, and beautiful trees, all kept in formal fashion with English Ivy and myrtle. The original clippings of ivy were brought from Westminster Abbey in London, England.

The house, described in a "History of Greensburg", is of Neo-Classical Jeffersonian design with four ionic columns. The original plans were found behind a drawer in the library, crushed and dirty, as if they had been lost for many years. There are 14 rooms, including the basement, with five bedrooms and five baths, and an upstairs living room.

Mr. Cram incorporated several interesting architectural features in the house. The front stairway leading to the second floor is thought to be the only free-standing spiral staircase remaining in Westmoreland County. The windows in the foyer and in the skylight on the second floor are leaded. Every inch of space is utilized; the curve of the second floor hall **provided ample closet space in connecting rooms. Other closets are "walk-in" size, which was unusual in 1900.** All rooms are light and airy with cross-ventilation on the first and second floors.

All woodwork in the music room and library is mahogany. When it was made in Philadelphia, **the craftsmen came along to install the beautiful wood. The mansion's basement was originally a game and ballroom.** It contains a fireplace and a full length mirror. Some of the original furnishings can be found throughout the house.

The handsome exterior of the house features a two-story porch with four stucco columns. The **classical pediment has a bull's eye window, while other windows are trimmed with marble** keystones and sills. There is a portico, supported with Ionic columns, under which early visitors would have arrived. Carriage steps led from the side porch into the driveway - which is narrow **by today's standards, but served the vehicles of the day.**

In 1968, Catherine Horn, daughter of the original owners, gave the house to Christ Episcopal Church. Two years later, the house proved unsatisfactory as a rectory. In consultation with Mrs. Horn, it was decided that the house would make a beautiful headquarters facility for the YWCA. After negotiations, the YWCA purchased the building from the Church in May 1970.

After this agreement was reached, there were many visits with Mrs. Horn. She expressed the desire that this home be a memorial to her parents, Mr. and Mrs. William Huff, since it had been built by them. There is a plaque so indicating on the front of the house near the door. The YWCA promised to keep the library, music room, and reception hall furnished in the tradition of the period. Some changes to the building had to be made to meet city and state safety regulations for use as a public building. The dedication and hard work of many volunteers enabled the YWCA to turn the house into an appropriate headquarters for the YWCA. The building was dedicated on September 12, 1970.

In 1994 plans were initiated for a 4,000-square-foot addition to the original building. The YWCA had seen tremendous growth since moving in at 424 North Main Street and additional program space was needed. It was not possible to make the original building handicapped-accessible, and this became an important need in making our programs and services available **to all. The Board of Directors approved a Capital Campaign entitled “The Shared Vision”** to raise funds for the new building project, and in September 1995 ground was broken for the YWCA Program Center addition. The original carriage house was unsalvageable and had to be torn down to make way for the addition and an expanded parking lot. The addition was dedicated on August 29, 1996, with nearly 200 people attending the event.

The Program Center incorporates a new reception room which links the two structures, a large multi-purpose room with a cathedral ceiling and dormer windows, and a handicapped-accessible restroom on its upper level. There are three preschool/day care rooms, bathrooms, a small kitchen, and a storage room on the lower level. Outside, a walkway links the lower level to the fenced playground and then connects to the sidewalk going to the front of the original headquarters building, the Huff house.