



**THE
HISTORY
OF
STEEPLECHASE**



We hope you enjoy reading about the history of Steeplechase. As with any project, the final product would not have been possible without the help of many.

Special THANK YOU to:

Felix Caste, Jr. and Dan Caste for all their contributions to this narrative. Marilyn Dabkowski for thinking this would be a good idea and helping with the research. Janice Herrle for hours scouring the archives. Scott Hinsh for the maps. Betty Long for her work on the production. My sister, Joan Williamson, for her eagle-eye editing. Randy and Valerie Wolfe for photos and “taking my list and checking it twice.”

Judi Lewis
January, 2022



STEEPLECHASE—1939



On January 29, 1947, Mr. Felix Caste, Sr. purchased land from the John Scully family for \$40,000. A portion of this land would become the Steeplechase Homeowners Association in accordance with a Declaration of Covenants filed with the Department of Real Estate of Allegheny County on September 17, 1984.

Prior to selling this land, one of the Scully Farm owners, Mr. Cornelius D. Scully¹, was the Mayor of Pittsburgh. The land was operated as a dairy farm with a Scully farm house situated on a hill near where Hennig and Caste Drives intersect. What we know today as Hennig Drive was then a small lake used for watering cattle.

The entire area was very rural. Indeed, Whitehall Borough did not exist until 1948. The City of Pittsburgh ended at the Overbrook area on Route 51.

1. Mr. Scully served as the Mayor of Pittsburgh from 1936-1946. He was succeeded by Mr. David L. Lawrence.

Mr. Felix Caste, Sr.
1899–1997



The place we now call home, was a vision of Mr. Felix Caste Sr. Mr. Felice Castagna and his brother Antonio emigrated from Naples, Italy to America in 1915, where they became known as Felix and Anthony (Tony) Caste.

Felix and Tony initially honed their skills in carpentry building barges in Pittsburgh. A few years later, they began residential construction working for a local builder who was constructing prefabricated "kit" homes sold by Sears & Roebuck.

In 1922, Felix and Tony used the profits from the kit houses to purchase land in what we now know as Mt. Lebanon. During that decade, they began building their trademark stone houses.

In 1933, the brothers formed Caste Brothers Construction initially focusing in Mt. Lebanon, where they built some of the most prestigious homes in Virginia Manor.

In the 1940s, the brothers turned their attention to the rural area that was to become Whitehall. Mr. Caste envisioned a total community development for Whitehall and began building homes in the early 1940s and continued on to the Scully Farm in the 1950s. This area came to be known as Overlook Acres which stretches from Hamilton Road, near Cool Springs, to Raintree Drive.

Felix Caste knew these families would need access to churches, schools, parks, and stores, and he decided to create a "shopping center" that replicated the village market of his Italian town where people came together for provisions, dining and fellowship. His vision led to the construction of one of the first outdoor shopping malls in Western Pennsylvania, known as "Caste Village."

Caste Village started with 12 merchants – including a gas station, small grocery store, shoe store, hardware store, beauty salon, florist/gift shop and bakery. The grand opening was heralded as a regional milestone in local newspapers. Mr. Caste donated parcels of land around the shopping center so the growing community could build churches, schools, a fire station and a community park.

Steeplechase

In 1969, representatives from St. Joseph Hospital on Pittsburgh's South Side and the Brentwood-Whitehall Chamber of Commerce met over breakfast to discuss the Hospital's need to expand and its desire to use the land which is now Steeplechase for a hospital and medical building. Site plans were developed with the hope of obtaining approval from the Whitehall Planning Commission, the Borough Council and the Hospital Planning Association.

In the meantime, Homestead Hospital also faced the need for additional facilities.

While we don't have information about who was doing what in terms of submitting plans, we do know that in the end:

- Homestead Hospital realized its expansion with what is now Jefferson Hospital on Coal Valley Road;
- Felix Caste purchased the land then held by St. Joseph Hospital.

Felix Caste hadn't been sitting around waiting for the hospitals to duke it out. He was busy constructing the Canongate and Maiden Bridge Apartment Buildings². His initial plan was to add two more high rise apartment buildings across the street – i.e., Steeplechase.

The land “across the street” had been zoned for commercial use to accommodate St. Joseph's plans – thus, needed to be rezoned as residential. The Whitehall Zoning Commission did not approve adding two more high rise apartments, but did approve rezoning for low rise apartments (no more than three stories high), townhomes and single-family homes. Since Mr. Caste had no immediate plans to develop the land, he did not object to the zoning change.

Felix Caste started the development of Steeplechase in the early 1980s. The first Steeplechase Master Plan had over 1,200 units – a combination of apartments and townhomes.

Before development actually started, Mr. Caste donated a 5-acre parcel in the middle of the Plan to Whitehall Borough for a future Park to be included in the Whitehall Park Program. Through the years, the Steeplechase Master Plans had to be designed around the Park.

2. Construction 1972-1976.

1983 and the beginning of Steeplechase

The Community evolved in phases.

Phase One included 82 Homes on Hennig, 18 on Lantern Hill and 4 on Caste— built between 1983 and 1995. The original site development plan (streets and sewers) for Phase One was installed as Hennig Drive and Lantern Hill and contemplated townhomes only. In the late 1980s, Felix Caste sold two lots (62-74 Hennig, and 33-45 Hennig) to Gus Gillespie of Heartland Homes. Today the difference in design of these two sections is obvious, with the Heartland homes having a more colonial appearance.

In 1992, Felix Caste commenced work on the final townhomes that he would build – 71-77 Hennig Drive and 5281-5293 Caste Drive. In 1993, Felix Caste suffered a stroke; and, from that point on, the project was managed by Mr. Caste's grandson, Dan Caste. Caste Construction Co. was formed in 1995 and built its first homes at the top of Hennig Drive (76-86 Hennig)³. The home at 82 Hennig was kept as a Model for several years.

Phase One Construction:

- 84 homes by Felix Caste, Sr.
- 14 homes by Heartland Homes
- 6 homes by Caste Construction Co.

3. John Stivala of JS Construction was engaged to construct most of the homes for Caste Construction Co.

In 1994, new Master Plans were contemplated for the balance of Steeplechase – reducing the density from 1,200 to about half that number. This Plan included both townhomes and walk-up apartments.

Ultimately, in 1995, a new Master Plan was approved by Whitehall which reduced the density and reconfigured the shape of the 5-acre park. The reconfiguration was done to better conform with the topography of the property and the contemplated road system so that a loop could be made from Hennig Drive back to Lantern Hill.

As mentioned, Dan Caste finished Phase One after his grandfather's stroke. In contemplating Phase Two and beyond, Dan Caste was focused on specific factors and demographics. Specifically:

- Whitehall is an extremely desirable community in which its residents are proud to live, and tend not to want to leave.
- With an aging population, trends indicated that "empty-nest" style homes were in high demand. Dan focused on a design which featured all daily living requirements on the first floor – i.e., garage, kitchen, master bedroom/bath and great room, with guest bedrooms on the second floor. The design required front entry garages and engineering work commenced.

The 19 homes on Paddock Lane were constructed in Phase Two between 1997-1998. All were built by Caste Construction Co.

Phase Three included 67 homes built between 1998-2000 by Caste Construction Co. on Upper Duncan Lane and Belmont Lane.

Phase Four included 67 homes, built between 2002-2006 by Caste Construction Co. on Lower Duncan Lane, Caste Drive and Parkside Lane.

Site work for Phase Four had begun in 2000 and included the construction of a large stormwater detention pond near the bottom of the plan adjacent to Weyman Road. This stormwater plan was designed for the entirety of the Steeplechase project.

Interesting note about the detention pond:

Steeplechase was Whitehall's first project that required stormwater management ponds. Whitehall asked Dan Caste to voluntarily oversize the stormwater detention pond near Weyman Road in order to help alleviate the flooding that was occurring downstream near Route 51. In 2001, this pond was constructed and contributed to solving the flooding issues downstream.

Phase Five included 27 homes, built between 2006-2010 on Lantern Hill Extension (from Parkside Lane to Steeplechase Court), and Steeplechase Court.

Phase Five Construction:

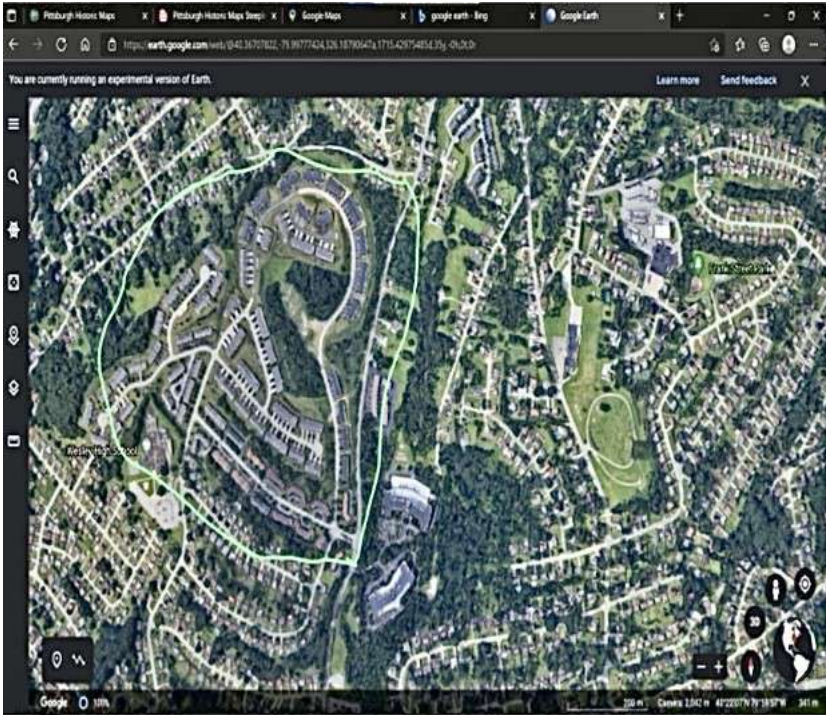
- 20 homes by Caste Construction
- 7 homes by Heartland Homes

Site work for Phase Five began in 2005. Faced with the impact on home sales of the 2007-2008 global financial crisis, the Caste family paused work on the Steeplechase project between 2010-2014.

In 2014, Dan Caste purchased the remainder of the land and developed the balance of the site – specifically, the loop road between Steeplechase Court and Hennig Drive. Neither Dan nor the rest of the Caste family wanted to continue with home construction and the lots were sold to Ryan Homes.

Phase Six included 64 homes, built between 2015-2017 by Ryan Homes, on Lantern Hill Extension (from Steeplechase Court to Lantern Hill Drive).

STEEPLECHASE—2021



Fast forward to today. Here we are ... settled into 348 homes.

One can only imagine what Mr. Felix Caste, Sr. would think about all of us. I think he would be proud. We have managed to take what he gave us and make it ours. Steeplechase has attracted a group of volunteers devoted to making Steeplechase the best we can be.



We also share our space
with some of the natives.



Twins!

Triplets!!!!







