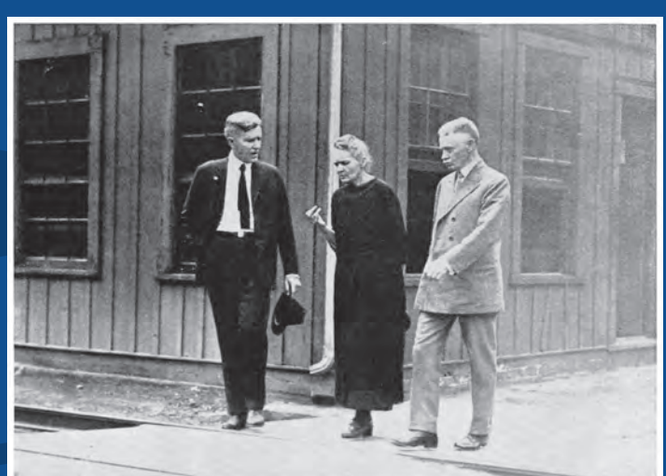
French physicists Marie Curie (right), Pierre Curie (center), and chemist Gustave Bémont (left) in the laboratory.

Physicist Marie Curie driving portable radiological unit

Corner of the laboratory of Pierre and Marie Curie



Marie Curie visiting with two scientists on street in Pittsburgh

Marie CURIE

(1867-1934)

In her 1897 doctoral research, Marie Curie decided to investigate the mysterious rays that had recently been discovered being emitted from uranium. Through her work, she realized something was more "radioactive" (a term she coined) than the ore itself. Her attempts to identify the source led to the discovery of two new elements: radium and polonium. For their investigations into the nature of the "uranium rays" and radioactivity, Marie Curie, her husband Pierre and Henri Becquerel shared the 1903 Nobel Prize in physics.

When Pierre died in a tragic accident in 1906, Marie assumed his teaching position at Sorbonne University in Paris, becoming the first woman to teach at the school in its 650-year history. Later, in 1911, Curie received her second Nobel Prize. This time, it was for chemistry in recognition of her discoveries of polonium and radium.

For the rest of her life, she worked relentlessly investigating and promoting the use of radium as a treatment of cancer.

Element 96, Curium (Cm), was named in honor of Marie and Pierre Curie.

ORAU Museum of Radiation and Radioactivity