

Chapter 4: Around Town

Change was in the air as the old century gave way to the 1900s. Broadway replaced Brinton Avenue as the main business district and by the 1920s there were probably over 50 different stores, shops and offices on Broadway. New jobs were being created daily, spurred by the burgeoning demands of the Railroad.



19. "Dook" Salyard in his New Auto on Broadway

Don Fails, a local historian and long-time educator in the Pitcairn schools, tells the story of the newcomers who followed in the wake of the railroad. *"Pitcairn started to grow a little bit more, and more and more people came in.*

Who were the people who were coming here? First of all they were the ones who ran the trains -- the rolling stock people; the engineers and

firemen, the conductors the brakemen. A lot of those people came initially from Homewood/Brushton, and Hays parts of Pittsburgh, and 28th Street in Pittsburgh.

They came here with their families and they came here with their jobs. They needed houses. The houses were built quickly, on 2nd St., 3^d St., 4 th 5th St., and on up the hill. Houses built in the late 1800s and early 1900s, But there still wasn't enough labor. They needed other people to come. They needed stonemasons. They needed mechanics. They needed machinists. They needed track layers. They needed maintenance personnel. They needed clerks and all sorts and kinds of people to work. And the immediate area wasn't enough. So they sent delegations to the center part of the state, and they recruited and brought them here. Farmers for the most part, who would be trained for the new kind of work.



20. Workers on the Railroad

They also went overseas. They sent delegations to Germany looking for trained mechanics, machinists. They recruited them to come to the PRR They also went to Italy and there they recruited stonemasons -- men who had been building things out of stone for centuries and doing great jobs of it.

And they needed that done. If you look upon the bridges and overpasses, and the water routes along the RR, they were made of stone. They needed the stonemasons that knew what they were doing, and they got them.... And then they needed the people for the labor for laying and maintaining the tracks --.basic labor. And they brought them over."

In time, the early Scots-Irish settlers were joined by these Germans and Italians, and by immigrants from many countries around the world, all lured by the promise of good-paying jobs for them and their families.

John Dominick, a long time Pitcairn resident remembers the impact the horde of new workers had on the town.

“Broadway....was a pretty busy place with the hotels...and those call boys who were making up the schedules hunting up those people to tell them “you’re next up”, because they slept there. Some of them wouldn’t go home, ‘cause they lived in Ohio and distance.

The railroad...at one time, that place was so busy they couldn’t get enough people. So Tommy Currier, who was my friend, was a supervisor down there; they would go to Mexico for all those people who wanted to work. And they’d bring them to Pitcairn. And if you acted up and didn’t work, they’d ship you back. You might say where did they live? Where did they stay? They fixed up some of them cars, those nice dining cars, some of them were their bedrooms. This is where they came to repair them to -- the upholstery shop.”

The Dominick family were part of the wave of Italians imported by the railroad.

The new arrivals tended to settle on the hill, where they established an Italian Club. A place fondly remembered by John Dominick.

“ I still miss that part where those little old Italian guys from Italy would come in with their cigars. They came in to play cards, have a drink. That was a pretty busy place when they were around especially on the weekends. Now on the weekends it’s closed, cause no one goes there.

Tenth Street -- that was all Italian. Come wine time, when the trucks came with the grapes, everybody made wine. And the joke used to be if you wanted to smell sauce cooking on Sunday morning after Mass go up to 10th St. The windows are open, take a walk up the sidewalk. See as old as I am I didn’t realize why I can’t find god sauce like my wife made, my mother made. It’s because they’d spend 3 or 4 on Sunday mornings making it, stirring it and putting things in it. “

Frank Gallo, from another early Italian family remembered what it was like going to school with the kids from “down the hill.”

In the summertime we walked to school...in the wintertime we bagged a lunch. I’ll never forget my mother used to make that home-made bread, my mother made hoagies before hoagies were even invented. She’d get that flat bread, half a loaf practically, and she put salami in there, provolone, and she’d cut it in half, and put an apple or an orange

in there...So I'd go to school with my brown bag. And I was ashamed to open my bag up, cause the people at the time down over the hill, they never realized "Italian food". And I'll never forget this one time, I took one half of my sandwich out and this one kid sitting across from me says: Frank what kind of a sandwich is that?" I says: "It's an Italian sandwich. It's got all kinds of stuff: tomato, lettuce, provolone, salami and everything. He says: "I never seen a sandwich like that". And I says "I tell you what, you take this half." Well, he had peanut butter and jelly in his. He says: "Boy, this is fantastic! I never had a sandwich like that." Later, he went on to be surgeon.

I remember my dad would give me a dollar to go down, and we had an A&P and a Kroger store. And we had two movie theaters...the Nemo ...and the Strand Theater. Now the strand theater on Monday they had the matinee...it was a 6 cents, if you had nickel sometimes it was hard to get that penny. It was a penny tax. What happened was, they had a serial every week, certain things like Buck Rogers or something like that. Now if you started to go to see the first serial movie, you had to go back next Monday to continue like 15 weeks. You had to keep going back...the whole 'school would go to the matinee so after like 15 weeks, they'd switch off and go to the other theater.

We'd have a lot of fun. We'd stop down at the 5 & 10 and buy candy, jelly beans or something like that, and take them with us. We had a nice Murphy's, G.C. Murphy's. It was 2 floors ...a big 5&10.



21. Five and Ten Stores were Popular along Broadway

For many years **John Dominick** worked in the Westinghouse plant in nearby Trafford. He recalled:

"I was a clerk there, and then in East Pittsburgh...They made welding rods, had a big printing division...They had a foundry....castings, for whatever they were making at the time, refrigerators... welding rods -- everybody used those...that place went 3 shifts. They produced a lot of welding rods they sent them everywhere."

Like John Dominick's job with Westinghouse it seemed the railroad had brought many opportunities; jobs were everywhere in the thriving valley: from the mines of Patton Township to the nearby Westinghouse plants; from bustling Broadway to the brickyard at the west end of town.

Howard Brendinger worked all his life at the local brickyard, and over the years he rose from a teenage helper to become the plant superintendent. At its peak, the Rambaugh Brickyard was a busy place, feeding the booming construction business in the Turtle Creek Valley.

"When we were making extruded brick, we were producing 60,000 brick a day by the time the plant closed. They were all hand set in kilns; coal fired, when I first started there. And for my first job they handed me a 12 lb sledgehammer and said go up on the

clay bank. And I worked there two years making small rocks out of big rocks.

This plant made an acid-resistant brick which was used in the steel mills. And those actually kept the plant running for many years because the building industry and houses just wasn't enough to keep all the bricks that we could produce; too many building bricks. So we went to this acid proof brick.

And when the plant for extruded brick shut down, they had bought machinery from somewhere in New Jersey for sand mould colonial brick. The machinery was hydraulic, everything worked by hydraulics...it had what we called a roller coaster. The moulds would come down through on the rollers down thru into the machine, down thru it to be filled with sand, come up in an s-shape be turned over to dump the sand, come back up in the s-shape then was shoved into the machine, the pressure would come up, fill them up with clay, the piston would come in and push them out, all with perfect timing.

It was the noisiest place and dustiest place you wanted to be in all your life -- that was sand mould colonial brick.

And when we finally got all the brick made, it was then that they said, "that's enough," and that's when the plant shut down and we left.



22. Loading bricks at the Milliken Brick Company, Pitcairn