

## PEERING INTO THE PAST: IMAGES OF A BYGONE ERA

The first four volumes of the *LOOKING BACK* series were illustrated by 387 historical photographs. With the addition of Volume Five, the now-completed five-volume *LOOKING BACK* series has presented more than 500 historical photographs of everyday life in Brownsville and vicinity during the “good old days.”

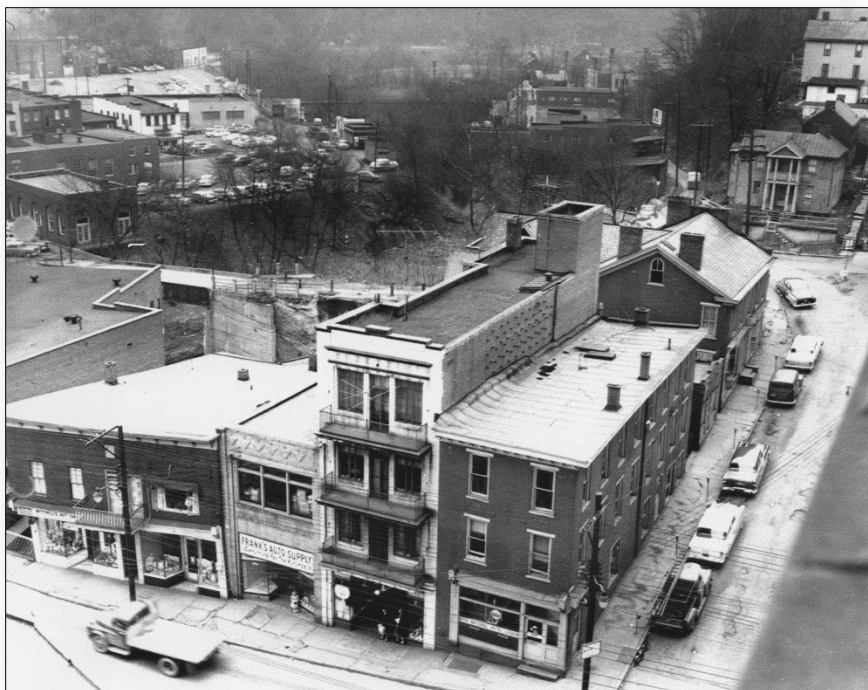
Among the photographs in this special chapter of expanded-caption images are “panoramic views” of Brownsville, Bridgeport, West Brownsville, and some outlying areas beyond the borough limits. In order to enlarge these photographs as much as possible, some pictures are presented in a “landscape” format (facing the side of the page). The larger size of these photographs on the printed page should make it easier to examine details in the pictures.

---

**(Top photo, next page)** This is a rare view of Bank Street, seen from the intersection of Bank and High streets. This picture is dated c. 1900 – 1909.

The building visible on the right is now the home of the Brownsville aerie of the Fraternal Order of Eagles. The empty lot between the corner and the present-day Eagles building was a fenced-in lawn when this photo was taken. Today, that lot is the site of the Crawford building (built in 1909) in which Antique Grill is located. The buildings on the left were removed in the 1960s when the Fayette County Redevelopment Authority razed all of the buildings in that block to construct a municipal parking lot.

**(Bottom photo, next page)** This view from the Gallatin Bank building, taken in the 1950s or early 60s, shows the entire block that was razed to build a parking lot. Among the businesses in the four High Street buildings shown were Mitchell’s Nut Shop, Dileanis shoe shop, Frank’s Auto Supply, Trumper’s clothing store, and the National Hotel. In the distance, the town’s parking congestion was evidenced by cars parked diagonally on Seneca Street, filling the lot across Brownsville Avenue from the A&P supermarket, and patronizing the municipal lot behind the A&P.





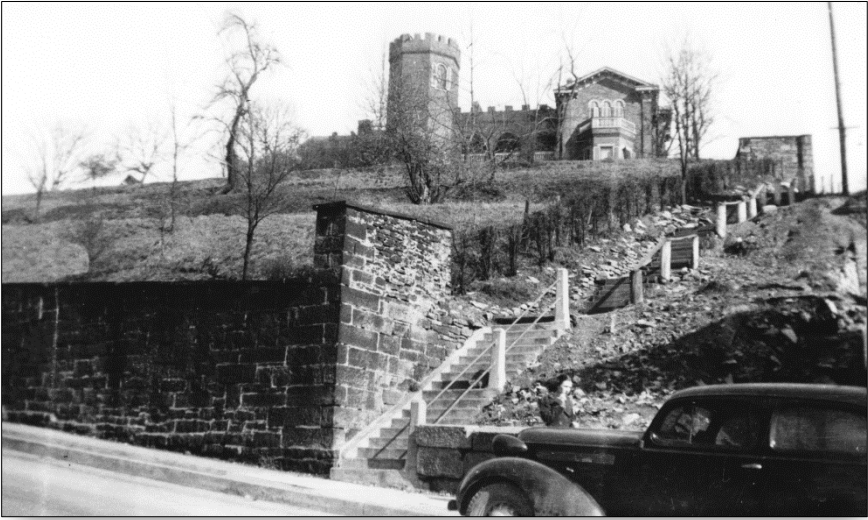
(Above) This 1932 photograph shows the interior of the Brownsville Wright-Metzler Department Store. The photo illustrates what a typical department store looked like in the early 1930s. Seven of the nine individuals in the photograph are identified in a handwritten note on the back of the picture. They are Mrs. Lizia Nanns, Mrs. Bertha Troutman, Mrs. Mary Craft, Mr. William Troth, Mr. Ray Miller, Mrs. Pauline McCreery (with the dark-rimmed glasses on the right), and Miss Katherine Britten.

The store occupied two floors and was located between the Cast Iron Bridge and the G. C. Murphy Co. The Brownsville store was one of several area Wright-Metzler stores (including Connellsville and Uniontown locations) and was part of the American Department Stores Corporation.

(Top, next page) This photograph, taken c. 1940, shows a view of Nema-colin Castle's grounds slightly different than we are familiar with today. There appear to have been fewer large trees dotting the terraced grounds during the 1940s than there are today.

Of note was the apparently recent renovation of the lower flight of steps leading up the hill. The stairs, which are still there today but rarely used, connected Market Street to Front Street.

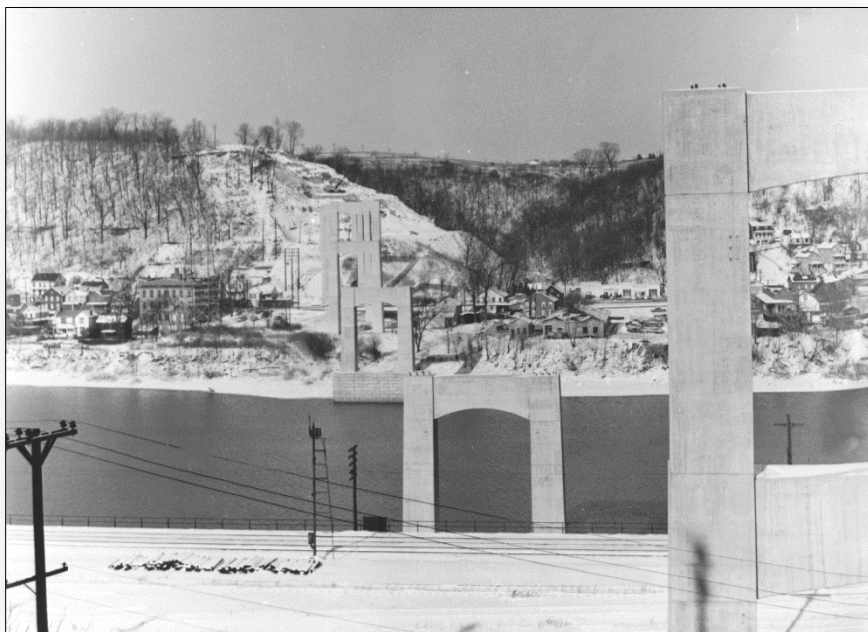
The large structure visible beyond the top of the stairs was the Brownsville Junior High School on Front Street. Some school students may have used the pictured stairs in the 1940s, but most chose to walk up or down the occasionally slick brick pavement (or sidewalk) of steep Front Street hill on their trek to and from school each day.



(Below) A winter day's chilly weather did not deter plenty of bowler hat-topped rubberneckerers from converging on Water Street to view the wreckage of a train in Bridgeport (South Brownsville).

The letters "P.McK.&Y" on the derailed car stand for "Pittsburgh, McKeesport, and Youghiogheny" (nicknamed P-Mickey), a railroad that merged with the Pittsburgh and Lake Erie (P&LE) Railroad. Several horse-drawn buggies are making their way along the snow-covered street, indicating that this photo dates to around the turn of the century (c. 1900) and possibly earlier.





(Above) Another winter scene, this one around 1960, shows the concrete piers of the Lane-Bane Bridge awaiting the spring for construction to resume. Of interest in this photo is the partially bare hillside beyond the last pier on the West Brownsville side of the river.

West Brownsville residents may recall the “Indian Rock,” a large overhanging boulder on that hillside, which yielded many arrowheads to youthful amateur archaeologists digging beneath the protective shelter of the outcrop. When part of that hillside was removed by excavation to make way for the western approach to the bridge, the Indian Rock became just another childhood memory for those who had visited it in their youth.

(Next page) In 1814, the towns of Brownsville and Bridgeport (later South Brownsville) were each established as boroughs by legislative action of the Pennsylvania General Assembly.

One hundred years later in the summer of 1914, both boroughs pulled out all the stops in staging a centennial celebration. 48-star flags and patriotic bunting bedecked every available utility pole, awning, and balcony in Brownsville’s Neck.

In this photograph, a lone light is suspended above the bend in the street, and an overhead sign warns automobile drivers and operators of horse-drawn conveyances to “Run Slowly” to avoid a car-horse collision.

High on the side of a tall building, the painted Coca Cola advertisement (“Coca Cola 5¢”), brilliantly white in 1914, slowly faded with time, lasting many years after a bottle of Coke no longer cost a nickel.





Previous page) This 1909 photo, apparently taken from the Snowdon Building (the five-story Union Station was not built until 1928), is rich with detail from that year. High on the hill in the distance, to the right of the former residence of J. W. Jeffries (which became a funeral home), was a vacant area that was soon to be the site of a new school.

One year after this picture was taken, lower Front Street became the home of the new Brownsville High School. Brownsville Borough's former high school building at Fifth and Church streets was closed in 1910, torn down, and replaced by Brownsville General Hospital.

The building to the photographer's left of the Second National Bank was on the current site of the former Towne House parking lot. The sign over its entrance reads "Colonial Restaurant."

Notice the maze of telephone lines. At that time, four different telephone companies – Bell, Federal, Monongahela Valley, and Home Mutual – were serving customers in Brownsville, Bridgeport, and West Brownsville, all on their own telephone lines.

Signs on the Flatiron Building advertising the L. A. Kail Magyar Bank were indicative of the large Hungarian (Magyar) population attracted to the area by jobs in the coal and coke industry. This was one of several ethnic banks operating in Brownsville at the turn of the century, when the area's coal and coke boom was at its height.

(Next page) For this photo, the photographer was positioned at the intersection of Bank and Water streets, near the top of the brick ramp that leads from Water Street, goes under the railroad tracks and continues down to the wharf. He was facing the Herbertson foundry at the far end of the block (the current site of Fiddles).

The foundry went into operation in 1838, when John Herbertson opened it to help fabricate iron pieces for construction of the new Cast Iron Bridge. Herbertson was collaborating with John Snowdon, who was also fabricating structural iron pieces for the bridge at his Snowdon iron works behind the Flatiron building.

The Cast Iron Bridge was dedicated in 1839 and is amazingly still in use today as part of old U. S. Route 40/Market Street in downtown Brownsville. 2014 is a double anniversary for Brownsville bridges. It is the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the opening of the Brownsville Bridge (also known as the inter-county bridge) and the 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Cast Iron Bridge. (We can only wonder if the Lane-Bane Bridge will last as long!)







(Above) This seldom-seen undated photograph shows the J. D. Armstrong Drug Store in the Neck. According to the sign in the window, the store may be going out of business. The building to the left of Armstrong Drug is the structure where Kaufman's Department Store was once located and later Kart's ladies' store. The building in which Armstrong was located (25 Market) was occupied by Sidler's store later in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. To the right of Armstrong Drug in the photo is Hormell and Son's clothing store.

Since this photo is undated, it is always intriguing to search for clues in the picture that might indicate an approximate year. One clue is the surface of Market Street. It is brick. Research turned up a story in the *Brownsville Telegraph* detailing the headaches caused by the paving of Market Street through the Neck with concrete. The Neck was closed for a month in the autumn of 1930 so that crews could relocate utilities and prepare for the laying of the concrete. Traffic on the National Road, which was always heavy in this bottleneck, was diverted through Snowdon Square and over the Brownsville Avenue bridge, then up Shady Avenue to Bank Street and down to High Street. Estimated date for the photo is c. 1920s.

(Next page) Here is the first of a series of fascinating panoramic views of Brownsville and the surrounding area.

This is one of my favorite photos of Brownsville. Taken by a Monongahela Railway photographer on September 22, 1926, this image captures the essence of Brownsville at its economic high point as a pulsating commercial center in the region. A powerful steam locomotive, black smoke churning from its smokestack, pulls a train of passenger cars past the Neck while a second passenger train sits at the old Union Station building, taking on cargo and passengers. Heavy train traffic as illustrated here spurred the 1928 construction of impressive Union Station.

The signs emblazoned on the buildings along the railroad tracks tell a busy story of banking, business, shopping, and optimism. Passengers on passing trains were among the intended viewers of many of these signs.

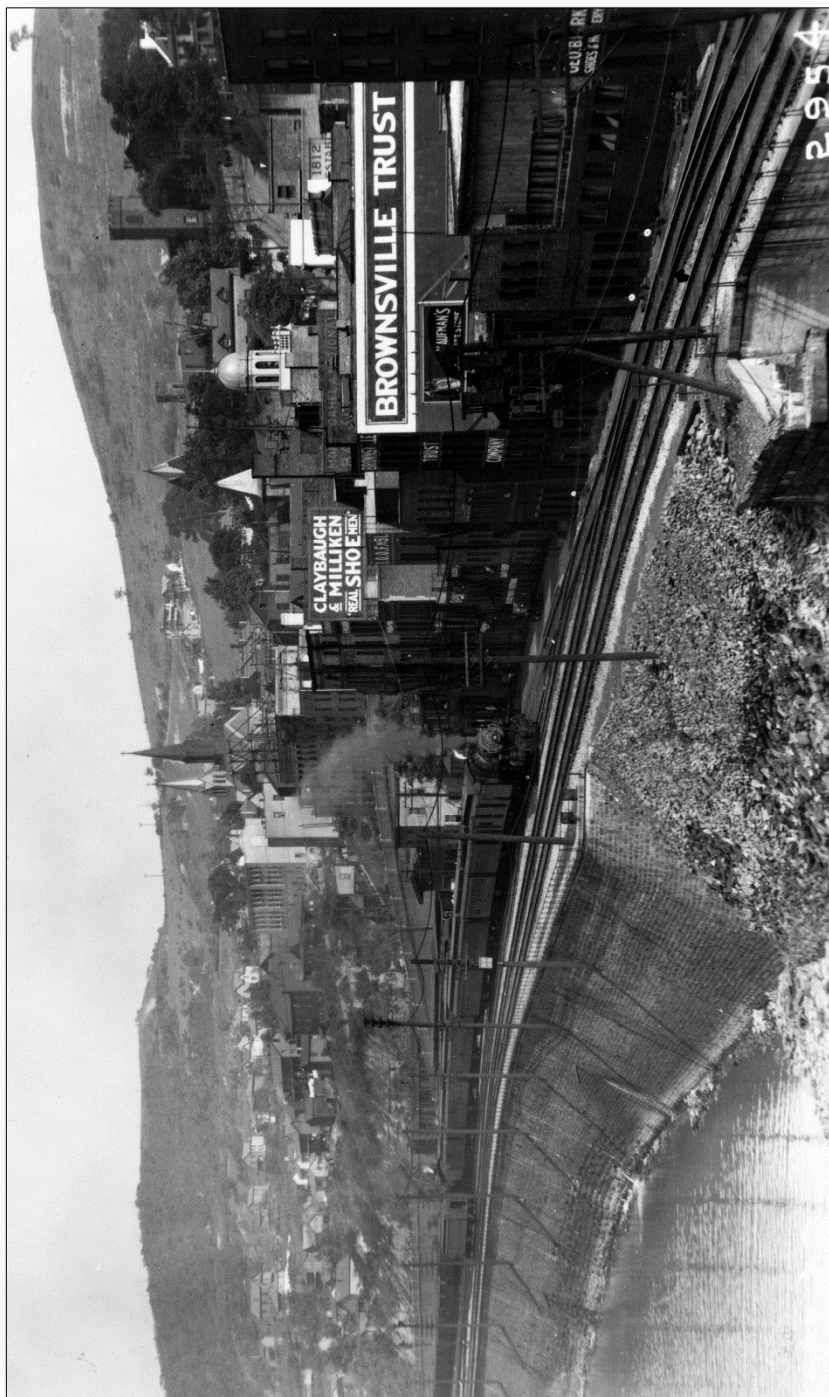
Among the signs are two for Brownsville Trust Company, which occupied 25 Market Street (Sidler's building) and was one of several thriving banks headquartered in the Neck. The sign for Kaufman's (just one "n") Department Store sat atop the building that later housed Kart's ladies' clothing store. At the extreme right of the picture is a sign for the George B. Kirk Shoe Store, which was located next to G. C. Murphy Co.

Signs can also be seen on the Odd Fellows Building ("I.O.O.F. #51"); Goldstein's ladies wear store; and Claybaugh and Milliken shoe store (actually painted on the side of the Monongahela National Bank building because Claybaugh and Milliken was located in the left-hand storefront of the Snowdon building, which had no exposed side walls).

The photo bristles with steeples and towers. Eye-catching is the lovely dome in the center of town (jutting above a fading "Monongahela National Bank" sign). That dome once graced the top of the bank, which operated in that building from 1900 – 1925. In 1925, the bank moved into its new headquarters across the street (familiar to many as the First National Bank building). Eventually, the dome was removed from the building, and the first floor façade of stone columns was moved to the front of the library.

Also gracing the skyline, in addition to the ramparts of the tower of Nemaocolin Castle, were the spires of St. Mary's R.C. Church, First Methodist Church, First Baptist Church, First Presbyterian Church, and Christ Episcopal Church.

As an obscure point of interest, little information is known about the brick building visible at the bottom of Church Street, below St. Mary's R. C. Church School and on the opposite side of Church Street. The top of the building's front wall was "stepped" with a round window inset high on the front wall. According to the 1902 "Bird's Eye View" panorama of Brownsville, the building is identified simply as "Baptist Church." Perhaps it was the predecessor of the First Baptist Church (now vacant) that is opposite the entrance to Albany Road. Its steeple is also seen in this photo.



(Next page) This may be the only photo I have ever seen showing a panoramic view of Blainesburg (the upper precinct of West Brownsville Borough) and West Brownsville. Blainesburg natives may want to retrieve a magnifying glass to examine this photo, taken 85 years ago on April 8, 1929 by a Monongahela Railway photographer. Blainesburg was primarily pasture land until the turn of the century, and for the first half of the century, it was not part of West Brownsville Borough. It was part of East Pike Run Township.

According to the late Jack Sabo, who served as West Brownsville Borough Secretary for over fifty years, Blainesburg left East Pike Run Township in 1954 and merged with West Brownsville Borough for governmental purposes (street maintenance, police, etc.). “Lower” West Brownsville along the river became West Brownsville Borough Precinct #1, and Blainesburg became West Brownsville Borough Precinct #2. In the meantime, California Community School District absorbed the rest of East Pike Run Township’s schools.

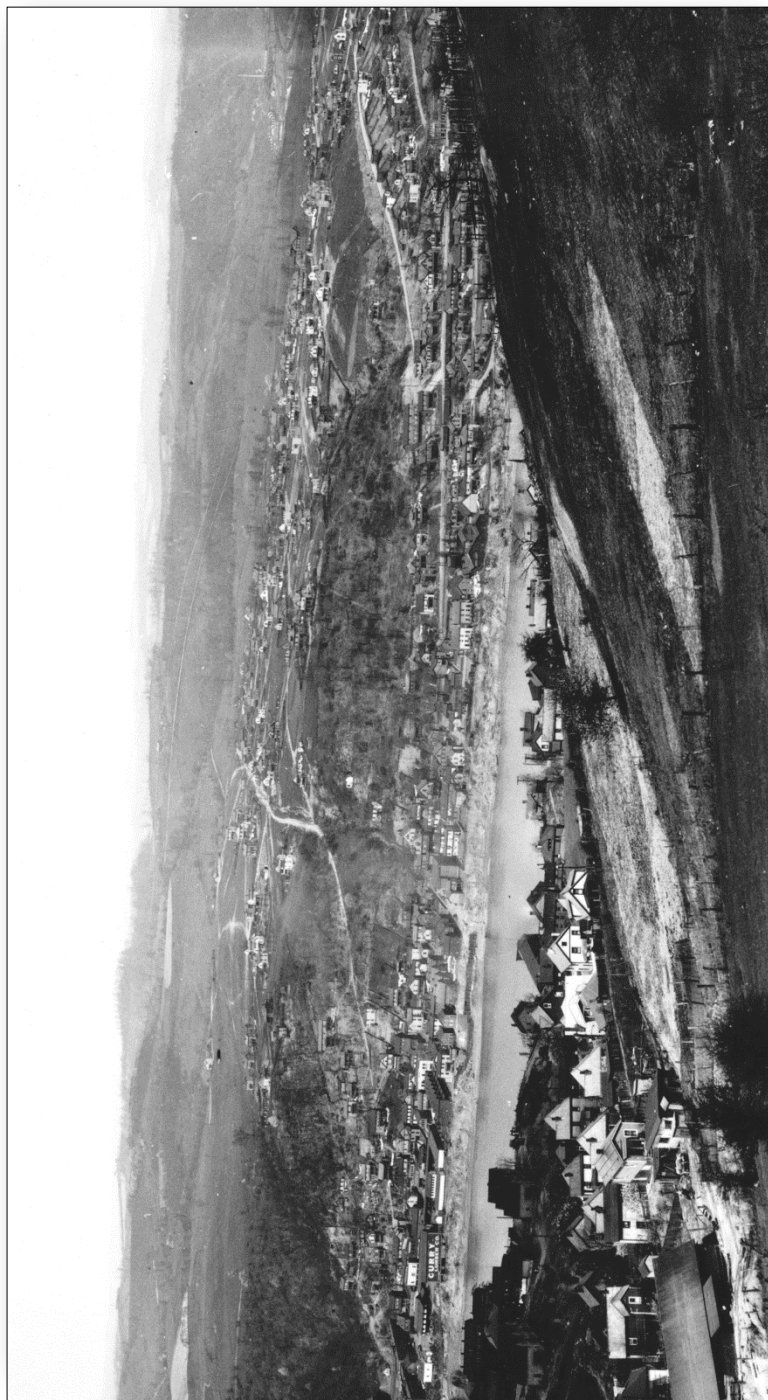
At the time of the merger of West Brownsville and Blainesburg into a single borough, Brownsville School District’s school tax millage rate was higher than California’s. Blainesburg elected to continue to send its students to the same schools they had been attending, which were now part of California Community School District. That is the reason that to this day, children in Blainesburg attend California Area School District.

Blainesburg school, visible in this photograph (grab that magnifying glass!), was built in 1908 by East Pike Run Township School District. It closed in 1961, with its students being sent to Phillipsburg School. It was burned down in 1985 as a practice exercise for a “fire school.”

It is possible to distinguish Pittsburgh Hill and Pittsburgh Road in the photograph, leading from West Brownsville (near the present-day borough building, formerly Collins Service Station) up to and through Blainesburg, and on to California. “Pittsburgh Road” was and is the local name for Route 88 as it travels through the borough.

Barely visible in the distant haze on the right side of the picture is Lilley, a coal mine patch for the Lilley Coal and Coke Company. The mine operated off and on into the 1930s (and possibly later). After it closed for good, some folks took apart the single-story patch houses, moved them elsewhere, reassembled them, and moved in.

In the foreground of the picture (on the Brownsville side of the river) are homes in the area beyond Baltimore Street and below Fifth Avenue, in a “patch” town locally known as “Hunkytown.” Visible along the Brownsville side of the river, almost directly over the hill from Hunkytown, is the Pike Mine (Peoples Coal Company) tippie, which fed coal into waiting barges for transport to steel mills in the Pittsburgh area.



(Next page) In this 1929 panoramic shot, the photographer has captured an image of the Union Street neighborhood that was wiped out in the 1960s when the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania decided to change the path of Route 40.

In the early 1960s, Market Street on Brownsville's North Side was also Route 40 (National Road), as it had been since 1818 when the National Road was constructed through Brownsville. A vehicle traveling up Market Street on the North Side would reach the intersection of Broadway and Market and turn right, continuing up Broadway and on to Redstone Township and beyond. That was the path of Route 40.

In the later 1960s, the decision was made to build a four-lane highway from Brownsville to Uniontown. The Lane-Bane Bridge had opened in 1962, and the four-lane highway was seen as a continuation of the modernization of Route 40. Broadway, which was a potentially dangerous hill for trucks to descend, would no longer be part of Route 40. (Broadway became part of "Old" National Pike after the four-lane highway opened.)

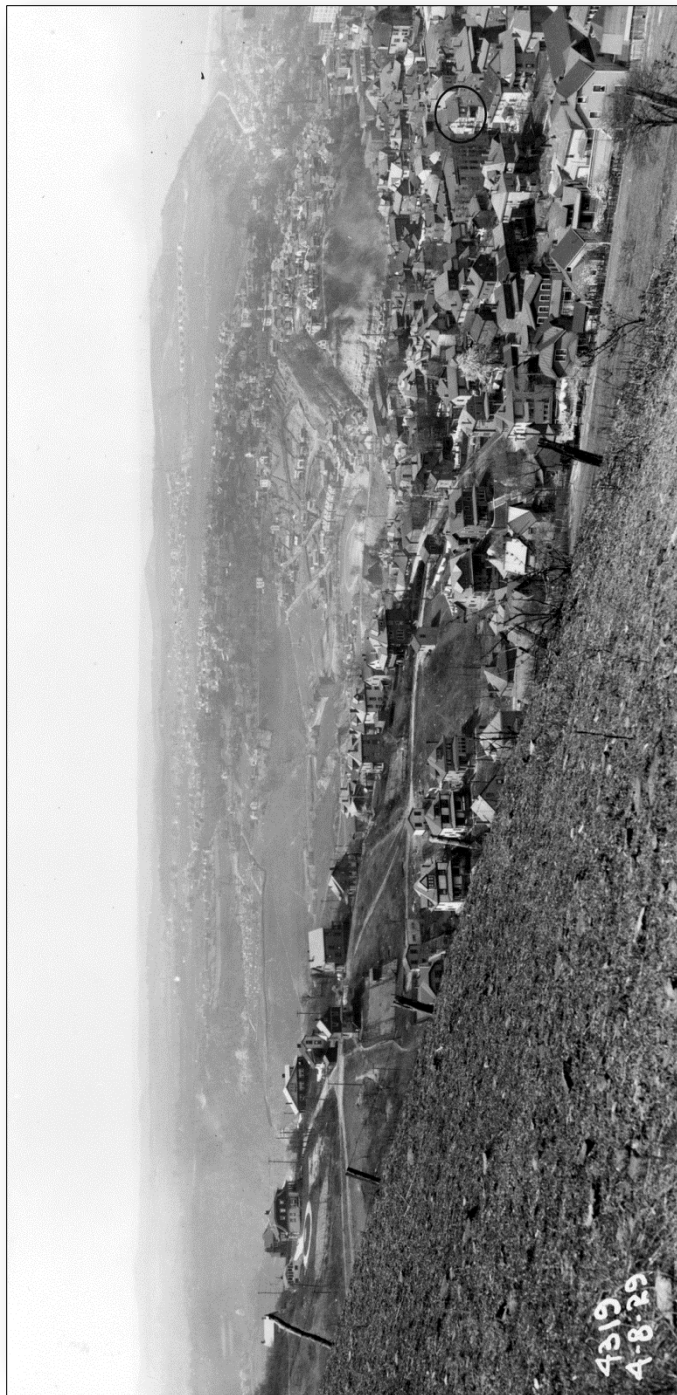
To build the four-lane highway, many buildings, most of them homes, had to be removed. At the intersection of Broadway and Market Street, the vacant Girard Hotel (see Chapter 10 for a photo) was torn down. That is where the new section of highway began, running eastward toward Uniontown, carving a deep chasm through the hillside as it exited Brownsville. To attempt to re-connect the severed neighborhoods on opposite sides of the gash in the hill through which the new highway was routed, a bridge was built over the highway to connect Playford Avenue to Union Street.

To help orient you, a black oval is shown on the right side of the panoramic photo. The building in the oval was on the site now occupied by the Brownsville Fire Company No. 1 (North Side) fire hall. The building to the immediate left of the oval was the Girard Hotel. Immediately to the right of the oval was the Shupe Building. The homes "behind" the Girard Hotel and on up the hill were targeted for removal to make way for the highway.

There is more to see in this photo. The Monongahela Railway photographer's picture is perfectly focused and invites enlargement with a magnifying glass.

On the left side of the picture, in the distance on the hill beyond the Dunlap Creek valley, is Bridgeport Cemetery. On the extreme right edge of the photograph is the Gallatin Bank building (at that time called National Deposit Bank).

Can you find Brownsville High School on High Street? (When the photo was taken in 1929, it was still South Brownsville High School.) How about the steeple of Central Presbyterian Church, blown off the roof seven years after the photo was taken? Can you spot Prospect Street School? Hiller patch? Alicia Road? The row houses along Dunlap Creek on Jackson Street? Spend some time with this photo and the previous one. They are treasures, capturing Brownsville and beyond as the communities appeared nearly a century ago.





(Next page) For this final panorama, we will travel back in time more than a century. There are many noteworthy points to be made about this early image of Brownsville. As we examine them, we will try to estimate the year this picture was taken.

First, look at the Neck. If you look straight down from the Brownsville (Bridgeport) end of the covered bridge, you will see a large wide building with rounded short towers on the top corners of its front wall. That was the Opera House. It opened in 1896 and burned down in 1919. Therefore, this photograph was taken sometime between 1896 and 1919.

The most conspicuous structure in the photo is the wooden covered bridge that formerly connected Brownsville and West Brownsville. A privately-constructed toll bridge owned by stockholders, it opened in 1836. By 1910, even though the bridge's wooden structure was still in good shape, riverboats were getting larger and higher and the bridge was too low to the water. If the river was running high, the bridge could literally block all river traffic from getting by.

How low was it? Horses, wagons, pedestrians, and (eventually) motorized vehicles entered the Bridgeport end of the covered bridge at street level on Bridge Street, right across the street from where Fiddle's is located today. In contrast, the steel inter-county bridge flies over Bridge Street and "lands" on High Street. In the autumn of 1910, the covered bridge was demolished and replaced by the higher (and longer) steel inter-county bridge, which opened in 1914.

Incidentally, the piers for the covered bridge were not re-used for the steel bridge, even though they were structurally sound. They were too far out into the river. The use of steel for the new bridge made it possible to have a longer center span with the piers closer to the two riverbanks, creating a wider channel for river traffic. The covered bridge still existed when this photo was taken, so the date of the photo can be no later than 1910.

Construction of Locks and Dam #5, just upstream from the old covered bridge, began around 1908. The locks opened to river traffic in 1910. In this photo, there is no lock wall yet on the Brownsville side of the river. The riverbank upstream from the bridge was still accessible for landing small boats, swimming, etc. This photo, therefore, dates prior to 1908.

Next, look at John Coulter's hardware store in the Neck. Two buildings to the left of Coulter's (pay attention to the different rooflines) was a tall building with an unusually shaped top to its front wall. That is the Odd Fellows Building, still standing today, and the second oldest building in the Neck. (The Flatiron building is the oldest.) To the *right* of the John Coulter hardware store are two one-story buildings. They are on the later site of the present-day Snowdon Building, which was built in 1906. Since the Snowdon Building did not exist in this photo, the picture dates between 1896 and 1906. That may be the best we can do with an estimate for when the photo was taken.



Many people who drive down Market Street hill to the Neck do not realize that just after they pass the intersection with Albany Road, they are driving over a railroad tunnel. The first photo (below), taken in 1964 from the Lane-Bane Bridge, shows that railroad tunnel, which was built under already-existing Market Street and Front Street around 1906.

The tunnel allowed trains to be routed under Market and Front streets, past the rear of the one-time A&P supermarket, then along Dunlap Creek, passing over several beautifully designed stone bridges that spanned the winding creek. When rail operations eventually ceased, the arched bridges fell into disrepair, and most of them have since been removed.

The tunnel under the two streets was not bored through the hillside, so by some definitions, it was not a “tunnel.” It was a “cut and cover” project, meaning that a deep crevasse was dug through Market Street *and* Front Street hill. Masonry was fashioned to form the shape of a “tunnel,” then dirt was filled in on top of the completed masonry. Then a new road surface was laid on Market Street and lower Front Street hill.

The second and third photos (next page) show the project as it was happening around 1906. The crevasse is shown with a temporary wooden bridge spanning it to allow access to and from the Neck. In the third photo, the rubble from the excavation is shown piled at the foot of Front Street.

The tunnel, while no longer in use today, is still there. It has been filled with rubble from the demolition of the Monongahela Railway roundhouse in South Brownsville.

Notice that in 1964, the parking area between Albany Road and the railroad tracks was in use. Note also that some time after the railroad tunnel was built, a small building was constructed on top of the tunnel.

