

PEERING INTO THE PAST IMAGES OF 19TH CENTURY BROWNSVILLE

Photographs truly do say more than a thousand words, and the rare pre-1900 photographs of Brownsville in this chapter are a revelation.

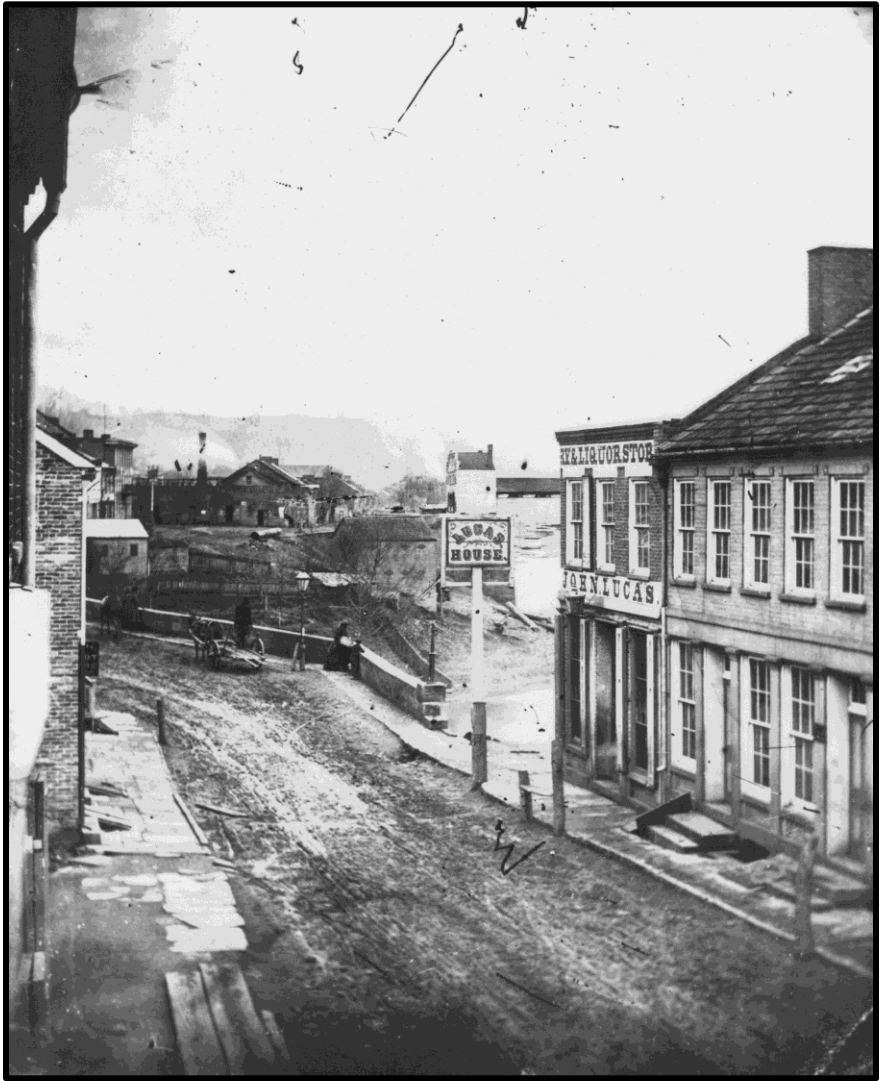
Our community is indebted to the 19th century photographers, identities mostly unknown, who created these images more than a century ago, and to the collectors who since that time have accumulated and preserved them. The challenge, of course, is to make these photographs widely available for viewing by those with a love of Brownsville's heritage. This special chapter is one way to do that.

Most of the nearly four hundred articles that I have written have dealt with events occurring in the twentieth century. I have included in this book many relevant photos to illustrate those articles. However, the photos you will find in this chapter are different. They were all taken before 1900, so they did not match up with the subject material in any of the articles I wrote.

No problem! Since there were no plausible reasons to include these photos as accompaniment to my articles, I have given them their own chapter. In Volumes 3, 4, and 5 in coming years, I plan to do the same. This will enable readers to see vintage photos that, while not related to the topics about which I have written, are well worth viewing.

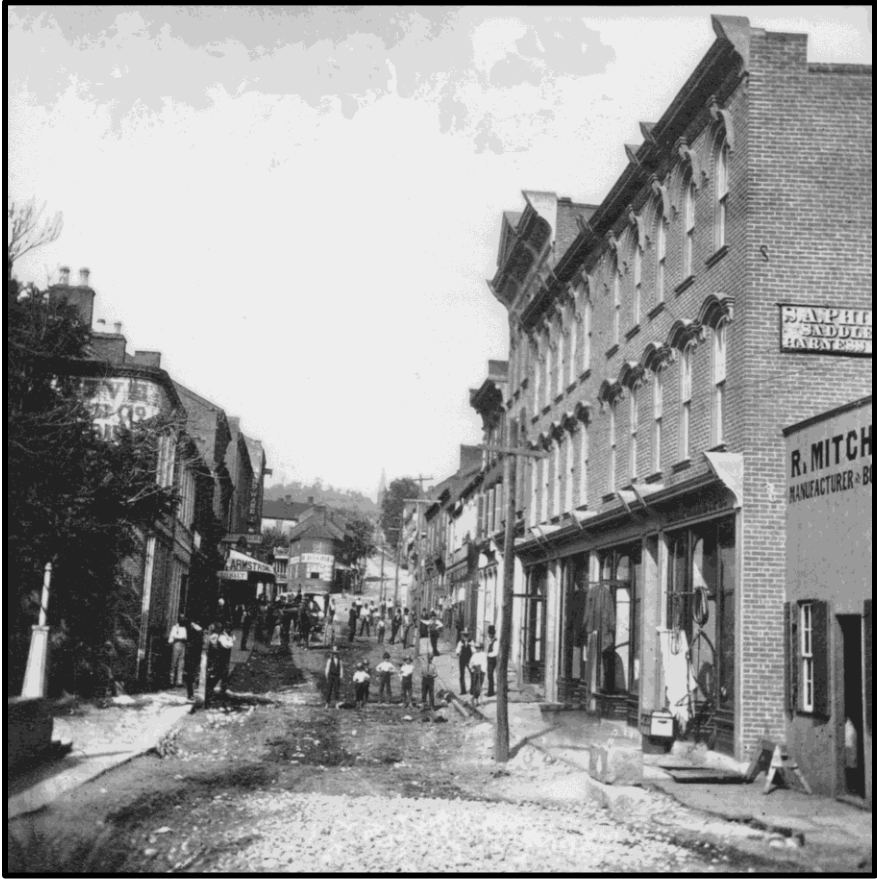
The original photographers died long ago with their chronicling on film of our town's past mostly uncredited to them, but certainly not unappreciated by us. Nearly all of the images in this chapter come from the archives of the Brownsville Historical Society, BARC, and the collections of Harold Richardson and Bill Patterson, all of whom I sincerely thank on behalf of the community and readers of this book.

These pictures provide a fascinating and unique look back at the Brownsville of over a century ago. Enjoy!



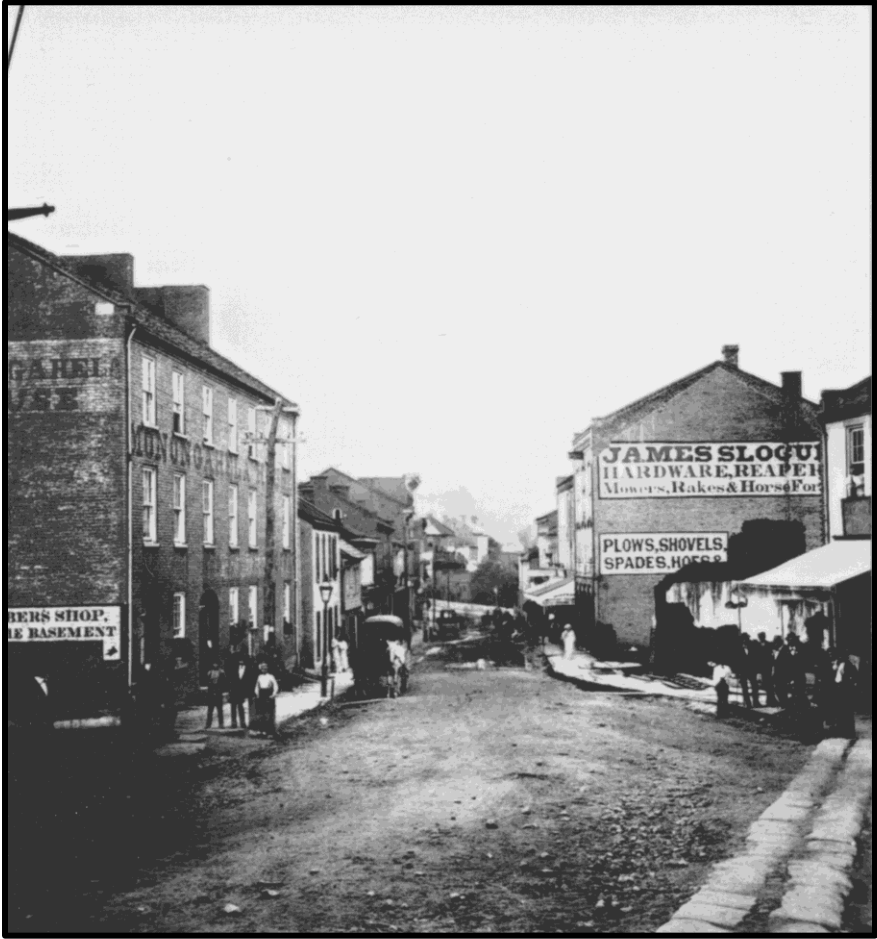
According to Norman (Bill) Patterson, this photograph is probably the oldest existing image of Brownsville. Bill estimates that it was taken around 1855 before telegraph poles and lines were installed. The only feature in the photo that still exists is the curve in Market Street, which was still a dirt street during that time period. Many years later, the G. C. Murphy Co. Five and Ten was located on that curve. The cast iron bridge over Dunlap Creek was in place after 1839, but it is not visible in the photo. Bill suggests this may be a daguerreotype, as evidenced by signs of tarnished metal seen in the upper left corner of the print.



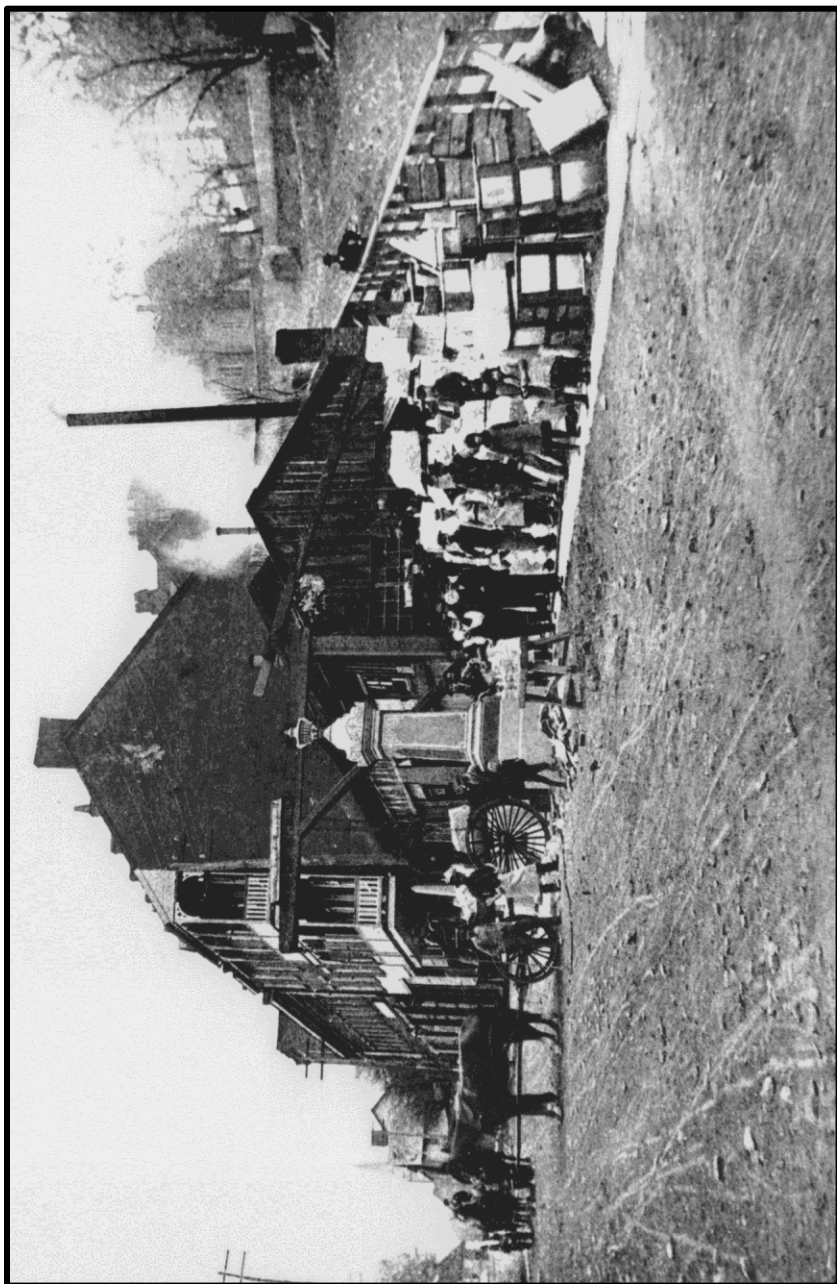


(Previous page and above) These two photographs were each taken from a vantage point in the Neck near the curve in dirt-surfaced Market Street. In both photos, the Flatiron building (built around 1829 or earlier) can be seen in the distance. The steeple on the skyline once graced the First Methodist Church until it was voluntarily removed to avoid catastrophe following the Storm of 1936, which toppled a steeple elsewhere in town. This photo is estimated to have been taken c.1870, earlier than the c.1880 photo on the previous page in which the Storey House can be seen behind the Flatiron building. Note the single cross-piece on the telegraph poles in this photo; in the photo on the previous page, the poles had evolved to a triple cross-piece.

In the photo above, restored by Bill Patterson, a sign for the Armstrong drug store is visible along the left side of the street. The boys posing in the street are apparently standing on a stone or wooden crosswalk, designed to permit crossing the street without stepping in the mud. This photo may have marked a special occasion, as many of the boys and some of the men in the foreground are wearing unusual hats.



This photo is taken from the north end of the Neck. Directly behind the photographer was the Flatiron building. The original Monongahela House is on the left. It was the first of three Monongahela House/Hotel buildings in that approximate location. The stone crosswalk leads from the Flatiron building to a spot that would correspond to the left side of the modern-day Union Station. The street that the crosswalk traversed was called Old Water Street. Today, that street is a dead end which stops behind the Flatiron building, but prior to the construction of the Monongahela Railroad in 1903, Old Water Street continued behind the Flatiron building, past the Snowdon Works, and on along the river all the way to Redstone Creek. The old Brownsville wharf was located along Old Water Street prior to the construction of the railroad. The vacant space to the rear side of the James Slocum hardware store was filled in 1906 by the erection of the still-standing Snowdon Building.

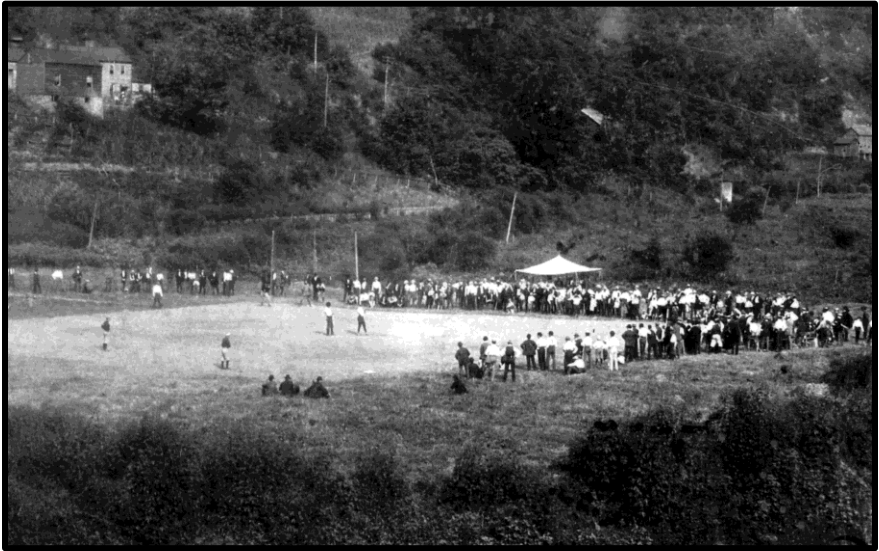
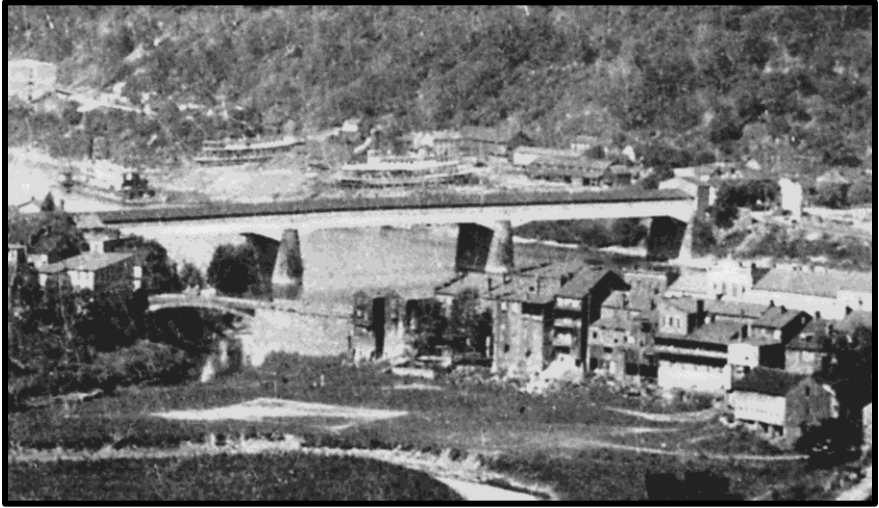




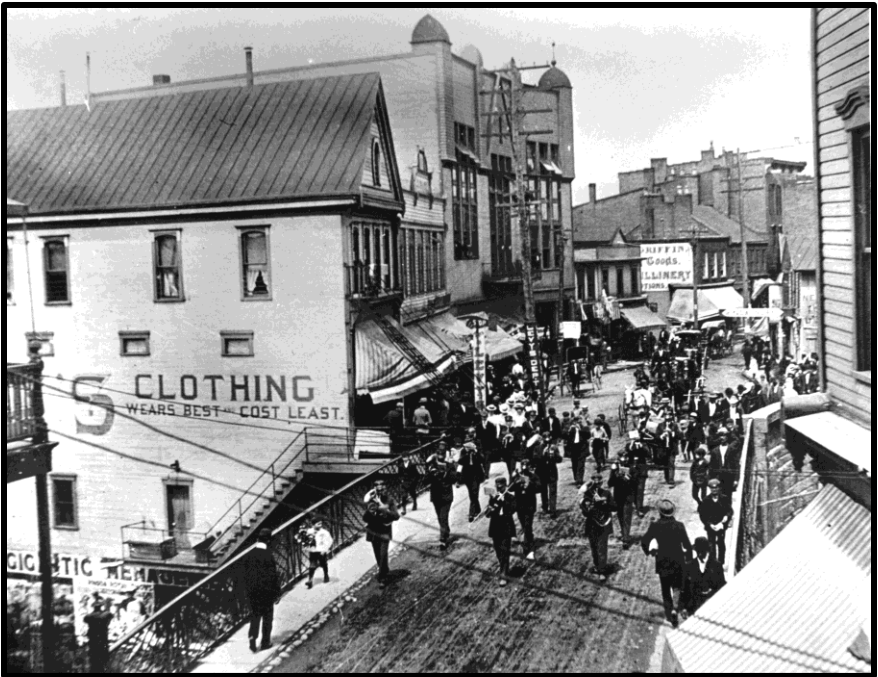
(Previous page) T. S. Wright's Steam Marble and Granite Works was located on the wedge-shaped lot between the bottom of Front Street hill and the bottom of Market Street hill. Both streets appear to be dirt in this 1882 photograph. Thomas S. Wright emigrated from England in 1848, joining his brother Moses in the tombstone business. In 1875 Moses retired, and in 1880 T. S. installed steam power to aid in creating granite monuments, which were replacing marble.

Many of the tombstone designs were done by T. S. Wright's son, Harry. Following the death of T. S. Wright, the business continued until shortly after the turn of the century. Harry Wright then turned from the tombstone trade to the advertising business, creating Wright Poster Outdoor Advertising Company and the Wright Amusement Company, which operated the Plaza Theater from 1921 until 1930.

(Above) This complex of buildings was the Snowdon iron works. The buildings were located just north of the Flatiron building in what is now a fenced-off parking lot near the old freight station building. The firm was founded around 1820 as a blacksmith shop by English immigrant John S. Snowdon. It gained renown for producing many of the familiar cast iron National Road mile markers, and in the 1830s it fabricated the cast iron tubular structure supporting the nation's first cast iron bridge in Brownsville. The firm built the engines for many of the river steamboats constructed in Brownsville and California boat yards. Snowdon died in 1875. His youngest son, John N., continued the business until around the turn of the century. John N.'s son, Charles, was a successful banker who also created Snowdon Place, the Brownsville Free Public Library, and the Brownsville Water Company.



These photos are grainy but valuable views of a Brownsville topography that disappeared a century ago. The top photo shows Krepps Bottom, the low-lying flood plain between Dunlap Creek and the rear of the buildings along the Neck. This area was later filled in with slag to raise it to the level of the Neck, creating Snowdon Place (now called Snowdon Square) in 1916. The cast iron bridge can be seen with no buildings blocking the view of the entire bridge. In the bottom photo restored by Bill Patterson, a turn-of-the-century baseball game is underway on the Krepps Bottom ball diamond, also visible in the top photo.

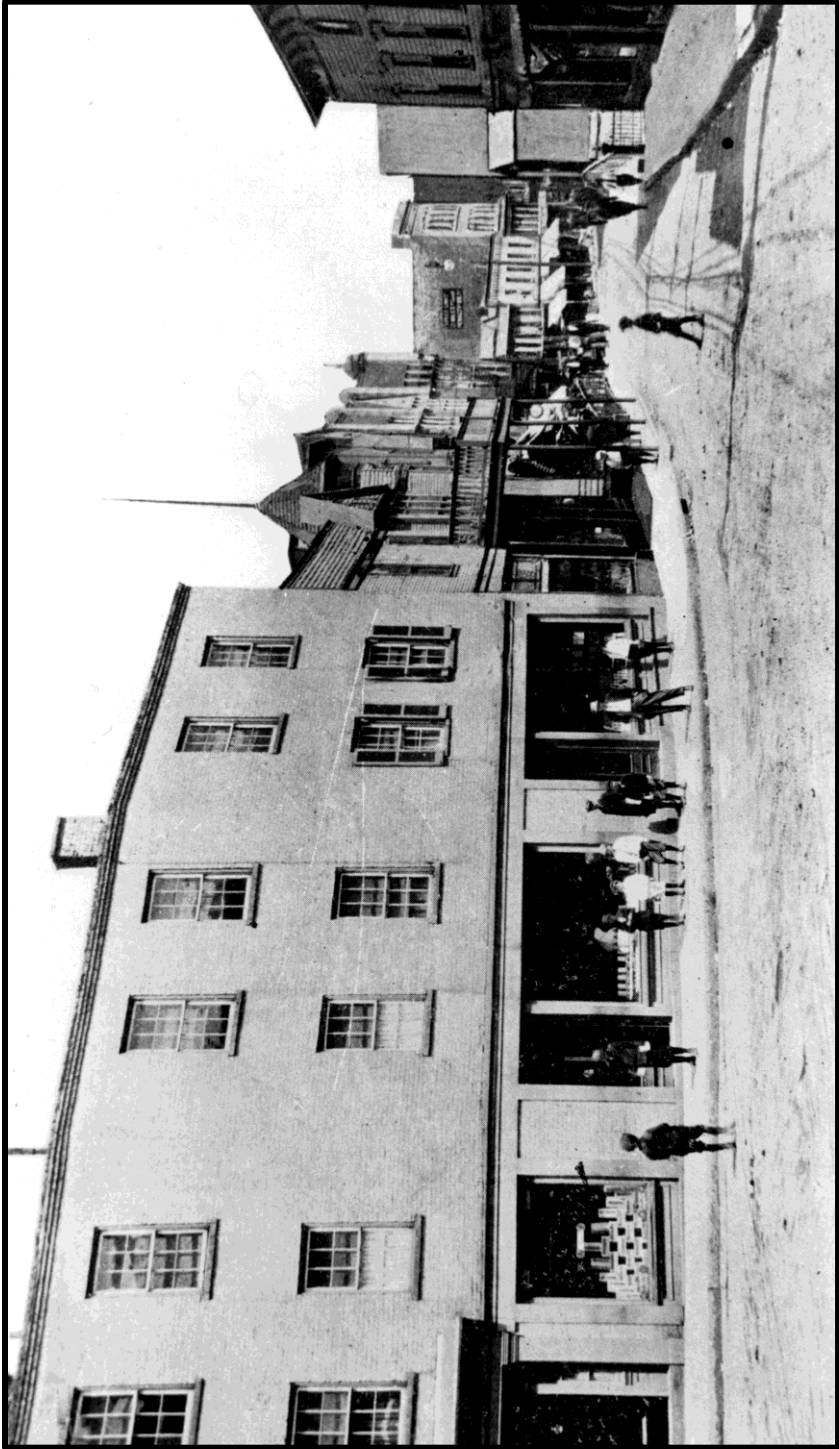




(Opposite, top) This c.1890 photograph shows a circus parade as it winds through the Neck on its way to Krepps Bottom. The photographer is standing at the curved end of the Flatiron building, which is behind him. The horse-drawn circus wagons are veering toward the right side of the picture because they need to swing wide to make the turn onto a dirt road that ran alongside the Monongahela House (large building on the left) and led down into Krepps Bottom, a flat flood plain that served as an ideal venue for circuses, football games, baseball games, and religious tent revivals.

(Opposite, bottom) Another parade, this one on the other end of the Neck, marked the Memorial Day celebration in 1898. The Bulger Band is marching across the Cast Iron Bridge toward Bridgeport, which was a separate borough from Brownsville until the 1930s. The large building (3rd from left) with the cupola-like corners on the roof was the Opera House, which was destroyed by fire in 1919.

(Above) Robinson's Pharmacy at the Bridgeport end of the Cast Iron Bridge. A sign on the pole indicated that a public telephone was available inside.





Both of these undated photographs were taken at the intersection of Bank Street and High Street in Bridgeport borough. On the previous page, the unidentified building on the curve was on the approximate site where Central Pharmacy was later located.

In the above photo, the original National Deposit Bank (established in 1872 as the Brownsville Deposit and Discount Bank) was in the right-hand storefront. It later occupied the entire ground floor, and in 1900 built a new building on that corner. On March 20, 1923, the present day building, also on the same site and now locally known as the Gallatin Bank building, opened for business.

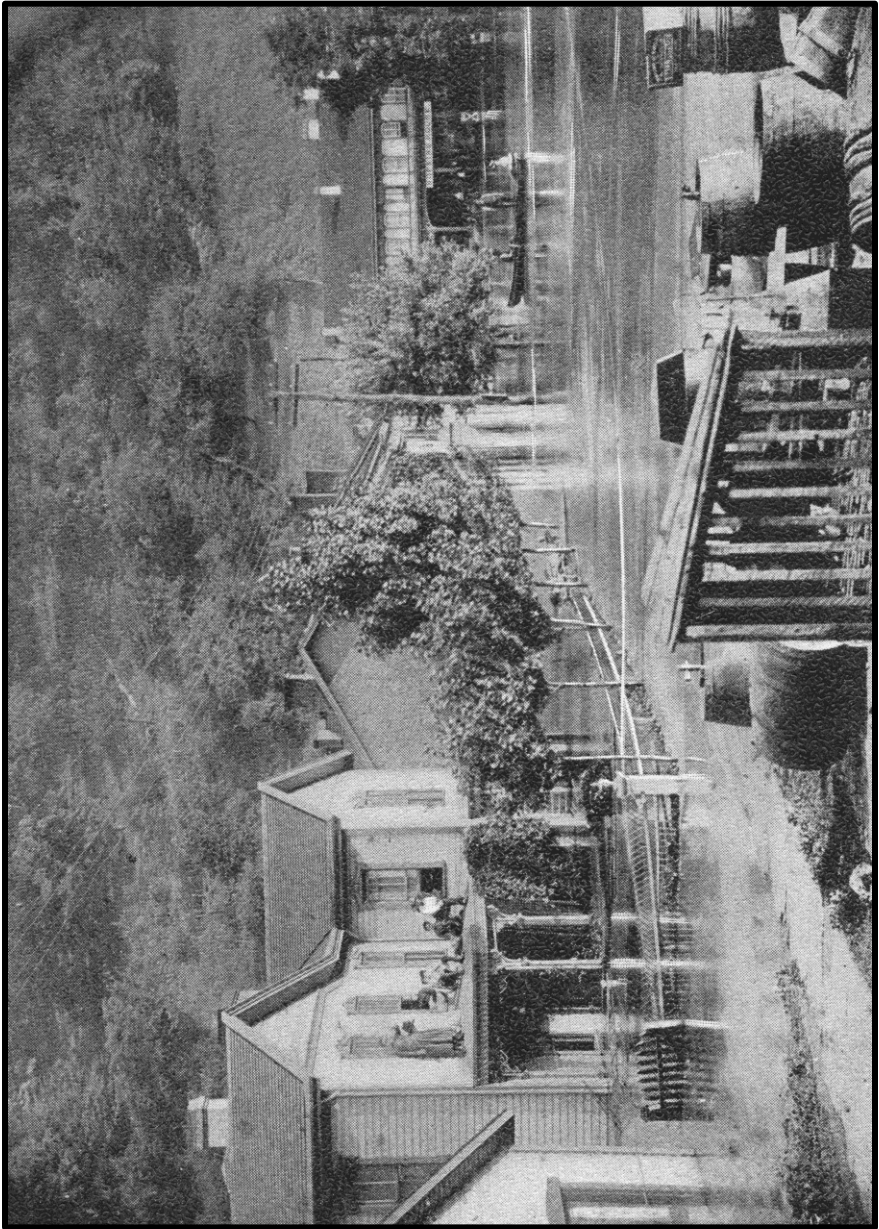


This was Scrabbletown Hill, now known as High Street. The bottom of the hill begins in front of the current Brownsville borough municipal building. The dirt surface of Scrabbletown Hill as shown here, when considered along with the single crosspiece utility poles leading up the hill, would seem to place this undated picture near the turn of the century. Interestingly, there is no reliable information revealing the exact location of Scrabbletown, which it is assumed was either on the hillside itself or was a neighborhood near the top of the hill. The erratically curving wooden walkway that borders the dirt street does not appear to have attracted the attentions of a surveyor when it was laid out.

Of particular note on the right side of this photograph is the white multi-story house. It is believed to be the oldest building within the boundaries of the former Bridgeport borough. Known as the Mitchell house, it dates to c.1795, is approximately the same age as the Brashear house on Brownsville's North Side, and is contemporaneous with the original stone trading post portion of Nemacolin (Bowman's) Castle.

However, unlike the Brashear house and Nemacolin Castle, each of which has been carefully maintained over the years, the condition of the historic Mitchell house has been allowed to severely deteriorate over the past two decades. The house's stucco exterior surface is falling off in large chunks, revealing the brick surface beneath. Vines have overgrown the structure.

The Mitchell house has stood at this location during four centuries, but if corrective action is not soon taken, its survival will be very much in doubt.





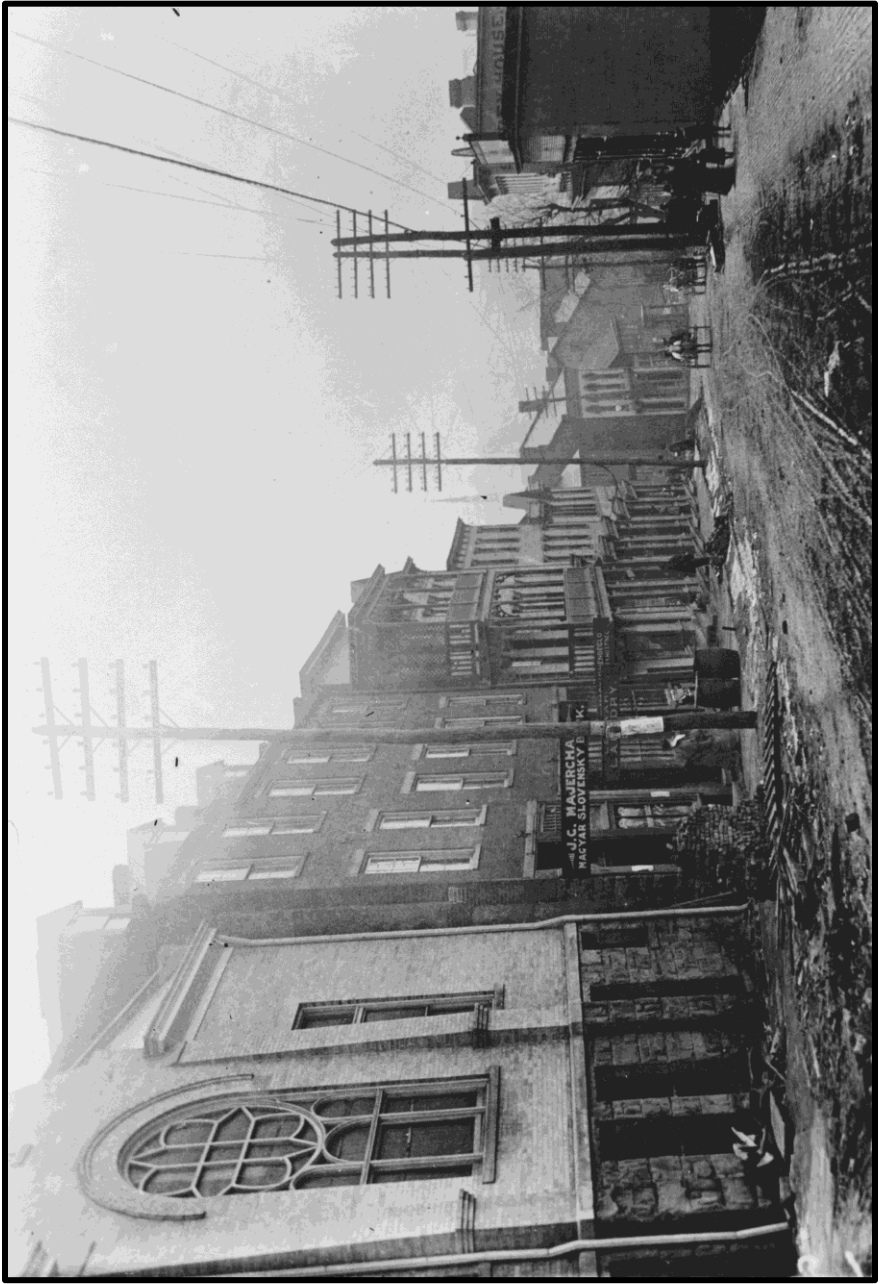
(Previous page) Unlike Brownsville’s Neck, which was a favorite subject for local photographers over the years, some parts of the Three Towns (Brownsville, Bridgeport, and West Brownsville) rarely attracted a camera’s lens. For example, there are far fewer photographs of West Brownsville in existence, and almost none showing certain parts of town. However, it seems that natural or manmade disasters were among the few lures that would attract Brownsville photographers to journey to the West Side.

The photo on the previous page, which was also featured on a postcard in a series sold by the Industrial News Company, was taken during one of those disasters. It is apparently an image of the worst flood in the history of the three communities, the Flood of 1888. Residents may recall that for years, the high water level of this flood was marked on the side of the building housing Mitchell’s Nut Shop, where it could be easily seen from the Cast Iron Bridge.

This scene appears to be of Bridge Street and its distant intersection with Railroad (Main) Street. The sign on the business at the far end of Bridge Street says Hopkins House. Note the entire family perched on the roof of the house on the left, apparently awaiting rescue (or posing for the photographer).

(Above) This was the Girard House, which stood the test of time until the 1960s when the state transportation department decreed that it must be removed in order to construct a four-lane highway from Brownsville to Uniontown. By then, the building had been radically altered and used as a Studebaker dealership. It was located at the intersection of Market Street and Broadway.

The sign over the porch says “1800 Girard House Ja. W. Claybaugh Prop[rietor]”. The establishment, formerly called the Workman House, hosted General Andrew Jackson on one of his frequent trips along the National Road and also the “Great Compromiser,” Senator Henry Clay. Both men traveled the National Road frequently on their journeys between the nation’s capital and their home states of Tennessee (Jackson) and Kentucky (Clay).



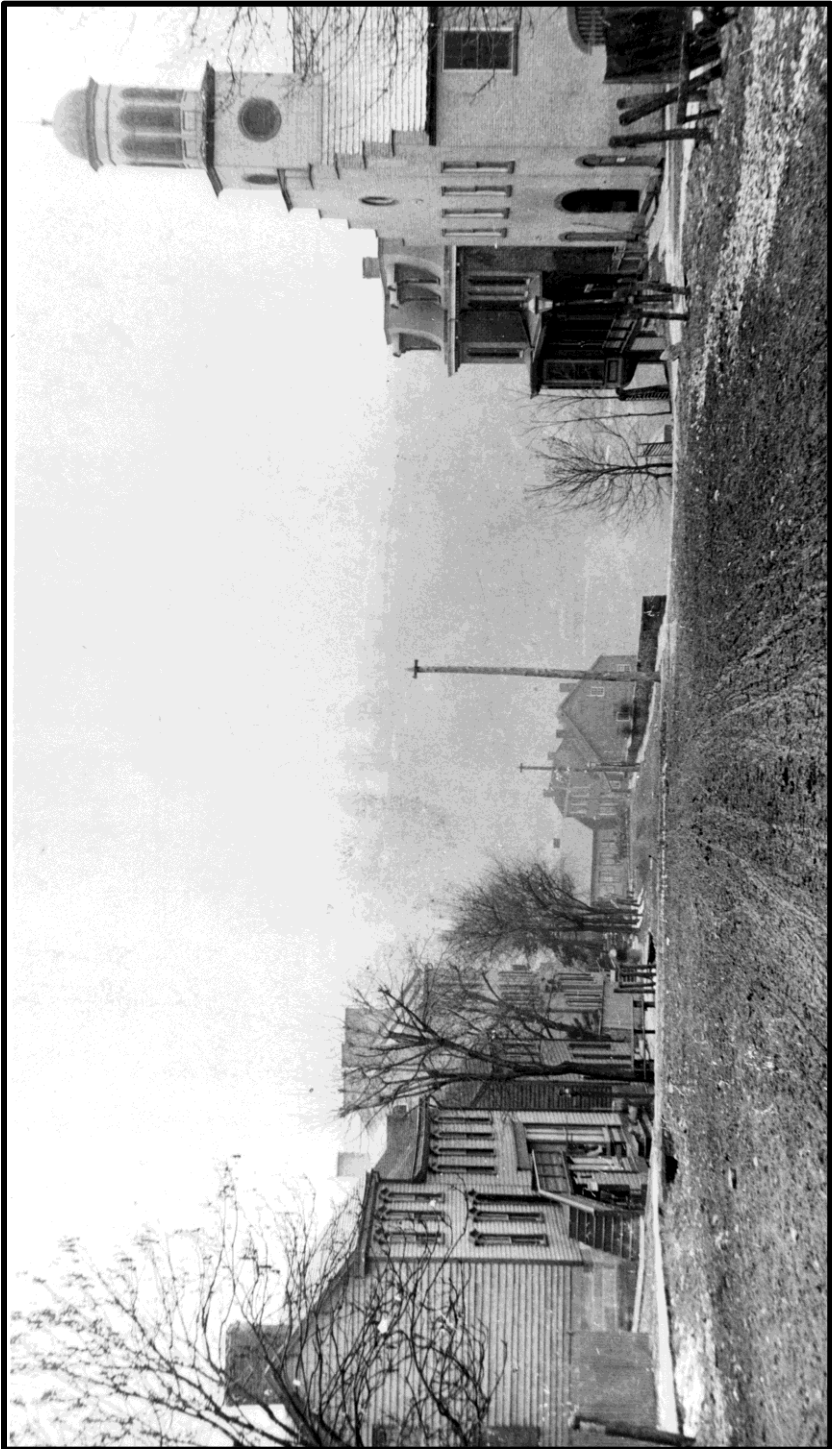


(Previous page) The church on the left was the First Baptist Church on Market Street hill. The building is still standing but vacant. It is directly across the street from the entrance to Albany Road.

This photograph is undated, but inasmuch as construction of the Baptist Church began in 1899, there are no apparent streetcar tracks in the brick street surface, and there are several horse-drawn conveyances on the street, this photo may be estimated as having been taken just after the turn of the century.

Notice the ethnic businesses along Market Street hill, a solid row of buildings leading down to the Neck. Next to the church is a Magyar bank, no doubt catering to the many individuals who had immigrated into this area from eastern and central Europe seeking employment in the coal mines or at the coke ovens. The second building on the right is the Storey House. It is difficult to discern whether the entrance to Albany Road had yet been constructed to replace Old Water Street, which was truncated by construction of the Monongahela Railroad.

(Above) This is the old Market House, built in 1820 and torn down sometime after 1902, probably not long after this photo was taken. It was located on the northwest corner of Third Avenue and Market Street. As a point of reference, the present-day St. Nicholas Greek Catholic Church, if it had existed then (it was organized in 1911), would have been located on the extreme right-hand side of the photograph where the utility poles can be seen. Steep Hill Street (also called Stony Road) began its descent to Old Water Street in front of the Market House . . . an exciting ride during inclement weather!





(Previous page) In this undated photo we see the Market House from a different angle in this panoramic look at the portion of Market Street just above North Bend. Market Street is still dirt-covered, and the utility poles may simply be carrying a telegraph line. The buildings to the left of the Market House are built on the slope leading down Hill Street. The low wall which borders the street in the center of the photo protects pedestrians from a fall down the slope to Hill Street, the entrance to which is to the right of the wall's near terminus. The old North Side fire hall on North Bend is not in this photograph, as it was not built until 1914.

(Above) This undated photograph provides a later view of the same general area. In the distance on the left is the First Presbyterian Church, built in 1896 and destroyed by fire in 1967. Just up the street from the church was the Playford house, which the church purchased in 1920 for \$15,000 for use as a manse. The three-story building above it was the S. S. Graham building, and on the extreme left of the photo was the Claybaugh residence.

On the right side of the photo, a pedestrian bridge (removed around 1925) connected Market Street with the homes on the north side of Hill Street. The home on the extreme right was the Kisinger residence. Built in 1885 by Dr. J. C. Abrams, it became the Kisinger Funeral Home in 1936.

(Next page) Market Street on the North Side as it once appeared, a broad avenue with tree-shaded sidewalks on both sides. This turn-of-the-century photo was taken from the Girard House.

