

FINAL REPORT:

STEEL INDUSTRY CORPORATION ETHNOGRAPHIC SURVEY

SELECTED BOROUGHES ALONG THE ALLEGHENY RIVER

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Plan of Fieldwork

For five weeks during the summer of 1993, I worked on an ethnographic survey for the Steel Industry Heritage Corporation in Homestead, Pennsylvania. The purpose of the survey was to document traditional culture in southwestern Pennsylvania, with an emphasis on the way the mostly departed steel mills had affected the towns that used to depend on them. Before leaving for Pittsburgh, I told a friend about the project. She said, "You're going to hear a lot of sad stories."

At the time, I more or less agreed. Several years ago, while working with a traditional arts program in the Youngstown area, I had met some sad--and angry--people who had worked in the mills in that region. One man about my age at the time (early thirties) had been laid off for about a year, and had a broken marriage, a shabby apartment, and a late-model Corvette sitting in the driveway, fully paid off, a product of the pay checks he had been getting. His plan at the time was to move to Nashville. He had been writing songs and getting some encouragement from a music friend who lived there. The last I heard, he was still in northeastern Ohio, and was working occasionally at a mill that was still in operation. That was years ago, and he may be doing something different now.

What I actually found in the Pittsburgh communities along the Allegheny was not anger or even sadness. Instead, there were people who had mostly lived there all their lives and liked their neighborhoods and mostly had positive things to say about Pittsburgh: The area has undergone a major economic transformation. But unlike Youngstown of 1983, the Allegheny Valley has seen growth and development; community-based businesses are taking advantage of the great natural beauty of the area to attract people to shops and restaurants, and to such river-related pastimes as fishing and boating. If the big mill pay checks are largely a thing of the past, it is also true that the river and air are cleaner now, and their communities are more pleasant places to live.

Partly, such boosterism was due to the ages of the people: demographically, the median age of the population in my study area is two or more years older than for Allegheny County as a whole; the people I talked to were often sixty or older. This statistic undoubtedly reflects the economic wrench that industry in the area has undergone. A lot of working people have moved away, and the people who have stayed were at or near retirement age, with no reason to go elsewhere in search of a job.

Partly, though, my findings are due to the nature of the work I was doing. In order to find out about local history,

businesses past and present, and attitudes that residents have about themselves and where they live, a fieldworker ends up talking to a lot of older people. As folklorists and similar types have long known, the older people in an area are the truly valuable contacts; they have the knowledge and skills themselves, or they know who has.

As I look at my notes from my first days of fieldwork this summer, this pattern is readily apparent. The first community I worked in was Blawnox, and my first notes were jottings of the names of the oldest looking businesses along Freeport Road, the main thoroughfare through town. During the first morning, I talked with two women at Isabella Tailors, Florence Vitari and her mother, a woman of about eighty standing by the counter supported by her walker, who mainly listened to the conversation her daughter and I were having, except when she disagreed with some piece of information, such as a date. Florence was sure she had nothing relevant to relate herself, although she was a lifelong resident of Blawnox. But if I wanted to find out more about the mill, which had closed a couple of years before, I should look up Bill Sproul on Center Avenue, who ran a small grocery and knew everyone who used to work there. This piece of information turned out to be entirely correct, and Mr. Sproul was one of the main resource people for me in Blawnox, a gregarious person who knew his town well and introduced me to a number of residents who also proved useful to my research.

The second contact I made that first morning was with a woman in a row house a few blocks east of Isabella Tailors, who was having a yard sale. As I looked through a stack of paperbacks on a table, she asked me what I was interested in. I told her that I was hoping to find something on the history of Blawnox, and she said that she had just what I needed. It was not for sale, but I was welcome to look at it. This woman, whose name is Ann Dudek, had a copy of a book printed in 1975 commemorating the 50th anniversary of the incorporation and naming of the Borough. The book had articles about the town, businesses, churches, and people; and it also had photographs of vanished buildings and early residents, and pages of pictures from the 1936 flood. From leafing through it I found that the name of the closed mill was Blaw-Knox, from which the town derived its name, and that before 1925 the town had been known as Hoboken. Eventually, I obtained a copy of the book from the Borough secretary, who kindly gave it to me when I mentioned that Bill Sproul had suggested the office as a place that might have a copy.

What I didn't know that first day but soon found out was that each community in my study area along the river had at least one anniversary book that had been locally produced, commemorating a significant date in the town. (The exception is Sharpsburg, where a resident is doing research for such a

book, and has solicited articles and the use of old photographs from other people in town.) These anniversary books have proved invaluable as sources of information about events, people, and dates; but they are equally of value because of the pride of community that the pages reflect, and the way that the articles and pictures go together to suggest things that the community deems to be significant, since they were made by local people for a readership of local people.

Some articles have particular value for a researcher, and one such was written by Mrs. Margaret Byrne Lang and appears in the Blawnox anniversary book. This essay is called "Study of a Small Town," and it was composed in 1947 for the Blawnox Public School. A headnote before the article reports that the principal kept a copy of the manuscript in the office where students studied it, and that Mrs. Lang is now deceased. The essay itself shows that the author knew Blawnox well, had done some detailed research, and was making an effort to convey to young people what made their town distinctive. This effort to reach the reader is apparent in the description the author uses for historical events. Here is Mrs. Lang, for example, relating details about the French force that came down the Allegheny River on April 16, 1754 to capture Fort Pitt:

The river was high and swift in the channel and swollen from bank to bank with the flood of spring rains and the melting of ice and snow in the mountains. The leading batteaux was
 about seventy feet long; following and grouped
 it in a long parade were other batteaux and 300
 canoes. They carried French soldiers in the
 blue and yellow uniforms of France,
 Canadian voyageurs in deerskin jackets and breeches and
 high leather boots and fur caps.

The language is plain enough for a young reader to follow, and precise enough to give any reader pleasure in the scene she describes.

My positive experience with the Borough office in Blawnox was duplicated in the other towns along the river; for my purpose, it was fortunate that the communities had been incorporated as boroughs. In each office there were people who were glad to be of service and point me in the right direction, once I had explained what I was after--or who themselves turned out to be generous and helpful with their time and information (Ralph DiLuigi in Sharpsburg, for example, and Mary Ellen Cavlovic and Bill Skertich in Etna). Elected officials who were generous with their time and information include Mayor Jack Cavanaugh of Millvale and former mayors Ed Merzlak of Aspinwall and Bill Helsley of

Verona.

Churches are a prominent part of the landscape in the boroughs along the Allegheny River, and their presence is historically and culturally important. As Sharpsburg attorney John Arch mentioned, the architectural dominance of St. Mary's Church in his borough is reminiscent of the configuration in older European towns, and it underscores the value that emigrants from Germany and elsewhere placed on religion as a link with the places they had left behind. Church people who were helpful with my survey include the Reverend Romildo Hrboka of St. Nicholas Church in Millvale, who talked with me about his experience in coming from Croatia to administer the gospel in Pittsburgh, as well as the magnificent Vanka murals in his church and the less-than-magnificent billboard placed by a sign company on the hill in front of his church. Nancy Hartman, the Church Secretary at St. Anthony's in Millvale, shared information about her church and her family's longtime affiliation with the parish and the town. Reverend Mark Shockey of the First Evangelical Church in Sharpsburg helped me explore the older files about his church and its early members; he also introduced me to other valuable resource people at the Rotary Club in his town. And Sister Therese of the Sisters of St. Francis Millvale shared information and gave me an anniversary book that documents the presence of the Convent on Mt. Alvernia since 1866, and the work in health and education the sisters have performed for the Pittsburgh area over those years.

Part of the traditional activity in the boroughs did meet my expectations. There was for instance an active Croatian community, centered more or less in Millvale's St. Nicholas parish, but actually present throughout the study area. I also found Italians, particularly in Sharpsburg, and Irish social activity as well. Local history people were every bit as strong as I suspected, in a part of Pennsylvania that has had so much happen to it over the past two hundred and more years. Craftspeople were not present in quite the numbers I had hoped, although this lack in my report may be due more to the time I could devote to it (and luck) than to the actual situation along that part of the river.

There were some talented people in my survey: I found the first in a theme-oriented hobby store in Aspinwall, devoted to miniature dollhouses and furniture. In the past I had come to associate such a shop with easy to assemble kits; but along with the pre-fab models there was a beautiful gray frame house that turned out to be based on an actual area home in Fox Chapel--the photo of the actual house was displayed beside the model. I found out from the clerk that the artist who had built the miniature was a retired carpenter who lived nearby in Etna. Earl Bernard turned out to be a quiet and polite man who was happy to show me his workroom and talk

about his materials (mostly birch for the frame with oak strips for flooring). He had retired in 1985 because of his health, and got involved with miniatures partly out of interest and partly because "my wife told me to stop watching so much tv and get involved in something."

From Mr. Bernard I learned about a man back in Blawnox, Charles Specht, who was president of the Pittsburgh Miniature Society. Mr. Specht was a former Blaw-Knox millworker who designed miniature rooms mostly of a historic nature, and usually with some connection to the early settlements in the Pittsburgh area. One example is a replica of an early 19th century carpenter's shop which he has constructed in an old wooden tool box that belonged to his great-grandfather Gerling, who lived in Allegheny City. From his days in the grating shop at the mill, he showed me an impressive wrought-iron chandelier that he had made in his spare time "from scrap" at Blaw-Knox. He mentioned that all workers in the shop made things from time to time, and indeed it was expected out of new men, as a sort of initiation. (Most of the other guys made iron mesh trash burners for their alleys; but Mr. Specht commented wryly that he always tried to do his own thing.) Later in my fieldwork, when I talked to retired millworker Ed Merzlak in Aspinwall, he showed me an iron plant stand, about four feet high, that he had made while at Wyman's. But I may have never seen this item if I hadn't met and talked with Charles Specht, and known about something to inquire after. And all of this is the point about much of what is found in fieldwork; it is chancy. When a person goes out to do a survey, something will definitely be uncovered, but what, precisely, is due to timing and sometimes an offhand question that happens to be just the right one.

Another useful avenue in my work turned out to be area libraries, good for both local history and also for resource people. Shaler Township has two good ones: the township library in Glenshaw (with helpful librarian genealogist Leslie Dunne) and the Glenshaw Public Library down the hill in Glenshaw Valley (with equally gracious librarian and stained-glass artist Violet Rowe). Ellen Kight, who was an invaluable source of information, alerted me to the existence of the Lauri Ann West Memorial Library in Fox Chapel. And, naturally, the Pennsylvania Room of the Carnegie Library in Oakland had vertical files that provided vital information about each borough I studied.

In the end, I did meet some angry former steelworkers, although I had to go to the International Union headquarters in Gateway Plaza to find somebody who really seemed passionate in talking about the demise of Steel Valley. Don Dalena, an editor for Steellabor, the bimonthly magazine of the United Steel Workers, commented that the Reagan Administration, certainly no friend of labor unions, "sounded the death knell

for steel" in Pittsburgh with policies favoring cheap imported steel and cheaper foreign labor. He also mentioned a book called And the Wolf Finally Came, in which John P. Hoerr presents a somewhat different culprit for the decline of steel in the Mon Valley. According to Hoerr, the real obstacle was the historically poisonous relationship between organized labor and management, where both sides mistrusted and detested one another for so long that nothing ultimately could bring them together, including the imminent dismantling of the industry itself. George Dolhi, a retired draftsman for U.S. Steel, was no Union man (he commented that the drafting department at U.S. Steel Headquarters had an ideal situation, since they enjoyed wages and benefits brought on by Union contracts without having to actually join and pay dues). Mr. Dolhi's view of the change in the steel industry was that technological advances made the collapse inevitable; the continuous-casting process for making steel, developed initially in Germany in the 1950s, made the large work force in a mill unnecessary; in order to compete at all, steelmakers around the world had to go to the newer, more automated methods.

All of these factors undeniably had a part in the 95% reduction in jobs related to steel in Pittsburgh. But the former workers I talked to were mostly happy to be retired or working at something else. As Mr. Dolhi said about his early days on the floor at Blaw-Knox: "I wanted a way out, and when I became a draftsman, I figured that was white-collar and I had reached my goal." Other former workers, such as Dale Roberts, who spent his entire career at the Blaw-Knox mill, mentioned the pride workers felt in making something that had to be right, such as radio antenna dishes used to track space vehicles during the Apollo program. But he spent most of his time off the floor and in the drafting office; he said that the mill was so noisy and dirty that he would dread having to go in there for any purpose.

It is also true, though, that the northern boroughs along the Allegheny were less directly affected by the cataclysm in the early 1980s. Steelmaking had never been a presence in that area to the extent it had in the Mon Valley; and the mills that had once existed were mostly long since gone by then. At this time Tippins in Etna is still involved with making parts for rolling mills; and Edgewater in Oakmont is hanging on as a producer of railroad wheels, although the company is currently undergoing reorganization in a bankruptcy hearing. All the other mills have closed, with Blaw-Knox being the most recent in my study area (the last department closed down in 1991). Indirectly and over the long run, the economy of all parts of the Pittsburgh area are tied together. In that sense the decline in population and the increased average age of residents is a result of industry change. And the development trend in the Allegheny Valley

towards using the river and other natural resources of the region to attract shoppers and recreation-minded consumers does have the air of a survival strategy in certain boroughs (the Millvale Organization of Businesses' expressed attitude about the River Front Development proposal in that town is one example).

Another notable feature of the boroughs on the north banks of the Allegheny is the recycling of structures and sites of manufacturing plants and mills. There are a number of industrial parks located in former businesses. On East Ohio Street about a mile west of the Borough is the Millvale Industrial Park, housed in a large brick building that had been a meat-packing plant. Farther out Rte. 28, In Blawnox, is the RIDC Industrial Park on the site of the old County Workhouse and Poor Farm. Part of the Blaw-Knox mill itself (mainly the old management offices) has been renamed an "industrial commons," and is used by an engineering and drafting business. It is hard to escape the impression at such a site of a large fossil that has been partly transformed by smaller, more efficient creatures (although the Blaw-Knox site is not nearly so large as the now- departed dinosaurs that dominated the Mon Valley around Homestead).

In the outlying boroughs, Aspinwall, Blawnox, and Verona (although the last is part of a different development pattern), some recycled properties fit an even more different kind of economic reality. The post office in Blawnox, for example, closed after declining business at the Mill no longer warranted a branch in the borough. The building, erected in the early 1940s, still looks like a small-town brick post office. Inside, however, are four antique shops, part of a dozen or so such shops along Freeport Road. The first antique shop, Frances Taylor Antiques, opened in 1976; now, the word-of-mouth popularity of the stores brings weekend customers from all over the greater Pittsburgh area to Blawnox. Local residents find the situation bemusing; Blawnox native Dale Roberts says he doesn't know any local person who patronizes the businesses: "It would be like buying junk." There is a nostalgic sense about the Blawnox post office building, though, that the current owner is exploiting for commercial purposes. On a much larger scale, there is also a nostalgic sense about the theme of the Waterworks Mall near Aspinwall, across the road from the huge old water pumping station. The commercial use of sites that once served quite different purposes is a development I hadn't foreseen before beginning the fieldwork.

My overall impression of the communities in my study area was well-put by 100-year-old Mary Soonick about her early years in Aspinwall: "Oh, yes, I liked it. Aspinwall was a small town. I knew everybody, and that made a difference It was a good place to live" (Centennial Book,

p. 49). In spite of all the change, these statements still hold true today.

In neighboring Blawnox, retired Blaw-Knox and U.S. Steel worker George Dolhi has made a 40-minute videotape about his town called "Nostalgia," in which he talks about buildings that were there when he was growing up, and how big a part the Pennsylvania Railroad played in the daily rhythm of work and play. The attraction of Blawnox for him does not begin or end with the departure of the old steel mill, which shut down its last department in 1991.

Millvale

1. Previous Research

For the history of Millvale Borough, the single most useful printed source is the 1968 Centennial Anniversary Book. This book recounts the beginnings of the European presence in the Allegheny Valley, concentrating on the area that would eventually become present-day Millvale. It further covers the history of business and industry in the town, including the 19th-century Kloman and Kloman metal forge shop where Andrew Carnegie is reputed to have had his first job in the steel industry as a bookkeeper (p. 33). For historic interest and detail, the book reprints five newspaper clippings about Millvale going back to a fairly extensive Pittsburgh Post article published in 1904. Organizations and churches in the town at the time of the centennial celebration are also covered in some detail. This work has been updated and revised for the 125th anniversary of Millvale's incorporation, which took place September 9-12, 1993.

Key resource people in the community who worked on the project are Rich Mikus (a barber on Grant St.) and Sister Therese Vaulet, a teacher and administrator at St. Francis Convent in Millvale. Other helpful resource people have been Mayor Jack Cavanaugh and St. Anthony's Church secretary Nancy Hartman.

Church publications also provide useful information about their own historic place in the community. Sister M. Zita Green's Chronology of 125 Years offers a detailed summary of the history of the Franciscan convent in the town, from 1866 through 1992 (the date of publication). She also covers the significant work done by nuns from the Millvale Convent in the greater Pittsburgh area, and, indeed, throughout the world.

St. Anthony's Church, the largest Catholic parish in Millvale, published a centennial anniversary book in 1986 detailing the history of a church which was begun to serve the spiritual needs of German Catholics in Millvale, but eventually expanded to include most Irish and English families

as well. The history of St. Nicholas Croatian Catholic Church is significant in part because of the striking murals painted by Maxmillian Vanka, a Croatian artist, between 1938 and 1941. There is printed material about St. Nicholas and the murals, particularly an illustrated pamphlet and accompanying article from a 1981 Church observance of the 40th anniversary of the completion of Vanka's work. The most detailed account I have found, though, is Doris Dyen's 1991 article, "Aids to Adaptation," which discusses the traditional and dynamic aspects of murals both in St. Nicholas Millvale and St. Gregory's Russian Orthodox Church in Homestead.

2.Geography and Cultural History

Millvale is located on the north side of the Allegheny River, approximately three miles upriver from the point where the Allegheny and Monongahela merge to form the Ohio River. The incorporated area of the borough covers .6 of a square mile, according to the U.S. Census, and the population in 1990 was 4,341 people (a loss of 431 from the 1980 figure). This declining population trend is true in general of the boroughs and townships in the vicinity of Millvale on the north side of the river. In addition, census figures indicate that Millvale has an aging population. The 1990 Census reports that 21.2% of Millvale's residents are aged 65 or over; this compares with 17.9% for Pittsburgh as a whole.

Millvale is bounded on the east and southeast by Spring Garden and Troy Hill; on the south and southwest by the Allegheny River; on the west by the Borough of Etna; and on the north by Bauerstown and Shaler Township. The town was originally built along the hollow formed by a creek called Girty's Run; the hills above the valley are steep and heavily covered with trees, a feature of the landscape that is generally the case with valleys or hollows formed by tributaries running into the Allegheny River.

Girty's Run is named after an early European hunter and trapper in the Pittsburgh area, a man named Simon Girty. Girty was captured and adopted by a local Seneca tribe as a child. By the early 1750s he had rejoined white society at Fort Pitt and built a cabin along the creek that eventually would bear his name. The Seneca and other tribes had long used the area surrounding the confluence of the three rivers for hunting and fishing.

An early resident of European background was James Sample, a veteran of the Revolutionary War. Sample built a house along Girty's Run in 1790; he moved there after being deeded the land by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania as payment for his wartime service. A stone house built by his son John around 1826 is still standing and in use as a private residence at 144 Evergreen Road. This house is the oldest

building standing in Millvale. During the 1820s the area of the current town consisted principally of the Allegheny County Poor Farm, which had been built on land purchased from the Sample family. Some buildings from that facility still stand, such as the old double house on Lincoln Avenue beside the Methodist Church, which used to be the home for the administrator of the Poor Farm. Eventually (in 1867) the County moved the Poor Farm to what was then called Claremont Station beside the present Borough of Blawnox (from the Millvale chronology at the beginning of the 125th Anniversary Book).

Before being incorporated in 1868, much of what is now Millvale was a part of Shaler Township known as Duquesne Borough. The Borough was tied in with heavy industry in Pittsburgh starting in the mid-19th century. A rolling mill that produced bars, sheets, plates and nails began operating along Girty's Run in 1847 near the spot where the Rte. 28 bypass runs now. In the late 1800s, this mill, under the management of Graff, Bennett, and Company, employed 300 Millvale men. It was due to this business, as well as the proximity of other factories, that Croatian people first became a part of Millvale and nearby Allegheny City. The mill itself was closed down by 1888, but the Croatian presence in the Borough persisted and resulted in 1900 in the establishment of a new St. Nicholas parish (an offshoot of the older one on East Ohio Street in Allegheny City).

After Graff-Bennett closed, Millvale continued to have manufacturing businesses, such as Bennett Lumber and Manufacturing, or the Ed Vero Company. But many businesses were geared toward customers in the borough itself. Some continue to exist today: the Peifer Funeral Home (begun in 1902) is still on Grant; and the Grant bar (1925) is still managed by the Ruzomberka family that started it during Prohibition, when it was known as the Grant Hotel. The Lincoln Pharmacy has been managed since 1928 by the Cohen family; the building itself sits on the original site of the Allegheny County Poor Farm along North Ave. (An oil painting of the Lincoln Pharmacy, as it appeared before remodeling took place in the 1970s, hangs in a prominent corner of the store. The picture was painted by Phyllis Rosenfeld, wife of one of the pharmacists in the business.) In 1938, Esther Mehler started Esther's Coffee Shop on North Ave., and today her son Bob operates a store on the same site, now known as Esther's Hobby and Toy Center.

Millvale has also been a home for notable religious organizations since the early days of the Borough. The Sisters of St. Francis began their convent on Mt. Alvernia in 1866; and their mission has consistently been to administer to the health and education of the community. In 1885, for instance, the Sisters began the parochial school for

St. Anthony's parish in Millvale; and since those early days, Franciscan Sisters have taught in area parochial schools, as well as running a girl's school at the Mother House on Mt. Alvernia (this school became an accredited high school in 1931). In 1967, Mother Viola began a "borough night" at Mt. Alvernia, in which adults and teenagers could get together for dances and a chance to meet Sisters at the convent under less formal circumstances than at school. These get-togethers continued for a number of years; the dances were eventually taken over by the Millvale Boy's Club.

Millvale's 125th anniversary celebration in 1993 underscored the community pride felt by many residents. One man who helped give an individual stamp to the anniversary was Ed Carr, who with his wife Arlene runs Yetters Ice Cream Parlor on Grant St. His idea was to raise money for the three-day celebration by making a local version of Parker Brother's Monopoly game that is called "Millvaleopoly." The board for Carr's game has the same format as Monopoly, but local businesses are featured around the board. The idea caught on quickly in town, and the forty spaces available on the board were quickly sold (at a fee of \$185 for a space). Soon, business people who had not gotten on the board itself were complaining about being left off, and so Carr and other planners decided to do a realistic four-color map of Millvale on the box lid that encloses the game. The map, drawn by local artist Carol Reihart, has an aerial 3- dimensional perspective, and businesses not on the board itself were drawn and named on the map (for a fee of \$50).

The game was not inexpensive to produce--it cost \$7,000 for printing and royalty fees. But it has proved quite popular: an initial run of 500 Millvaleopoly games were sold this summer at \$20 a game, before the anniversary celebration had actually begun. People living around the country with ties to Millvale have heard about the game, and orders for it have come from many areas of the United States. Neighboring Etina, which was also incorporated 125 years ago, is planning an anniversary celebration next year (in 1994). People in the Borough office there have expressed interest in the Millvaleopoly idea, and may adapt it to their own town.

Joseph Maritzel runs a computer hardware and software business in Millvale (he is a North Side native), and he is a bit of a gadfly when it comes to the Borough. He helped start a group for local business people called "M.O.B." (for Millvale Organization of Businesses) as an effort to get people working together on revitalizing Millvale's economy. The Borough looks down at the heels due to an eroding tax base--an older, mainly retired population, that can't afford to support all the needed repairs to roads and buildings. A bridge has been out for 2 1/2 years near North Avenue and Frederick Street, causing a detour that Mr. Maritzel regards

as a local embarrassment. He believes the Borough has been too passive in getting Penn Dot to do the necessary work.

M.O.B. is seeking to promote more aggressive activity to get needed things done and attract new business to town. One project which his group is solidly behind is the plan for a River Front Development scheme at the location of the present Millvale Marina (near the Washington Crossing Bridge). In general, the plan calls for retail, recreational and residential development of eight acres along the river bank, including stores, a bike path, and townhouses. A major Millvale figure in this project is Jack Kearney, a Borough Council member and entrepreneur. Mr. Kearney owns a company called Brown Bear Bait, which is marketing an invention of his for biodegradable fishline. Mr. Kearney has brought in some investors, and it looks as though the River Front Development project could actually happen. (Mr. Kearney projects certain businesses such as K- Mart being on site by next year, which seems unlikely when the location itself is seen). What is significant here is that Millvale business people are thinking of the future and how to take advantage of what the Borough has--in this case, a portion of the north bank of the Allegheny River.

Communities further upriver such as Aspinwall and Verona are already using the Allegheny as a location for recreation and consumer-oriented business. Older communities closer to downtown Pittsburgh, such as Millvale, Etna, and Sharpsburg, need to get involved in riverfront activities, or get left out of the action. The Allegheny has been and will be the site for commercial exploitation, and the only question is where future sites to attract people will be.

3. The Croatian Community in and near Millvale

Croatian culture in Millvale is based in St. Nicholas Church, with recreational activities (e.g., the annual July 4th picnic and polka and tamburitza music on Sundays during the summer months) taking place at the Croatian Lodge Picnic Grounds on a hill above Babcock Boulevard, just north of town. The Church and picnic grounds draw people from other parts of the Pittsburgh area, such as Etna and Lawrenceville. St. Nicholas in Millvale is a historically significant parish. According to the article in the Millvale Centennial Anniversary book, the Church which was originally built on the hill in 1900 was the first new Croatian Catholic church building erected in America (p.100). The Croatian parish in old Allegheny City predates the Millvale parish, but the Millvale church was the first new one to be built. In 1921 the original church burnt to the ground; on May 30, 1922, the current building was dedicated and the cornerstone laid at the site of the original church on the hill overlooking Millvale.

St. Nicholas Church conducts masses that are well attended (the early Sunday mass I went to had over 100 people and was one of five held that weekend), but the pastor, Father Romildo Hrboka, maintains that it is only a matter of time until the parish is done away with by the Pittsburgh Diocese, with the congregation being split up among other churches in the area. Father Romildo also explained that he stopped giving a Sunday mass in Croatian about ten years ago because of the small number of people in the parish who understood the language well enough to follow the service (personal interview, June 24, 1993). If the Church ceases to function, the church building (erected between 1922 and '32) and the famous murals inside will be maintained in part by the Society for the Preservation of the Murals of St. Nicholas Millvale, a community-based grassroots organization that actively solicits subscriptions for the maintenance of the building and the paintings inside.

St. Nicholas School, a parish school beside the church, was started in 1921, but the building is not used for that purpose any longer (A Sunday school class still meets on the second floor). For the past four years, an area business, Kathy's Custom Draperies, started by a Japanese emigre to the Pittsburgh area, has occupied the rooms on the first floor of the schoolbuilding. The Drapery business employs ten seamstresses, none of whom live in Millvale; the owner, Kathy Flowers, is a resident of nearby Glenshaw. Since Mrs. Flowers is a Catholic convert, she was able to obtain a lease on the school building for her business from the Pittsburgh Diocese. The Diocese administrators are encouraging her to purchase the building, another sign that the parish is no longer as viable as it was a few years ago.

The Croatian Lodge picnic grounds north of Millvale are a social center for members of the Croatian community that extends far beyond the borders of the town itself. On any Sunday during the summer months, weather permitting, several hundred people gather to eat food either sold on the grounds or brought in by them, and to listen to polka and tamburitza music. Pittsburgh area bands play, such as Golubi Tamburitza from Lawrenceville or Bob Hamovic's Slovenian polka band (mainly from Carnegie); but the Lodge Grounds also brings bands in from as far away as Youngstown to play during the summer. Occasionally, organizations such as the North Hills Junior Tamburitza will play and dance at this site. Carol Sees of Etta manages the North Hills Junior "Tammies," made up of members from Croatian families living throughout the Allegheny Valley.

During the 1930s and 1940s, Hickey Park in Bauerstown, bordering Millvale on the north, was the place to be on Monday nights for area boxing fans. One fighter who had some of his first professional fights there was Fritzie Zivic, a

Lawrenceville native who went on to win the welterweight championship in a memorable bout against Henry Armstrong in 1940. Zivic, who was known as the "Croatian Comet," was a popular figure with the Croatian community on both sides of the Allegheny, as well as among area sports followers in general. Along with heavyweight fighter Billy Conn, Zivic enjoyed avid support during and after his career; Pittsburgh remained his home until his death in 1986. Ron Weisen, an area labor leader, was an amateur boxer in Pittsburgh. He is not old enough to have seen Zivic in his prime, but he has heard of Zivic's reputation as a brawler in the ring--a fighter who would "gouge your eye and butt you with his head"; in short, do anything to win. Joe Merzlak's woodworking shop in Etna has a shrine on the wall beside the front door--a collection of pictures of Fritzie Zivic as a fighter, family man, and in uniform during the Second World War.

Etna

1. Previous Research

Two histories have been published locally in the past thirty-four years. The first is a 90th Anniversary Book commemorating the incorporation of the Borough; the second is a centennial book from 1969 (published one year after the hundredth anniversary of incorporation, which took place in September, 1868). These books contain narrative histories that trace the development of Etna from a Seneca hunting area to the development of early industry, notably the Spang Company, a pipe-making mill that began business in 1828. The centennial book also contains information about other businesses, such as the Isabella Furnace for the Carnegie Steel Company (and later U.S. Steel), as well as social organizations and churches in the Borough. Important occurrences, such as the 1936 Flood, are also commemorated in pictures and words. The current Borough Treasurer, William M. Skertich, was involved in the research and writing of both local history books.

A second helpful person in the Borough office is Borough Office Manager Mary Ellen Cavlovic, who kindly donated back issues of the Borough newsletter. This quarterly publication is very useful because of a periodic feature on local history, which highlights organizations, churches and businesses that have been located in Etna for some time.

Another person who has been very helpful in my survey of Etna is Joe Merzlak, a native who has lived in town for all of his 68 years. Mr. Merzlak is a woodworker whose shop, Merzlak Wood Specialties, is located on Sycamore near the southwest boundary of Etna. Mr. Merzlak's shop is in effect a town archive documenting changes he has seen during his lifetime.

The walls have pictures of the town as it appeared during the years when both Spang and Isabella were in full operation. He also has photos of prominent Croatian residents of Pittsburgh, including Fritzie Zivic, a boxer from Lawrenceville who was a local hero. Mr. Merzlak allowed me to borrow a biography of this fighter which was written by Timpav, another Pittsburgh native, and published in 1988. Mr. Merzlak has a great deal of information about the Croatian community in general; he is a member of St. Nicholas Church in Millvale, and gave me a 1981 pamphlet and poster commemorating the 40th anniversary of the completion of the murals painted by Maxo Vanka.

Another helpful resource person in Etna is Carol Sees, whose grandparents emigrated from Croatia in the second decade of this century. Her grandfather worked at Isabella Furnace in Etna, and her father worked for Spang in the same town. Carol manages the North Hills Junior "Tammies," a music and dance group for youngsters up to the age of about eighteen devoted to traditional music from Croatia and other Balkan countries. Carol is well-versed in the Croatian music scene in Pittsburgh; her sixteen-year-old daughter Lara is one of about forty current members in the North Hills Junior group. Carol also alerted me to other key people in the Croatian musical community, including Zejelko Jergan, a folklorist from Croatia who is the musical director and choreographer of the North Hills Junior "Tammies"; and Joe Kordesich, a tamburitza musician who in turn knows central figures in the Pittsburgh area and beyond, including musicians and instrument makers (I found none of the latter in my specific study area--see "Potential Contacts" section).

2. Geography and History

Etna is located along the banks of Pine Creek, a stream that empties into the north side of the Allegheny River four miles above the point where the Allegheny joins the Monongahela to form the Ohio River. Page 16 of the Etna Centennial book has a good summary of natural features and resources in the Borough, in addition to waterpower from Pine Creek and the River. The town has also exploited such minerals as iron ore and limestone beginning early in the 19th century; hardwood from the forest on the hills has been used to make charcoal since the early days of settlement. Stone quarries and salt mining operations have been located in the Borough, and a brickworks, using clay from the bank of the Allegheny was in operation for use by the community by 1875. In the 19th century, farming was a major occupation in the borough and surrounding township; as late as World War I, truck gardeners sold produce in the area. A late October frost date and average rainfall of 41 inches per year made the area suitable for farming, although the hilly terrain surrounding Pine Creek made farming on a large scale impractical along the banks of the Creek itself.

By the start of the 20th century in Etna, the local economy was directed mainly towards steel and heavy manufacturing, as well as businesses that serviced and supplied the workers employed in local and nearby factories. Also from the Etna centennial book is a section on early nationalities attracted by local industries (p.26). Many of the ironworkers employed by Spang during the late 19th century came from Wales. The Etna Welsh community erected a small Methodist church which "is a two- family dwelling now owned by Victor Bosilevac." The Etna centennial book has a history of Spang, Chalfant & Co. (pp. 45-48). These pages include some good photos of the Spang works, including women working on the production of fragmentation bombs during World War II, and an "Old 1900 dinkey and crew." The section concludes:

Spang's whistle has joined the steam locomotive
whistle. For years the whistle was part of
life in Etna. The time of its blowing was so
accurate that people set their clocks by
it.

Due to the passing of the mill Etna will not be
the same again. (47)

[This passage is similar to Dale and Betsy Roberts's reminiscence of the part played in the community by the Blaw-Knox Company whistle: ES93 JS2 C.]

Two pages on the Isabella Furnaces in Etna include a 1953 poem about the mill written by Henry J. Fullerton, "an Etna resident and published poet" who was also known as the "bard of Cabbage Hill." The poem commemorates the importance of the Mill in the history and life of the town, and includes this vernacular etymology for the town name:

And her volcanic sheen, spewing hot cinders
down
Had a Mt. Etna mien, hence the name of our
town.
(49-50)

The Etna By-Line's "History" column reports that "during the war years, jobs were plentiful and National Supply's Spang Chalfant Division and Carnegie Steel's Isabella Furnaces truly lit up the skies like a volcano"--a sentiment that would surely meet the approval of Mr. Fullerton. Due to the absence of male employees, over 150 women worked at Spang's alone; during a two-year period, Spang made 781,004 bombs for the war effort (p. 47). In 1958, National Supply sold the Spang division in Etna to Armco, and three years later, when that corporation phased out the mill and moved the business to Ambridge, Spang's Pipe Company ceased to be a part of the Etna economy after a span of 133 years.

3. Tippins Machinery

In 1961, after Spang shut down for the last time, George Tippins of Fox Chapel started Tippins Machinery in the old Spang factory building in Etna. His father had a mining machinery business which George redirected into steel machinery. Mr. Tippins explains the company's steel rolling mill construction business thus: "Our market strength is to be full-service. We conceive, design, construct and start-up, do total turnkey mill installations--including business systems, operator training and computers for process control." (In Executive Report: July 1989). Tippins manufacturing plant is located in the building that originally belonged to Spang Chalfant steel pipe company, which in its earliest form dates back to 1828 in Etna. The headquarters office in Etna is a remodeled bank along with the adjoining structure, a former movie house. Tippins is a vigorous business that constructs rolling mills all over the world. In 1992, for instance, the company got a contract to build a rolling mill in Belgium and in July of '93 Tippins obtained the contract to construct a new cold rolling mill in Indonesia (Pittsburgh Business Times: 5 July 1993, p. 8). Tippins Machinery has been and remains a principal employer in Etna and nearby communities on the Allegheny River.

Sharpsburg

1. Previous Research

I have found no comprehensive history of the community that has been written and published. Currently, Ralph DiLuigi, a Sharpsburg resident, is researching a history of the Borough which he plans to write and publish in the near future. Mr. DiLuigi has formed a group called the Sharpsburg Historical Commission, which solicits subscriptions for the upcoming book. I have seen one article by Rev. Mark Shockey, pastor of the First Evangelical Lutheran Church in Sharpsburg, which is a brief history of his church. This article was prepared at the request of Mr. DiLuigi for his book. Another person with a connection to the borough who has a good grasp of local history is John G. Arch. Mr. Arch is an attorney who has an office on N. Canal Street in downtown Sharpsburg; he is from the north side of Pittsburgh (old Allegheny City), but has an interest in the whole area along the Allegheny River. Another person with an interest and knowledge of Sharpsburg and the surrounding communities is Ellen Kight, who lives in O'Hara Township. She has further suggested another resource person, Bill Crooks, the president of the Rotary Club in Pittsburgh and an executive at a local manufacturing plant. Mr. Crooks is aware of the Steel Heritage Project and has offered to share information, but I haven't had the opportunity to talk with him in depth.

Printed resources that are helpful for a brief overview include a 21 March 1979 newspaper article in the Herald, "Sharpsburg Takes its Name from Founder James Sharp." Besides

a sketch of the Sharp family, the article discusses the Seneca Chief Guyasuta and two prominent town businesses (in 1979) the Henry Miller Spring and Manufacturing Company and the Deitch Company. The Rev. Shockey donated a photocopy of a centennial book published in 1963 about the First Lutheran Church, as well as a copy of his own article about the history of the church written for the upcoming Borough history. A 1973 biography of Sharpsburg native H. J. Heinz by Robert C. Alberts provides useful information about Sharpsburg during the late 19th century, as well as about neighboring communities (particularly Etna and Aspinwall) and the Pittsburgh area in general.

2. Geography and Cultural History

Sharpsburg is located on the north bank of the Allegheny River, six miles east of the point where the Allegheny and Monongahela flow together. It is bounded on the west by Etna and on the east by Aspinwall. Most of the town is located on a narrow flood plain, about a quarter-mile wide, between the Allegheny River on the south and steep wooded bluffs on the north, with O'Hara Township beyond the northern boundary of the borough. The Route 28 by-pass runs along a terrace carved out of the bluff north of Sharpsburg, with an elevated view of the town below and the river just beyond. From this vantage point, the most noticeable structure is St. Mary's Catholic Church, with its tall spires rising above all the other buildings. The current church, built in the Romanesque style, dates from 1917 (the parish of St. Mary's in Sharpsburg was begun in 1852). John Arch believes the church "gives the town a very European look; a big monstrous limestone church looming over all these working-class houses. . . . Some of the vistas down very narrow streets" also remind one of a European town (personal interview, 9-17-93).

St. Mary's is German Catholic, the same ethnic orientation as the original settlers of Sharpsburg, including founder James Sharp. Sharp moved onto the land in 1827, after purchasing 200 acres from General William Wilkins. The town was largely built of brick made from clay soil along the Allegheny and was lit by gas manufactured locally as well (The Herald 3-21-79). In 1841 Sharpsburg was incorporated as the second-oldest borough in Allegheny County; by 1850, the Heinz family had moved to the town from Birmingham and set up a brickworks as a family business. John and Anna Heinz, the parents of H. J. Heinz, the pickle and condiments magnate, had emigrated from Bavaria into the Pittsburgh area in the early 1840s (Alberts, p. 2). Their son Henry got his start working in the family brickyard, but by the time he was sixteen he was also peddling horseradish from a cart on the streets of Sharpsburg, the beginning of his lifelong career selling prepared foods.

The First Evangelical Lutheran Church is another old

congregation with a German pedigree. Begun in 1863, this church also had services in German until the advent of American involvement in World War I. This church is notable today for its parochial grade school. Lutheran churches in the Upper Midwest often operate elementary and high schools; a Lutheran parochial school in the Pittsburgh area, however, is much more unusual. Rev. Mark Shockey, the pastor, writes that the church "from its very inception concerned itself with education . . . as early as 1866, regular week-day classes were being held." The Heinz family has a history of helping to endow Sharpsburg churches. First Evangelical Lutheran has a window acknowledging the generosity of H. J. Heinz; Mr. Heinz himself was a member of Grace Methodist Church in Sharpsburg and taught Sunday school for many years there. In 1917 the Heinz family also contributed to the building fund for St. Mary's, which cost a reported \$300,000.

Another notable location in town is the triangular intersection where Main Street and N. Canal Street converge. At this spot is a bronze statue of Chief Guyasuta, the Seneca guide who reputedly worked with George Washington on a surveying expedition in 1753. This statue is not original; according to John Arch it is the third that has stood at that corner. The original was wrecked in the 1930s by an automobile; the second was demolished in the 1970s by a trucker that attempted too sharp a turn from Main onto N. Canal. The third statue was cast from the mold of a "generic Indian"; according to Mr. Arch, the same statue stands in other towns, where it may be used to commemorate Tecumseh, or some other famous Native American figure of local importance.

3. Sharpsburg's Italian Community

There is an active Italian community in Sharpsburg which is a result of the mills that were in or near the town before the first World War. Anthony Sacco has had a barbershop on Main Street in Sharpsburg since 1931, and his family typifies the Italian presence in the borough. His father Frank worked at Spang's Steel Pipe in nearby Etna after emigrating from Italy in the second decade of this century; by 1917 Mr. Sacco was operating a barbershop as well as working at the mill. His plan, which has often been used in Sharpsburg and indeed throughout the area, was to make the job at the mill a platform for a more desirable career in an individually owned business or trade.

Other successful Italian businesses in Sharpsburg point to the same pattern, such as the popular Sal Pietro's Restaurant, across the street from Sacco's Barber Shop. Elsewhere along the river, former mill workers tell similar stories of finding a way out of a job that was noisy, dirty, and often dangerous. For instance, George Dolhi in Blawnox went to night school after WW II on the GI Bill so that he

could be ome a draftsman and leave the Hammerweld shop in the grating department of Blaw-knox Company, a job he detested.

Frank Sacco's older brother John followed the trail blazed by his father: he worked at Union Steel in Sharpsburg during the 1920's before taking up the barbering trade himself. Anthony himself worked at Spang as well as in the family barber shop during the 1930s; after serving in the Second World War, however, he returned to Sharpsburg and devoted himself exclusively to the barber shop. His brother John passed away about ten years ago and Anthony still works half-days in the shop at the age of 82. Anthony Sacco's shop is a social center for old friends and customers, who drop by in the mornings for a trim or some conversation. The shop itself is an archive with old pictures of family members and friends on the walls. Mr. Sacco also has a large collection of cigarette lighters in the show window of his shop, some of which are old and quite ornate. Mr. Sacco, who smokes a pipe, says he still adds to his collection from donations by friends and acquisitions at flea markets, but decent lighters are "hard to come by now--they're all throw-aways."

Another center for Italian activity is the Regina Elena lodge about two blocks east of Sacco's Barber Shop on Main Street. There was a Sons of Italy chapter in town as well, but it is now gone. Two Regina Elena Lodge members, Jim Malley and Orlando Vilenza, mentioned that there also was a Polish Falcons club in town that is gone now as well. Malley remarked that "the Irish used to meet in a car so they could go down the street throwing bombs"; and on a more serious note, he mentioned that if I wanted to see real activity and clubs in town, I "should have come sixty years ago." Holy Madonna of Jerusalem at 9th and Clay Streets is the Italian Catholic church in town; Madonna is in a church building that was originally St. Joseph's, but that congregation moved to a site on Dorseyville Road in O'Hara Township in the early 1960s. Another Catholic congregation with an ethnic orientation is St. John Cantius Church at 612 Penn Avenue, about a block away from St. Mary's. This small congregation serves the families of Polish descent in the borough.

Next to the Regina Elena Lodge building on Main Street is a large apartment building that houses retired people. The plaza in front of this building has benches and is a center for older people to congregate and socialize. This paved area also is used by residents and others as a flea market, which operates periodically in nice weather.

Aspinwall

1. Previous Research

The most significant previous printed work is contained

in the 1992 book commemorating the centennial of the borough, Aspinwall: the Town that Pride Built. Besides an account of the community's early days, the book includes chapters on events and organizations over the past 100 years: schools, churches, civic groups, the borough fire and police departments, and the personal reminiscences of older natives. A book on architecture in the Pittsburgh area by Franklin Toker, Pittsburgh: An Urban Portrait, contains information about houses in Aspinwall and Fox Chapel planned by architect Frederick Sauer. (For photos of the Sauer houses, see p. 127 of the Aspinwall centennial book.)

Resource people include Tom Ference, who operates the tackle and bait shop on Freeport Road, the International Angler. Another source of information about the borough over the past twenty years is Ed Merzlak, the former mayor from 1977-1981. Ellen Kight, a longtime resident of nearby O'Hara Township, has good information about the evolution of Aspinwall from a middle-class residential suburb to a magnet for retail activity along the north bank of the Allegheny River.

2. Geography and Cultural History

Aspinwall is located on the north bank of the Allegheny River, eight miles east of the point where the Allegheny and the Monongahela Rivers converge. The town is contained largely between the river on the south and the Route 28 Expressway on the north, with O'Hara Township and the extensive residential district of Fox Chapel located to the north of the highway. The Borough of Sharpsburg lies just east of Aspinwall and the Highland Park Bridge. Blawnox is located two miles west of Aspinwall; along Freeport Road between the two boroughs is the RIDC Industrial Park, built on the site of the former County Workhouse. The 1990 population figure was 2,880, which is a decline of about 400 people from 1980. During the same period, however, housing units in the borough showed a slight increase. The median age of Aspinwall residents is 38.3 years, about two years older than the figure for Allegheny County as a whole.

As one drives north of Aspinwall along Rte. 28, the largest and most noticeable structures are the Aspinwall Water Pumping Station along the Allegheny and the Waterworks Mall, a shopping center taking its name from the function of the Station. Both facilities are based on the presence of the river and mark changing strategies for exploiting the Allegheny to best advantage for the people in the community and surrounding region. For the first 90 years of its history, the borough of Aspinwall was primarily a residential area with businesses and retailers geared toward serving the local population. Since the early 1980s, the advent of the modern and elaborate shopping complex beside Aspinwall (the

Waterworks Mall is technically a part of Pittsburgh) is the primary example in the Allegheny Valley of the attraction this area has for outside business people and consumers.

In the beginning, borough founders were thinking mainly of a place to escape the bustle, crowding, and dirt of industrial Pittsburgh. Aspinwall was originally a part of the Depreciation Lands north of the Allegheny River that eventually formed O'Hara Township. Few people lived on the land until the 1820s, when the Pennsylvania Canal was constructed between Philadelphia and Pittsburgh. During the next seventy years the area east of Sharpsburg was rural country with farms and a few summerhouses for wealthy Pittsburghers such as the family of James Ross, a member of the Constitutional Convention who built a home at what is now the corner of Freeport and Fox Chapel roads. During the 1860s, young H. J. Heinz had leased 160 acres in the Sharpsburg area to grow horseradish and other crops for his fledgling prepared-foods business. A few of these acres were near the spot now occupied by the Highland Park Bridge, and the aroma from these fields reputedly caused people on the opposite banks of the Allegheny to call the area "Spicey Town" (Centennial Book, p. 10). This location began to become a real town in 1890, when Henry Warner purchased 155 acres from Mrs. Annie Aspinwall, a descendant of Ross, and began selling lots for homebuilding under the name of the Aspinwall Land Company.

Warner, who was superintendent of the Allegheny County Workhouse, a mile or so east of his new land, envisioned a community for Pittsburgh residents tired of the noise and grime of the industrial town, as well as the crowds--in 1890 the population of the city was already over 200,000. By 1892 the new town had about 400 people and had petitioned for borough incorporation, since the resources of O'Hara Township were not equal to the needs of the residents for maintained roads and waste disposal. The new borough concentrated on community improvement such as a sewer system during the next several years, and by 1900 the population in Aspinwall had grown to 1,231.

Over the next several decades, a pattern of slow but steady development in the borough persisted. By 1930, at the onset of the Depression, the population had reached about 4,000 in Aspinwall. After that time, the town's population stabilized, but the community retained a reputation as a pleasant, livable place. In the Centennial Book, 100-year-old native Mary Soonick reflected back on her upbringing in Aspinwall: "Oh, yes, I liked it . . . I knew everybody and that made a difference. I remember where my friends lived--where all the schools and churches were-- especially our Presbyterian. It was a good place to live" (p. 49).

3. Commercial Development and the Waterworks Mall

Edward Merzlak, a native of Etna, also attests to Aspinwall's attraction as a place to live. He moved to the borough after getting married in the mid-1950s and has lived on Fifth Street ever since. He comes from a large Catholic Croatian family, and admits that another reason he and his wife decided to move a few miles from Etna was for breathing room. His mother ruled the roost at home, and he recalls that even after he got married, he and his brothers and sisters (nine altogether) were expected at home for Sunday breakfast before church: "She was the boss" for as long as she lived. Merzlak worked at Wyman's Steel Mill (originallyn the west end of Pittsburgh, now located at nearby RIDC Industrial Park) for 29 years. He retired five years ago and now works as a watchman at Longwood Retirement Center in Oakmont "to keep busy." His living in Aspinwall and working elsewhere in the area is also a tradition in the borough--as Mr. Merzlak commented, "There's no industry in Aspinwall."

Ed Merzlak is also the first (and thus far only) Croatian and Democrat to be elected mayor of Aspinwall. The borough, unlike the working-class communities of Sharpsburg, Etna and Millvale, is primarily Republican in its voting pattern. His brother Joseph, who has a woodworking shop in Etna, has a wonderful photograph taken after the election showing Ed holding up a local newspaper erroneously awarding the race to his opponent: "Buckley gains close win." Mr. Merzlak attributed his upset to the mood of voters at the time: he was the younger man, and the Borough was ready for a change. He also credited a close friend from Etna, Tony Damiano, with providing advice for his campaign--"He [Tony] taught me everything." Mr. Damiano was a long-time Borough Council member in Etna and an eight-term mayor there. (He passed away in April of this year.)

Mayor Merzlak's term, from 1978 to 1982, was significant since it was during that time that the city of Pittsburgh approved plans for the Waterworks Mall adjacent to Aspinwall. Mr. Merzlak and other residents of the borough point out that since the shopping center was built, the small town has experienced big-city traffic congestion along the main thoroughfare, Freeport Road. He recalls that during his term he lobbied the city to put in a separate entrance ramp to the Mall from the Rte. 28 expressway, but he was not able to accomplish this. The proximity of the Mall, but the fact that it is in a separate jurisdiction, also causes problems for Borough emergency units and the police. The reluctance of the city of Pittsburgh to permit Aspinwall units to respond to calls from Mall businesses indicates a lack of reciprocation; in nearby communities, such as Etna and Millvale, as well as Aspinwall, the Pittsburgh police department has worked out a partnership arrangement with local authorities so that their units have the discretion to answer emergency calls in those

boroughs.

Businesses in Aspinwall itself are affected by the influx of people from all over the area who come to the Mall to shop. The town has refurbished certain commercial blocks (on Commercial Avenue, for instance) so that adjoining buildings have the same color scheme, types of signs, and awnings above their show windows. Such cosmetic features suggest an attempt to attract casual visitors and browsers, as well as local customers. Some Aspinwall retailers have to attract out-of-town dollars to stay afloat. Lynlott's Miniatures on Commercial Avenue is geared towards collectors with an interest in collectible dolls and realistic dollhouses. While much of the store's stock comes from outside the Pittsburgh area, the owner, Deborah Lynn McManus, does stock the work of talented local craftspeople as well, such as woodworker Earl Bernard of Etna, who makes highly realistic miniature houses to the scale of one inch to the foot, including replicas of houses in the Aspinwall / Fox Chapel area.

Another local businessman connected to a traditional craft is Tom Ference, who owns and manages the International Angler on Freeport Road. Mr. Ference is an angler and fly-tyer who receives orders from around the country and the world for his lures, which he makes using methods and materials originally learned from his grandfather, Homer Fritz of New Kensington, "the hunter and fisherman in the family." When I first visited the store, Mr. Ference was instructing his son, who is eight, about the proper way to tie a streamer lure used for Atlantic salmon. Tom also is an accomplished caster, and he gives lessons at nearby Squaw Run Park on the proper way to cast a line for accuracy and distance.

Tom Ference's International Angler shop is an example of the way the river and surrounding area are being used to foster an economy based more on natural resources and recreational pastimes than on the heavy industry of the past. In the memory of older residents of towns such as Aspinwall, Blawnox and Verona, the Allegheny River was swift-running, shallow and clean, ideal for wading, fishing, and ice-skating in the winter months. After the river was dammed in the 1930s, it became slower and deeper, which made it better suited to barge traffic related to heavy industry and not so good for recreation. Now that industry has been scaled down along the lower Allegheny, the river is running cleaner. Recreational pursuits such as boating and fishing have made a comeback, as well as local commercial enterprises geared to those activities--marinas or bait and tackle stores.

Blawnox

1. Previous Research

The 1975 anniversary book, Borough of Blawnox: A Story of Its People, is a valuable resource. This book includes useful articles by residents: Margaret Byrne Lang's previously unpublished 1947 manuscript, "Study of a Small Town," gives a well-written overview of 200 years of history about the town and the lower Allegheny River valley starting with the onset of the French and Indian War in 1753. There are other articles as well, including the one-page "History of Blaw-Knox Company," (author unknown) which resident Dale Roberts remembers as a speech given by a company executive. This book contains important information about the history of the town and the Blaw-Knox Company, from which the town got its name in 1925. (Before that time, the village on the town site was known as Hoboken.) Key local people who worked on this project, in commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the incorporation of Blawnox, are Elizabeth Roberts and Vinnie Malec.

Another useful book is Margaret K. Look's At Home on the Workhouse Farm (1986). For over a hundred years, beginning in 1869, Allegheny County maintained a Workhouse and adjoining farm along Freeport Road, immediately west of Blawnox. Ms. Look's father, Samuel C. Kincaid, managed the farm for the County from 1919 to 1956, and it was on this farm that the author grew up during the 1930s and 1940s. This institution is well-remembered by Blawnox residents, both as a source of employment and as a place to buy fresh produce, eggs, and items that inmates manufactured in workshops, such as wicker chairs and brooms.

Key resource people in Blawnox include grocery store owner Bill Sproul, former Blaw-Knox draftsman Dale Roberts, Elizabeth Roberts (Dale's sister), former U.S. Steel draftsman George Dolhi (who has donated a 40-minute videotape in which he narrates a history of Blawnox), and Charles Specht, who is active in local history organizations such as the group who maintain the Neville House on old Washington Pike (Rte. 50).

2. Geography and Cultural History

The borough of Blawnox is located on the north bank of the Allegheny River, nine miles east of the point where the Allegheny and the Monongahela converge to form the Ohio River. Blawnox is bounded on the east by the RIDC Industrial Park (formerly the site of County Workhouse) and on the west by the village of Montrose. The town is situated mainly in a flood plain about a quarter mile wide between the river and Freeport Road; another quarter mile of the borough on the north side of Freeport is steep and hilly terrain which contains residential neighborhoods along terraced streets. Just north of Blawnox is O'Hara Township.

The site for the town was first surveyed into tracts immediately after the Revolutionary War as part of the

Depreciation Lands that the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania gave to soldiers in lieu of cash payment for wartime service. Until the advent of the Pennsylvania Canal, however, in the 1820s, there is no record of anyone building a structure within the boundaries of the town. In about 1820, a canal house was built at the spot where Center Avenue is crossed by the railroad tracks (Lang, p.12). This structure, which originally served as an inn for canal travellers, stood until the late 1950s, when the borough condemned and burned it. At the time of its destruction, according to resident John "Tip" McMahon, the old canal house was so solidly built that the structure burned for three days before it was entirely consumed.

The town site remained a rural farming area until the advent of the Pennsylvania Railroad, which was constructed in the bed of the Canal after the Railroad company obtained the right-of-way. On July 1, 1868, the first town plan of lots was laid out for the village of Hoboken, Indiana Township (Lang, p.18). In the same year, Allegheny County began work on the Workhouse and Inebriate Asylum which was located just to the west of the village. This facility provided a locus for employment in the area, and many of the first residents of Hoboken were guards and other personnel employed at the Workhouse. In her manuscript, Lang writes that one reason for the location of the Workhouse near the village of Hoboken was the number of footloose men after the Civil War who roamed the country, often following the path made by the railroad or riding in freight cars. Many became stranded in Pittsburgh, a railroad center, and in order to manage and care for "these numbers of penniless, homeless, ragged men as well as other petty law breakers and inebriates," the County planned a Workhouse at Clermont (a tract of land just to the west of what is now Blawnox; it was also known as Claremont Station). The bricks for this structure and the surrounding walls were made from a clay field along Center Avenue (Lang, p. 19). The Pennsylvania Railroad line through Blawnox continued to attract travelers for many years after this time. Resident Bill Sproul maintains that the old town name of Hoboken was a result of hobos who rode the trains and would camp by the tracks on the eastern edge of town. Sproul remembers seeing hobos in town as a young man--"they always seemed to know which house would give them a handout; they'd come back again and again" (field notes, 6-22-93).

Lang's manuscript includes a vivid personal memoir of the town at the turn of the century, when the Workhouse was the chief employer. Trilby Hall, at the corner of Center Avenue and Freeport Road, was used as a meeting place by such groups as the Odd Fellows and the Rebecca Lodge. Young people in the area used to organize dances there, although transportation for the band from Pittsburgh was always an issue, since the

last train to the city left at 10:45, too early in the evening for the dancers to quit. Eventually, a town band was organized, and the young people would do "the waltz, the Newport, the two-step and the Schottische" (Lang, p. 27).

Longtime residents tell stories about the Workhouse and how the institution was tied in with life in the town. The farm which employed inmates was a source of produce and chickens for townspeople; and workshops at the Workhouse itself provided household items such as brooms and chairs. Blawnox residents reminisce about Workhouse trustees who would be seen regularly around town on errands such as picking up mail at the post office on Freeport Road. George Dolhi recalls Workhouse inmates helping to rescue people from their homes during the 1936 St. Patrick's Day Flood ("Nostalgia" videotape: ES93 JS1 V).

Several people in town still remember and tell the story of Stanley Hoss, an inmate who escaped from the Workhouse in the late 1960s, stole a car in Blawnox, and shot a policeman to death in Verona, across the river, after the officer had pulled him over (see tape interview ES93 JS2 C). According to the 1991 Verona Anniversary Book, the Verona officer killed was Joseph P. Zanella, on September 19, 1969. Blawnox grocery store owner Bill Sproul links this incident with the subsequent closing of the Workhouse-- he maintains that the institution was never intended to house violent felons in the first place, and it was a great mistake to incarcerate a man such as Hoss there. Allegheny County closed the institution and sold the land in the early 1970s. The site of the old County Workhouse is now occupied mainly by the RIDC Industrial Park; part of the old wall still runs along Freeport Road, although it is reduced in size.

3. The Blaw-Knox Company

The most important institution in Blawnox since the 1925 incorporation of the borough was the Blaw-Knox Steel Construction Company. The company was formed through the merger of Blaw Steel Construction and the Knox Pressed and Welded Steel Company in 1917. Prior to this date the village that existed was in an area of the county chiefly used for agriculture, and the town went by the name of Hoboken. Local historian Elizabeth Roberts maintains that the town before the mill came was still rural: "People used to grow tomatoes for Mr. Heinz" at that time (ES93 JS2 C). The name Blawnox was adopted at the request of the Blaw-Knox company in 1925, eight years after the company located in the town. The rationale, according to residents Dale and Betsy Roberts, was that the company received virtually all mail going to the village, and company officials wished to make the address easy for their correspondents.

The company achieved initial success when Jacob Blaw, one of the founders, devised re-usable steel forms for concrete sewer construction in 1906 (Snyder, p. 11). The Blaw Steel Construction Company began operations in Reynoldsville, PA. In 1917, Blaw merged with the Knox Pressed and Welded Steel Company, which was located in Sharon, PA, to form Blaw-Knox Company, and the new company set up business in Hoboken, PA. Dale Roberts asserts that part of the incentive for Blaw-Knox to come to Hoboken came from the Pennsylvania Railroad, which agreed to build a track from the station house in the village to the site for the mill. After the merger, the company manufactured steel forms for a variety of construction projects, including bridges, dams, tunnels, and roads. The plant also made steel and aluminum grating used in bridges, railroad crossings, sewer gratings, and flooring in steel mills. At its height in the decade following WW II, the Blaw-Knox company had divisions not only in the Pittsburgh area, but in cities such as Wheeling, Buffalo, and Hartford. The variety of equipment Blaw-Knox made for the construction and manufacturing industries was so extensive that it was known as "the Department Store of Fabricated Products" ("History of Blaw-Knox Company" in the Blawnox 50th Anniversary book).

During the first years of operation in Blawnox, the Blaw-Knox Company influenced the development of the town in many ways. Approximately 150 homes were built for company workers. (Many of these homes still stand in town, along the southern side of Freeport Road, for example, just west of the Borough office building.) George Dolhi, who worked in the Hammerweld department of Blaw-Knox as a young man before and after serving in the Second World War, recalls the track line that ran from the railroad station house in town right into the Blaw-Knox plant grounds.

Dale Roberts, who worked in the grating department for Blaw-Knox for thirty-four years, discussed some of the highlights of the company during his time of employment. The mill located in town was always involved in fabricating parts for steel mills: grating for stairs and walkways, water-cooled furnace doors, transfer cars, ladle hooks and tongs, buckets, and other items. Mr. Roberts' view is that the company did well until the time the original management sold out to White Consolidating in 1977. For Mr. Roberts, the golden era of the company began with World War II and continued during the building boom that followed the end of the war. He recalls that during that period, the parking lot was always full and the mill operated with three shifts around the clock. This view is concurred by Emma Chedonic, who owns Emma's Bar on Center Avenue, less than a block north of the Blaw-Knox steel yard. Her husband started the tavern in 1933. He passed away in 1945, but Mrs. Chedonic has continued the business with the help of her sister-in-law Ann ever

since. She recalls that when Blaw-Knox had peak employment, workers would stand in line waiting for a spot at the bar during a shift change.

At the height of the company, Blaw-Knox had divisions in several Pittsburgh area locations, as well as in other cities such as Wheeling and Buffalo. After Blaw-Knox was sold in 1977, however, the period of expansion for the business came to an end. (Other mill employees place the change in ownership a few years earlier, in the late 1960s, but they, too, agree that the company changed for the worse after this sale.) Mr. Roberts maintains the business philosophy changed from pleasing the customer to trying to make a quick profit. After White took over, for example, machinery in the plant was not upgraded and replaced at nearly the rate it had been before. Another illustration of the change was in the large steel yard at the western end of the plant: it always used to be full of steel plate so that orders could be filled quickly; after 1977, though, the steel in the yard was sold off and subsequent orders could not be filled as swiftly, making the company less competitive.

Mr. Roberts has other stories of company misfortune starting in the 1970s. Blaw-Knox already had ordered an expensive high-speed grating machine from an Austrian Company at the time White Consolidating took over. The new owners were not nearly as committed to the machine, and after it was shipped, they dragged their heels on figuring out what to do with it. In addition, the machine was dropped by a crane while being unloaded from a ship at a harbor in Baltimore. The machine had to be shipped back to Austria for extensive repairs. As Mr. Roberts put it, "The Mill was snakebit." Eventually, the machine was repaired and set up at a division of the company in the Chicago area-- but it never was very reliable and the management seemed uncertain how to make it a part of the overall operations of the company. Roberts himself worked on it for six months in 1985. Blaw-Knox was eventually sold to a man named Tomovich in Cleveland, who gave even less attention to keeping the business competitive. Mr. Roberts was laid off in 1991-- "the last man in the drafting department"--and took his retirement at that time.

Mr. Roberts does recall the time, during and after World War II, when there were three shifts and the company made construction equipment that was used all over the world. He also mentions aerospace work the company did during the Apollo Moon Program, when Blaw-Knox made radio antenna dishes that were used all over the world to track spacecraft and help pinpoint destinations. To make such products took precise work and a great deal of skill, and the company people who worked on the project were proud of their ability to turn out high-quality antennas.

Work on the floor of the mill was always noisy and dirty and frequently hazardous as well. George Dolhi, who spent 29 years as a draftsman at U.S. Steel remembers well his motivation to take up that trade. After returning from the navy at the end of WW II, he got a job in the hammerweld department at Blaw-Knox. Hammerwelding, he explains, involved beating two plates of steel together in a huge press "until you couldn't tell where the seam was." Mr. Dolhi's job, as a new man on the floor, was to grab a metal plate that had been heated in a furnace to the point where it wasn't red hot, but hot enough to be malleable under the press, and place it in position to be beaten. The heat from the furnace affected him to the point where he developed boils under his armpits. That was when he decided to go to night school on the GI Bill and get a draftsman's certificate.

Another way of coping with the mill was through pranks. Mr. Dolhi knows a number of men in Blawnox who worked at the mill at one time or another and all are about his age (68). These men remember initiating new workers by sending them off to another Blaw-Knox plant in search of "quarter-inch squares," or some other non-existent item. Bill Sproul, who worked in the mill for brief periods as a young man (he mainly worked in the family grocery which he now owns), remembers welding a new man's lunch bucket to the floor. Andy Dolhi, George's older brother, remembers pouring water into the lock of an equipment-shed door at the end of his shift on winter days. Andy knew that George needed to get equipment out of the shed first thing in the morning, and he would be forced to crawl through a window since the lock was frozen and the door wouldn't open. George did not find out about his brother's prank until years later; he refers to the hazing as a "real story of brotherly love." Several men who worked on the floor decades ago still talk with emotion about careless crane operators who would pass metal blocks and plates over their heads without giving them adequate time to get out of the way--against company safety rules. These operators would also be the targets for anonymous pranks from time to time. Overall, though, workers were proud to be associated with the products made by Blaw-Knox, at least up until the time when White Consolidating assumed control of the company.

Dale Roberts mentions that towards the last period of operation, business had slackened to the point where the final shutdown affected the town very little, since so few local people remained employed at the plant. Now, the Blaw-Knox plant buildings are used by several smaller businesses. An engineering and drafting firm, for example, has taken over the management offices located beside the fence on one side of the old steel yard. Blaw-Knox still exists in name with divisions under operation in Wheeling and Buffalo, and with corporate offices in downtown Pittsburgh. But the business, since 1991, no longer operates in the town nine miles upriver, which took

its name from the Blaw-Knox Company.

Verona

1. Previous Research

Verona has produced two anniversary history books. The most recent is Verona Then & Now (1991), commemorating the 120th anniversary of incorporation as a borough. The earlier book, from 1971, is called A Verona Album: 1871- 1971: 100 Years of Memories, and this book is more informative on the history of the town. The key resource person on the 1991 book is Nancy Jefferies, co-owner of Dirty Harry's Bike and All Terrain Vehicle Shop in Verona. The editor of the 1971 book is Helen Barr. Former mayor Bill Helsley was a very useful resource as well. Jennifer DeZuitti graciously loaned her copy of the 1971 Verona History book which I photocopied.

2. Geography and Cultural History

Verona is located on the southern banks of the Allegheny River, ten miles from the point where the Allegheny and Monongahela Rivers converge. The Borough of Oakmont lies north and east of Verona, just upriver, and the two towns are divided by a viaduct on Rte. 130, the main throughfare through both communities. The 1990 census lists the population at 3,260, an increase of 81 over 1980, after several decades of slow decline. The percentage of the population over age 65, however, rose from 14% in 1980 to 15.4% in 1990.

The land that eventually became Verona was part of an area that the Seneca and other Iroquois used for hunting at the time the first European explorers and trappers came into the Allegheny River Valley. In 1669 the French explorer Rene La Salle traversed the Allegheny River and noted the presence of villages in which Indians hunted and planted corn. The first permanent English-speaking settler was Michael Bright, who purchased 300 acres of land at the current site of the Borough from Robert Elliott, described in the 1971 Verona history book as an "Indian agent" and land speculator. For the next 53 years, the eventual townsite was mainly woodlands and fields on which some farming occurred.

In 1869, James Verner bought the property, and by the end of the next year he had laid out the site for a village on the land. His motivation was the development of the Allegheny Railroad. Verner arranged for the presence of "railroad shops" in the new town, including an engine house for repairing cars, a machine shop, a brass foundry, and a passenger station. Within a few years, Verona had 200 workers employed in these businesses. As former Verona mayor Bill Helsley has commented, for many years afterwards, the community was mainly known as a railroad town.

Verona Borough was incorporated May 10, 1871, and originally included a "second ward" north of Plum Creek. This ward eventually withdrew from Verona and became the Borough of Oakmont on March 4, 1889. The origin of the name Verona is open to disagreement. According to the 1971 history, the name derives from Verner and Iona, two railroad stations within the Borough limits in 1871. In the 1991 Anniversary book, however, the theory is proposed that the name resulted from the mispronunciation by early Italian immigrants of "Verner Station"; these people pronounced the town name to sound more like "their city of Verona in Italy." How this eventually became the official name and pronunciation is not explained.

Railroad business in the town attracted other business and industry around the turn of the century. Two early manufacturing companies were Agnew Glass (1870) and Verona Tool Works (1873), which was sold and known for many years as Woodings Tool Works (until the early 1970s). A famous product of the Works was the Verona Nut Lock, used by major railroads for splicing rails. According to the 1971 history, "It was said you could not ride over a mile of track anywhere in America without riding over a Verona made product." Another prominent manufacturer in the Borough was the Union Specialty Steel Casting Corporation, which began in 1904 as the General Casting Company. The castings from this company were used in rolling mills, railroad cars, automotive dies, locks and dams, bridges, and many other items. The foundry was closed in 1984; the site, on the southwestern edge of Verona, is now occupied by River Towne Shops, a shopping center.

3. "Verona was a Railroad Town"

Bill Helsley, a Verona resident since 1931, recalls the borough used to be known as "a railroad town." When he was growing up, Mr. Helsely mentions that the railroad roundhouse (located on the site now occupied by RobRoy Tool & Die) was a center of activity. The Verona roundhouse, used for repairing locomotives, was the only one in the Allegheny Valley, and all the trains came through Verona. Mr. Helsely reports that several mills in the area used to employ Verona residents. He remembers when a ferry used to take men two miles downriver to the northern banks to work at Blaw-Knox Company.

Also, the Edgewater Steel Company in neighboring Oakmont has employed Verona workers since opening in 1916. In August 13, 1993, the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette reported that Edgewater Corporation was striving to stay open after going through reorganization for bankruptcy. At stake were 380 jobs (down from over 1,000 at the plant's peak) and retirement pensions for many former workers in Oakmont and Verona.

At present, some industry still exists in Verona, such as Robroy Tool & Die. Principally, however, businesses in town sell retail goods and services to area residents. Futule's

Restaurant on Allegheny River Boulevard bills itself as "Verona's Oldest Business since August 1906"; it has been owned and operated all that time by the Futules family. This family, of Greek descent, is prominent in the Borough; William A. Futules served as Borough mayor from 1982 to 1990. A more recent business in a historic building is an antique furniture store called the Choir Loft at the corner of South Avenue and Allegheny River Boulevard. Before the current business, the building was the original site of A-Z Chevrolet; before that, it was the original Verona United Presbyterian Church (organized in 1896). A longtime Verona resident, Clarence Mason, claims to have married his wife Sophie in the original church building, in 1947, and afterwards to have patronized both subsequent businesses, A-Z Chevrolet and the Choir Loft. To sum up, Mr. Mason remarks, "I was married, bought a Chevy and bought a couch all in the same building."

Verona's business district contains a number of small shops, some of which require skilled work from the proprietors. Examples are Don Sobel, a Penn Hills resident who handweaves cane chair backs and seats for Lou Race, a furniture restorer. Another shop owner who uses his hands is Joe Connelly, of Custom Canvas, who has been working at this business for eight years. Dave Manella makes guitars in a small shop in the same building as Dirty Harry's, on Allegheny River Boulevard. I did not have the opportunity to interview these craftspeople in depth during my survey.

Verona is generally undergoing a post-industrial adjustment similar to the boroughs on the north side of the Allegheny. It is, however, not closely tied in with the northern boroughs because of geography and its historical association with railroad parts manufacturing and repair--a "track record" connecting it much more closely with the adjacent Borough of Oakmont and the Edgewater Corporation, a maker of railroad car wheels. Years ago, some Verona residents worked on the other side of the river, at Blaw-Knox. But for the most part, the river has served as a natural boundary; as Dale Roberts of Blawnox put it in referring to his own connection with Verona: "That's on the other side of the river; it might as well be Timbuktu."

There has been talk in Verona over the years about getting a bridge built. There is a bridge two miles upriver at Oakmont, and about three miles downriver at Aspinwall (the Highland Park Bridge). But with the volume of traffic along both sides of the river, getting to Verona from the north is a fairly protracted trip by automobile. This issue is of concern to business people, such as Nancy Jeffries of Dirty Harry's Bike Shop, because the town is isolated from well-heeled potential customers in Fox Chapel, a district that is only a couple of miles away as the crow flies, but a longer and more indirect drive. Ms. Jeffries is in the process of

submitting a plan to Penn Dot for a bridge, a necessary initial step. But the reality remains years away, at best.

COMMON THEMES AND ISSUES

All communities are dealing with a so-called post-industrial economy. They share a movement towards retail businesses (suburban malls, as well as revitalization of older centers of retail activity in towns); towards recreation oriented to the Allegheny River (fishing tackle and bait shops such as the International Angler in Aspinwall and marinas by Aspinwall, Verona, and Millvale); towards new economic development on the River (the Waterworks Mall near Aspinwall and riverfront development plans in Millvale).

Traces of the older economy persist in some areas: Tippins Machinery in Etna makes equipment for steel rolling mills; the Heinz Company, with historic ties to Sharpsburg, still operates on the banks of the Allegheny across the river from downtown Pittsburgh; the Edgewater Plant in Oakmont still makes wheels for railroad cars. But many plants no longer exist, and the one mill still in operation on the north banks (Tippins) is a non-union shop that has taken over the facilities of the Spang works, which began in Etna in the 1820s and operated as a pipe-making company for over 140 years. In addition, Tippins began by buying and recycling equipment from mills that had gone out of business (although its operations have increased to a global scope since that beginning in the early 1950s).

Retail activity, particularly in the outer boroughs of Aspinwall and Blawnox, is now directed towards customers throughout the greater Pittsburgh area, and beyond. Witness the dozen or so antique shops in Blawnox, all within several blocks of one another along Freeport Road. Another example is the large Waterworks Mall also along Freeport Road between Aspinwall and Fox Chapel (the Mall occupies land that is owned and maintained by the city of Pittsburgh, but the location makes it appear to be part of Aspinwall's expanded business district; traffic on Freeport certainly travels into the borough and the volume of vehicles is a daily part of life now in Aspinwall.)

This large shopping center beside Aspinwall has affected the nature of retail business in the borough itself. Along Commercial Avenue, for example, a block in 1946 contained the Embassy Theater for movies, Fehrman's Drug Store, and Bud's Market (a delicatessen). Today, the buildings, rehabbed to present a similar color scheme and awning design, contain the Town and Country Portrait Studio, Lynlott Miniatures (a craft store for collectors and hobbyists), Rugerri's Food Shoppe and a restaurant. The first two of these businesses rely on

regional clientele beyond the scope of a town with a population base of 2,880 (1990 census). Upstream and across the river in Verona and neighboring Oakmont, the same pattern of commercial redevelopment has been going on since the late 1970s. (Verona, a town of 3,200 people, currently has two bicycle retailers.) The moral seems to be that retailers must attract outsiders with disposable income if they are going to survive.

Communities closer to Pittsburgh--Millvale, Etna and Sharpsburg--all have an older, working-class architectural layout (and to a certain extent population as well). Note the compact space these boroughs occupy between the north bank of the river and the steep hills located about a quarter of a mile from the river's banks. This is a part of the Pittsburgh area going back to the development of the 19th-century steel industry when the mills were built on river banks to take advantage of the natural transportation and waste disposal route and workers' homes were built on hillsides and flood plains not occupied by the mills but fast beside them. Architectural features suggest this pattern in the three northside Allegheny communities, particularly the prominent placement of churches on higher ground to command the eye of the viewer and underscore the importance of the church in the lives of working class families. (Note the comments of Sharpsburg attorney John Arch; also, Toker's comments about Millvale on p. 302.)

Historical characteristics linking the towns--the borough system of government and the older office of burgess instead of mayor; these features suggest the importance of early Scots-Irish residents in the Pittsburgh area. The older churches in the study area (Lutheran and Catholic parishes) reflect the early German influence on the settling and development of the Allegheny River valley. The importance of churches such as First Evangelical Lutheran in Sharpsburg (founded in 1863) or St. Anthony's in Millvale (1886) persists, although oftentimes without such a decidedly German orientation (e.g., the practice up to World War I of having church services in German). One example: after a July 4, 1878, Heinz company picnic to Aspinwall ended in the tragic loss of seven people during a violent storm, the funeral sermons the next day in Sharpsburg and Etna were mainly held in the German language (Alberts, p.36).

Another historic event that is talked about in each community I visited along the Allegheny is the 1936 St. Patrick's Day Flood. Stories about this natural disaster form a traditional link among all communities in the Pittsburgh area that were hard-hit by the flood. The Reverend Mark Shockey showed me the high water plaque in the entrance hall of the First Evangelical Lutheran Church in Sharpsburg, above one of the double doors leading into the worship area

(the water crested at 46.6 feet, with 92% of Sharpsburg borough flooded). Every local history book I saw that had been produced since the disaster--in Millvale, Etna, Aspinwall, Blawnox, and Verona--had sections on the 1936 flood with pictures and printed commentary.

Issues of community identity have to do with the tendency of people to live where they were brought up, and also the recognition of ethnic ties in certain neighborhoods. Both patterns have undergone change since the gradual breakup of the regional steel economy. Younger people now often leave in search of higher paying jobs elsewhere; third- and fourth-generation residents see themselves as more American than anything else. (Dale Roberts of Blawnox remarked that he is almost 100% Irish on both sides of his family, but he was never interested in this aspect of his heritage: "To me, I was an American-- hell, they go around over there blowing themselves up with bombs!")

Nevertheless, ethnicity still plays an important role in the identity of many residents; the Croatian community, which is centered in the St. Nicholas Parish in Millvale (as far as this study area is concerned) is quite active; church members have formed a group to preserve the unusual murals painted by Maxo Vanka between 1937 and 1941; music reminiscent of the Balkan background of this group can be heard on Sundays at the Croatian picnic grounds just north of Millvale in Bauerstown. Both Millvale and neighboring Etna have active Croatian lodges; in Etna the Croatian Fraternal Union Lodge #4 was formed in 1894 and met for years in the hall at 30 Grant Avenue (now the Blarney Stone Restaurant, a prominent Irish establishment in the Pittsburgh area). The Etna CFU #4 currently meets at the Jockey Club on Isabella Ave. (near the site of the long- departed Isabella Blast Furnace). Membership stands at about 700 adult members (not limited to residents of Etna).

Community identity is also present in the yearly street fairs and parades that the northern Allegheny communities have. These are fundraisers tied in with established churches, such as St. Anthony's Catholic Church in Millvale (originally seen as the German parish in that community, but now multi-cultural), or with volunteer fire departments. Other examples of community pride are the celebrations towns stage on significant dates such as the centennial anniversary of borough incorporation. These anniversary events often bring forth borough history and memory books, with photos and reminiscences of longtime residents included. The books and celebrations are not limited to 100th anniversaries. In the course of my research I found a 50th anniversary book for Blawnox (from 1975), a 90th anniversary book for Etna (1959), a 120th anniversary book for Verona (1991), and a 125th anniversary book for Millvale (1993). These books contain significant events and personalities, past and present, and

businesses and social organizations. Altogether, anniversary books provide a revealing glimpse of how community members view themselves and the place where they live. One item that is invariably present commemorates the town's high-school athletic teams; since in most cases these high schools no longer exist, the pictures and captions are the source of nostalgic reverence for the compilers and residents donating photos and information.

Cultural Heritage Issues

1. Ethnic culture: the Croatian community in the boroughs along the north bank of the Allegheny is still distinct in many ways, even though the people are often no longer in distinct ethnic neighborhoods. One focus is St. Nicholas Church Millvale; this parish is historically important--the first Croatian Catholic church building to be built in America was erected on this site around 1900; the current building is culturally and artistically significant, with the Vanka murals inside displaying the artist's (and by this point) the community's vision of a people's immigrant experience in the Pittsburgh area. The community is committed to preserving the building and site, but what if the parish is taken away? How will the structure be preserved and used over the long term? A local organization, the Society for the Preservation of the Murals of St. Nicholas Millvale, is committed to sustaining the church. But do they have the wherewithal and expertise to do this over an extended period? I don't believe that anybody should attempt to come in and tell the community what to do with their church. But this building is a local treasure that has a message that can reach the hearts and minds of anyone who visits. And one last query: can't anything be done about the billboard on the hillside in front of the Church?

One possible follow-up program: as a tie-in with the 100th anniversary of the Croatian Fraternal Union in Pittsburgh, celebrate the two parishes of St. Nicholas, along East Ohio Street and in Millvale. These two churches are among the oldest Croatian Catholic parishes in America. With the cooperation of key church people, such as Father Romildo Hrboka of St. Nicholas Millvale, have an event at one or both churches. Display historic and contemporary photos of the sites and people. Music would include the North Hills Junior Tamburitians (director is Carol Sees); but musicians throughout the Lawrenceville and Pittsburgh area are also logical inclusions, since parishioners are not restricted to the northside area and Millvale and Etna. Key local resource people besides those already mentioned are Joe Merzlake (Etna), Joe Kordesich (musician), and Bernard Lukatich (president of Croatian Fraternal Union).

2. Religion and Community: Churches in general in the

Allegheny Valley boroughs are historical and cultural repositories. One example is the proliferation of Catholic churches in Sharpsburg: St. Mary's (German); Madonna of Jerusalem (Italian); St. John Cantius (Polish); and St. Joseph (other Catholic). What has kept these parishes in one small community distinct for so long? A joint presentation of the cultural heritage of each church would be a revealing portrait of the retention of national and ethnic identity over several generations in one very self-contained place.

One follow-up program would involve documentation through interviews with local church people (taped) and slides or videotapes of historic and contemporary pictures. The audience for the slide/tape show or videotape would be partly local Sharpsburg residents, but also people with an interest in Pittsburgh; a videotape on this topic might work for community-access or public television.

Older churches have archival files that can prove invaluable: First Evangelical Lutheran in Sharpsburg, for example, has files of papers, photos, and yearbooks in German going back to the 1863 beginning of the church. Other Lutheran churches in town are offshoots of First Lutheran. Through interviews with key people, such as Reverend Mark Shockey, the First Lutheran pastor, the history of the Lutheran parishes in Sharpsburg, as well as issues that unite and divide them, might be told. Other key people are local historians Ralph DiLuigi and John Arch. Two follow-up questions: Is it primarily a matter of ethnicity that has caused the Catholic and Lutheran churches to split in Sharpsburg, or disagreement on sectarian issues? And second, in the case of First Lutheran, what was the reason for beginning a Lutheran parochial school in Sharpsburg?

3. Environment and Community: Each of the boroughs in my study area shares a set of similar environmental features: the Allegheny River, a narrow band of level land, and steep, wooded hills enclosing the main part of each community. These physical features have affected the development and limited the growth of these towns. And yet, within these confines the character of each place is different, despite an outward similarity when viewed while traveling, for example on the Rte. 28 expressway. The reason is, naturally, that the people are not the same from place to place. What do they view as distinctive about their communities, compared to their neighbors along the river? In general, my survey got at some broad answers--in Aspinwall, the lack of local industry made them different from Sharpsburg and Blawnox on either side. Blawnox is distinct because it is so clearly the product of one company, along with the longtime presence of the County Workhouse. Sharpsburg, on the other hand, is a much older town than Blawnox, and one with a more complicated industrial

past.

But these are broad strokes: how do the people see themselves in relation to their neighbors? I have gotten glimpses; such as a group of Blawnox friends who grew up in the 1930s discussing the fights they had with Aspinwall boys, who called the Blawnox kids "Mill Hunkies." Much more remains to be found, though, about ways that residents define and distinguish their communities in this area. To my mind, this topic is primarily a research issue, which would involve taped interviews with borough residents, exploring how they view their town and neighboring communities.

4. Occupation and Community: One clear focus is the Blaw-Knox Mill. In existence from 1925-1991, the Company named and helped build and run the town; several blocks of Company built houses are still occupied; the Borough council was always conscious of the needs and demands of the Blaw-Knox company, and, indeed, Company officials were often on the Council. The site of the mill is still intact and many residents worked there and have stories to tell.

One follow-up study would involve taped or videotaped oral histories by former Blaw-Knox workers, as they visit and explain the still largely intact site of the Mill. There would be local interest in a slide show with taped comments, or a videotape. Key local people to work with in planning and presenting an oral history of Blaw-Knox Company would be George Dolhi, Bill Sproul, Peg Albright, Charles Specht, Dale Roberts, Elizabeth Roberts, and Vinnie Malec.

One note: Blaw-Knox Company had an impact on people outside of Blawnox as well. Bill Helsley of Verona, for example, remembers a ferry that used to operate at the end of Grant St. in his town that took people across the river to work at Blaw-Knox.

HERITAGE ISSUES

5. Local History and Community Identity: An indisputable sign of community pride in the boroughs are the anniversary celebrations for significant dates, such as the centennial of borough incorporation. Along with street fairs, parades, and other public events, the boroughs along the Allegheny have produced commemorative history books. These books present the community, past and present, as local writers and researchers see it, for an audience that is also local. Commemorative books are kept for years as mementos: the earliest I found during my month of research was a 90th anniversary book for Etna, from 1959. The books, or at least articles in them, tend to be well researched with good information about events, organizations, businesses, and people at the time of printing. Taken as a whole, such a book presents the image of

the community that local people recognize and see as typical or significant--worth noting. Other commemorative books about churches exist as well; in my research I came across ones for St. Thomas in Millvale, the Sisters of St. Francis Millvale, First Evangelical Lutheran in Sharpsburg, and St. Edwards in Blawnox. There is also a biography of the boxer Fritzie Zivic, a local hero for Croatians and other Pittsburgh sports fans, which was self-published by Timpav, an area writer. This biography has a commemorative approach to a local hero that is similar to the anniversary books. Such books obviously have archival significance and can also be used to elicit response from longtime residents who worked on them or are simply viewing them. One question that is worth exploring about the commemorative books is when and how the practice got started in these boroughs, or throughout the Pittsburgh area. Was it a matter of keeping up with the Joneses, for other communities, once the first one was produced?

One follow-up program would involve a tie-in with the 125th Anniversary celebration in Etna, slated (I believe) for the late summer of 1994. A Steel Industry theme would be to coordinate oral history interviews with former workers at Spang and Isabella, the two Etna steel mills from years past. Plan an exhibit in conjunction with the anniversary celebration.

Some exhibit ingredients include prints made from glass negatives that were in the possession of John Fisher at the time of the Etna Centennial Book (1969). These old photos are impressive glimpses of Etna and the Isabella Furnace as they appeared in the early 20th century. Intersperse the older prints with contemporary pictures of local historians and tradition bearers in Etna, such as Joe Merzлак (former Spang worker/ woodworker/ the Croatian community); Bill Skertich (history of the Etna Borough); and Carol Sees (from a steelworking family/ director of the North Hills Junior "Tammies"/ the Croatian community). Also include quotes from local historians about Etna and its past industry, either printed or on audio tape. Open the exhibit at an event in which local historians, storytellers, and perhaps Croatian musicians would be featured.

6. Age and Community: Older residents, aged 65 and above, are an increasing part of the population in the boroughs I studied. According to the 1990 Census, the percentage of residents aged 65 and above in my boroughs ranged from a low of 15.4% in Verona up to 22.6% in Blawnox. These people are, of course, a valuable resource in their communities, and their presence brings up a couple of ideas.

One is to encourage documentation by audio- and video-tape of older family members in the boroughs. Stress to

community members at available opportunities, such as the 125th-Anniversary activities in Etna in 1994, that longtime residents are valuable repositories of information about their families, neighbors, and towns. Hold workshops to demonstrate collection methods. Obtain copies of pamphlets available for these purposes, such as "Folklife and Fieldwork: A Layman's Introduction to Field Techniques," published by the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress.

Older residents also face challenges in living in small towns that have an eroding tax base due to a declining and aging population. Bill Helsley in Verona talks about the need for affordable apartment housing in his borough; he also is concerned about the limited access some older people have to shopping areas, or simply to getting out of their homes. He has mentioned the possibility of golf carts for seniors to use for shopping and inside-the-town transportation (interview, 7-15-93). This idea does work in retirement communities in Florida, for example; it might have limited use in boroughs such as Verona. The business section of town is on a flat plain by the river; there are residential areas, however, on steep slopes facing the lower part of town. These higher homes would not be very practical for golf cart transportation. Mary Ellen Cavlovic brings up the same shopping and transportation issue in an Etna By-Line column: she discusses Etna seniors who do not have easy access to a grocery store, since there isn't one in the Borough (this is also the case, I believe, in Millvale and Sharpsburg). Encouraging community meetings at which residents can discuss the problems older residents face in the boroughs--along with possible solutions, such as Bill Helsley's golf carts--could improve the quality of life for a significant portion of the population in the communities in my study area.

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