

Steel Industry Heritage Corporation

Ethnographic Survey  
of the following  
communities in the  
Allegheny-Kiskiminetas River Valley:

New Kensington  
Arnold  
Braeburn  
Tarentum  
Brackenridge  
Natrona  
West Natrona ("Ducktown")  
Natrona Heights

With Brief Forays into:

Vandergrift  
Buffalo Township

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FINAL SUMMARY REPORT

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## **I. Introduction: Conception and Evolution of Fieldwork**

The conception and execution of this ethnographic study derives from the premise that an eight-community region lying along the border of Allegheny and Westmoreland counties, near the confluence of the Allegheny and Kiskiminetas Rivers, has figured prominently in the development of the rich cultural and industrial heritage of southwestern Pennsylvania--i.e., within the designated broader "Study Area" of the Steel Industrial Heritage Corporation (SIHC). A native (though not a life-long resident) of the region, I began with some rudimentary knowledge of the industrial and cultural resources of the projected study area. My field-work proposal ambitiously (and naively) projected to know everything--social and cultural settlement, industrial history, attitudes/values/beliefs about private vs. public space, the environment, living and forgotten traditions, etc. (see epic-length proposal)--about these eight communities in 30 days: Arnold, New Kensington, Creighton, Tarentum, Brackenridge, Natrona, Natrona Heights, and Braeburn. Alas, I must report that that mission is unfulfilled.

Although these communities are "organically" (via the river) and historically/culturally linked, my proposed study area (as well as thematic scheme) was admittedly too vast. Upon initial consultations with the project director and a fellow fieldworker, a decision was made first, to relieve me of Creighton entirely, and second, to divide, in some way,

either Tarentum, New Kensington and/or Arnold with my counterpart, Robert Metil, who was based across the southern border of my proposed region (Creighton/Springdale/Harwick/Cheswick). After conducting some initial investigation there, I handed my contacts in those areas over to my colleague. Regrettably, however, the latter portion of the proposed division of labor never occurred.

I proceeded nevertheless as thoroughly as possible with a survey of all of the communities in my initial proposal, excepting Creighton, but adding (upon the request of the project director) Vandergrift as a community I would, at a minimum, "probe." Upon reconsideration and consultation, my fieldwork plan was thematically narrowed to a focus on industrial and social-cultural heritage. My objective was to develop an ethnographic portrait of an industrial region: to gain a full understanding of the region's industrial development, and, concomitantly, the cultural heritage and living traditional/social activities spawned by the peoples who lived and worked (and still do) in these communities.

In terms of procedural execution, I possessed a handful of personal contacts in two or three of the communities and moved from there, sitting in barber shops, taverns ("beer gardens" as they are called by old-timers here), and the like to gain more information. I conducted extensive cold calls to ethnic and social/industrial organizations in the area and was

able to gain invitations to several of these, several leading to fruitful interviews, some less productive. By the second week of my initial queries, I had garnered enough leads, names, and events to explore that could have extended this project long beyond its scheduled completion date. I thus submit this report feeling less than confident about the project's consummation--some communities require further inquiry, a few key individuals have not been interviewed, etc. (See Section VI of this report.)

This survey is heavily weighted in favor of industrial heritage/oral histories and away from expressive cultural tradition, a deficiency attributable both to the paucity and obscurity of still-vital cultural heritage organizations and to insufficiency of time: a number of good contacts for cultural traditions were discovered too late in the survey to be included at this time.

## **II. Overview: Physical, Historical, and Cultural Geography**

Like much of southwestern Pennsylvania, the study region is characterized by small hills (less than 1,200 feet above sea level), valleys, and ravines caused by the erosive force of numerous creeks and the two major waterways in the area, the Allegheny and Kiskiminetas rivers. Bull Creek (pronounced "crick" locally) empties into the Allegheny River from the northwest at Tarentum. That important confluence spawned early Native American settlement and in 1734 "Chartier's Old

Town," before eventually incorporating as Tarentum in 1842. Pucketa Creek enters the Allegheny from the southeast at Parnassus, on the southern perimeter of New Kensington. Dividing the counties of Armstrong and Westmoreland, the Kiskiminetas River winds from the east through the communities of Apollo, Vandergrift and Leechburg before emptying into the Allegheny just north of Freeport.

Steep cliffs rise from the Allegheny River on its eastern shore, from the present-day Tarentum Bridge north to Braeburn.

South of the bridge the increase in elevation is more gradual, historically offering flat ground for the riverside industrial development of Arnold and New Kensington. Hills gentle and old in appearance define the upper, residential (and now commercial, as well) sections of New Kensington, Arnold, and the bedroom community of Lower Burrell. Likewise on the west side of the river: in Brackenridge and Tarentum gradual hills rise to the west around Bull Creek and smaller streams, with steeper cliffs to the southwest constricting the industrial and residential development of Creighton and the former Glassmere. Hollows marked by small streams and scattered housing emerge from these hills into Creighton at Freeport Road (old Rt. 28).

Natrona lies in the narrowest section of the west-side river plain, with Natrona Heights--the most elevated community in the region--lying high on a plateau overlooking the Bull Creek valley to the west and the river valley east. Finally,

situated approximately 12 miles east of New Kensington, the community of Vandergrift epitomizes this pattern: a flat, riverside industrial site with undulating hills gradually increasing in slant and natural beauty--a setting which provided the perfect raw material for the architectural firm of Frederick Law Olmsted to design a picturesque "workingman's paradise" in 1896. Eastern U.S. hardwood forest and dense undergrowth common to this portion of the western Appalachian Mountains are the predominant vegetative features throughout the study region.

Originally an agricultural/trade community centered around the Logan's Ferry and Parnassus section near Pucketa Creek, New Kensington (the "New" was only added when it was discovered that a Kensington already existed in the state) was developed in the early 1890s by a group of Pittsburgh capitalists who realized the advantages of the relatively level land on the east-bank flood plain of the Allegheny River. Their Burrell Improvement Company quickly sold lots to Pittsburgh investors and within a matter of months more than a dozen industries--steel, glass, tin plate, flour, and planing mills among them--employed nearly 5,000 workers. Among these burgeoning factories, most significant for the long-term development of New Kensington and Arnold was the Pittsburgh Reduction Works, site of the first commercial aluminum production in the United States. Established in 1888 on Smallman Street in Pittsburgh's Strip District, the Reduction

Works was moved to New Kensington in 1891 and later renamed the Aluminum Company of America (ALCOA). Thanks to the technological ingenuity of an Ohio inventor named Charles Martin Hall, aluminum production became not only economically viable, but was the pivotal development in the growth of New Kensington and gave it the appellation, "The Aluminum City."

Older English- and Irish-stock Americans and earlier European immigrants, primarily Germans, were the predominant cultural groups in New Kensington, as well as throughout the region until around 1890. Beginning in the mid- to late-1890s, however, great numbers of Poles and Italians, and, to a lesser extent, Russian Ukrainians came to the New Kensington/Arnold area, lured by the word of industrial jobs passed by relatives and friends. These late-arriving groups settled themselves throughout the lower sections (between the railroad tracks and the river) and middle sections (gradually, and then steeply sloping toward the east) of both New Kensington and Arnold. The top of the hill (along and to the east of Freeport Road) was unofficially but unequivocally reserved for more well-established merchants and industrial managers of English, Irish, and Scotch-Irish ancestry. German and Irish families lived in the area along and above Kenneth Avenue. By the early 1920s, African Americans migrating from the south established settlements in the Logans Ferry area, as well as a large and well-defined neighborhood in New Kensington, on 12th and 13th streets from Second to Fourth



Avenue.

Poles and Italians, along with a few Hungarian- and African-Americans, were the predominant groups emigrating to Vandergrift. They were drawn by the promise of jobs at the nearby Apollo Iron and Steel, purchased in 1895 by George G. McMurtry, a Scotch-Irish immigrant, who expanded its operation two and one-half miles south in Vandergrift. McMurtry envisioned, and commissioned the design of a picturesque residential community; Vandergrift was incorporated in 1896 with the following settlement pattern: Anglo-Saxons and Scotch-Irish "on the hill," Poles and Italians below in the downtown section, and Blacks and Hungarians located in North Vandergrift (the latter two groups generally had the worst jobs in the steel mill).

Simultaneous to these developments in steel and aluminum, the Chambers Glass Company in 1891 became the industrial life-blood of what was New Kensington's Second Ward, until seceding to become Arnold in 1896. Like Captain John B. Ford across the river, James Alexander Chambers imported hundreds of Belgian and French glassblowing artisans to work in the plant. The Chambers Glass Company employed several thousand people, changing its name to the American Window Glass Company in 1929 and continuing as such for several decades until being purchased and renamed the American St. Gobain Glass Company. At its peak, it was the world's largest producer of window glass and provided Arnold a sobriquet, "The Glass City," to

compete with its rival (aluminum) mother. The lower part of Arnold surrounding the glass company resembled a company town, with the "Red Row" company homes situated along Second Avenue from Cherry to 14th streets, and a company store located at 17th Street and Fifth Avenue. Further north along the river, away from the industrial area, was the Valley Camp section, seasonally but exclusively inhabited by upper- and middle-class outdoor enthusiasts from Arnold and communities beyond.

On the northern side of the industrial sites, embracing virtually all of lower Arnold and New Kensington, the new immigrants settled and built their homes, churches, and fraternal organizations. Italians built St. Peter's Roman Catholic Church on Constitution Boulevard (in 1944 moving up the hill to construct the elegant Mt. St. Peter's on Freeport Road), and every other group, it seems, built their places of worship on Kenneth Ave.--a street listed at one time (year uncertain) by Guinness as having the greatest number of churches in the world (eight). Roman Catholic Poles built St. Mary's of Czestochowa; African Americans, the First Baptist Church; Irish Catholics, St. Joseph's; the Jewish people, Beth Jacob Congregation--all on Kenneth Avenue from Arnold to New Kensington. Syrians and a few Lebanese established a tightly knit neighborhood in the area of 12th Street and built the nearby St. George's Antiochian Orthodox Church.

Ethnic and fraternal organizations ranged from the

Society of Black Masons to the Polish National Alliance on Second Avenue to the Sons of Italy in downtown New Kensington.

Italians also had the Umbria Club (restricted to immigrants from northern Italy), the Knights of Columbus, and the Spartaco (Sportsmen's) Club--all located in the same general neighborhoods of lower Arnold and New Kensington, within walking distance of the riverside industrial area. Faced with pervasive prejudice and stereotyping, Italians were expected to remain in "their" neighborhood: when Mrs. Vera Ginocchi's father tried to move his groceria from the southern to the northern side of Drey Street, English and Scotch-Irish--some of whom were patrons in his store--balked. "Those Italians...trying to cross the line," as she remembers the reactions.

As suggested above, glassmaking figured equally prominently in the industrial growth of Creighton, Glassmere (now absorbed by East Deer Township), and Tarentum across the river. Until the 1890s, the portion of town now known as East (or "real," as partisan residents called it) Tarentum was the only formally settled section. When it was formally laid out by Col. Henry Marie Brackenridge in 1829, Tarentum was a sprawling river community embracing lands which came to be separated out as Brackenridge and Harrison Township (Natrona and Natrona Heights). Consisting originally of German and Scotch-Irish entrepreneurs and farmers, the community in 1828 was given its economic *raison d'etre* by the passage of the

Pennsylvania Canal (via the Kiskiminetas River) through the center of town. As it had since the Indian trading days of Chartier's Old Town, Tarentum continued to serve as a vital crossroads community for the passage of commercial goods and industrial raw materials.

While wood, salt, and coal dominated Tarentum's early industrial years, in the 1880s glassmaking came to be its economic lifeblood, and consequently transformed the town's cultural landscape. Captain John B. Ford, a Scotch-Irish immigrant entrepreneur and founder of the New York City Glass Company, had determined to construct a plate glass works in the area, using the area's plentiful supply of natural gas to fire the production process. In 1882 Ford aggressively recruited highly skilled Belgian glass artisans to work there and to train the local work force in plate glass production. Belgians came in great numbers to West Tarentum and came to dominate the southern-most section of the town's west side. In 1883 the newly renamed Pittsburgh Plate Glass Company succeeded in producing the nation's first plate glass.

Other glass works followed: Challinor and Taylor (tableware and cooking utensils), J.W.E. Wilson (delicate "pressed glassware," closely resembling cut glass or crystal), C.L. Flacus (prescription bottles and drug supplies), Fidelity Glass (milk bottles), and the Atlantic Bottle Company (tobacco jars and milk bottles).

By the 1890s, small iron and steel foundries, along with

glass factories in Glassmere (a now-absorbed community just south of Creighton) as well as in the far northern section of Tarentum (by then Natrona), were attracting Polish and Slovak immigrants. Slovaks concentrated themselves at the northern end of West Tarentum (on the hill overlooking Bull Creek), with a few families settling in Brackenridge and Natrona. Thus by the turn of the century, West Tarentum had been transformed from a sparsely settled rural community of English and German peoples (Johnny Bull and Germanian clubs had been established in 1873) into a grid-like (although steeply sloping) concentration of predominantly Slovak and Belgian industrial workers. For decades thereafter, West Tarentum was referred to, pejoratively, as "Little Europe," or "the Catholic part" of town. East Tarentum--from Bull Creek northeast to Bridge Street--was, for residents of the West, "the Protestant side." It was a stark demarcation which very much determined where churches, ethnic clubs, businesses, and of course succeeding immigrants, would locate. Around the same time, Slovak and Italian families also settled west of Tarentum in the Bairdsford and Russelton areas, many working in coal mines and a few establishing small farms.

Prior to the 1880s, Natrona was prime flood-plain farmland inhabited by a few Irish and German families, with a small community of ("German") Poles as well. The lone industrial plant--and it was a notable one--was the Pennsylvania Salt Manufacturing Company ("Penn Salt"), which

had started salt-drilling operations in 1850. "Uncle Billy" Smith, a local Tarentum blacksmith whose technological prowess was instrumental in Col. Edwin Drake's successful commercial oil well in Titusville, also made the drilling tools that resulted in the accidental discovery of oil at a Penn Salt well in 1845. Smith is an obscure, but absolutely pivotal figure in western Pennsylvania's industrial heritage. Penn Salt then drew to Natrona a number of German chemists to perfect the technological and scientific operations of a full line of chemical and soda products, including: liquid chlorine, laundry and agricultural chemicals, refrigerants, and a variety of aluminous materials. Penn Salt won first prize at the Chicago World's Fair in 1859.

In the latter part of the 1880s, a number of small steel and iron works began to flourish along the river, forerunners of what became Allegheny Iron and Steel (later Allegheny Steel, and then Allegheny Ludlum Steel Corporation). In the late 1890s, Poles began streaming into Natrona to work for Penn Salt and in the foundries, recruited and settled here by two well-established Polish immigrants, "Big Bill" Rusiewicz and Tom Korpanty, who were thereafter regarded as local folk heroes. Poles dominated the southern end of Natrona (south of Garfield St., described even today as "the Mason-Dixon line of Natrona," separating Poles from "the Slovak side of town"), nearest the steel and iron foundries. Irish and Germans, with Slovaks increasingly dominant after 1890, settled in the

northern end of the town, nearer the Penn Salt plant and snug against the hill where coalmines also were in operation. At its height, that section of Natrona (which means "salt" in Greek) was essentially a company town, with several rows of worker housing on either side of Federal Street and a company store at the corner of Federal and Blue Ridge Avenue. "Everything up to Chestnut Street was all Penn Salt," according to Stanley Kaminski, a local resident and knowledgeable historian.

What came to dominate the other end (and eventually all) of the industrial landscape of Natrona and Brackenridge was Allegheny Ludlum Steel Corporation (AL). For decades the world's largest producer of specialty steel products, AL ("the mill," or, most affectionately, "Uncle AL") at one time employed nearly 10,000 workers, 75 to 90% of whom lived in either Natrona or Brackenridge, within walking distance of their jobs. In the first decade of this century, Poles and Slovaks joined the Irish, Scotch-Irish, German, and English as the dominant ethnic groups employed at AL.

Early union history, although not popularly celebrated, is deep here. Like the entire steel industry, AL was non-union in 1919 when organizer Fannie Sellins (who had known and worked with Mother Jones and Philip Murray) was clubbed and shot to death while attempting to rally miners and steel workers employed by the company to unite under the banner of the United Mine Workers. She and fellow organizer Joseph

Strezleski died on the "Ducktown" hillside of West Natrona (near "the rock" off Bluff Drive), victims of the Coal and Iron Police. Eventually, after a resurgence of agitation and a failed company union, AL workers reorganized and in 1938 signed the first contract in the United States between the newly formed United Steel Workers of America and a "little steel" company.

Restricted geographically, Natrona could not hold all the Poles coming there and migration expanded in the 1910s up the hill to West Natrona ("Ducktown," so named for the many ducks raised and eaten by Polish families there). Ducktown was settled almost exclusively by Poles, with some Slovaks. Further up the hill--called "the heights" long before it was Natrona Heights--was a largely rural community of Scotch-Irish and German cultural origins. Never the site of industrial activity, Natrona Heights (and the neighborhood communities of Birdville and Campton which it embraced) evolved into a sprawling commercial district and bedroom community of sorts for sons and daughters of Natrona and Brackenridge steel workers, whose lives were increasingly disconnected from those towns "on the flats."

As noted earlier, Brackenridge was originally part of Tarentum, and then Natrona (when the latter seceded from Tarentum). The community known for a time as "The Avenue," or "Avenue, PA" for its most dominant thoroughfare, Brackenridge Avenue, maintained a distinct cultural identity and seemed



destined for ultimate independence. One of the chief small industries in town was Anchor Beer, located on Sixth Avenue (formerly Canal Street, one of the many still-extant place names derived from the canal era). In 1901 the town fathers of Natrona (primarily of Irish and German stock) began threatening to enact a temperance statute for Natrona (possibly a defensive move against the tide of Poles). In response, the section of town which included not only Anchor Beer but a dozen or more taverns along Canal Street and the Avenue, decided to secede as the borough of Brackenridge in order to preserve its alcohol consumption and production rights. (Tarentum, too, had long been a "dry" town.)

The other industrial site of note is Liberty Mirror, which relocated from East Liberty in 1930 and at one time produced 75% of the nation's automotive rear-view mirrors. Today they manufacture a large variety of metal-and-glass assemblies used in various industries.

Culturally, Brackenridge became a more diverse, pluralistic community than either of its adjacent neighbors, welcoming roughly equal numbers of Italians, Slovaks, and Russians. Soon after arriving, the vast majority went to work in the fledgling steel and mine works of Allegheny Steel. In 1919, in response to the union organizing effort at their Brackenridge plant, officials at Allegheny Steel aggressively recruited dozens of African American workers and families from regions of the South to work (unbeknownst to them) as

strikebreakers in the mill. The company constructed row housing for these workers on Clay Street (later Fourth Avenue, known as "The Street" by residents) in Brackenridge. Eventually The Street became an interracial, tightly knit community of mostly steelworker families with a lifelong attachment to their neighborhood.

Perhaps because of this industrially contrived African American settlement, Brackenridge was more tolerant of Blacks than other surrounding communities. Natrona had a statute on the books as late as the 1920s forbidding Black persons from appearing on the street after seven in the evening. Unlike life on "The Street," Tarentum's African American community was strictly segregated "across the tracks" in the lower reaches of West Tarentum, although a racially mixed community of African Americans, southern European immigrants, Jews and English came to flourish in the Job's Hole area. For the most part, however, segregation ruled, as in the 12th Street section of lower Arnold and New Kensington. Even in pluralist Brackenridge, as recently as the early 1970s, there was de facto segregation in workers' taverns; "George Greek's place" was the notable exception, the one public facility which served an interracial clientele.

Across the river to the east lay the small community of Braeburn, originally part of the land grant belonging to Major Andrew Arnold (namesake of Arnold), but an area that grew up separately from the "glass city." Its life was tied more

directly to the Allegheny Valley Railroad which passed along the eastern shore of the river beginning in 1855, through Arnold, New Kensington and Parnassus. One 1903 sketch of the area shows coal mining at the south end of Braeburn along the shore across from Tarentum. Farther upriver was Braeburn proper, site of a railroad roundhouse and train station, and more significantly, Braeburn Steel, producing an assortment of alloy steels for tool products. By the early 1920s this farming hamlet, composed formerly of English, Irish and Germans, had been transformed into a steel-making community with up to 300 or more mill jobs available to a now-mixed population of Slovaks, Italians and older, British-Isles stock ("Johnny Bulls"). The residential area nearest the steel-making facility was the only level site in Braeburn, and was unofficially reserved for "Johnny Bulls," who were chiefly the managers of the mill or held other independent mercantile positions in town. Newer immigrants--chiefly Slovaks and Italians--settled up the hill and into the narrow hollow extending back approximately one mile from the mill.

### **III. Shifting/Current Settlement Patterns**

Unless stated here, settlement patterns in all the communities have remained essentially unchanged. Several developments, however, are worth noting: African Americans are now the dominant racial/ethnic group residing in the downtown/innermost sections of both New Kensington and Arnold,

between the railroad and the river. While the area east of the tracks and west of Freeport Road ("middle section") now consists of neighborhoods more culturally heterogeneous, it remains almost exclusively white. Many of the sons and daughters of Italian and Polish, Ukrainian, Lebanese, and Syrian immigrants have moved "up on the hill," either to sections of New Ken along Freeport Road, out along the rural areas of the Seventh St. Extension (Rte. 780), or, in greater numbers, to Lower Burrell. There are still significant English, German and Irish/Scotch-Irish populations living in the upper sections of both communities.

"Wayman Way," or "across the tracks," was a segregated Black community, developed around 1910 in the area of West Tarentum between the railroad tracks and the river. It was home to male industrial workers and female domestics, many of whom had migrated from Peyton City, West Virginia, in search of jobs. Not told by Allegheny Steel of the labor troubles at their mill, some refused to cross the picket line as strike-breakers in the infamous 1919 labor strife that killed Fannie Sellins and Joe Strezleski. Indeed, one story has Fannie Sellins at Wayman Way in 1919 urging residents not to cross the picket line and to join the organizing effort at Allegheny Steel. Wayman Way was razed after WWII for industrial development, with Blacks from that original community scattering throughout the valley but remaining strongly attached to the church they had built for

themselves--the Bethel A.M.E. Church. A few African American families are now scattered along West Seventh Avenue.

"The Street"--the racially mixed, though predominantly Black neighborhood of Brackenridge--was razed in the late 1960s for redevelopment, dispersing African Americans to various places throughout and beyond the valley--off Sardis Road in New Kensington, in the Sheldon Park housing project of Natrona Heights, West Tarentum, and elsewhere in Brackenridge.

Similarly, the tiny, racially mixed (though largely African American) settlement called Job's Hole, tucked into a hollow at the sharp bend in Bull Creek just west of Tarentum proper, was almost entirely obliterated in the late 1970s by the construction of the Allegheny Valley Expressway. Job's Hole natives, though they remain attached by phone and informal reunion, have scattered to other areas.

Not surprisingly, few of these displaced Black residents moved to Natrona. That community remains almost purely and ardently Polish, Slovak, Irish, and German. The "Mason-Dixon line" of Garfield Street is now home, ironically, to a few African American families, as is River Road, but Natrona residents fiercely resist what they variously perceive as a dangerous intrusion, or a dilution of white ethnic homogeneity. Many, if not the majority, of Slovak, Polish, Irish and German sons and daughters of Natrona, have moved "up on the hill"/"up the (Natrona) Heights" or "across the river" to Lower Burrell. This outward migration has been the single

most profound development in the devolution of Natrona: while the overwhelming majority of Allegheny Ludlum employees before the WWII era lived in either Brackenridge or Natrona, now less than 10% reside "on the flats". More than 100 businesses once thrived in Natrona, now fewer than 15 serve Natrona's population of aging natives and younger non-native renters.

Natrona Heights is possibly the most heterogeneous community in the region, with its original cultural base of English, Scotch-Irish, and German now further mixed with people of Polish, Slovak, African, and Russian descent, mainly younger refugees of older industrial areas. It remains, according to most observers, "the most Protestant" and seemingly individualistic town in the area, with a paucity of social and cultural organizations.

#### **IV. Social-Cultural Life**

##### **A. New Kensington-Arnold**

The summer months, quite obviously, are the time for the key outdoor, community-wide social activities that take place throughout the region. Sponsored by the city's Volunteer Fire Department, New Kensington's "Community Days" festival is held during the last weekend in June. The event was originally held downtown when the event began five years ago, but grew so large and popular, say organizers, that it had to be moved to the New Kensington Memorial Park. The park is situated on the periphery of the city limits on the picturesque banks of the

Pucketa Creek.

Extremely well-attended, New Kensington Community Days seems to draw crafters from mostly outside the region--Ukrainian egg decorators from Murrysville, quilters from Latrobe, for example--and features a variety of American (and some ethnic) foods, a children's petting zoo, and various (mostly American popular) musical performances. This is an enormously successful fundraising event for New Ken firemen and seems to fill a social void for the greater (non ethnic-specific) community, one created by out migration, increased mobility, and the general movement away from traditional family, church, and neighborhood ties. Arnold's "Street Fair," held near Roosevelt Park at Drey Street and Constitution Boulevard in mid-August, seems to perform the same social and financial functions, the principal difference being its physical proximity to the heart of the community. Arnold also holds its Family Day in late summer at Roosevelt Park, with big-band music, ethnic foods, and children's games highlighting that event.

Other similar summer events--a "Street Fair," "Festival '93," and an "Alarming Weekend"--are staged by the three volunteer fire companies in Tarentum: Summit, Eureka, and Highland Hose, respectively. Eureka's "Festival '93" was clearly the largest and most successful, probably due to its prime location in Riverview Memorial Park.

New Kensington and Arnold, as suggested earlier, are

strong church-going communities, and much of their remaining traditional life is bound to religious belief and institutions. A Syrian Food Festival is held in mid-May at St. George's Antiochian Orthodox Christian Church in Arnold. Some of the foods prepared and offered for sale by parishioners at this three-day event include the following: Syrian and Lebanese cheeses and yogurts, various breads, stuffed grape leaves, bread dips made with chick peas and olive oil and egg plant, taboulhe-like salads made with grape leaves and cracked wheat, and "Kibbe," a raw-meat delicacy. Services at St. George's, formerly said all in Arabic and Latin, are still 1/3 Arabic, 1/3 Latin, and 1/3 English. Use of Arabic is being phased out, however, with the aging of Syrian immigrants. St. George's also holds a Syrian Picnic in mid-September at the Veterans of Foreign Wars pavilion in Lower Burrell.

At St. John the Baptist Catholic Orthodox Church in New Kensington, Catholic Orthodox Christians have retained a strong spiritual sensibility that is nurtured by the regular practice of traditional customs and rituals. Established by Ukrainian and Russian immigrants a century ago, they are today "not an ethnic church," instead serving as a refuge for "wounded Catholics" and peoples of other ethnic groups. Ethnicity is expressed chiefly in occasional use of Slavonic language in special services and in a Slavic Food Festival, held for two days at the church during June.



According to Father Paul Ziatyk, the cosmological views of the people begin from the premise that "one's customs must reflect something very meaningful" behind them. It is a "very religious world view," expressed in a rigorous church calendar of traditions: Elevation of the Cross with hymnography and procession, rooted in the first century; St. Phillip's Fast with intense Advent preparation for Christmas; Ukrainian and Russian native Christmas caroling at homes of elderly and shut-ins; Blessing of Water from parishioners homes on Epiphany, January 6; intensive, reverent fasting for Lent climaxed by three-hour Easter vigil service which ends at 3 to 4 AM, after which "we all go home and enjoy sunrise feast" with food blessed at service; decoration of altar with green branches 40 days after Easter; two additional summer fasts (during which the people are strongly discouraged from scheduling weddings).

#### CASE STUDIES: Polish and Italian Heritage in New Ken/Arnold

The Polish community of New Kensington and Arnold, as it has for over a century now, remains united around its church, St. Mary's of Czestochowa. Although not quite so rigorous as at St. John's, there is at St. Mary's a similar calendar of rituals tied to ethnic custom and religious belief: Christmas Eve traditional dinner and midnight mass, with the oplatky (thin bread wafers) passed around during mass; "Ponchki Dance," ("ponchki" are doughnuts without the hole) held the

last Saturday before Lent; "Dingus Day," occurs the day after Easter and features boys and girls, in a playful gender/romantic ritual, dousing each other with water; "Lamentations" during Lenten Season; a May Crowning for the Blessed Mother performed by the Sodality Girls; a candlelight procession service in October where parishioners form a "Living Rosary"; services in August marking the feast day of St. Mary of Czestochowa; and the bringing and blessing of flowers on the Feast of the Assumption. St. Mary's also maintains a strong parochial school next door.

"The people's love of God...God and Country... pulled them through [hard times]...a quiet resistance" of the Polish people has made them endure, here and in the Old Country, notes Dorothy Perdeus, a tradition-bearer of Polish-American heritage at the church. "Anybody who thinks about the world [today] will find joy in these traditions," says Perdeus.

St. Mary's organizes a Polish Day Picnic every August, a hugely popular event featuring Polish music by Robert Jezewski and The Merrymakers, Polish beer and foods--pierogi, halushki (cabbage and noodles), halubki (stuffed cabbages), and Polish dancers from Pittsburgh. This event is held at the VFW Pavilion in Lower Burrell.

Italian-American heritage is maintained through a number of visible and vital organizations, events and individuals. Italian Day, staged two weeks after Polish Day at the same venue, is also enormously popular and features an outdoor mass

and Italian foods and music. The Spartaco Club, located along the river in Arnold near the former location of American St. Gobain Glass Corporation, was organized to promote various traditional recreational and sportsmen's activities in the Italian-American community. Members still participate in weekly bocce ball tournaments, in addition to regular hunting and fishing outings and "towel bingos," a popular region-wide variation of bingo in which winners take home towels. Very occasionally, older members join in a round of traditional Italian song and music. The women's branch of the Arnold Umbria Club (northern Italy descent only), though small in number (50 and decreasing) is still active and gets together occasionally to prepare "tagliolini" (wide noodles) among other group domestic activities. The Knights of Columbus, Loggia Italia Redenta, Sons of Italy, Sons of Columbus, and the Italian Daughters of America all are viable organizations; the Knights of Columbus and Sons of Italy maintain buildings and strong social memberships.

The spiritual centerpiece of Italian-American heritage in these two communities, and one of New Kensington's true architectural landmarks, is Mount St. Peter's Church on Freeport Road in New Kensington. This highly ornate building was constructed in 1944 from the Mellon Mansion in the Oakland section of Pittsburgh, when that structure was dismantled. A small but dedicated group of parishioners currently works hard at researching and preserving the history of the structure,

and produce a quarterly publication, *The Barque*, recounting history and tradition in the church. Anthony and Vera Ginocchi, my Italian-American informants, give tours of the church with great pride to interested members and groups in the area.

Among the many cultural and religious traditions still carried on at Mt. St. Peter's: a 13-week-long Novena to St. Anthony, elaborate processions marking various feast days throughout the year, a dramatic visit by St. Nicholas to the children in church every December 6, an elaborate "May Crowning" out in the church courtyard, paying reverence to the Blessed Mother, and the "Pilgrim Madonna," a ritual involving the in-home homage and passage of an ornamental statuette of Mary by parishioners. The host/hostess of the Madonna invites worshippers to come nightly for one week to say the rosary before the Madonna moves on to the next home.

There is a quilting group recently formed by the women of Mt. St. Peter's Church. They convene regularly during the cool months, and occasionally sell their work (I saw them at the New Ken Community Days Festival). (The inter-ethnic Alle-Kiski Valley Senior Citizens Center in New Ken also does quilting.) There are domestic forms of Italian artistic expression, as well: Mrs. Ginocchi, for example, does large and delicate embroidery work; this craft, along with much Italian cooking and baking, comes from her father's artistic sensibility, she says.

On the heritage of immigration, Anthony and Vera Ginocchi say this: "We appreciate ...and admire (greatly)" the sacrifices of the emigrating generation. "Coming here . . . with nothing but their faith, without knowing the language, the culture, etc...[you] can't say enough about what they all did...not just the Italians--all immigrants."

The Ginocchis described their efforts to maintain the sense of family upon which they grew and were nurtured. "We gave our children roots and wings," notes Vera Ginocchi, and now, "We have every plan AT&T offers!" The children remain interested in family, church, ethnicity, history, and tradition, requesting that the parents bring and make them special ethnic foods when they visit, and that the special prosciutto meal be on the table at Christmas. She discussed at some length the ritualistic, rhythmic nature of seasonal foods in her family's past, vestiges of which she carries on: "Nothing goes to waste...one season leads to the next."

It should be noted that, although fewer in number than when Vera Ginocchi's father operated his store, the neighborhood "Mom and Pop" groceries are still prevalent in Arnold and New Kensington. Still operating are Spezanno's, Mazziotti's Bakery, Fazio's, and Costa's; all specialize in the preparation of Italian-American foods.

Other New Kensington/Arnold Social-Cultural Traditions

Ethnic--Regional but with a strong base in New Kensington

and Lower Burrell: Allegheny-Kiski Chapter 73 of DANK, the German American National Congress, was organized in January 1991 to "teach the German language and culture." This is a vital and growing organization with 200 members whose interest in heritage preservation extends beyond the bounds of their own German ethnicity. Don Stoffel described the organization as a "bridge-builder," and offered the following example: at the group's "October Fest," they will feature the "Pas Slovak Ensemble," a Slovak vocal group from Swissvale, along with a core of German musicians and dancers recruited from within the region. One ethnic group other than German, he says, will be invited every year. In the same cross-ethnic spirit, the group arranged for a multilingual series of readings for Pentecost Sunday at the Sacred Heart Church in Tarentum, the traditional German church in West Tarentum (one reading in German, the second in Slovak, and other spoken verse in Italian). The October Fest will feature German music (brass bands and a men's choir), as well German foods, including: strudels, "beenenstisch" (almond-flavored cake topped with honey), and tarts. DANK also, as per its stated mission, conducts German language classes at various local schools, and offers a \$100 award for the top graduating student.

In the summer, there are regular opportunities for Poles and Slovaks to engage in lively polka dances. These are festive occasions, held at Legion Halls or VFWs in New Kensington or Lower Burrell. Many aging residents have fewer

opportunities for ethnic dance because, according to Eddie Mack, their children and grandchildren prefer disc jockeys for the current generation of weddings. Thus the elders look forward to those community polka opportunities that are still available: "I'd rather dance than eat!" says Mary Tomko of Natrona. These dances usually feature Bob Jezewski and the Merrymakers.

Occupational--Allegheny Valley MORA (Men Over Retirement Age) Club includes a significant proportion of ALCOA retirees. The MORA Club, which also includes retirees from Allegheny Ludlum and Pittsburgh Plate Glass, gets together regularly for bowling and other large social events. ALCOA itself has a 25-Year Club which exists to reunite former aluminum workers at banquets and picnics held at least annually. For glass workers, there is the Annual American St. Gobain Reunion held at the Spartaco Club every July. [NOTE: See the 1993 report of a study conducted by America's Industrial Heritage Project for more information on ALCOA history and the heritage of aluminum workers.]

Community--Picnic neighborhood reunions of former residents of the Valley Camp and Valley Heights areas of New Kensington are held annually. Literally covering the walls of the Arnold Municipal Building are hundreds of old photographs chronicling Arnold's past. Arnold's Memory Walls are frequent objects of the residents' nostalgic gaze.

Religious--Revivals sponsored by the African-American

churches, Baptist and Methodist, are held in late summer and fall. These are region-wide and churches take turns hosting the event. Revivals feature spirituals and gospel music, charismatic preaching, and traditional African-American foods, including: barbecued ribs and chicken, "greens" (leeks, mustard, collards, etc.), and chitlins (pork intestines). A gospel radio station based in New Ken reaches the African-American community throughout the Valley.

#### B. Tarentum

Environmental/Community--As suggested earlier, the river has long been a traditional source of recreation for residents from Tarentum and throughout the region. Frances Magoc, a former Brackenridge resident, remembers the river of the 1930s as "our private swimming pool." Though not nearly as popular as it once was, Braeburn Beach still attracts swimmers on hot summer days.

Richard Esler is a retired PPG management employee whose "true profession is a poet." Esler has published 14 books of poetry and prose, much of it inspired by and centered on the Allegheny Valley. His work is both historical documentation and folkloric text, describing the course of major events and traditional life in communities along the river. Much of his prose has an environmental ethos about it and offers a strongly regional "sense of place."

Walking and sitting in Riverview Park are time-honored summer rituals that have survived the devolution of the nearby



East Tarentum business district. Boating and fishing remain popular environmental/recreational activities for local residents. Indeed, with the cleanup of the river and the creeks over the past two decades, fishing seems more popular than ever: Opening Day of trout season finds the banks of Bull Creek and Little Bull Creek lined with anglers; small boats with anglers dot the Allegheny River daily throughout the summer months. Walks "up the crick" on hot summer days, with swimming stops in Job's Hole, is a tradition that remains somewhat alive. Although not investigated in this survey, deer hunting--as is true throughout Western Pennsylvania--remains a sacred, mostly macho, tradition. Folk place names (beyond those previously mentioned) include: "Hunky Alley," named for the many Slovaks who filled the worker housing established on Conroy Way in the first decade of this century; "Job's Hole," named for the legendary teamster Job (the story varies as to the color of the man) whose horse went into a deep hole while crossing Bull Creek at its Little Bull Creek confluence and was never seen again.

Gardening--"Everyone had a garden in West Tarentum ...there was friendly competition among neighbors for the nicest flowers, the biggest zucchini," notes Wayne Klems. Although not the dominant ritual it once was, gardening--flower and vegetable--remains a serious passion for many residents of Tarentum and throughout the study region. Berry picking (blackberries and black raspberries), although in

decline as well, is still enjoyed by residents able and willing to search (patches are fewer since the intrusion of the Allegheny Valley Expressway). Some traditionalists continue to make jellies from the berries (Pauline Arnold even makes violet jelly.)

Food preservation in general is still carried on, although certainly not to the extent it once was. Tomatoes, pears, and peppers are among the foods grown, processed, and preserved by locals (mostly women). This is a traditional activity that seems rooted both in "old country" rural life and in "making do" through the lean years of the Great Depression. "Nothing ever goes to waste" is a phrase repeated again and again by gardeners and food preservers throughout the region: composting and seasonal, ritualistic food preparation seem to reflect a region-wide circular cosmology from a pre-modern era, though often suppressed by the dominant culture (see Burtner House interview, among others).

Neighborhood reunions are held (albeit irregularly) by former residents of the obliterated settlement of Job's Hole.

Community firemen's fundraising fairs (discussed in the previous section) remain popular events. Children's street play, while until recently officially outlawed by an arcane nineteenth-century ordinance, has long been a pastime of West Tarentum children. Among the games played in back alleys and main streets: football, baseball, and, more recently, hockey, along with traditional games like "hide and seek," "kick the

can," and "release the beldrum"--neither the etymology nor the spelling of the latter is clear to me, but the game revolves around the "capture" of players by opposing teams in two designated areas.

Skip Culleiton's local postcard collection is a real treasure, several hundred images chronicling and recalling the past of Tarentum and other local communities. Bob Lucas also maintains a vast photograph/postcard collection.

Ethnic/Religious--The Slovak Heritage Association was formed by several parishioners of St. Clement Roman Catholic Church in West Tarentum in 1992 for the purpose of promoting the preservation of Slovak language and culture. Provoked by the current, somewhat contentious merger of St. Clement with Sacred Heart-St. Peter (which formed Holy Martyrs Parish), the organization has held one full year of successful language classes and is interested in expanding its activities to include some kind of ethnic food and music/ dance festival (see the Recommendations section in this report).

Church-centered, the group also promotes the continuation of Slovak tradition at St. Clement, including at least one Slovak song at every mass, and the Procession of the Risen Christ at the Easter Vigil mass. The Jednota Club, the "First Catholic Slovak Union," maintains a viable social membership and fraternal life insurance program.

For the family of Stephen and Frances Magoc, Family Reunions remain a vital living traditional activity. The

Uhrics, the maternal side of that family, has remained extremely close and recently held its 53rd annual reunion, growing larger and stronger every year. Where once Slovak music filled the air at this event, those who speak and can sing the language are diminishing in number; now, the principal expressions of ethnicity are the foods on the table.

Softball ("mushball" as it is still called by some) is a featured recreational activity at this reunion, though one reserved for the men. The Magocs, paternal side of this same family, were once held together geographically in the same neighborhood of the Bull Creek Valley, but were scattered in the early 1970s with the coming of the Allegheny Valley Expressway. Their regular festive gatherings became a thing of the past. Five years ago, however, they began reuniting annually in an attempt to recapture that family spirit. Ethnic foods (including halubky, halushky, pierogi, and krupy) and a photograph display of the old days are features at this event; a pledge was made this year to try and relearn and teach the younger generation a few Slovak songs for next year's event.

CASE STUDY: Annual Corpus Christi Sawdust Carpet Display Held at Sacred Heart-St. Peter's worship site of Holy Martyrs Parish, this event recently saw its 50th year. Originally derived from the Black Forest of Germany, the ritual was brought to the German congregation at Sacred Heart during

World War II by local priests. It is truly a dazzling cultural/artistic expression involving considerable preparation and participation. First, key organizers gather nightly for one week in advance of the event to meticulously dye--in dozens of bright colors--several hundred pounds of sawdust. Then, early on the morning of Corpus Christi Sunday, thirty or more groups, mostly parish families and extended families, gather in the church parking lot to begin the construction of their individual carpets. One person will draw in chalk an outline of their carpet design; images come from funeral card and calendar pictures, Christmas cards, or sometimes from someone in the group itself. One somewhat controversial carpet design at this year's display, put together by one conciliatory parishioner at St. Clement's, symbolized the merger of the two churches, an issue less resolved for some than for others at St. Clement.

After the image is laid out, group members fill in the spaces with a variegated and sometimes spectacular combination of colored sawdust. The carpets are formally laid out in a long path from one end of the parking lot to the other, and occasionally (and lightly) watered down to preserve them for the duration of the day. Towards twilight, an indoor mass is held (this year featuring one German hymn), ending with a procession of priests, altar boys, the choir, and the Knights of Columbus in full robes. Consecration of the "body of Christ" (Corpus Christi) at a highly decorated altar at one

end of the carpets concludes the ceremony.

The Carpet Display was initially carried out solely by the men of the parish, who would meet nightly for weeks beforehand at the neighborhood Belgian Club to plan the event.

In the early 1970s, after some quiet agitation and increased peripheral participation by a few women and children, they, too joined in the design and labor of the carpets. Although the event is now perceived more as a family affair, there is some discussion afoot to return patriarchal control to the parish Men's Club.

At any rate, the parish greatly anticipates the feast of Corpus Christi for reasons that have a lot to do with "family and tradition," as Dave Kuniak put it. "There aren't many things like this...that mean something and are rooted in the past...left in the world today," said Marilyn Huey, another event organizer. "It's a demonstration of faith," notes Skip Culleiton. "You sacrifice, you do all this hard work and it's torn up at the end of the day. Yet you're striving in your work to eventually see God."

\* \* \*

The Belgian Club, organized at the turn of the century by Belgian glass workers recruited by Captain Ford, remains a viable social, though no longer ethnic, organization with some vestiges of traditional activity. Its slogan enshrined on the front of the building, "Fraternite Musicale Belge," reflects a musical tradition that was expressed for decades in musical

group/orchestral competition among Belgian and other ethnic clubs in the region. Although that no longer exists, another tradition from the club's early years remains: the raising and racing of homing pigeons, a tradition club president Wayne Klems speculates derives from Belgian rural folk culture. The West Tarentum Union Eagle Homing Club remains active, keeping their pigeons in cages in the basement of the Belgian Club, and attending races in various places within and outside the region.

Homecoming Weekend for the Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church, held every August, is a special event in the life of a once geographically centered church. Former members of the congregation return from as far away as Texas and Oklahoma for this "family reunion," for family is how the members of the church perceive themselves. In its 14th year, the Homecoming Weekend draws more than 125 people and features church services, gospel singing, a picnic with traditional foods, and children's games.

Other rituals at the Bethel A.M.E. Church (and the Black community at large) include "Watch Night"--New Year's Eve when a meal of spicy pork and greens is prepared as a hopeful symbol of good luck for the coming year. Other activities at Bethel A.M.E. include: a rigorous Sunday school and Bible School program, daily hot lunches prepared for the children, and missionary visits from outside the region--all vestiges of another time when the Black churches ("the only thing we

really owned," recalls Ruth Johnson) were the spiritual and social center of the Black community, in Tarentum and throughout the study region.

Most German families in Tarentum maintain vestiges of their traditional Christmas celebration, including the leaving of straw in shoes for the Dutch Santa, who replaces the straw with goodies on Christmas morning. Bayberry candles are left burning in the window as a symbol of welcome for stray travelers, special breads (nut rolls, poppy seed rolls and strudels) are made as well every Christmas; pork and cabbage are prepared for New Year's Eve.

Occupational--Regrettably, I uncovered few living expressions of Tarentum's important industrial heritage (no glassblowers, for example); mostly what I found was in the realm of historic preservation: the Tour-Ed Mine, a local tourist site located on the outskirts of Tarentum and operated by Ira Wood. Visitors are led deep into a coal mine shaft where they are provided a history of mining in the region, after which they tour the mining museum filled with various local artifacts from the industrial era. At the Museum of the Allegheny Valley Historical Society in East Tarentum, there are exhibits illustrating the rich history of glass and aluminum. These are artifact-rich displays, which beg expansion and greater social-cultural interpretation. There are also models of salt and oil wells and other industrial artifacts scattered about the museum. Personal bottle



collections reflecting Tarentum's glassmaking heritage are not uncommon among individual residents. Bob Lucas has painted a number of mural-size images recalling life in Tarentum from Shawnee times through canal days.

### C. Brackenridge

#### CASE STUDY: Annual Reunion of "The Street"

When Allegheny Ludlum recruited African Americans from the South to work at their mill as strikebreakers, the company constructed a row of houses along what was first known as Clay Street, then Fourth Avenue in Brackenridge. To residents, it was always "The Street." Life on The Street was "nice, very nice," recalls Eunice Walker, a former resident. Contrary to the segregated nature of public facilities elsewhere in the Valley, Blacks and a minority of Whites (who came later on) co-existed happily in this insular neighborhood, irrespective of color. Men and women shared common public bathroom facilities at either end of the settlement, their children played together, and they worshipped at a common Baptist Church which AL also built for residents. Life was close, seemingly a world apart: "I don't know if I can express to you how close we were on The Street," recalls Dennis Walker, a former resident. So close, in fact, that dozens of natives of The Street--some coming from as far away as Texas--still get together annually for a day-long reunion to share memories and try to pass on "that feeling of community...that love for one another" to their children. "We still see it in our mind's

eye," Dennis Walker told me.

Always well-attended, The Street Reunion features a photograph collection and the victuals of the African American community which Euro-Americans in the neighborhood had come to enjoy as well: barbecued ribs and chicken, greens, ham hock with bacon, chicken- and pig's-feet, and black-eyed peas (the latter, along with pork and sauerkraut, is a New Year's good luck favorite among African Americans).

Community/Environmental--The annual Fourth of July Fireworks Display, sponsored by the Pioneer Hose Volunteer Fire Company, is so revered an institution that when it was in danger of cancellation for lack of funds this past summer, residents and businesses responded generously and enthusiastically to save the event. Residents from Brackenridge, Tarentum and all of Harrison Township come together in backyards and in Riverview Memorial Park (which extends through Brackenridge) to watch the display. Firemen occupy a revered place in community consciousness throughout the region. That hallowed niche was further enshrined in December 1991 when four firemen from Hilltop Hose in Natrona Heights were tragically killed fighting a Brackenridge fire. They have been memorialized with four dogwood trees and a plaque in the Brackenridge section of Riverview Park that honors war veterans. This area is now the site of an annual commemoration on the December 20 anniversary of the fire.

Just across the street, the American Legion bingo, held

weekly at the Legion building, is an enormously popular event.

Next door one finds another popular summertime ritual in Brackenridge, the barbecuing of ribs and chicken at JT's Parkview Tavern. Swimming, boating, fishing are popular river activities in Brackenridge as well as in Tarentum. Outdoor sporting activities are formally organized at the Oregon Hunting and Fishing Club, a socially exclusive group of outdoor enthusiasts.

Team sporting events have long been a staple of community life throughout the region, and the baseball fields at Dreshar Stadium in Tarentum and Brackenridge (on the border of the two communities) symbolize that tradition. The riverside stadium continues to host Little League baseball and "midget" and high-school football games. The Allegheny Ludlum field, situated in the shadow of the mill, likewise is the site of nightly summer baseball.

Ethnic/Religious--Revivals are held at the end of every summer at the Shiloh Baptist Church and feature charismatic preaching, gospel song, and traditional African American foods. The First Church of God continues its longstanding religious rituals: the Washing of the Saints' Feet and a reenactment of the Lord's Supper on the Thursday preceding Easter Sunday, and baptism by immersion.

Italian-American heritage in the borough is maintained, at least nominally, at the Integrity Lodge. Organized in 1935 under the auspices of the Italian Sons and Daughters of

America "to promote the ideals of American citizenship," the club maintains an active social membership not restricted to persons of Italian descent. They hold an annual summer picnic featuring Italian foods and music, and sponsor a bus trip to Italian Day at Kennywood Park in Duquesne. Dileo's, an Italian corner groceria on Ninth Avenue, specializes in homemade Italian foods and retains a faithful clientele.

As is true throughout the region, Italian, Rusin, and Slovak families meticulously maintain flower and vegetable gardens, and grow trees and shrubbery in their yards with the utmost love and care. As one Brackenridge Italian-American told me, "You can always tell a man by the way he keeps his yard."

Occupational--The Pensioners of United Steelworkers of America Local 1196, operating from the union hall on Brackenridge Avenue, organize an Annual Summer Picnic and a Fall Banquet. Horseshoe pitching, bingo, and story-swapping are the principal activities at the picnic. Local 1196 also hosts a larger banquet in the fall at Laube Hall in Freeport Park. Former employees of the Bar Mill department at AL get together every fall at the White Star in Freeport to share stories over dinner and to look at old photographs.

#### CASE STUDY: Industrial Lore at Allegheny Ludlum

Conversations with retired AL steelworkers reveal a richly fascinating and significant industrial heritage. From

Fannie Sellins lore to legendary tales of men with superhuman strength, stories of steel mill life abound and workers seek out opportunities to recall their experiences. One sees retired workers sitting almost daily throughout the summer on the Sycamore Street bench in Natrona, in the shadow of their former employer.

Joseph Falensky, for example, speaks proudly of a work ethic which runs across ethnic and racial lines and is still expressed in the retired life of many steelworkers: "Joe don't loaf, see . . . it was a hard life in them days but we ate. We took care of each other. . . I worked in three or four coal mines in West Virginia (when work was non-existent at AL during the Depression). . . . I was a "Jumbo" (one who worked too hard, pushed his co-workers). . . . I wasn't afraid to work. I still work. . . . I do my own lawn with a handmower and I don't use electrical/mechanical tools, see. I get down on my hands and knees and use hand clippers (to trim hedges). I do things by hand. . . . No, I was a workin man all my life."

Another current employee (now president of the union Local 1196), Tony Slomkoski, spoke of life in "The Butcher Shop," Number 11 Department, where scores of men (including his father) lost limbs and a few lost their lives. (This may be the source of the dubious sobriquet applied to the mill by one informant, "Agony Steel.") Inspired rather than repelled by his father's experience, Tony went to work in the mill and

continues to work toward the strengthening of his dad's union and the preservation of labor history throughout the region.

Variations on the traditional "Man of Steel" legends, while not plentiful, can be found. Dave Stewart reports with awesome wonder the tale of his father doing one-handed chin-ups from the end of a crane hook seventy-five feet in the air. "'My Dad wouldn't take an easy job (not just sayin' this 'cause he was my dad)...he was the strongest man I ever saw in my life. I don't believe they make men like that anymore. . . He would lift the front of a car up with one hand." There are tales of a legendary strong man from Ducktown who could lift a two-ton box of scrap steel off the ground; and of "Big Shovel," who used the largest shovel available to load the open-hearth furnaces.

D. Harrison Township: Natrona/Natrona Heights/Ducktown  
Ethnic/Religious--Still revered by the Slovak and Polish people of the entire region, the ethnic music of Eddie Mack "brought a lot of pleasure to the hearts" of immigrants and their families. Mack is retired now, his music available only on the six albums he recorded with his band. Bob Jezewski of Natrona Heights, however, seems to be carrying on that tradition quite well, with frequent appearances around and outside the area (he was in fact out of the area for an extended period when I belatedly "discovered" him and sought him out for an interview).

The Slovak Hall in Natrona, after nearly closing a decade ago, is stronger than ever financially with a large social membership. While the days of Slovak vaudeville dramatic and musical performances are long gone, Margaret Jancech, the daughter of one of those performers and current president of the Hall, is determined to keep Slovak heritage alive in whatever ways she can. Duck-pin bowling leagues and an occasional Slovak song fest are remaining vestiges of tradition/ethnicity at the hall, although Mrs. Jancech sees combining energies with the Heritage Association at St. Clement to orchestrate an ethnic festival of some kind as a real possibility. She greatly mourns the loss of Slovak traditions at St. Matthias, previously the Slovak Catholic Church in Natrona but now merged and stripped of its ethnicity by the diocesan reorganization.

Just outside of Natrona Heights in Butler County's Buffalo Township stands Palko's Bar, a nondescript building (with not even a sign to mark it) constructed with wood from the old Washington Hotel in Natrona, but whose more interesting cultural features are inside. On the walls are epic-size murals depicting rural life (Slovak and local, it seems, nobody knows) painted by an unknown Slovak artist in 1933 when the bar first opened. There are frequent and informal musical performances by local guitar and banjo players, and ads for turtle soup on the bulletin board. Frank Palko, long-time owner of the bar, once hosted religious

education classes for Slovak children from rural areas who couldn't attend St. Clement or St. Matthias (in Tarentum and Natrona, respectively). This is a rural neighborhood place reeking of tradition.

The Polish National Alliance in Natrona, four generations old, is another still-vital ethnic organization. Certainly it is "less ethnic" than it used to be, with a large, young social membership of frequent drinkers and the ethnic dances only a memory. Still, there are remnants of Polish cultural roots: 60 fraternal members who subscribe to the PNA's valuable life insurance policy; and one extended family that still rents out the large dining hall for their wigilia, or Christmas Eve Dinner, a traditional activity confined to the home for most Poles in Natrona. Only certain dishes are allowed for this meal and no one is permitted to eat anything until the first star in the sky is visible. Fish and soups, including "Szczaf," a sourgrass soup still made by a few older women, are features at this ritual meal.

Other aspects of Polish heritage still viable in Natrona include two other fraternal organizations, the Polish Roman Catholic Union and the Kosciusko Club, visited mostly by older women and men, respectively; finely manicured flower gardens; and the preparation of "czarniena," a duck soup made with the blood of duck. This is a delicacy in the folk culture of Natrona Poles and indirectly gave West Natrona its sobriquet of Ducktown, as many people raised ducks to make the soup in



their backyards. Sabotka's in Natrona, one of the last neighborhood grocers serving Polish people in the area, still offers the ingredients needed to prepare czarniena.

In Ducktown itself, Polish residents are fighting tenaciously for the preservation of their heritage as it is maintained at their church, Our Lady of Perpetual Help. They are currently involved in litigation to roll back the merger of their parish with the Irish/German church in Natrona Heights, which is much larger and more "homogeneous," according to Joseph Stokwicz, a Polish member of Our Lady of Perpetual Help and a leader in the current struggle. Customs and religious rituals they believe are at risk of being lost there include: the Ponchki Dance before Lent, Polish music, Lamentations during Lent, Christmas Eve midnight mass with Polish carols, oplatky (communion wafers) broken in church, and an Easter sunrise service with a "Risen Christ" carried around the church by an elder.

Community/Environmental--Community Days was organized annually in Natrona from 1976 until 1990 when Freddy Skwireg, the inspirational and organizational force behind the event, passed away. This was a hugely popular event, which allowed the ethnic and other clubs in town to open their doors to the public (each one taking a different night) and to celebrate both community and ethnicity in high-flown fashion. Participants sometimes went round-the-clock with ethnic foods, dancing, a firemen's "battle of the barrel," and considerable

drinking. Community Days was marked each year with a material monument of some kind in "the Square," located on Pond Street.

For example, one year the schools and churches were honored with a plaque, another year Penn Salt paid for a granite salt barrel with an inscription. There is great interest in revitalizing the event: the American Legion Post 48, one of the remaining organizations of some vitality in Natrona, hosted a very successful one-day event this summer as a "test run" for future endeavors; plans are underway to expand it for 1994.

All of this and much, much more is reviewed in Louis Chernan's recently completed documentary videotape history of the town, "Remembering Natrona." Produced solely for the purpose of "tryin to make 'em (especially the children of Natrona who are no longer living here) feel how important this town was at one time," according to Chernan. Chernan includes in the video shots of paintings done by Frank Jagodzinski, a Natrona artist and life-long resident whose impressionist-style work depicts Pennsylvania Canal and Penn Salt days in the town. Produced with great love, "Remembering Natrona" will hopefully become more than an artifact of the past (see Recommendations Section).

German and Irish traditional rural life is institutionally preserved by the Burtner House Restoration Society, along with their namesake--an early nineteenth-century farmhouse designated as a National

Historical Landmark. The Strawberry Festival and Fall Festival are the key social/fundraising events for the group and feature homemade foods and traditional dress by caretakers of the house, some of whom include Burtner descendants. My interview with the Burtner House women provides an interesting study in gender roles, the work ethic, and women's roles in historic preservation and the maintenance of traditional rural values and traditions in an increasingly suburbanized landscape.

"That's Pennsylvanian," noted Pauline Arnold, referring to an apparent regional tendency to see something one likes but rather than buying it, to go home and build a replica from memory. Her husband "can fix anything" and they have taught their children that they can "do anything"--a commonly expressed sentiment I heard throughout the valley across racial and ethnic lines.

Elsewhere in Natrona Heights, there is a spring Arts Festival held annually at Harrison Hills Park, and gatherings of various groups, some apparently musical, at the Tarentum-Pittsburgh Campground. "Singing festivals" (by whom I could not ascertain) are held each Sunday and Wednesday evening during July and August at the campground. Blessed Sacrament Church holds a Parish Festival, with small amusement rides, games for children and various foods. At the end of the summer, the Natrona Heights Plaza shopping center invites non-profit social and religious organizations of all stripes

to sell baked goods and other items at its Good Neighbor Day Sidewalk Sale. Finally, "the spring," located on Argonne Drive between Natrona and Ducktown, continues to draw local residents to its cold pure spring water as it has since human habitation of the area. Township officials have warned in recent years of the spring's possible deleterious impurities, but residents have had independent medical analyses conducted as reassurance of its benign nature.

E. Vandergrift--My probe into this community involved principally a lengthy interview with Clyde Floyd, who was a former steelworker at US Steel, a knowledgeable local historian, a woodworker and clockmaker, and a terrific storyteller.

Since the founding of Vandergrift, the Fourth of July has been the focal point of community celebration. Fireworks and a three-day Community Heritage Days (featuring crafters, ethnic foods and dance, bingo, etc.) are the key festivities.

Not being able to attend, I can report nothing else on this event, other than to note that its 1995 celebration will be the largest ever, marking the town's centennial year. There is a video history in the works for 1994 in advance of that event, being produced by Greg Rempel Productions. Finally, I have learned that former employees of the Vandergrift Murphy's store have recently gotten together for a reunion.

F. Braeburn--Again, the chief inquiry here was a fascinating interview with a former resident and employee of

Braeburn Steel. Andy Piecka, like other steelworkers from other communities, continues to do some of the same kinds of work he performed at the mill, only at home. He fashioned a metal grill and other iron and steel products for his home, and he maintains a lawnmower repair business in his garage. He longs for a local revival of Slovak gymnastics, of which he was once instructor at the local SOKOL Club.

Otherwise in Braeburn, there is a Strawberry Festival sponsored by United Methodist Women in July at the Braeburn Methodist Church. There is a store (rarely open in summer) called The Heritage Shop which ought to be investigated.

River activities remain popular: there is a small marina on the shore of the river facing Jack's Island and a snack and bait store maintained in the same place. An interesting Braeburn landmark is the St. John Bosco Roman Catholic Church, a spin-off from Mt. St. Peter's, serving Braeburn's Italian-American community.

Footnote on Ford City: With the PPG plant about to close down, it seems to be a prime opportunity to help that community rebound emotionally by helping to preserve its deep glass industry heritage. A Mr. Engler of Ford City has written a book on Ford City history and "does" Captain John B. Ford for school groups and various local organizations.

#### H. Additional Thematic Connections Among Communities

Many of these have already been noted in individual community sections. Below is a summary in list form, with a

few additions previously not noted:

1. Garden culture remains particularly strong among Polish, Slovak and Italian ethnic groups.

2. Blessed Mother (of Jesus Christ) Grottoes, adorned with flowers, are found throughout the valley, with an especially strong concentration in "Catholic parts" of communities.

3. Food preservation activities and rituals, coupled with a pre-modern environmental/conservation ethic was noted by virtually every ethnic group--German and Irish, Slovak, Polish, Anglo, and African.

4. Socially viable ethnic organizations with vestiges of ethnic tradition are found throughout the Valley. (Belgian Club, Slovak Hall, Jednota, Integrity Lodge, Polish National Alliance, etc.).

5. Hunger for a revitalized ethnic pride is being expressed in new organizational activity, and there seems to be renewed determination among some groups to hold on to their fraternal organizations as long as possible, in whatever ethnic-diluted form. One also sees this regeneration of ethnicity in the enthusiasm which greets visitors from the old country: Not noted in above section, this was recounted to me by three different ethnic groups: the (Slovak) Magoc family in 1991 sponsored a spirited welcoming celebration for a Slovakian cousin at the Jednota Club in Tarentum, complete with ethnic music; a nephew of Joseph Stokwicz in Ducktown was

overwhelmed with the attention and celebrations offered him upon his visit in 1992; and Mr. and Mrs. Ginocchi who hosted an Italian Cardinal from Rome, strengthening their already deep religious faith and ethnic sensibility.

6. Volunteer Firemen's Community Fundraising Festivals

7. Ethnic Heritage Days--Polish Picnic, Italian Day, Syrian Picnic, October Fest--organized by New Ken's ethnic groups, held in Lower Burrell, serve the whole valley.

8. African-American Religious Revivals

9. Boating, fishing, and hunting

10. Industrial Heritage/Work ethic--noted among every occupational group in every community.

11. Video Histories--already executed in Natrona and New Ken, there is one in the works for Vandergrift. A videotape history of the Corpus Christi Sawdust Carpet Display at Sacred Heart Church in Tarentum has been made as well. There is talk of a Tarentum video documentary.

12. Paintings and other Visual Expressions of Collective Memory--Richard Nitowski, a retired school administrator from Harrison Township, has rendered a series of paintings depicting America's military experiences; these hang at The American Legion-Post 48 in Natrona and at Natrona's PNA. Robert Lucas's painting of the Shawnee arriving at Bull Creek hangs in the upstairs children's room of the Public Library in Tarentum. Frank Jagodzinski has produced numerous paintings of Natrona during canal days and at the peak of its industrial

power. As noted earlier, there are paintings of rural scenes at Palko's Bar in Buffalo Township done by a Slovak immigrant more than 50 years ago. The large mural circa World War II at the Alle-Kiski Valley Museum, depicting military, industrial and home front scenes is a real gem in need of some restoration. Also, there are the walls of photographs hanging in Arnold's Municipal Building, and numerous personal collections of postcards and photos.

## **V. Cultural Heritage Issues of Concern**

### **A. Ethnicity and Religion**

If the attitudes of tradition-bearers are any measure (and surely they must be), the most dynamic living cultural expressions--particularly those with deep local roots associated with the churches--seem to have a bright future in these communities: Vera and Tony Ginocchi are extremely confident about the maintenance of religious and ethnic heritage at Mt. St. Peter's Church, as well as through the staging of Italian Day. Dorothy Perdeus at St. Mary's of Czestochowa echoed that sentiment on the future of Polish traditions in New Kensington. Likewise for the maintenance of ritual and custom at St. John's Orthodox Catholic, German American culture and language as preserved by DANK, the Sawdust Carpet Display at West Tarentum's German church, Homecoming Weekends of the Bethel A.M.E. Church in Tarentum, and the Uhric/Magoc family reunion tradition centered in



Brackenridge and Tarentum. These all appear to be secure, sacredly held traditional activities with a long life ahead.

Other events and institutions have futures less certain: the Walker family in Brackenridge feels rather certain that The Street reunions will become a thing of the past within another decade or so, as more and more folks with a direct connection to that neighborhood pass on. Poles in West Natrona, faced with a bitter church merger and the loss of time-honored traditions, are in an anxious and defensive mode while they cling tenaciously and proudly to the ethnicity "allowed" them by diocesan "revitalization." Slovaks in Natrona are perhaps more angry and less hopeful, for they have been given even less room for ethnic expression in their church. The merger combining Poles and Slovaks into one parish in Natrona has only reignited and exacerbated century-old tensions, suspicions, and prejudices between these two groups. For their part, Natrona Poles seem more resigned to the impending changes and cannot understand the outrage of the Slovaks ("selfish," "self-centered" are adjectives I heard two Polish persons use to describe the Slovaks).

In West Tarentum, the merger involving Slovaks at St. Clement with Belgians, Germans, Irish, and Italians at Sacred Heart-St. Peter has not erased Slovaks' longstanding perception of discriminatory attitudes directed at them by Sacred Heart parishioners. Though they took it as an affront to their cultural dignity, it was not surprising to the

Slovaks at St. Clement's when in the 1960s the Sacred Heart school was closed by the diocese and the parishioners of the latter refused to send their children to the Catholic school operated by "those Hunkies." Ironically, the merger has reinspired a defensive ethnic sensibility among Slovaks.

Discrimination against African Americans has been previously noted but should be updated here. It is said in Natrona that the only thing the Poles and Slovaks are together on is their antipathy toward Blacks. Together, they continue to resist the "intrusion" of African Americans in sometimes horrific ways: in the spring of 1992, Beau Cannon, a 14-year-old African American from New Kensington, was badly beaten in what was widely acknowledged to be a hate crime; the incident prompted the establishment of an Alle-Kiski council on human and racial relations. It is needed, and not only in Natrona: Ku Klux Klan graffiti and Confederate flags, along with retaliatory messages by Blacks, are visible throughout the area.

At any rate, because of racism and a strong sense of racial solidarity, "a degree of cohesiveness [among Blacks throughout the valley] will always be there." This group sensibility is maintained, despite the geographical dispersal of African Americans throughout the valley. Pockets of exclusively Black communities do remain--at the Mill Street housing complex in Tarentum, in most of downtown New Kensington and Arnold residential areas, in well-defined areas

of North Vandergrift, and in Sheldon Park of Natrona Heights.

Regrettably, however, say African informants, what is lacking in these areas is the unity, the sense of extended family that used to exist in the Black community; neighbors having carte blanche to show one's children "manners," respect, values. That sense of closeness and reliance upon traditional institutions (church, family, elders, and neighbors) for acculturation is largely gone, something very much regretted by older African Americans. Despite racial solidarity, the Black community in general has long been more open than the southern Europeans to racial intermarriage and to "homogenization" of cultural traditions, e.g., there is a lot of crossover in food preferences among area Blacks. The churches remain a strong force for African Americans, though not the social and spiritual center they once were.

Several informants expressed their concerns over what they perceive as the loss of their local newspaper. The Valley News Dispatch, although still locally published, is owned from outside the region and is now much less focused on local communities than it was years ago. Reasons for this go well beyond the scope of this project, but that attitude seems to reflect a hunger--expressed throughout this inquiry--for a return to traditional forms and institutions of community life, one of them being a "real local paper."

Except for the Polish Day Picnic and other occasional celebrations, Poles in Natrona and Ducktown see little

connection between themselves and Polish heritage in New Kensington/Arnold. Likewise, Italians from across the Valley and beyond might attend Italian Day and the Spartaco Club, but for the most part, see little connection with New Kensington-Arnold Italians (who generally do see themselves as a community). German-Americans are interested not only in region-wide preservation of their ethnic heritage, but committed to a healthy spirit of cross-ethnic cooperation. Syrian and Lebanese peoples of New Kensington, although marked by differences in immigration history and other concerns, remain rather tightly knit in the celebration and maintenance of cultural and religious tradition through St. George's Church. The Catholic Orthodox religious community has diffused itself throughout the valley, with various ethnic groups establishing their own churches in various places. Church festivals provide opportunities for region-wide reunions of families, many of whom have their religious roots at St. John the Baptist, the mother church. Saint Vladimir in New Kensington (Ukrainian) and Sts. Peter and Paul in Tarentum (Rusin) are both Byzantine rite, but are quite distinct communities. (The latter is the only Catholic Church in East Tarentum, having been built near the east-west border fairly recently.)

Expressed throughout my interviews are the strong religious beliefs among Roman Catholics of various ethnic origins; those remain a common source of strength as several

churches struggle through reorganization. The Catholic Orthodox faith has remained true to its rigorous calendar of rituals which require discipline and are imbued with a deep sense of spirituality; there is a sense among Orthodox people that Roman Catholic churches, in an effort to maintain congregations, have compromised on the practice of their faith and made things too easy (giving up, for example, longstanding religious traditions and cultural customs). Black churches, though they do not fill the central role they once did in African American life, are still vitally important; Bible Schools, Sunday Schools, and religious revivals, though less rigorous than in a previous era, remain important religious institutions. Declining congregations were noted by several Black church leaders as cause for concern in their communities.

In contrast, the merger of Catholic churches in Ducktown/Natrona Heights and West Tarentum has created the problem of congregations that are too large and that do not share the same religious culture. Polish parishioners at Our Lady of Perpetual Help complain that incoming members of their newly merged parish do not share their sense of reverence and duty toward God and the church. These concerns were also noted by the Slovaks at St. Clement vis-à-vis Sacred Heart parishioners, who, they say, come late and leave early, stand in the back of the church during mass, don't support their church monetarily, etc.

## B. Occupation

Economic concerns of unemployment, underemployment, declining wages, and the threat of reduced pensions are nearly universal across the region. African Americans, Slovaks, Poles, Italians, Germans, Rusins, and Ukrainians all spoke with one voice on this issue--the present age is a far cry from the days when ALCOA and Allegheny Ludlum each employed nearly 10,000 workers, and other steel, glass, and iron workers numbered in the tens of thousands combined. This explains the great reverence in the community and among workers for AL management, which still employs 2,700 workers and remains the economic pulse of the northern end of the Valley. Automation at AL has been both a curse and a blessing, although most informants weigh in toward the latter: AL is, after all, one of the few large industrial employers remaining, precisely because they have reinvested in new technologies.

Interestingly, there is overall more blame than sympathy directed toward the striking workers at Pittsburgh Plate Glass in Creighton, in spite of the fact that PPG this summer made a decision to close down its Ford City plant, the economic life-blood of that community. Though not universal, there is a sense among residents in the region that the workers in Creighton are "cutting their own throats" and ought to settle for whatever management is willing to provide. Others (including some union locals of other industries) express

union solidarity and bitterness and resentment toward management.

The union local at AL, though significant in labor history and once quite militant, is currently in a more passive mode, ready to acknowledge company management nearly as much as the union as the key to their job security. (It is, they acknowledge, management and not the union, which provides reinvestment.) Though AL once paid a large settlement to Black workers in a class action discrimination lawsuit, that is apparently an issue of the past only. Current union members in the last contract expressed solidarity with their forebears, giving up a percentage of their wage increase in order to allow pensioners to receive the scheduled cost-of-living increase in their pensions. Management, says Joe Falensky, calculates that "we don't make one nickel for them anymore," and thus feels free to cut their benefits. Indeed, that is one of the large issues at stake in Creighton (see Rob Metil's Ethnographic Survey).

Work conditions and safety at AL, though vastly improved from generations ago, are always a concern. "Every job in that mill is (still) dangerous," declares Tony Slomkoski. Stories of mill accidents, many fatal, abound in my oral histories of mill workers.

There is a latent sense, sometimes expressed in these same stories, that the work ethic among steelworkers is not what it once was. While this certainly may be the natural

nostalgic prejudice of a retired generation, the decline in a strong and disciplined work ethic was a concern I heard across the region--from farmers and rural women to steelworkers in Vandergrift and Braeburn. Conversely, however, when ethnic groups talk about important values to their cultural heritage, a strong work ethic is one of the first words one hears, and they remain hopeful about it in that sense ("My people work hard and always have").

#### C. Family/Community

Throughout the region, a sense of resignation dominates the discussion over aging communities and the need for children to leave in search of better employment opportunities. "What can we do? They go where they have to go," is the typical response. Mrs. Ginocchi's "roots and wings" is an apt metaphor. Children who do leave, it seems, stay in close touch with families and have in recent years developed a new sense of ethnic pride connected to this place.

Some informants reported to me that they knew of immigrant children who, once embarrassed by their ethnic names and having changed them, have gone back to their family names.

In terms of the integrity of the community, the following issues and concerns were common throughout the region: a loss of safety--"you can't leave your doors unlocked for a minute anymore" (in many cases this issue had racial connotations); a general decline of individual pride (reflected in the degradation of backyard appearance, a leading example);



personal responsibility (increasing numbers of welfare recipients "loafing"); laziness of the children/addiction to popular entertainment (seen in the difficulties this summer experienced by high schools in recruiting high school football players--a stunning and somewhat alarming development in this sports-crazed area); and perhaps above all, a reliance on the automobile and television as sources of family and community fragmentation and obsessive individualism.

#### D. Environmental

I experienced a conflict myself with one individual boat owner last summer over public v. private access to the riverbank, an encounter which prompted an inquiry and satisfactory response from the borough of Tarentum (there is in fact free public access to the riverbank area flanking private docks!). In general, the rivers are widely accessible to the public. One finds, for example, elevated parks and paths down to the shoreline in Tarentum and Brackenridge, steps leading to Braeburn Beach areas, a marina in Tarentum for boaters, etc. By increasing pedestrian traffic, the borough of Arnold is attempting to reclaim an abandoned and unsafe riverside park near its former industrial section, and generally to revitalize riverside recreation.

The railbed of the Allegheny Valley Railroad in Braeburn is in the process of being converted over to hiking trails, and offers great potential as a natural recreation site. Braeburn residents do feel isolated in their area, though most

seem to prefer it that way; they are fearful of rumors of private condominium/marina development along Braeburn's shoreline. Most are confident that those plans will not, at least soon, come to fruition.

"As long as you seen smoke comin' from that mill, you had food on the table," Stanley Kaminski told me. That is a typical remembrance of traditional attitudes toward any environmental degradation caused by regional industrial activity. One gets the feeling that the tradeoff of cleaner air and water is felt with some ambivalence by older residents, who remember the region as an industrial powerhouse with environmental/health effects that one simply accepted.

Not everyone accepted them so easily, however. Richard Esler's adoration of the Allegheny River valley is coupled with a strong conservationist ethic, one that makes him less than confident about planetary ecological survival. And two Polish women in Natrona expressed to me their longstanding grievances with Allegheny Ludlum Steel and mill workers themselves. Mary Tomko of Natrona railed about having always maintained spotlessly the inside of her home, her front yard, and even the street in front her home on Blue Ridge Avenue, only to have the heavy smoke from Penn Salt and AL soil her house, and the workers leave personal trash and scraps of steel lying about. This is an interesting line of concern which, I suspect, might well fall along gender lines, if one were to fully investigate.

There is surprisingly little concern expressed over the delayed cleanup of one old industrial site in Harrison Township. The ALSCO Park Superfund site, left over from more than a century of (mostly) Penn Salt and Allegheny Ludlum dumping, is scheduled to be cleaned soon and, at least currently there is little concern over it. (I understand there was more outrage when it was first revealed a few years ago that ballfields were knowingly built on top of a toxic dump.) The Babcock and Wilcox nuclear site in Apollo provides an interesting comparison; residents there are up in arms over the deliberate speed and suspect methods of waste cleanup. In general, though, residents here long ago reconciled themselves to the environmental costs of industrialization.

## **VI. Recommendations**

### **A. Interpretive Public Programming**

One of the key regional institutions engaged in historic and cultural preservation--the Allegheny-Kiski Valley Historical Society and its Museum in Tarentum--is in need of rejuvenation, clarification, and possible expansion of its vision. Currently, industrial/military history dominates museum exhibits; there is little to be seen of the Valley's richly textured cultural heritage. The current president and board acknowledge these deficiencies and are determined to begin the revamping and restoration of their building (a

treasure in itself, exemplified by the hallway mural and art-deco architectural features) and to move in the direction of community-oriented programming. Society leadership would like technical assistance in restoring the hallway mural and the art deco interior of the ballroom. Among the other needs is a serious attempt to support the activities of the still-viable ethnic and fraternal organizations working to maintain their heritage. There is a striking paucity of industrial workers and members of ethnic organizations among the leadership.

The military history contained in the museum's "Hall of Honor" (a large, art-deco style, war memorial ballroom) could be augmented with materials from the various ethnic groups and the patriotic spirit expressed by their participation in American wars.

It seems also that the Society could support an effort to complete a series of videotape/photographic histories of Valley communities. Tarentum, Brackenridge, Arnold, Braeburn, Saxonburg, Ford City, Creighton, and Glassmere are among the towns meriting a visual portrait similar to those recently completed on Natrona and New Kensington. Even the videotape on New Kensington is just 32 minutes long and could be expanded significantly. If the response to Lou Chernan's Natrona history is any indication, people from all of these communities would respond enthusiastically to such productions. They would find them cathartic in the face of

rapid social and economic change, in addition to whatever role they might play in the construction of a useable past.

Postcard and extensive personal photograph collections, home movies, newspaper archives and fascinating oral histories abound throughout the valley, and ought to be incorporated into these visual and narrative portraits.

Another option would be to create an Ethnographic Industrial Heritage film documentary, tracing the vital role that various ethnic groups played in the course of this region's significant contributions to national industrial history: the first aluminum and plate glass production, the first "Little Steel" union contract, the world's largest specialty steel maker, Fannie Sellins, etc.

Although estranged from the Historical Society, Bob Lucas will be an integral figure in whatever comes about in the area of historical and cultural preservation. His vision of the public memory is an inclusive, collective one, although his Tarentum History and Landmarks Association is oligarchic in organizational structure while doing some valuable preservation work. Lucas speaks of Walking Tours of neighborhoods as something he (and Lou Chernan, among others) would like to organize.

Ethnic Heritage Festivals--Italian, Polish, and Syrian peoples have a strong tradition of orchestrating these events; Germans are about to pull off their first ever; SIHC ought to do whatever it can to support the efforts of the Slovak

Heritage Association to organize a similar effort in either West Tarentum and/or Natrona. There is great promise and energy behind the idea, there are some human resources (musicians, lacemakers, cooks) available; technical/networking assistance (e.g., putting them in touch with regional tradition-bearers--Slovaks dancers, crafters) and organizing expertise are primarily what is needed. Slovak gymnastics used to be a vital part of the local ethnic heritage--could it be revived? (Andrew Piecka is available). Likewise, the Slovak vaudeville troop from Natrona (the Jancechs) could possibly be rejuvenated in some form.

For West Tarentum, another possibility is to orchestrate some kind of photo collection/ethnic foods event that would include individuals, organizations, and churches of all ethnic groups from that side of town--including African Americans, Belgians, Irish, Italians, and Germans. I believe there would be strong support for this from Belgian Club members, Jednota Slovaks, the ethnic churches, and that it might move those groups toward a better understanding and appreciation of one another's common heritage.

Students attending the area's principal institution of higher education, Penn State University in New Kensington, ought to be given an opportunity to explore their own place and cultural background. A course in Regional Folklife seems to be an obvious way to invite individuals to connect themselves to their roots and to institutionalize the

exploration and celebration of cultural and industrial heritage throughout the region. Similarly, elementary and secondary schools ought to be encouraged to develop programming around industrial and cultural heritage-dramatizations of key events, sections of history courses, guest speakers are among the possibilities. School programming is something in which Jim Thomas of the Historical Society has a great interest; Clyde Floyd in Vandergrift is available, anxious, and quite able to become involved in public speaking on industrial heritage. Mr. Engler's Captain Ford dramatizations ought to receive greater visibility beyond Ford City, since Ford and the glass industry played such a central role in the entire region's industrial history.

Neighborhood reunions are occasional existing events which could be replicated in other areas. Natives of Stieren Street in Brackenridge and the Bull Creek Valley in Tarentum, for example, marvel at the gathering of "The Street" people and long for a similar sort of occasion for themselves.

Leaders of the American Legion/Post 48 and the Polish National Alliance are rejuvenating Natrona Community Days and this event ought to be supported.

A walking tour of Prospect Cemetery, oldest in the Valley, ought to be conducted. Such a tour has been considered by the Tarentum Genealogical Society, which has done extensive study there. A walking tour of Natrona might include: Penn Salt remains (company store, worker housing),

some of the old shopping areas which Lou Chernan calls the "first shopping mall" (Center Street, which ought to be the centerpiece of any economic revitalization for this town), the place where Leon Czolgosz grew up (the man who assassinated President McKinley), churches, the Fannie Sellins murder site, and more. There is a lot of history in this town, and, unfortunately, an equal amount of resignation about the future. Still, there are a number of individuals committed to preserving the past, that if a vision of how that fits economically into the future could be offered, I believe the community could be made to believe. Harrison Township (Natrona-Natrona Heights) politics might be problematic, but not insurmountable in revitalization efforts. (Talk with Rich Milito about this.)

There is an extensive collection of historically significant materials--e.g., union contracts and photos--at the USWA Local 1196 Hall in Brackenridge. President Tony Slomkoski would like to see them catalogued and preserved in a local or regional industrial heritage museum of some kind.

#### **VIII. Bibliographical Essay**

The following materials are located in the New Kensington Library: A vertical file on New Kensington and Arnold (and extending even to Harmar) history, including newspaper clips describing mining disasters, sporting events, impact of wars and other broader historical events upon the local community,



centennial celebration books, an organizational directory dating to 1986, and various other miscellaneous material. Also in the New Ken Library are Monsignor Fusco's Mt. St. Peter's Church, a 1944 book published (locally by the diocese) just after the building of the new church, several local cookbooks, and various bound family histories.

The Community Library of Tarentum holds copies of anniversary histories of Tarentum, Brackenridge, Harrison Township (a particularly good one), Springdale and Harmar Township. These were published for silver, diamond, and sesquicentennial celebrations and offer a nice portrait of how these communities see themselves and their past. Interestingly, there is a striking absence of recent ethnic history in virtually all of these narratives; there is little about the immigrant experience in the mills and factories, and African Americans are virtually invisible.

Bob Lucas's Tarentum Glass (Tarentum: Robert Irwin Lucas Publisher, Printed by Buhl Brothers of New Ken, 1981), chronicles the history of glass making in the Tarentum area, with dozens of photographs of glass patterns, special product lines, and the like, but little about the people. Copies of Lucas's book are available at the Tarentum Library and at the A-K Valley Historical Society's Museum. The latter institution maintains an extensive collection of local photographs, local community and industry histories, and various odds and ends (brochures, pamphlets celebrating church

anniversaries, etc.).

One may purchase copies of Richard Curry Esler's work at several places--the Tarentum Library, Costello's Printing in Tarentum, or from the author himself. As noted earlier, these are fascinating folkloric and historic materials which provides a glimpse of mostly past community life throughout the valley. Esler's prose offers an inviting "sense of place."

There are individuals throughout the valley holding personal collections of postcards, photos, old yearbooks, rare histories, etc., some of which I have noted above. Jim Thomas of the A-K Historical Society, and others on his board, are the best sources for what is out there. Bob Lucas, though disgruntled, remains the "most faithful reader the Valley News Dispatch has." For decades now, he daily cuts out anything having to do with local history and cultural life in the valley. That collection is being microfilmed and stored at the Community Library in Tarentum.

Lucas is THE BEST source of anything that has ever been written on valley life. Lucas tends to work autocratically, isolated from organizations other than his own; he needs to be persuaded in no uncertain terms that any venture will be worth his time before he will insert himself and his substantial resources into a future project. Obviously, he merits the effort.

The Tarentum Library sells the current issues of Tarentum

Times, published quarterly by the Tarentum History and Landmarks Association (Lucas's group), current issues of *Historia*, the once-quarterly, now yearly publication of the A-K Valley Historical Society (although they have yet to put one out in 1993). Articles in both of these are written by local folk and vary widely in subject matter, though are of an almost exclusively historical nature.

Videotapes: "New Kensington: A Community First," produced in 1993 by New Kensington Community Development Services with SIHC support, whets the appetite for something longer and more comprehensive. It offers a glimpse, and not much more, of the growth of New Kensington and Arnold--some nice, but brief oral histories, lots of sports history, and a chronicle of industrial growth. Much more needs to be done here.

"Remembering Natrona," produced in 1993 by Louis Chernan, is both historical and folkloric in nature. Fairly lengthy (one and three-quarters of an hour), what is missing as I view it are two things: oral histories (there are no talking heads, Chernan does all of the talking), and any sense of a future in Natrona. It is more eulogy of the past than a possible prologue for the future.

There is also a videotape of the Corpus Christi Sawdust Carpet Display at Sacred Heart in Tarentum, which includes footage of the event from the 1940s through the 1980s. I took an entire roll of slides, so did not feel compelled to purchase this. Skip Culleiton can get SIHC a copy upon

request.