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The Steamboat Industry in Brownsville, Pennsylvania: An Ethnohistorical Perspective on the Economic Change in the Monongahela Valley

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THE STEAMBOAT INDUSTRY IN BROWNSVILLE, PENNSYLVANIA:
AN ETHNOHISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE ECONOMIC
CHANGE IN THE MONONGAHELA VALLEY

by

Marc Nicholas Henshaw

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I would like to preface this thesis by giving credit to Captain Leo Hughes, without whom I would never have been able to imagine such an important chapter in Brownsville’s history and whose stories brought to life an era long since past. First I want to thank my mother and father who pushed me to stay in school when it was the last thing that I wanted to do. Secondly, I want to thank Dr. John Nass who introduced me to Archaeology and instilled within me a passion for the riddles of the past. Thirdly, I want to thank Dr. Frederick Smith and Dr. Allen Zagarell, who saw merit in my research when others saw only dead end. Without the careful instruction of these two gentlemen, I would have been unable to pursue my dreams of giving voice to my community and to the town’s forgotten past.

Lastly but by no means last, I want to thank my friends in the Collective who pushed me forward and taught me never to back down even when the pressure was high. Dan Lynch, Monika Trahe, Brock Giordano, Meghan Moran, James Tyler, Rory Becker, Holly Strebe and David Black you are truly remarkable individuals and without whom I would never have finished. I also want to thank those who said that my thesis could not be done, thank you for strengthening my resolve to do so.

Marc Nicholas Henshaw
THE STEAMBOAT INDUSTRY IN BROWNSVILLE, PENNSYLVANIA: AN ETHNOHISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE ECONOMIC CHANGE IN THE MONONGAHELA VALLEY

Marc Nicholas Henshaw, M.A.
Western Michigan University, 2004

This thesis is a detailed ethnohistorical study examining landscape changes in Brownsville Pennsylvania from 1759 to 1925. The changes that occurred in the town were heavily influenced by the flatboat and steamboat industries and the later introduction of the railroad. The catalyst for the shifts in landscape use was derived from the economical transition from a frontier economy and core producer, to mining satellite of the Pittsburgh region.

This study employs the use of period town directories, diaries, maps, photographs, and oral histories to recreate the town and to flesh out gender roles, racial diversity, and class structures both on land and on the steamboats. This thesis tracks changes in the businesses that the steamboat industry consisted of and how, as the town refocused its economy to mining, these business reacted. The research I conducted will aid in the long term as the community begins to rebuild Brownsville’s past and serve as a model for future archaeological work.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS....................................................................................... ii

LIST OF TABLES................................................................................................ iv

LIST OF FIGURES............................................................................................... v

CHAPTER

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>TITLE</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I.</td>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II.</td>
<td>FROM MUSCLE POWER TO STEAM POWER: BROWNSVILLE 1759-1870</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III.</td>
<td>A PERIOD OF TRANSITION: BROWNSVILLE 1870-1900</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV.</td>
<td>A NEW ERA: BROWNSVILLE 1900-1925</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V.</td>
<td>CONCLUSION</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

APPENDIX

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>APPENDIX</th>
<th>TITLE</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A.</td>
<td>HSIRB Approval Letter</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

BIBLIOGRAPHY............................................................................................... 76
LIST OF TABLES

1. African Americans Living in Brownsville in 1850 ................................. 36
# LIST OF FIGURES

1. Map of Fayette County, Pennsylvania .......................................................... 3
2. Drawing of Fort Burd ................................................................. ...................................... 8
3. Flatboat Carrying Geneva Stoneware, Circa 1860 ........................................ 10
4. Nemacolin Castle or Bowman’s Castle on Front Street ................................ 13
5. Overview Map of Brownsville, Bridgeport, and West Brownsville With Centers of the Steamboat Industry Marked ................................................... 17
6. Vulcan Iron and Machine Works, Circa 1860 ................................................. 18
7. Sanborn Map Showing the Plan View of the Vulcan Iron and Machine Works ................................................................................................................. 20
8. First Cast Iron Bridge Built in the Nation Over Dunlap’s Creek .............. 21
9. Cast Iron Bridge as it Appears Today Over Dunlap’s Creek ..................... 22
10. Herbertson & Company ................................................................................. 23
12. John Cock Boatyards ..................................................................................... 25
13. Steamboat *Reindeer* Built at John Cock’s Boatyard in Bridgeport ....... 26
14. The Black Horse Tavern on Front Street Next to Nemacolin Castle ....... 27
15. Steamboat Gothic Architecture Circa 1848 (Steamboat Porch With Intricate Scroll Working) on a Front Street House ........................................ 28
16. Child Miner Holding Chewing Tobacco Pouch in Left Hand .................... 33
17. Two Steamboats Taking on Coal ................................................................. 39
18. *Island Queen*, One of the Most Luxurious Steamboats to Ply the Monongahela and Ohio Rivers ........................................................................ 40
List of Figures—continued

19. Steamboat *Davenport*, Member of the Northern Line Packet .................. 41
20. Bird’s Eye View Map of Brownsville in 1883, West Brownsville in the Lower Right Corner ................................................................. 48
21. Axton & Pringle Boatyard .................................................................... 49
22. Towboat Docked at Axton & Son’s With a Flat Bow and Braces to Distribute the Weight of Barges .......................................................... 50
23. The Towboat *Vulcan* With Sternwheelers for Added Maneuverability and Simpler Design Sitting in Front of the Riverbank Where New Railroad Has Been Cut ................................................................. 51
24. Massive Coal Flats Parked Along a Mine on the Monongahela River With Two Towboats of Varying Size ....................................................... 52
25. Railroad Construction Along the Banks of the Monongahela River ......... 58
26. Wall Behind Vegetation Elevating the Train Tracks Above the Water Line ................................................................................................. 60
27. People’s Coal Company, Later Renamed Pike Mine ............................... 61
28. Empty Tract of Land Where the Once Prosperous Axton & Pringle Boatyards Used to Be Located ............................................................... 61
29. Sanborn Map Detailing a Vacant Lumber Yard Where Axton & Pringle Was Located a Year Before ................................................................. 62
30. The Massive Round House and Railroad Facilities in Bridgeport .......... 66
31. Site of the Vulcan Iron Works Facing North With the Brownsville Electric Building in the Background .......................................................... 67
32. Abandoned Railway Tunnel, Which Passes Beneath the “Neck” of Brownsville, Located at the Corner of Where the Vulcan Iron Works Once Stood .......................................................................................... 68
33. Fiddle’s Restaurant Occupying a Corner of the Block Where Herbertson Had His Foundry and Rolling Mill ....................................................... 69
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Southwestern Pennsylvania is a tract of land flanked on the east by the Appalachian Mountain range. These ancient mountains stretch from Quebec Canada to Alabama and provide a natural barrier to the eastern side of the state. While their peaks have worn down, the Ordovician megaliths of sandstone and granite are covered with dense foliage of mountain laurel and a wide variety of maples, pines, oaks, chestnut, and spruce (Sevon et al. 1989). Mountain streams etch deep into the bedrock forming narrow but formidable gorges and crevasses filled with cold swiftly running water. During the winter months high winds and blowing snow make traveling across the mountains treacherous in the higher elevations.

The mountainous obstruction called the Appalachians has done much to shape the cultural heritage of southwestern Pennsylvania. During the colonial period only the heartiest of mountaineers and pioneers traveled westward in search of land to place farms and raise livestock. Those adventurers, entrepreneurs, and soldiers faced certain hardships in their search for suitable land. Native American attacks, severe winters, and uncertainty plagued the average traveler as they crossed the mountains toward unknown lands. Crossing the Piedmont lowlands of the eastern side of the state, one would have to ascend the Blue Ridge and then traverse the undulating
mountain range before descending the Allegheny mountain front leading into the
lowlands of southwestern Pennsylvania.

The geologic underpinnings of this area can be divided into two regions, anthracitic coal to the northwestern part of the state, and bituminous coal to the west (Sevon et al. 1989). For many years it was known that coal lay contained within the strata of the ground. During the colonial period, imported British coal was readily available in Philadelphia markets and at low costs. However, the United States' embargo on British goods in 1807 and the War of 1812 forced Pennsylvanians to heat their homes with wood. As a result, forests were quickly cleared and coal became the only reliable fuel source (Kussart 1930). Anthracite coal burned clean and with little ash. Bituminous coal, on the other hand, was sulfurous and soft and was turned into coke for use in the furnaces of iron forges and steel mills. Most of this coal was transported by river and rail, and when deposits were found, towns sprang up to exploit the find. Dense networks of towns grew out of the demand for coal to fuel the furnaces of the Industrial Revolution.

Before the widespread mining of coal in southwestern Pennsylvania, the military was the basis for the settlement of the region. Soldiers built forts in strategic locations especially along fordable rivers. The western half of the state is cut by three river systems. The northward flowing Monongahela River originating from West Virginia meets the Allegheny River at Pittsburgh and they both form the Ohio River. The Ohio was considered the gateway to the west, because it flows into the Mississippi River. The settlements along these rivers provided economic
opportunities for immigrants, which lead to an influx of immigrants, both from the eastern side of the state and from Europe into the frontier region. These towns needed to provide everything necessary for the westward travelers including food, equipment, farming implements, and transportation, which fueled the demand for boats. Towns soon became specialized in boat building using the timber lining the river valleys as demand rose.

One such town is Brownsville located on the Monongahela River in Fayette County (Figure 1). This thesis is an ethnohistorical study of the town, from its humble beginnings as a frontier fort, to its rise as a leader in steamboat production, and finally its transformation into a mining satellite of Pittsburgh. The evidence for this evolution is found in directories from different periods of the town's history, a
steamboat captain's diary, various maps, oral histories, manuscripts, photographs and architectural analysis. Together they form the basis for a study on immigration, race, gender, and labor in Brownsville. In addition, this evidence allows us to examine the broader role of Brownsville within the emerging frontier. Brownsville was indeed part of a layered world economic system.

Brownsville is unique among small towns as it was actually three separate boroughs: Brownsville, Bridgeport, and West Brownsville. Brownsville and Bridgeport were united under one township in 1882 (Hart 1904). Although there were three distinct towns geographically and industrially, the collective community regarded itself as Brownsville.

Timothy Mahoney (1985), an urban historian, suggests that towns should be examined in three ways: (1) examine changing patterns in the landscape derived from shifting exchange or trade, production, consumption of goods and services; (2) changing patterns of interaction between towns and cities; and (3) identify responses of merchants and manufacturers in the local histories as they adjust to internal/external changes. These points illustrate the need to view towns as ever changing entities that grow and adapt to outside influences.

Brownsville is unique in Pennsylvania history; it was founded by traders and entrepreneurs and evolved into a boat building capital of the Industrial Revolution. Archaeologists and historical geographers refer to these hubs of production and distribution as a "central place" (Mahoney 1985). From the 1790s to the 1880s, Brownsville asserted the position of being one of the largest flatboat, keelboat, and
steamboat producers in the nation. Most of the products that were shipped on these vessels were produced locally, such as farm equipment, metal goods, alcohol, furniture, and foodstuffs. This material was shipped along the Monongahela and Ohio Rivers as immigrants, travelers, and pioneers made their way to the west.

Another analogy given by a social geographer and world economist, Immanuel Wallerstein (1980) is that of the “core” and the “periphery”. Brownsville fits Wallerstein’s definition as a core or a town heavily involved with industrialization or shipbuilding. The core and periphery are based on an evolving scale. For example, Brownsville during the colonial period was a periphery to the eastern part of Pennsylvania, relying on trade from that area to sustain its growth. Its trade network extended only eastward, across the Appalachian Mountains. Grain was traded to the east for farm implements and other groceries unavailable in Brownsville or western Pennsylvania. As the dawn of the 19th century approached, manufacturing centers built in Brownsville supplied dependant communities of the western frontier with foodstuffs and products to sustain their communities.

Brownsville maintained itself as a central place until the late 1800s when transportation and the demand for the town’s products changed. This thesis will explore that change. It seeks to know how introduction of new technologies, the demand for fossil resources, and the abandonment of diverse industries caused Brownsville to lose its central place status. How did Brownsville become a satellite community? These changes are evident in the maps, photographs, directories, and histories of Brownsville.
The ever-evolving landscape of Brownsville is not only a local story, but also a story of the nation on its rise to industrial power. Brownsville’s steamboats pushed expansion westward and later her coal would fire the furnaces of Pittsburgh’s steel industry. The remnants of the town’s prominent past can still be seen on the landscape today, which continually reminds the community of its proud heritage.
CHAPTER II
FROM MUSCLE POWER TO STEAM POWER: BROWNSVILLE 1759-1870

In 1759, Colonel James Burd erected Fort Burd on a bluff overlooking Dunlap’s Creek and the Monongahela River (Ellis 1882; Thurston 1859). This fort was built on a prehistoric earthwork and mound complex that had been given the name Redstone Old Fort (Ellis 1882; Thurston 1859). “Redstone” taken from the name of a creek to the north of Brownsville and “Old Fort” a name given to mounds and earthworks that early explorers encountered (Figure 2).

Fort Burd’s main purpose was to provide defense from Indian attacks and establish a clear English presence on the western frontier (Ellis 1882; Hart 1904; Thurston 1859). Colonel Boquet of Carlisle, Pennsylvania ordered the construction of the fort to challenge French claims to the region (Ellis 1882; Thurston 1859). The French had already made their presence known by their occupation of western Pennsylvania and the construction of Fort Duquesne where present-day Pittsburgh now stands. Colonel Burd’s first order was the construction of a road from Shippensburg, Pennsylvania across the Appalachian Mountains linking a road previously cut by British General Braddock in his attempt to attack the French occupied territory (Ellis 1882; Thurston 1859).

The construction of Fort Burd in October of 1759 provided a rendezvous point for military operations that were used to spy on Native American movements. Some of these men, such as Colonel Michael Cresap, a trader and veteran of Dunmore’s War of 1774, found permanent residence in the area known as Redstone Old Fort (Ellis 1882). Cresap bought a Virginia title to several hundred acres of land. He built
the first house made of hewn logs and a nailed shingled roof west of the mountains (Ellis 1882). Cresap set up a trading post and store at the mouth of Dunlap's Creek in 1770. Cresap also established the first running ferry to cross the Monongahela River (Ellis 1882). Around this time, Thomas and Basil Brown settled into the area and purchased several tracts of land from Cresap. There, the brothers planned out the town that took their name and intended it to be a stop along the “Whiskey Path” (Ellis 1882; Kussart 1930; Thurston 1859). This “path” was the route from which western farmers could ship whiskey across the Appalachians to towns and cities to the east.
Thomas Brown built the first factory in the town, a flour mill, on Redstone Creek (Ellis 1882).

The town was laid out upon the site of the old Native American and colonial fortifications and provided a stopping point for pioneers headed towards Kentucky and the southwest after the Revolutionary War. Water transportation along the Monongahela River was faster than the overland journey. The thick forests and gently sloping banks that surround Brownsville facilitated the building of flatboats and keelboats (Figure 3). The fledgling boat building business helped to transform Brownsville into a center of trade and exportation. In 1782, Jacob Yoder, a Brownsville resident, made the first recorded trip from Western Pennsylvania to New Orleans with the sole purpose to sell or trade items from the Monongahela valley. At the end of his trip he sold all of his products, including his flatboat and walked back to Brownsville. His journey was estimated to have taken six months or more roundtrip (Wiley 1937).

John Moore, an early settler of Redstone Old Fort observed:

in the long cold winter of 1780, the snow was three to four feet thick and crusted. The road to Brownsville was lined on both sides with wagons and families, camped out, for the loosening of the icy bonds from the waters and the preparation of boats to embark to the West, the men dragging old logs and stumps for fuel to save their wives and children from freezing (Ellis 1882:421).
In 1787, flatboats were being constructed at Brownsville for the use of the George Rogers Clark expedition to pursue British and Native Americans and force them out of the Northwest Territories (Wiley 1937). That same year upwards of one hundred and twenty boats passed by Pittsburgh on their way to Kentucky with an average of fifteen persons each adding hundreds of settlers to that area (Kussart 1930). Once Brownsville built its first lumberyard next to its boatyard, the bases for the local economic structures were in place. The flatboat was little more than a floating platform with a flat bottom and a shelter placed on top. This vessel had to carry all of the provisions (food, cooking utensils, farming implements, etc.) for a six-month or longer trip (Kussart 1930; Wiley 1937). Often emigrants were held up for weeks at Brownsville awaiting the completion of their boats. By the 1790s, keelboats
entered the construction yards. These vessels had more of a traditional boat hull and could be used for both up and down stream travel (Ellis 1882; Kussart 1930; Wiley 1937). Wood poles were used to move and navigate the vessels. In some areas along the river, mules or horses were used to drag the boats up stream against the swift currents. An emigrant from Connecticut who traveled from Morgantown, West Virginia up the Monongahela River to Brownsville was quoted by an unknown local man in 1796 as saying, “...in the spring seventy boats passed Redstone in one day with families headed to the Ohio” (Kussart 1930:16).

The condition of the Monongahela and Ohio Rivers in the late 18th century was extremely different than those of today. Both only flowed high enough for trips to be made in early spring or fall to take advantage of high water (Hunter 1943; Kussart 1930). Rapids, sandbars, waterfalls, river pirates, thieves and Indians all contributed to the perilous journey made by migrants traveling west. However, the ideal location of Brownsville insured a steady influx of travelers headed to the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers. Franklin Ellis (1882:421), a county historian, commented:

If they [emigrants] had rightly timed their journey, and the melting time soon came after their arrival at the place of embarkation, then all was well with them, but if spring thaws delayed their coming, and the shivering, home sick wayfarers were compelled to wait for weeks in their comfortless shelters awaiting an opportunity to proceed.

In 1796, Elijah Clark started a boat building business on Water Street, about three acres north of the present Union Station Building (Ellis 1882). To capitalize on the need for more boatyards and better storage facilities, Captain T. Shane began advertising boat sheds and boatyards for sale in the area to meet the demand. The
high volume of travelers to the town attracted traders and businessmen alike. One such person was Jacob Bowman who had traveled to Brownsville from Maryland in 1789 (Ellis 1882; Thurston 1859). His merchandizing business imported goods from over the mountains via packhorses. These horses carried almost 2,000 pounds of goods per trip at a cost of three dollars per pound for the new store. Bowman’s reputation as a businessman and his prior work as a government official lead to his appointment by President George Washington as the nation’s first postmaster.

Acknowledging his German ancestry, Bowman built his home, called Nemacolin Castle, in the form of a brick castle with a large octagonal tower and massive stonewalls lining the courtyard (Figure 4). The castle, named after the Lanai Lanape Chief Nemacolin who had resided in the area, is a prominent feature on the landscape of Brownsville as it overlooks the town where Fort Burd once stood (Ellis 1882; Kussart 1930).

Brownsville borough was one of three boroughs that comprised the town in the 18th century. South of Dunlap’s Creek is a separate region known as Bridgeport. Bridgeport from a very early beginning had its own churches, schools, doctors, and industry. However, as a community, the people of Bridgeport shared their collective identity with Brownsville as a whole (Hart 1904). The third borough is West Brownsville, which is located on the opposite shore of the Monongahela River in Washington County. West Brownsville’s importance grew in the mid 19th century as boatyards began to move into the district.
Bridgeport was settled by Quakers in 1763 and the town was laid out by Reese Cadwallader in 1794 (Ellis 1882; Thurston 1859). Bridgeport contained a large floodplain that allowed easy access to the river. Flatboats and keelboats were constructed from local timber and a thriving economy grew from the boatyards. However, a technological shift occurred at the turn of the 19th century that changed the way people traveled, and altered the landscape of Brownsville.

In 1807, Robert Fulton designed and built the first steam-powered boat, the Clermont, and used it to demonstrate its potential on the Hudson River (Hunter 1943).
The *Clermont* revolutionized the way in which people thought about transportation and commerce. It especially changed the view of westward expansion by offering a cost effective and fast mode of transporting people and goods long distances without the need to dig canals or cut through expanses of forest (Hunter 1943). A new vision of steamboats on every navigable river prompted companies and states to invest in slack water improvements and steamboat industries.

In 1811, Daniel French of Philadelphia moved to Bridgeport in order to construct steamboats and begin a western transportation route (Ellis 1882; Hart 1904; Kussart 1930; Thurston 1859; Way 1994). French was successful in persuading local businessmen to invest in his endeavors. Two of these men, Israel Gregg and Henry M. Shreve, for whom Shreveport is named after, oversaw the construction of two boats, the *Enterprise* (75 tons) and the *Dispatch* (25 tons). Both boats were powered by French’s steam engines of his own design and were constructed in a yard above Dunlap’s Creek (Ellis 1882).

In 1814, the *Enterprise* embarked from Brownsville to New Orleans with Henry Shreve as captain (Ellis 1882; Hart 1904; Kussart 1930; Thurston 1859; Way 1994). On her arrival in Louisiana, General Jackson pressed the boat into military service to carry troops and munitions until the end of the War of 1812. Shreve piloted the vessel back to Pittsburgh and the *Enterprise* became the first boat to ever make the trip from Pittsburgh to New Orleans under its own power. This marked the beginning of the steamboat era in Brownsville, a town already equipped with major
boatyards to handle the construction of these smoke belching machines and coal to fuel them.

The successful voyage of the *Enterprise* marked a turning point in river navigation. Local business firms deepened the river channel, dynamited waterfalls and removed obstructions that would snag boats (Kussart 1930; Moxley 2001). Boat builders improved their designs, which were based on 17th and 18th century boat guidelines. For example, the *Enterprise* had a deep hull that resembled that of an ocean-trolling vessel, which displaced a great deal of water. Hunter (1943) alleges that had it not been for the exceptional conditions of the river the voyage may not have been a success. The key was to design a boat that had a shallow draft hull and could be used throughout most of the year.

Shreve was an innovator, the lessons he learned in Brownsville allowed him to make changes in design that became standard in steamboat construction. He is given credit for situating the boilers horizontally and placing them onto the main deck (Hunter 1943). This differed from French’s *Enterprise*, which had vertically mounted engines in the boat’s hull. French’s interior design required a deeper hull that displaced more water. When Shreve approached French about redesigning the vessels, French turned him down. Shreve got support from other investors and the result was the steamboat *Washington* (403 tons). With its redesigned boiler and engine configuration built to Shreve’s specifications, the *Washington* produced around 100-horse power (Ellis 1882; Hunter 1943).
The turn of the 19th century and the introduction of steam power ushered in a new industrial rush in Brownsville and Bridgeport (Figure 5). In 1818, John Snowden arrived in Brownsville from Yorkshire, England (Ellis 1882; Gresham and Wiley 1889). After apprenticing for a few years in a local foundry, he opened his own machine shop and rolling mill within close proximity to the riverbank. Named after the Roman god of fire, the Vulcan Iron and Machine Works opened in 1824 (Figure 6). The Vulcan factory built the engines for the steamer *Monongahela* in 1827. Snowden improved and extended the factory and, in 1831, built the engines and boilers of the ironclads *Manayunk* and *Umpqua*. In 1853, the establishment burned down and was subsequently rebuilt. The business renovated to include a forge, rolling mill, pattern shop, foundry, boiler yard, and finishing shop all located on an acre of land on the bank of the Monongahela River (Kussart 1930; Thurston 1859). The main two-story buildings were made of brick and faced the river. The purpose of this main building was the finishing shop where parts were completed. An excerpt from Thurston’s (1859:34) town directory describes in detail the factory:

> Within its walls and distributed over the use of two rooms, with nice regard to their convenient use, is gathered a large amount of machinery, of the latest improvements, adapted to all the requirements of machine manufacturing; among them are 19 turning lathes, 6 planning machines, 4 boring machines and 8 drill presses. There upon the lower floor, 10 blacksmith fires, with all of their accompanying cranes, steam forge hammers, and etc.
Figure 5. Overview Map of Brownsville, Bridgeport, and West Brownsville With Centers of the Steamboat Industry Marked (Brownsville Area Chamber of Commerce Map, 1998)
The foundry and finishing shops were constructed of brick and connected with the main building. This area contained cranes and two large 12-ton capacity cupolas for delivering molten iron. The foundry was in the forefront of the rolling mill and the forge was contained in another one story building. Within this structure were six pairs of rolls, two puddling furnaces, two heating furnaces, one spike and one rivet machine that turned out 600 tons of bar iron a year (Thurston 1859). A pattern shop used for cutting different shapes of metal adjoined the foundry.
The Vulcan Iron and Machine Works, later called Snowden & Sons, employed 110 people with a weekly wage of $6.83 per person (Thurston 1859). This factory produced a similar number of land use stationary steam engines such as those used to power the large belts of the machine shop (Hawkins 1987). The convenient location of the factory next to the Brownsville wharf allowed engines to be fitted to hulls while incoming boats unloaded goods (Figure 7).

John Herbertson arrived in Brownsville in 1829 after learning the trade of steam engine building in Pittsburgh. Originally from Glasgow, Scotland, Herbertson became a foreman in the Vulcan Iron and Machine Works engine shop. When the wooden bridge collapsed over Dunlap’s Creek connecting Brownsville to Bridgeport, Snowden took the contract for the erection of a cast iron bridge (Ellis 1882; Kussart 1930; Thurston 1859) (Figures 8 and 9). This is believed to be the first iron bridge ever built in the world. Herbertson designed the bridge and supervised its construction (Gresham and Wiley 1889). Herbertson eventually went into a partnership with Thomas Faull who was already operating a small foundry in Bridgeport. Together they formed the Fayette Foundry, until 1842 when Faull withdrew from the partnership (Ellis 1882). Herbertson later created Herbertson & Company with his sons in the 1880s as the business grew.
Figure 7. Sanborn Map Showing the Plan View of the Vulcan Iron and Machine Works (Sanborn-Perris Map Co. and American Fire Insurance Company, 1886)
Herbertson & Company buildings were constructed of brick including the foundry and machine shops with a footprint of 40 by 100 feet in length (Thurston 1859) (Figures 10 and 11). Roughly forty people were employed with a combined weekly salary of $250. The establishment produced an average of fifteen steam engines a year, some of which were valued at $12,000. Also available as services at this site were castings, mill gearing, shaftings, and a variety of engine repair and maintenance facilities (Thurston 1859). John Herbertson filled orders for steamboat and mill engines from all parts of the United States and Mexico, adding to
Brownsville’s reputation as a core for steam engine production and export (Gresham and Wiley 1889).

The ability to produce steam engines and boilers in Brownsville was only matched by the ability to construct steamboat hulls. Brownsville’s ability to fabricate all the components necessary to construct a steamboat from start to finish was unique in the Monongahela Valley (Ellis 1882; Kussart 1930; Thurston 1859). This was greatly facilitated by the two major boatyards located in Brownsville before the
1840s. The boatyard owned by Elijah Clark in Brownsville disappeared by the early part of the century; its location was in the same area as Snowden & Sons foundry. Although there were numerous steamboats built by Elijah Clark until the 1830s, the town directories fail to list the business as producing steamboats on a regular basis. However, there are three major boatyards recorded in Bridgeport that were born during the keelboat days.
Figure 11. Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of Herbertson & Company Foundry (Sanborn-Perris Map Co. and American Fire Insurance Company, 1886)
John Cock had built keelboats for emigrants in his Bridgeport yard until the steamboat showed promise of profit (Ellis 1882; Hart 1904; Kussart 1930; Thurston 1859) (Figure 12). In 1827, Cock had built two Ohio steamers, *Erie* and *Shamrock*.

Figure 12. John Cock Boatyards (Courtesy of California University of Pennsylvania, Special Collections)

Coffin and Miller, another of Brownsville’s steamboat contractors also using their expertise from the keelboat era built the *Reindeer*, *Mountaineer*, and *Champion* steamboats for the western trade (Figure 13). John S. Pringle arrived from the eastern
part of the state in 1826 and built his first steamboat, the *Highlander*, with the help of John Herbertson (Ellis 1882; Hart 1904; Kussart 1930; Thurston 1859). His boatyard became a center of steamboat manufacture throughout the Monongahela Valley.

Figure 13. Steamboat *Reindeer* Built at John Cock’s Boatyard in Bridgeport (Courtesy of California University of Pennsylvania, Special Collections)

As America pushed westward and travelers came to Brownsville via Burd’s Road, now called Route 40 or the National Road, they were greeted in town with a variety of shops, hotels, and taverns. The earliest inn located in Brownsville is the Black Horse Tavern (Figure 14). It was the central meeting point of local men who plotted an uprising against the government due to the excise tax on whiskey. In 1794, these insurgents led the Whiskey Rebellion (Baldwin 1967; Brackenridge 1969; Ellis 1882; Kussart 1930; Thurston 1859). Travelers entered the Monongahela House,
United States Hotel, the Snowden House, or the Girard House for room and board (Hart 1904). With steamboats leaving Brownsville and Bridgeport several times a day, the town transformed from a colonial stopgap to an industrial haven for travelers of all the social classes. Brownsville and Bridgeport embraced their image as modern and progressive towns. During the 1840s some homes were built with large open deck-like porches with multiple levels to represent the layered decks of a steamboat (Lawrence 1987; McArdle and McArdle 1978). Large wrap around porches were dubbed Steamboat Porches and were dressed with flowing scrollwork-resembling
lace. These porches often faced toward the river in order to observe river traffic. This new type of emulation was coined Steamboat Gothic and stems from the gothic revival of the 1830s (Lancaster 1956; Rickert 1967) (Figure 15). These houses were symbolic representations of wealth and power and represented the same meaning that the steamboat reflected within the towns that built them (McGuire 1991). For Brownsville and Bridgeport, the houses built with steamboat porches conveyed high social class and offered a panoptic view of the river and town whereas most houses

Figure 15. Steamboat Gothic Architecture Circa 1848 (Steamboat Porch With Intricate Scroll Working) on a Front Street House (photograph taken by author, 2003)
built with a single level porch were not afforded this view. This gave the owners of these houses the sensation of a captain standing on the Hurricane Deck of a steamboat as it made its way down river (McArdle and McArdle 1978).

The 1840s also brought about a new technological change in steam transportation, the steam locomotive and the railroad. Brownsville did not embrace this new mode of transportation, denying the Baltimore and Ohio Railroads access to the town. Many of the inhabitants living along the National Road viewed the rail line as a bypass around their fledgling towns and businesses (Kussart 1930). The threat of the railroad coming through Brownsville following the banks of the Monongahela may have prompted John Cock and J. Pringle to move their steamboat yards to West Brownsville in 1843. The railroad had already been in place well back from the river's banks in West Brownsville by 1840. Whatever the cause, the steamboat yards relocated across the river.

From the late 18th century to the mid 19th century, Brownsville asserted itself as a central place, a core producer on the western frontier. The early town thrived on boat building, transforming the industry from flatboats to steamboats. The demand was high for river transportation of both goods and people, and Brownsville was the central hub in southwestern Pennsylvania. The next chapter explores the evolution of the steamboat industry and the changes brought about by the introduction of new technologies.
CHAPTER III

A PERIOD OF TRANSITION: BROWNSVILLE 1870-1900

Brownsville in the 1870s was a bustling town with high hopes for the future. The boat building industry was the base industry that provided Brownsville with a strong economy. The export trade in finished goods such as furniture, groceries, clothing, alcohol, and a variety of essentials needed to supply the western frontier’s pioneer families was overshadowed by the demand for steamboats. A steady influx of emigrants arriving on the National Road from Cumberland, Maryland and cities from the east allowed the town to flourish as never before. The arrival of diverse groups into the Brownsville area brought about a great ethnic diversity not found in many areas of the Monongahela Valley. German, Dutch, English, Irish and African Americans settled in the town searching for jobs. Many found work in the variety of mills, foundries, boatyards, wharves, and newly opened coalmines and coke works.

Coal, the fossilized remains of organic material from a Paleozoic Era, 220-600 million years ago, when Pennsylvania was covered in lush dense forests and bogs, was known to be abundant in the area since the 18th century (Kussart 1930; Parker 1999). In 1760, Major Edward Ward, who was garrisoned at Fort Pitt (Pittsburgh), opened a mining pit to keep the fort supplied with coal for heat and cooking. In 1768, Pennsylvania annexed the counties of Allegheny, Washington, Westmoreland, Fayette, and Greene from the Six Nations of American Indians. The price paid for
this land and all of the coal buried beneath was a mere $10,000, or less than one cent per acre. This large coal vein became known as the Pittsburgh Seam, and extended 5,700 square miles into four states: Pennsylvania, Ohio, West Virginia, and Maryland.

The early coalmining technology in southwestern Pennsylvania was simply digging pits into the soft ground to access the black deposits of fossil fuel (Kussart 1930; Parker 1999; Wiley 1937). Often the coal veins were visible from the river cut, protruding from between the sand and limestone layers of rock. Laborers worked the coal pits along the Monongahela Valley to keep a steady supply of the material to the towns (Kussart 1930; Parker 1999). Most of the forests along the river were clear-cut for boat building and agricultural purposes in the 19th century. The clear cutting of trees led to the slow developing dependence on coal to burn for fuel in homes and in the fireboxes of steamboats. The steamboat was unique because it was able to burn coal, wood, or anything else that could be ignited in its firebox.

The ability to mine the coal seam started slowly. In Brownsville, Colonel Burd reported in his journal in 1759 that Redstone Creek was “paved with coal” and that he used some of it to fuel his camp fire (Kussart 1930). This discovery began a legacy of coal mining in the Monongahela Valley. Many of these early mines were of the open pit variety until technology made it possible to reach the coal seams that ran deep underground. Advances such as the use of stationary steam engines helped pump poisonous gases from the mines allowing workers to dig deeper and further than before (Hawkins 1987). The addition of cars guided by rails to carry the raw material to the surface inspired another important invention, the railroad.
The increased focus on coal mining, and the waning dependence on finished goods such as furniture, stoves, clothing, farming implements, and groceries caused a shift in the steamboat industry and the town as a whole. Brownsville as a gateway to the frontier, and a core producer of finished products for use in frontier settlements, was transforming as the settlements to the west became autonomous. The demand for coal and coke in the Pittsburgh mills made working in the mines an attractive opportunity for the unskilled labor pools of the Monongahela Valley. This was the starting point of Brownsville’s move into the periphery of industrialization and the general deskilling of labor in the 19th century (McGuire 1991).

In 1872, the Umpire Coal Mine was constructed outside of Brownsville and mined coal from a seam fifty feet above the river’s surface (Ellis 1882). This coal fueled Brownsville’s foundry furnaces, melted glass in the glass factories, and heated the boilers of steamboats. The Umpire Mine employed roughly 120 men working over a mile into the hill covering the coal vein (Ellis 1882). Thousands of wooden posts had to be cut from the abundant trees of the surrounding area and used to support the cavernous corridors leading to the underworld below. They mined one million bushels of coal per year, using goats and mules to pull the carts from the depths within.

The town directories describe the Umpire Mine and Ethel Coke Works in some detail, but exclude the mention of individuals employed there (Ellis 1882). The individuals listed in the directories shed light on the racial diversity within the mines. Miners both white and black were under the direct guidance of a foreman. The
foreman was in charge of organizational labor and made sure the process of mining was carried out efficiently. The hierarchy within the mines place minimal value on human life, and often it was more expensive to replace a mule or a goat than a worker. There were among the miners, women and children who may have worked in the Umpire Mine (Figure 16). Children often accompanied their fathers into the mine before child labor laws existed. This was considered acceptable because mining was
a trade, and the young children were learning a valuable skill. Moreover, mining was a family heritage. Sons entered the mines because their fathers and grandfathers had labored there a generation before.

In 1873, risky loans made by bankers to railroad operators and others contributed to the worst economic collapse of the nineteenth century, the Panic of 1873 (Friedman 1992). Ten thousand businesses were forced to close in a depression that lasted until 1878. This economic unrest forced many local business owners to shut their doors, forcing unskilled laborers to seek jobs in the mines or to work on the river.

The Ethel Coke Works was a sister company to the Umpire Mine, sharing both their founder, George E. Hogg and their date of opening in 1872. The purpose of the coke works is to burn coal at high temperatures to expel any impurities from the coal leaving only a pure nodule of carbon. This carbon is then added to steel in order to strengthen it. The impurities that were expelled were tar, ammonium sulfate and methane. Ammonium sulfate was used as fertilizer for the local farmers in the area. The coke works consumed on average 1,000 bushels of coal a day. By 1881, the Ethel Coke Works were in operation by Snowden & McCormick of Brownsville (Ellis 1882; Kussart 1930; Wiley 1937). The combining of the businesses ensured that both were able to compete within the market share for coal and coke distribution in the area. This allowed for the regulation of prices between the mine and the processing facility so that each could benefit in a market dominated by the coalfields of the Connellsville region of northern Fayette County. The train and the steamboat
transported the coal and coke form tipples extending over the rail lines and out onto the river. Steamboats ferried the cargo up the Monongahela and distributed it to the various mills or other coke plants along its banks. Some of the coal and coke made its way to Pittsburgh, Ohio, and points west along the Mississippi River.

African Americans made up a small percentage of all the miners, but their history in the Brownsville area is almost as old as the town itself. A small group of Blacks emigrated to Brownsville in the first half of the 1800s. It is possible some of them were fleeing the bondage of slavery in the South and seeking shelter in the North. Brownsville had become a major stop along the Underground Railroad for escaping slaves, many hiding in the secret tunnels and passages of Bowman's Castle. The castle served as a stopgap for African Americans as they made their way onto boats via the castle's tunnels. Whatever the circumstances, Thurston's (1859) Directory of Brownsville lists the names of property owners taken from the 1850 census, including a small group of African Americans, their respective occupations and their residence (Table 1).

In the Brownsville area including Bridgeport, there were 52 African Americans residing in town and none living in West Brownsville (Thurston 1859). Those that were miners lived in Brownsville on Church Street and around Bowman's Castle on Front Street. Those Blacks living in Brownsville held jobs as miners, teamsters, butchers, and barbers. Blacks and whites that worked as steamboat and river men lived in Bridgeport, the center of steamboat activity. This is also true of the
Table 1.
African Americans Living in Brownsville in 1850

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Street Name</th>
<th>Location</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Bridgeport</td>
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<tr>
<td>Baker, Thornton</td>
<td>Laborer</td>
<td>Church St.</td>
<td>Brownsville</td>
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<td>Market St.</td>
<td>Brownsville</td>
</tr>
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<td>Angle St.</td>
<td>Bridgeport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Barber</td>
<td>Angle St.</td>
<td>Bridgeport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bolden, William</td>
<td>Steamboatmen</td>
<td>Front St.</td>
<td>Brownsville</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bradley, James E.</td>
<td>Coal Miner</td>
<td>Church St.</td>
<td>Brownsville</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bradley, Lewis C.</td>
<td>Teamster</td>
<td>Church St.</td>
<td>Brownsville</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bradley, Robert</td>
<td>Teamster</td>
<td>Church St.</td>
<td>Brownsville</td>
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<td>Brookins, Hannah</td>
<td>Widow</td>
<td>Market St.</td>
<td>Brownsville</td>
</tr>
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<td>Laundress</td>
<td>Market St.</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Widow</td>
<td>Prospect St.</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Barber</td>
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<td>Bridgeport</td>
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<td>Cook</td>
<td>High St.</td>
<td>Bridgeport</td>
</tr>
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<td>Riverman</td>
<td>Water St.</td>
<td>Bridgeport</td>
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<tr>
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<td>High St.</td>
<td>Bridgeport</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Bridgeport</td>
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<td>Driver</td>
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<td>Brownsville</td>
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<td>Steward</td>
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<td>Water St.</td>
<td>Bridgeport</td>
</tr>
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<td>Laborer</td>
<td>Market St.</td>
<td>Bridgeport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Shoemaker</td>
<td>Angle St.</td>
<td>Bridgeport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little, Matthew</td>
<td>Coal Hauler</td>
<td>Water St.</td>
<td>Brownsville</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little, William</td>
<td>Coal Miner</td>
<td>Water St.</td>
<td>Brownsville</td>
</tr>
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<td>Lovett, Josiah</td>
<td>Laborer</td>
<td>Market St.</td>
<td>Brownsville</td>
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Table 1 — Continued

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<th>Location</th>
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<td>Second St.</td>
<td>Bridgeport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metarie, Ephriam</td>
<td>Barber</td>
<td>High St.</td>
<td>Brownsville</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minne, Noah</td>
<td>Shoemaker/Shop Owner</td>
<td>Second St.</td>
<td>Brownsville</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moore, Baker</td>
<td>Teamster</td>
<td>Cass St.</td>
<td>Brownsville</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morsett, Charles</td>
<td>Riverman</td>
<td>High St.</td>
<td>Bridgeport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patterson, Margaret</td>
<td>Widow</td>
<td>Market St.</td>
<td>Brownsville</td>
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<tr>
<td>Patterson, Susan</td>
<td>Teamster</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Bridgeport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peyton, Henry</td>
<td>Wagoneer</td>
<td>Water St.</td>
<td>Bridgeport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smith, John</td>
<td>Laborer</td>
<td>Valley Mills</td>
<td>Bridgeport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smith, Steven</td>
<td>Carter</td>
<td>Angle St.</td>
<td>Bridgeport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sorrel, Thomas A.</td>
<td>Boot Maker</td>
<td>Spring Alley</td>
<td>Bridgeport</td>
</tr>
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<td>Terrell, LaFayette</td>
<td>Laborer</td>
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<td>Bridgeport</td>
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<td>Terrel, Wilson</td>
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<td>Coal Road</td>
<td>Brownsville</td>
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<td>High St.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Williams, Cyrus</td>
<td>Riverman</td>
<td>Water St.</td>
<td>Bridgeport</td>
</tr>
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</table>

steamboat captains, with their houses overlooking the river from Catherine Avenue in their panoptic grand style. The situation of the houses overlooking the town below formed an ideological barrier on the landscape. This separated the wealthy steamboat captains and reinforced the symbolic capital over the rest of Bridgeport. These mansions, some with steamboat porches, represented wealth that the average individual living in town did not experience. The majority of the steamboat industry's workers lived in town, constantly reminded by the chain of command when they gazed upon the hillside. The homes on Catherine Avenue signified an ideological pilothouse, with the town stratified below like a great steamboat.

From the information gleaned from the census records located within the directories, there was no clear racial divide on the landscape of Brownsville or
Bridgeport (Ellis 1882; Hart 1904). The divide came from job specialization within the two regions. The designation of where someone lived corresponded with the proximity of the job site. Miners lived closer to the mine, teachers lived near the schools, and steamboat workers lived close to the wharves. The image painted by the directories and maps show a masked integrated community defined by occupations. This masked integration is a by-product of capitalism that portrays the town as unified, when in reality the town is organized on industrial labor for easy control (McGuire 1991). Victorian culture in this area was laced with racism and segregation built upon by the control of labor by wealthy business owners. Historians have overlooked African Americans along with women and their unique contributions to the region, even though both played major roles in the operation of the steamboat and the various jobs associated with working on the river.

Life on the Monongahela was difficult for both those who worked on the steamboats and those who toiled on the docks. The life on board a steamboat was hard, exhausting and dangerous work. Captain Joseph L. Hendrickson, a steamboat captain and prominent figure in Brownsville, left an extensive diary that recounts the story of everyday life aboard a steamboat. Combining this diary with detailed oral traditions help illuminate differential gender and race issues aboard the boats.

The steamboats of the 19th century Monongahela River were for most of the century, packet boats (Kussart 1930; Wiley 1937). Packet steamboats carried both passengers and cargo to and from their ports (Kussart 1930; Parker 1999). These steamboats are what many envision as the “classic” steamboat dressed from bow to
stern in elaborate woodcarvings and gingerbread with their side wheels lazily paddling through the water (Figures 17 and 18). Many of these vessels were built in this fashion, floating hotels that resembled multi-tiered wedding cakes as they made their way up the rivers. The reality, however, was that there were many different kinds of boats on the river and not all of them were opulent. Many steamboats rested low in the water and had one main deck and one upper deck where the pilothouse was situated. They were dirty, cramped, and loud, offering few amenities to those that traveled on them.

Figure 17. Two Steamboats Taking on Coal (Courtesy of California University of Pennsylvania, Special Collections)
Steamboats were incorporated into packet lines, and each operated in a specific trade (Figure 19). A trade might be the Brownsville to Pittsburgh trade, or the Pittsburgh to Cincinnati trade. In the early days of the steamboat, the owners of the boat were competing against one another, and often an owner was also the pilot of the boat. In Brownsville, various steamboat owners joined together in the mid 1800s to form the Brownsville Packet Line. The increased competition and resultant consolidation allowed for the price of shipping goods and people to fall dramatically. It also changed the role of the steamboat captain and the steamboat owners.
According to Captain Hendrickson (1899), a part of his pay went to the owners of his boat and to the packet line. He was part owner of the boat so some of his pay went into paying off the vessel. The system operated close to the way modern truck drivers who own their own trucks yet drive for a larger company. Steamboats were often painted in red on white, blue on white, or green on white to identify with a particular packet line.

On board the steamboats life was filled with hard work and heavy labor. The Captain of the boat was in charge of the well being of his crew and safety of his ship. Often times he was required to have the steamboat ready to go at any hour of the day.
or night in good or harsh weather. Some trips were required in the late evening if the packet had been hired out for a quick delivery of goods a short distance up or down river. Sometimes boats were expected to complete as many as twenty-five landings in one trip (Hendrickson 1899). Below him in rank were the pilots. These were men training to be captains and had obtained pilot’s licenses. They were allowed to have their own watch while the captain was sleeping or tending to other duties. The next in ranks are the 1st and 2nd Mates. These men were in charge of the deck hands and the rousters. They were responsible for keeping discipline on the deck and making sure the work was done with efficiency when loading and unloading cargo. Mark Twain often remarked that the mates were some of the foulest mouthed, profane individuals on board the boat. All of the individuals above comprised the “Deck Department” of the steamboat. The engine room crew encompassed the Chief Engineer who was in charge of the engine room, 1st and 2nd Strikers, 2nd Engineer, and the Boiler Deck Man. Also on board were the Steward, Cooks, Maids, and the Firemen who occupied lower class ranks on the boat.

The values of the 19th century are evident in the men and women who worked on board these steamboats. Women are not often thought of having been employed by the packets, and have all but been overlooked in many of the historical documents. Oral tradition offers a window of women’s work not often associated with the hardened image of the rivermen. Women sometimes filled the role as Stewards on the boats; their job was like that of a host, ensuring the comfort of passengers on their long trips. There also were maids who changed linens and cleaned the interior of the
boats; on many occasions African American women were employed in this role (Hughes 2003).

The role of African Americans in the function of the steamboat is that of hard labor and in often-dangerous conditions. Feeding the boilers, with their insatiable appetite for coal or wood, was the firemen. These African Americans endured blazing heat, scalding steam, and long work shifts. The attitude at the time toward these men was of indifference. Victorian society believed that because Africa was a hot arid climate, blacks were well suited to hot environments (Gillespie 2001; Hughes 2003). Standing in front of a steamboat’s fireboxes subjected the workers to intolerable heat and searing light, not to mention the fumes produced from burning coal (Gillespie 2001). The songs that they sang to break the monotony of the workday were often misinterpreted as songs of content workers who were well suited to hard labor and heat.

Rousters had a different experience from the firemen on the steamboat. They slept in the open air on the decks or in between the cargo or wherever there was room (Gillespie 2001; Kussart 1930). Their main task was loading and unloading cargo at the many wharves of wharf boats stationed along the river. These men worked in all types of weather, be it snow, rain, or the dry heat of summer. Before the Civil War, rousters on southern boats were often the property or chattel of the captain or boat owner (Gillespie 2001; Kussart 1930; Twain 2001). In Brownsville, the life of a rouster, often called rivermen in directories and census data, was a job of freedom that
most people often did not have. The majority of Blacks are listed as rivermen before the turn of the 20th century, and most, if not all lived in Bridgeport.

Blacks who worked on the steamboat were not free from segregation that permeated throughout society. The steamboat was a reflection of the society and the morals of those who constructed it (Hindle 1981). The firemen who were relegated to the boiler room had their own sleeping compartment in the back of the boat. This was particularly uncomfortable due to the loud noise of the engine machinery that was close by. Inside this small room were one table, some chairs and a small lamp. Because running the boat ran throughout the day and night meant the fires had to be tended 24 hours a day. One shift slept while the other labored, so that no time was lost in the trip. Meals were also another means of segregating the crew. Often one group of individuals, such as those from the Deck Department dined and then the Engineering crews would eat. Lastly, the African Americans were allowed to eat, and this was usually no more than the table scraps, or soups made from leftovers by the cooks.

Travelers were also bound by these strict standards, social class played an important role in a person’s position on board a steamboat. Wealthier travelers could expect the highest treatment (Hughes 2003). Many steamboats offered luxury not found in many of the towns they serviced. Staterooms, waiters, and gourmet food were not uncommon as travelers dined on fine porcelains (Gillespie 2001). Lower class individuals slept with the rousters under the decks, they were sometimes given blankets to either lay under or to use as dividers, hanging them between the rails and
the walls (Hugh 2003). Whatever the status, women were separated one step further. Often women were meant to sleep on one side of the steamboat while the men slept on the other. In the long saloon that ran down the center of the boat between the staterooms, women were often separated from the men by a bar (Gillespie 2001). The saloon was considered a male’s only feature separating the staterooms. Captain Hendrickson (1899) writes that while piloting the steamboat *Germania*, the boat was so over crowded with passengers that he gave up his own room for female passengers.

*Victorian Brownsville held many opportunities for those looking for employment on the river, after all the river was the economic foundation that allowed most of the businesses in Brownsville to operate (Ellis 1882; Kussart 1930). Getting a position as an apprentice or junior pilot on a steamboat was a difficult journey. To earn the coveted pilot’s license, a person had to know the river inside and out (Hughes 2003; Twain 2001). Every sandbar, snag, rock, and tree fall had to be committed to memory, both in the day and during the night, and up river and down river. This type of education required years in the pilothouse, instructed by captains who had worked for decades on the ever-changing river.*

*During an interview with retired steamboat captain, Leo Hughes, he explained that during his youth he lived next door to a Captain John Britton in Bridgeport. Britton told stories of life on the rivers including tales of distant ports such as St. Louis and New Orleans. These stories of adventure on the rivers and the grandeur of the Mississippi only resolved the boy to seek out employment on the Monongahela River. After approaching several captains seeking apprenticeship, he was turned*
away each time. When asked about this, he responded that many of the steamboat
 captains wore Masonic rings, and without being a Mason, it was almost impossible to
gain training.

Hendrickson’s (1899) diary supports this. Hendrickson was a member of the
International Order of the Odd Fellows; it was he that transported the three chain links
that now grace the Odd Fellows lodge in Brownville from Pittsburgh by steamboat.
The International Order of the Odd Fellows was and still is a fraternal organization
for men, much like the Masons, but has a completely different set of rituals and rites.
Adam Jacobs, a steamboat builder, captain, and merchandiser in Brownsville was also
a personal friend of Hendrickson. In his diary, Hendrickson mentions that Jacobs
sponsored him in the Odd Fellows organization. Jacobs was also a Mason, his name
appears in the county history of 1882 in a member list of the local Masonic lodge.
Upon closer examination it was not uncommon to be an Odd Fellow and a Mason, as
the lists have many names common to both.

The permeation of closed societies that influenced those who entered into the
trade and upper echelons of the steamboat industry undercut the progressiveness of
the 19th century and the Industrial Revolution. There were many secret societies
located within Brownsville, such as the Keystone Temple of Honor, International
Order of the Odd Fellows, Masonic Temple, Western Star Lodge, Order of the
Redman, and many others (Ellis 1882; Hart 1904). President-elect Andrew Jackson
was greeted by Freemasons in his trip to Brownsville in 1829 and attended a service
in the lodge located in town (Ellis 1882). John Pringle, operator of Pringle and Son’s
steamboat yard in West Brownsville, was a member of the Keystone Temple of Honor. George Herbertson who owned his machine shop in Bridgeport is listed in the honor role of the Odd Fellows.

Brownsville's industrialized cores were a symbol of 19th century modernity, yet those individuals in charge of their operations were members of closed-door societies, harking back to the medieval guild systems in Europe. The men who were part of these societies were leaders within the town and operated numerous businesses. The ability to give preferential treatment was easy for those who were members of the lodges, while a person outside of the group was often left to other devises. These secret orders represented white protestant males of high status within the town. While today many of these groups allow other denominations into their ranks, traditionally those of certain ethnicities or religious affiliations were not admitted. This meant that Catholics, Jews, African Americans, and women could not be lodge members. Also, the ability to pay dues to the organization kept lower income citizens out of the lodges, as the listings within the directories supports this. All of those listed as members were high social class business owners and property holders. These unspoken business practices allowed for a select few to gain access to resources, such as jobs, in the Brownsville area.

The period between 1870 and 1900 was a time for change in the steamboat industry (Figure 20). The Axton & Pringle steamboat and barge yard was funded by John S. Pringle and moved to West Brownsville in the spring of 1844 (Crumrine 1882; Ellis 1882; Kussart 1930) (Figure 21). By 1881, the firm was operated by his
son, J. D. S. Pringle and his son-in-law, Andrew C. Axton. The name changed to Axton & Son after Pringle retired from the business. This establishment covered roughly ten acres of land, and the sawmill located on site could prepare sixteen thousand feet of boat lumber per day. The entire operation employed sixty workers and in 1881 produced nine steamboats for the river trade (Ellis 1882). The tally of steamboats constructed to this date was well over 500 boats and each were in use on a variety of rivers such as the Monongahela, Ohio, Mississippi, Missouri, Tennessee, White, Red, and even some of them had made it as far as South American waters.

A competitor followed Axton & Pringle shortly after their move across the river in 1844. John Cock and Leonard Lanehart established in 1848 the “lower boatyard” (Crumrine 1882; Ellis 1882; Kussart 1930; Thurston 1859). The literature
is sparse on this establishment as they were always in the shadow of the Axton Yards. Little can be stated of the size or the number of employees who worked there, other than Thurston (1859:38) who mentions that boats constructed there were of “fine quality” and “…they have established their reputation...as boat builders”. However, by the outbreak of the Civil War the business was in trouble. After the war, the yard changes hands until it finally ceases to exist in 1875 (Crumrine 1882).

Axton & Son, in response to the demand for greater shipments in coal and coke, pioneered on the Monongahela a new type of steamboat, the towboat (Ellis
1882). The Coal Hill was the first of more than twenty-five similar boats that marked the beginning of the end of the packet steamboat in the eastern waters. The towboat was a unique design with a flat bow used to push flats or barges carrying a variety of materials (Figure 22). A towboat pushed barges filled with bricks, coal, iron, coke, and even planks of wood to a number of destinations (Hendrickson 1899). The revolutionary concept of pushing freight on the river was born from attempts to pull freight. Pulling freight was instituted in the 1830s but caused a steamboat to become uncontrollable due to the wake hitting barges from the large paddle wheels (Parker
The pushing of barges and flats equaled out to more tonnage of material than even a fully loaded train was able to handle (Wiley 1937). A single towboat was able to push several acres of coal loaded onto many different barges (Figure 23).

![Figure 23. The Towboat *Vulcan* With Sternwheelers for Added Maneuverability and Simpler Design Sitting in Front of the Riverbank Where New Railroad Has Been Cut (Courtesy of California University of Pennsylvania, Special Collections)](image)

In 1899, the Monongahela River Consolidated Coal & Coke Company was formed (Kussart 1930; Wiley 1937) (Figure 24). This company acquired coalmines, piers, coke plants, landings, mills, and steamboats through massive buyouts. Hundreds of companies, including many packet companies, were swallowed by the massive consolidation. Landowners with large expanses of river property sold their deeds to this new entity. The effects of this purchasing power caused many smaller
mining operations to shut down in the wake of this new competition. The land on either bank of the Monongahela River became the property of Consolidated Coal & Coke from which new expanses of rail lines were laid to allow easy transportation of raw materials (Kussart 1930; Wiley 1937). This competed directly with independent steamboat packet lines causing many local businesses that depended on the shipment of goods to close their doors.

The close of the 19th century for Brownsville marked a turning point in the town’s history. Brownsville went from the leader in steamboat transportation and a leader in the export of goods to the western frontier, to a town on the periphery of
industrialization. The focus shifted to new products of coal and steel, neither of which had company headquarters in Brownsville. The resources were mined by companies that were often based outside of Brownsville, so that revenue was not always redirected into the town itself. The next chapter examines how the company store replaced the need to buy goods from the town, and how many mine companies forced families to shop at their stores. Many shops within the heart of Brownsville changed from manufacturing products to selling products manufactured elsewhere. This transformation from a core producer to a peripheral consumer had dire effects on the steamboat industry, the base of the economic foundation that Brownsville was built.
CHAPTER IV

A NEW ERA: BROWNSVILLE 1900-1925

Brownsville at the turn of the century was a progressive town facing an evolving economic base. This base was transforming the once central manufacturing district into a satellite mining community within a span of a decade. The landscape was changing rapidly as the mining industry constructed piers and tipples out into the Monongahela River and new mines were opened. It is around this time that the term “patch” community or “patch town” came into existence. These small communities developed around a mine and consisted of a company store, sometimes a school, and houses that were built in the same architectural style. Company patch towns such as Hiller, Tower Hill 1 and Tower Hill 2, Republic, Superior, Century and La Belle emerged in the first quarter of the 20th century.

The new economy based on coal mining had a dramatic effect on the valley as rail lines were laid for a complex network of tracks that extended throughout the states of Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Ohio. This new competition in the transportation of resources and goods between the railroad and the packet lines was quickly coming to a head. The railroad built several bridges in the Monongahela Valley and over the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers that were too low for steamboats to pass beneath (Kussart 1930). To circumvent the power of the railroad, steamboat designers outfitted their boats with cantilever smoke stacks that were pulled down as
the boat passed under one of these low bridges (Hughes 2003). Although steamboats
towed more coal than the average train, the speed that the rail lines afforded meant
higher profits for the mines. Coal was shipped as fast as it was being mined as
Pittsburgh’s steel industry grew.

The steamboat packet lines, in an attempt to compete with the rail lines for
both passengers and freight, began cutting their shipping rates (Kussart 1930). These
constant rate cuts by packets were implemented to attract business to the lines,
however, the loss in profits started to gouge shareholders who then began to place
their money into competitors, namely the railroad. Faith in the steamboat industry
was waning as the turn of the century approached. On July 11th 1901, the packet lines
united to resist the encroaching railroad in the Monongahela Valley. They formed the
Pittsburgh, Brownsville, and Monongahela Packet Company and other smaller
organizations and lines in the hopes that by forming into larger entities they would be
able to stabilize the price of shipping freight, transporting passengers, and towing
coal. These newly formed corporate entities gained control of the steamboats,
towboats, and wharf boats operating along the river. The coalitions were a desperate
attempt to save the packet lines. However, the impact of these firms on the smaller
towns was felt on all areas along the river.

Towns along the river valley invested a great deal of time and money into their
wharves (Hughes 2003; Kussart 1930). For many smaller communities, the wharf
was the link to the outside world where goods were loaded and unloaded from
moored steamboats. These wharves, much like Brownsville’s, were constructed from
stone and mortar and used heavy iron retaining rings to tie the boats down. This type of wharf stabilized the riverbanks during times of flooding and prevented the shore from washing away. However, many of the smaller towns along the river were unable to afford to build a permanent wharf (Kussart 1930). The solution to this problem was the use of wharf boats. These boats were usually constructed out of a steamboat hull, decked over, and then enclosed (Gillespie 2001; Hughes 2003). These boats were towed into place and then anchored to the riverbank.

The wharf boat provided a stable anchor for steamboats to dock; their enclosures were used to store goods for shipment and for passengers to wait for their boat to arrive (Gillespie 2001; Hughes 2003). Many perishable items, such as grains and vegetables that required immediate attention were stored on a wharf boat between loadings (Hughes 2003).

To the community, the wharf was a symbolic representation of modernity and capital. A town along the river that had a wharf was able to attract products and people traveling to Pittsburgh, Brownsville, Ohio, West Virginia and ports west. Those towns possessing a wharf boat were able to do the same, and provide accommodations to travelers, such as taverns, hotels, and markets. The wharf boat was the entrance through which capital entered many of these small towns and symbolized a position of status among other towns within the valley.

The Pittsburgh, Brownsville & Monongahela Packet Co. viewed wharf boats as a liability and expense in some of these smaller settlements. Wharf boats required maintenance and constant upkeep. Floods and ice easily destroyed these boats
because they had no power of their own to be moved into different areas. The new packet company decided to move many of the boats to larger more lucrative communities along the river (Kussart 1930). The unfortunate effect of moving the boats disconnected many towns from river commerce and their businesses suffered. Goods had to be transported over land to towns such as Brownsville in order for them to be shipped by steamboat or by rail. Some of these areas had no easy access to the larger towns due to poor roads and rugged terrain surrounding the river valley.

The landscape changes occurring within Brownsville, Bridgeport, and West Brownsville at the turn of the 19th century were dramatic. A new era of construction introduced the embracement of the railroad and a farewell to the steamboat industry. In the 1840s, the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad built a trestle bridge across the Monongahela River where Redstone Creek enters that tributary (Hart 1904). The railroad was diverted away from Brownsville and through West Brownsville due to protests from supporters of the National Road. It was their belief that businesses along the National Road were in jeopardy due to unfair competition created by companies that had access to the rail line.

The steamboat industry had moved their yards from Brownsville and Bridgeport and settled them in West Brownsville. There the rail line was constructed well away from the riverfront with large expanses of land for use in boat construction. The reason for the companies moving across the river is not mentioned in the directories of the county histories, however, the rail line thoroughfare was planned to follow the riverbank on its way to Wheeling, West Virginia. This was not realized for
another fifty-three years, and by that time the steamboat industry was well entrenched in West Brownsville.

In 1900, Snowden & Son's foundry was out of business and the land was in ownership of Jacobs and Dawson, who then sold the estate to the Monongahela Division railroad (Kussart 1930). By 1902, the tract of land in front of Brownsville's riverbanks that was once the foundry, the wharf, and the Brownsville Brewery, was built up for train tracks and a tunnel (Figure 25). The land had to be prepared for the rail lines by leveling its surface. The way this was accomplished was first to build scaffolding to elevate the tracks above the uneven surface, and then fill in the areas

Figure 25. Railroad Construction Along the Banks of the Monongahela River (Hart 1976:123). Used with permission of Robert Mammarella, Brownsville Historical Society, 10-10-2003.
around the supports to form solid stable ground. This helped ensure against flooding so that the trains ran unimpeded through rough weather conditions. The construction terminated Water Street, which once followed the river and passed through the wharf to the Snowden & Son foundry. According to historian, Sarpeta Kussart (1930:670):

The building of the railroad along the river front, at Brownsville effected a wonderful improvement. The general appearance of the town, viewed from the river was entirely changed. Previous to the building of the railroad, no town along the Monongahela River had more an unsightly appearance as Brownsville, the river bank being a general dumping ground.

The destruction of the Brownsville wharf forced steamboats to dock in Bridgeport as the railroad snaked its way to Fairmont, West Virginia sixty miles away (Kussart 1930). The increased numbers of towboats made the Brownsville wharf obsolete due to the absence of goods being shipped by river. The rail line, elevated on a sandstone wall that rose up from the Monongahela River, gave Brownsville the appearance of a great walled city with the river as its moat (Figure 26). The real estate values soared as the rail line was completed and many businesses competed for space along the tracks. The People's Coal Company, today known a Pike Mine, built two piers out into the river to facilitate the loading of coal onto trains as well as steamboats (Figure 27).

The directories lack information about the demise of the steamboat industry in Brownsville. They give no indication that by the turn of the century the business of building steamboats was in jeopardy. From a detailed sketch of Brownsville drawn in 1902, the land that once was occupied in West Brownsville by the Axton & Pringle boatyard is mysteriously empty (Figure 28). The Axton & Pringle construction yard is shown as a vacant lot on the 1901 Sanborn fire insurance map (Figure 29).
Figure 26. Wall Behind Vegetation Elevating the Train Tracks Above the Water Line  
(photograph taken by author, 2003)

Figure 28. Empty Tract of Land Where the Once Prosperous Axton & Pringle Boatyards Used to Be Located (Fowler 1902)
The origin for the abandonment of boat building in Brownsville stems from an economic shift towards coal mining and the increased reliance on the railroad. Stores selling goods from larger manufacturers based out of Pittsburgh replaced businesses that produced finished goods such as farming equipment, glasswares, and furniture. The core manufacturing centers moved from the local towns and were replaced by retail from larger corporations located in cities. This shifted Brownsville from a core central place to a peripheral consumer.

Smaller manufacturing centers were not able to compete with larger mass production corporations. The restructuring of Brownsville toward a system based
purely on mining allowed manufacturers to settle into areas where capital was growing, such as cities like Pittsburgh. This relegated Brownsville to a consumer market based on an unskilled labor force. Unskilled labor was highly competitive in pay compared with those of the steamboat and foundry businesses. Not only were there more jobs for individuals in the mines than those in the skilled labor sector, the mines became a trade that was passed down within families of miners.

The steamboat industry in Brownsville was no longer lucrative or able to compete with the larger boatyards of Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, or St. Louis. The consolidation of the packet lines meant that boats were no longer owned by the captains or local entrepreneurs, but rather by large-scale corporations. These companies bought out the small-scale owners and moved their base of operations outside of Brownsville and the Monongahela Valley.

The steamers running on the Monongahela in the early 20th century were mainly towboats and excursion boats (Kussart 1930). In 1904, three packets were running, the Rose Hite, I.C. Woodward and the Columbia. The packets were not without their problems even at this later stage. The Rose Hite on a trip to Morgantown, West Virginia collided with the steamer John F. Klein a half mile above Brownsville while in a dense fog. Four crewmembers died in the sinking of the Rose Hite, two whites and two African Americans perished. The four individuals were asleep in the crew quarters at the rear of the boat when the accident occurred.

The accident of the Rose Hite offers a window into an often-overlooked aspect of sailor's lives that has transcended history, namely superstition. George
Shelvocke’s account of killing a white ibis during his voyages on the *Speedwell* as he rounded Cape Horn and the calamity that followed blamed on the bird’s death is a good example of seafarer’s superstitions. Likewise superstitions of steamboat captains and crew were common on the inland rivers. The two African Americans who drowned on the *Rose Hite* were found with soaked and mashed baked potatoes in their hip pockets. It was common among deck hands to believe that as long as one had a baked potato in a pocket they would not drown (Hughes 2003; Kussart 1930).

In 1904, the railroad and the steamboat packets were found once again at odds. Bridges built over the Monongahela River at several points including Brownsville and Fairmont, West Virginia were too low and obstructed shipping by steamboats. An excerpt from the Pittsburgh Dispatch from September 11, 1904 reads, “Another bridge, which has been preventing free and easy navigation on the Monongahela River has been ordered elevated, by Secretary of War W.H. Taft”. This was the first order affecting bridges over the Monongahela River and concerning elevation. The mandate stated bridges were to be at least forty-six feet about pool level (water level) and have a channel span of 280 feet. At the time, the bridge in Fairmont was a mere 26.5 feet high. The bridge was later replaced, allowing steamboats to once again travel beneath it.

By 1906, Hart’s Directory of Brownsville published details of a town starkly different from Thurston’s 1859 history. The steamboat industry was gone; there was no mention of the Axton yards, only a brief overview of Brownsville’s once prominent boat building heritage. The census lists located at the end of the directory
reveal occupations not much different than those of the 19th century. However, in the mid 1800s many of those employed, both blacks and whites in the Bridgeport area, had jobs working on some aspect of the river. By 1906, these river jobs are absent, overtaken by an influx of mining and mine related professions. The number of African Americans living in Brownsville was 134, in Bridgeport 207, and in West Brownsville only 1 (Hart 1904). Listed within these lists is an absence of any blacks employed on the river or on steamboats. Absent were the numerous clerks, stewards and captains that had called Brownsville their home, and of those less than a handful remained.

The emerging workforce in the area entering into the 1910s and 1920s was that of the laborer and miner. The majority of the African Americans and the white labor pool were miners, railroad employees, or listed simply as laborers. The coal tipples of the People's Coal Company replaced the wharves along the river, and more and more communities sprung from the need to work coalmines. Many of these small communities built their own tipples into the river or over the railroad tracks to transfer the millions of tons of coal to the multitude steel mills that lined the river.

Brownsville was also changing spatially during this time period through World War 1 and as the town entered the roaring 20s. Coalmines flanked both sides of the town, and in Bridgeport, the railroad built a massive "round house" (Figure 30). The round house was used to rotate train cars and locomotives in order to position them on the tracks. The building made repairs to train cars. It was in use until the 1990s when it was eventually torn down after its abandonment.
Brownsville's rise to industrial power in the early to mid 1800s established the town as a central core fulfilling a role that was unique in history and the history of western expansion. The steamboat industry once vital to Brownsville's growth,
struggled as new technologies, such as the railroad, competed for market share. Compounding this was the town’s reorganization toward mining from a frontier economy based on the export of finished goods. The aftermath of the mining area on Brownsville is highly visible on the town’s landscape. An empty expanse of land where the Vulcan Iron and Machine Works once stood and its crumbling railroad tunnel is all that is visible where the industry once flourished (Figures 31 and 32).

Figure 31. Site of the Vulcan Iron Works Facing North With the Brownsville Electric Building in the Background (photograph taken by author)
On the site of Herbertson's foundry there now stands a restaurant and an electrical store (Figure 33). The once proud location of the Pringle boatyards in West Brownsville is an area overtaken by scrub brush and small trees with no evidence of the business that went on there. The steamboat and the industry surrounding the construction of these crafts diminished. The scars of the mining era and of the railroad are the most prevalent and visible on the town's landscape, leaving only empty lots as reminders of boat building and heydays of the steamboat.
Figure 33. Fiddle's Restaurant Occupying a Corner of the Block Where Herbertson Had His Foundry and Rolling Mill (photograph taken by author)
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The mining boom in Brownsville shifted the capitalist ideology from the steamboat and the industry associated with it to a new symbol of modernity and progressiveness, the mine. The mine and its facilities of piers and tipples replaced as symbolic representations of capital the steamboat yards, wharves, and wharf boats on the landscape. By 1900, no longer was a town’s success measured by its proximity to the river, but rather to the railroad.

Brownsville’s economic base of boat building was one part of a cyclical pattern that Wallerstein (2000) identified as expansion and contraction. Brownsville moved from a core producer and central place, to a peripheral consumer and satellite of Pittsburgh. The corporate consolidation of mines in the late 1890s moved the ownership and the capital out of the hands of locals and into the hands of wealthy businesses in distant cities. Likewise, the steamboat industry was moved off site as the costs outweighed the returns for a few skilled laborers. The mines were the alternative to river work, employing large amounts of both African Americans and white laborers.

The rapid growth of Pittsburgh’s steel industry forced a change in loci of production and a new division of labor or axis of labor. The independent contractors that had once served as the backbone of the steamboat industry found themselves
bought into larger scale companies as pressure from the railroad increased. Economic hardships in the late 1800s found many investors losing capital in the steamboat industry as passenger traffic and the shipment of goods started to decline in favor of transporting raw materials by towboat or simply by transportation on the rail lines. Hendrickson mentions in his diary during the periods when the packets barely ran on the river, that the excursion business on steamboats was doing well (Hendrickson 1899). This may be an indicator that the steamboat, as a method of transportation in the business sense, was slowly losing interest among companies. Today the descendants of the grand steamboats are merely excursion boats used for the pleasures of gambling and short trips along the river. The cause of this transformation may be found in the ideological representation that both the steamboat and the train represented.

The steamboat of the first half of the 19th century was a symbol of modernity and progressiveness to a community, especially to a town such as Brownsville that helped foster its invention. The steamboat pierced many areas of the nation by way of rivers that were inaccessible or impractical to traverse by foot or horse. The time saved in the transportation of goods meant that frontier settlements were supplied regularly from towns to the east. The steamboat had its disadvantages as well, namely they could explode if pushed too hard, they were slow when compared to trains, and they placed occupants in the center of rivers at a time when the average individual did not know how to swim. There are many accounts of travelers stuck on the roofs of steamboats that sank only yards away from shore that needed rescue.
The railroad transformed into the same ideological framework that the steamboat occupied as a mode of transportation. However, the railroad had several distinct advantages. The first of these was the labor boom associated with the construction of the hundreds of thousands of miles of rail thoroughfares. The second was the speed that a train delivered its cargo. The third was that the rail lines penetrated deep into areas of land that did not have access to river transportation. Lastly, the railroad was viewed by the elites of capitalism as the preferred mode of transporting their products and people. Trains transported guests in posh sleeping compartments, with tracks laid on solid ground quickly and efficiently from town to town. The train represented the corporation; there were no private individual owners of trains and thus no need for micromanagement in that regard.

Brownsville adapted when the economic base shifted from boat building to mining. The town that once rejected the railroad, embraced it, and by doing so sacrificed its once proud steamboat industry. All that remains, as a reminder of this history, is a newly renovated wharf with an entrance vaulted by train tracks. Presently, the mines that are located around Brownsville are empty. Gone, too, is the mighty steel industry of Pittsburgh that helped ensure a steady supply of coal from those tunnels. Brownsville is once again facing a transition in a period of post industrialism. The rail lines, though still in use, are only a pass-through for coal trains as they head to the all infrequent mill or power plant located on the banks of the river. The town is looking forward to once again harnessing the power of the river in the form of tourism and historical naturalism that have replaced blue-collar industries that
once flourished in the valley. Perhaps ethnohistory and archaeology will help to
reconstruct a distant past that will illuminate the community to once again bring about
positive change.
Appendix A

HSIRB Approval Letter
Date: February 24, 2003

To: Frederick Smith, Principal Investigator
   Marc Henshaw, Student Investigator for thesis

From: Mary Lagerwey, Chair

Re: HSIRB Project Number 03-02-22

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project entitled “Waves on a River of Change: The Influence of the Steamboat on the Development of Brownsville Pennsylvania” has been approved under the exempt category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note that you may only conduct this research exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project. You must also seek reapproval if the project extends beyond the termination date noted below. In addition if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: February 24, 2004
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