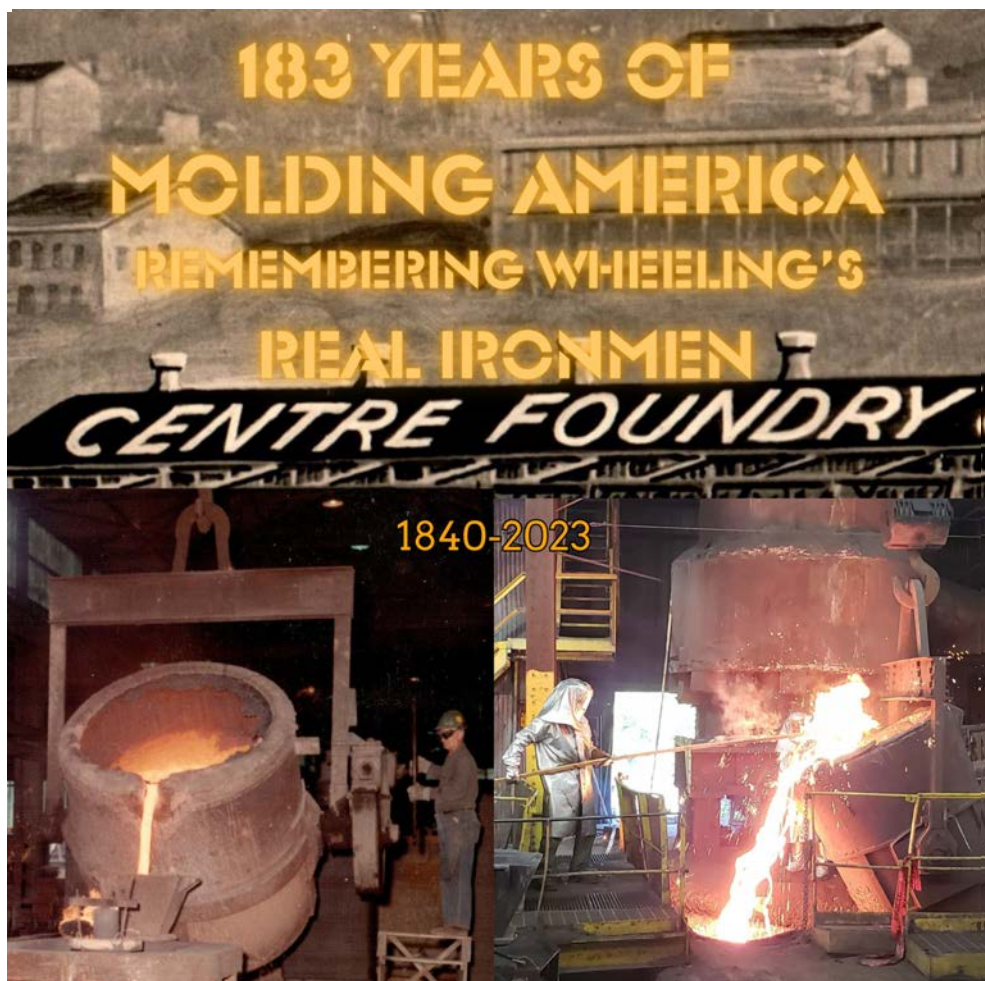


Summer/Fall 2024 **UPPER OHIO VALLEY**

# **HISTORICAL REVIEW**



**In this issue:**

The First Amputation of the Civil War  
by Jon-Erik Gilot

Elm Grove by Ryan Stanton

North Wheeling in 1902  
by David Javersak

Remembering Wheeling's Real Ironmen  
by Sean Duffy

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**Volume 44, No. 1 • Summer/Fall 2024**

## UPPER OHIO VALLEY HISTORICAL REVIEW



A publication of the

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# **UPPER OHIO VALLEY HISTORICAL REVIEW**

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Single Copies: \$5.00

Founded by the Wheeling Area Historical Society in 1968, the **UPPER OHIO VALLEY HISTORICAL REVIEW** is the only publication of its kind in the northern panhandle of West Virginia. Dedicated solely to local history topics, it has become a treasured publication and valuable tool for studying and learning about our geographic area. Wheeling National Heritage Area Corporation (WNHAC, later Wheeling Heritage) continued the tradition, editing and publishing the **REVIEW** from 2010-2018. Ownership of the **UOVHR** publication was transferred in the second half of 2018 to the Ohio County Public Library in Wheeling.

**UOVHR** content has historically included articles, transcribed documents, book reviews, and accounts of the economic, political, social, and cultural history of the greater Wheeling area contributed by historians, researchers, and scholars. Any editorial views expressed by authors do not necessarily reflect the views of the **OCPL**.

**OCPL** is honored to publish the **UOVHR** and continue this great tradition for years to come.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>On the Cover</b> .....	4
<b>Note from the Editor</b>	
Seán P. Duffy, Ohio County Public Library .....	4
<b>Was the First Amputation of the Civil War at Wheeling?</b>	
By Jon-Erik Gilot.....	6
<b>The Forks of Wheeling - The Neighborhood of Elm Grove</b>	
By Ryan Stanton .....	17
<b>North Wheeling At The Turn of The Twentieth Century</b>	
by David Javersak.....	27
<b>183 Years of Molding America: Remembering Wheeling’s Real Ironmen</b>	
by Seán P. Duffy.....	37
<b><u>Book Reviews—Local &amp; Regional History</u></b>	
<i>Pulling the Thread: Untangling Wheeling History</i> , essays by Christina Fisanick, PhD (review by Dr. Charles A. Julian, PhD) 57	
<i>John Brown's Raid: Harpers Ferry and the Coming of the Civil War, October 16-18, 1859</i> (Emerging Civil War Series) by Jon- Erik M Gilot and Kevin R Pawlak (review by Jay H. Ferris).....59	

On the Cover: Centre Foundry images OCPL Archives.

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## UPPER OHIO VALLEY HISTORICAL REVIEW

# NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

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Dear Readers:

The Summer/Fall edition of the Review includes a most interesting look at what may have been the first amputation of the Civil War in Wheeling by Jon-Erik Gilot, whose new book about John Brown is also reviewed within these pages.

This edition also includes a continuation of our Wheeling neighborhood history series featuring a look at Elm Grove from ancient times by history educator Ryan Stanton and North Wheeling in 1902 by history professor Dr. David Javersak.

We'll also say our goodbyes to one of Wheeling and Warwood's most durable businesses, Center Foundry & Machine Company, which closed its doors last year after 183 years of continuous operation.

Returning to our roots as a source of information about local and regional history books, we include, in addition to the review of Jon-Erik's book, a review by Dr. Charles Julian of Dr. Christina Fisanick's collection of history-focused essays, *Pulling the Thread: Untangling Wheeling History*.

As always, we hope you enjoy this edition of the Upper Ohio Valley Historical Review.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Seán Duffy', with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Seán Duffy, Editor



Courtesy Wheeling Heritage.



OCPL Archives.

## Was the First Amputation of the Civil War at Wheeling?



Hanger's shop. Library of Congress.

by Jon-Erik Gilot

Popular history tells us that young Confederate James E. Hanger of the Churchville Cavalry was the first amputation of the Civil War when his left leg was shattered by a cannonball at the

Battle of Philippi on June 3, 1861. His story has become a mainstay in Civil War historiography – Hanger goes home to recuperate, develops his own prosthesis, files a patent for his work, and by 1864 is the leading supplier of prosthetics for other Confederate amputees. Hanger's company, now known as Hanger Prosthetics and Orthotics, continues as the nation's leading prosthetic company.<sup>1</sup>

William C. Parker, a conductor working out of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad depot in Wheeling in 1861, did not enjoy the same distinction or renown as Hanger. And yet it may be that Parker was the first of more than 50,000 recorded amputations during the Civil War. As early as 1862, the federal government began providing an \$8 monthly pension for grievous injuries like those endured by Parker.<sup>2</sup> Parker's problem – and perhaps the reason why he has been overlooked for more than 160 years – has more to do with his civilian employ than the nature of his injury. His struggle for recompense eventually caught the attention of high-ranking military and government officials and reverberated in the halls of Congress in the decades following the war.

On the night of May 25, 1861, Confederate troops at Grafton, Virginia burned two bridges on the mainline of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad near Farmington. This was the act of war George B.

McClellan, commander of the Department of the Ohio, had been waiting for. Ohio's governor William Dennison had urged McClellan to "defend Ohio where it costs least and accomplishes most...beyond rather than on her border."<sup>3</sup> McClellan could now push his Ohio, Indiana, and loyal Virginia troops east from the Ohio River into the interior of Virginia to secure the B.&O. and drive the Confederates out of northwestern Virginia, and he could do it without appearing the aggressor.

The following day, McClellan ordered Col. Benjamin F. Kelley and his 1st Virginia Infantry to proceed on the B.&O. as far as the burned bridges, where Kelley would repair the bridges and continue to Grafton and drive out the Confederate troops organizing in that area. Ohioans at Bellaire and Marietta were also ordered across the Ohio River to move in conjunction with the 1st Virginia, soon followed by several regiments of Indiana soldiers.



CDV of Benjamin Kelley. OCPL Archives.

In the early morning of May 27, Kelley visited the B.&O. depot at Wheeling and directed that a train be prepared to carry his regiment south at 4 am that morning. Without enough cars on hand at Wheeling, tonnage conductor William C. Parker and Samuel Hartley, regulator of trains, hurried a locomotive three miles south to the siding at the Benwood depot to pick up the cars and steam back to Wheeling. During their trip, a storm blew across the Ohio River, rocking the Virginia shore with pelting rain and violent winds. The *Daily Intelligencer* reported the storm "continued to increase in violence till towards morning. Such peals of thunder, vivid flashes of lightning and sheets of rain are seldom heard or seen."<sup>4</sup>



The track was clear on the short trip south, where the cars were hitched, and the train began backing up the track to Wheeling. Hartley and Parker stationed themselves on the platform of the rear car to spot any obstructions



that may have blown across the track behind them. In the inky darkness, the pair did not spot a house car that high winds had blown from the siding onto the main track. At 2 a.m. the train slammed into the house car, throwing Hartley and Parker from the platform onto the track below. Hartley was “cut literally to pieces by the wheels and was instantly killed.” Though not the first death in the Civil War, or even the first death in western Virginia, Hartley here becomes the first casualty of the first campaign of the Civil War. The newspaper reported that Parker “had a leg cut off, and was otherwise injured, though hopes were entertained for his recovery.”<sup>5</sup>

The accident upset Kelley’s planned 4 a.m. departure. The track was cleared, the train pushed back to Wheeling, and the troops departed south at 7 a.m., perhaps unaware of the blood that had been shed in preparing their transportation. The troops arrived at the burnt bridges later that day, quickly repaired the damage, and advanced on Fairmont and Grafton before routing the small Confederate command at Philippi on June 3.

Hartley and Parker were soon forgotten by history, but not by

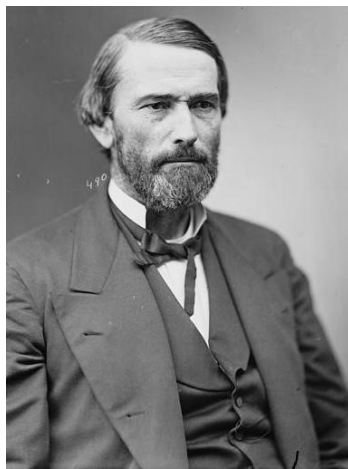
their families or friends, who recalled both as “much loved and esteemed.” The two men had been housemates near the railroad in Centre Wheeling. Hartley was 31 years old and left behind a widow and three young children. Parker was likewise 31 with a wife and four young children. Neither man had much in the way of personal property or real estate.<sup>6</sup>

Lavina Hartley remarried in 1867 to a veteran of the 77th Ohio and bore him three children. Because her second husband had not divorced a previous wife, Lavina did not qualify for his military pension following his death in 1883. In 1889, with the help of a sympathetic legislator, a bill was put forward to grant a pension to Lavina A. Patton, widow of Samuel Hartley, as well as her daughter, Belle Hartley. The bill was referred to the Committee on Invalid Pensions but was not taken up. Lavina tried again in 1892, this bill noting that Hartley “was killed on the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad while a soldier in the discharge of his duty,” the petitioner likely realizing that Hartley must be framed as a soldier if he hoped to secure the widow’s pension. The second bill was again referred to the Committee on Invalid Pensions where it was again left to expire. Lavina died four years later without securing a pension from either husband.<sup>7</sup>

William C. Parker’s injuries plagued him for the rest of his life. Parker’s right leg was severed in the accident, and the left foot so mangled as to necessitate amputation. His spinal cord was badly injured, and with both feet removed Parker lived as “a most deplorable cripple,” relying on charity to support his family. Parker’s first pension application was denied “for the technical reason that he was not actually in the military service of the United States.” Not to be deterred, in 1880 he enlisted the help of a local congressman to advance his cause.<sup>8</sup>

In a bill [H.R. 3786] authored by Congressman Benjamin Wilson (D-WV) and presented to the Committee on Invalid Pensions, Wilson argued that...

“...at the time the engines, cars, and employees of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad Company were subject to the orders of the military officers of the government; that an emergency called for an immediate removal of the troops from Wheeling to accomplish which General B.F. Kelley, then in command of the government forces in that State, issued his peremptory military order, about one o’clock in the morning, to have an engine and a sufficient number of cars in a state of immediate preparation for the movement of troops; that Parker was directed to perform this duty, and in his performance and during the prevalence of the storm a collision occurred by which he sustained the injuries aforesaid; that he was not in the military service of the United States, but was acting under the immediate peremptory orders of the military commander, and that in the prompt discharge of his duties and in the execution of these orders he sustained injuries that have made his life one of sorrow and suffering.”<sup>9</sup>



WV Congressman Benjamin Wilson led the fight for Parker’s pension.

While legislation limited the scope of pensions to those who served in the military, their widows, or dependents, Wilson argued that Congress had set a precedent prior to Parker’s application when it granted a pension to a civilian teamster who went blind from a fever contracted while under the employ of the government. Even so, Wilson likely realized he was fighting an uphill battle. To help his cause, Wilson went to the man who gave the order that ultimately cost Parker his feet and his livelihood. Writing in support of Parker’s application, Bvt. Maj. Gen. Benjamin F. Kelley urged that...

“Although Parker was not in the service of the United States at the time of the accident, yet he was executing a peremptory military order, and therefore I think it would be an act of justice and humanity if Congress would pass an act to place him on the pension-roll of wounded soldiers.”<sup>10</sup>

Wilson sought a \$25 per month pension for the remainder of Parker’s life, believing he was owed at least that much for his sacrifice during the first campaign. And the Committee on Invalid Pensions agreed. On December 17, 1880, the bill advanced out of the committee to the Committee of the Whole House. While pension relief applicants recommended from the Committee on Invalid Pensions typically did not attract significant debate, Parker’s application was anything but typical.

Following the introduction of Wilson’s bill to the committee, congressman William A.J. Sparks (D-IL) quickly seized on Parker’s status, questioning whether the intention was to pension “a man who never was in the military or naval service of the United States at all.” Alexander H. Stephens (D-GA), former vice-president of the Confederacy, clarified that Parker was “in the service, but not upon the rolls.” Unsatisfied, Sparks admitted that Parker had “perhaps a meritorious case,” but reiterated that he had no service to the United States “in any acceptance of the term whatever,” recalling that pension laws make provision only for those who had military or naval service. Sparks suggested that Parker “look for compensation to the railroad company” rather than “a bill pensioning a man in conflict with the pension laws.”

Congressman Alexander H. Coffroth (D-PA) clarified for Sparks that it was the duty of the Committee on Invalid Pensions – which had already reviewed and recommended passage of Parker’s pension – to determine the lawfulness of the application and whether it should be worthy of consideration and relief. Coffroth reported that the committee had “found one or two precedents where a man had been pressed into service by a general in

command, for the purpose of the transportation of troops, and where he was injured and received a pension by a special act of Congress,” reiterating that Parker’s case was meritorious.

At this point, congressman Wilson took the house floor to relate the history of the case, namely that in May 1861 “at the insistence of the Government, the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad Company put their road, rolling-stock, and employees at the disposal of the United States Government,” and that Parker “did for the Government as much as a soldier could have done.” Wilson mentioned that Parker was “old and crippled...surrounded by a family of consumptive children, who are utterly penniless and dependent on charity.” Wilson believed that if Parker were pensioned “for the remaining period of his life, which in the ordinary course of human events cannot be long,” Congress would be doing an act of justice “which every patriotic man will applaud.”

Congressman Benton McMillin (D-TN), marveled at how it came to be proposed for the government to pension a disabled railroad employee, to which Wilson clarified that Parker “was not obeying the order of the railroad company. He was directly in the service of the Federal Government, under the orders of the general commanding in that district.” Unmoved, McMillin retorted “I do not care whose order he was obeying. He was an employee of the railroad, serving the railroad, and was never a soldier, nor did he ever claim to be.” McMillin noted that current pension obligations of \$50,000,000 per year were estimated to balloon to \$500,000,000 annually, and worried that cases such as Parker’s could open the floodgates “and let in every railroad employee, be he of low or high degree, who gets crippled and has the audacity to demand pay for it.”

“I take a different view of this bill,” seized Adoniram J. Warner (D-OH), himself a decorated Civil War veteran. Warner believed that cases such as Parker’s were “the only cases that ought to be made the subjects of special acts,” and that “where damage has

been sustained in such cases there is some obligation resting upon the Government.” William M. Springer (D-IL) agreed, questioning how “service” may be defined, believing “it is not necessary that a man should have been regularly enlisted and mustered into the ranks or commissioned as an officer of the Army” to qualify for having served the Government. “This man,” noted Springer, “was in the military service of the United States just as much as if he had been sworn into the service.” Seizing on the moment, Springer continued...

“This man was liable to the service of the Government, and was in the service of the Government, and compelled to perform that service. If he had refused to perform it he might have been immediately taken out by order of the military commander and shot. He was in the midst of war, and the military commander ordered him to do a certain thing. He proceeded to do it, and while he was doing it he was the servant and employee of the Government, and in the military service of the United States, and as much entitled to be protected while in that service as any person in the service by virtue of regular enlistment.”

Unaffected, Gibson Atherton (D-OH) expressed that he was “not willing to extend the pension laws any further than they reach now,” refusing to believe the argument that Parker was in the service of the United States, but rather that Kelley’s orders to prepare the train were given to railroad officers, who in turn ordered their employees to prepare the train. “Whose orders was Parker obeying?” questioned Atherton. “Not the orders of the military commander directly, but the orders of the railroad officers,” who told Parker to place the cars upon the track. Atherton concluded that Parker “was the employee of a railroad company simply executing such orders as his superior officers in that company told him to execute, while perhaps the company was placing its rolling stock, its cars and locomotives, at the service of the Government.”

Perhaps realizing the futility of convincing the majority of Parker’s service, Wilson moved to amend his own bill “by striking

out the words “‘place on the pension-roll, subject to the provisions and limitations of the pension laws, the name of,’ and in lieu thereof to insert the word ‘pay.’” Wilson’s revised bill would now read...

“That the Secretary of the Interior be, and he is hereby, authorized and directed to pay William C. Parker, of West Virginia, who lost both legs by a railroad collision while transporting Government troops during the late war, under a peremptory order of General B.F. Kelley, the officer then in command of said troops in West Virginia, at the rate of \$25 per month.”

Wilson’s revision satisfied enough of the concerned parties. Wilson asked that the bill be laid aside to be reported to the House of Representatives with the recommendation of the Committee of the Whole House that the bill pass. The vote was taken, with 67 yeas and 15 nays. On December 20, Wilson’s amended bill passed the House of Representatives. After returning to session, on March 3, 1881, the bill passed the Senate, was endorsed by the speaker of the house, the vice-president, and on the final day of his presidency, signed into law by Rutherford B. Hayes, himself a wounded veteran of the Civil War. Parker’s first long-awaited payment was issued in April 1881.<sup>11</sup>

William C. Parker’s \$25.00 per month “payment” supported him through his declining years. Parker lived for several years at Loudenville, near Cameron, West Virginia. In March 1883, Congress approved “an act to amend the pension laws by increasing the pensions of soldiers and sailors who have lost an arm or leg in the service, and for other purposes.”<sup>12</sup> For those soldiers who “lost either an arm at or above the elbow or a leg at or above the knee,” thirty dollars per month was granted. Parker attempted to claim such a disability to receive the five-dollar monthly increase due to his “total disability and helplessness,” but was rejected on the grounds that he was receiving a *payment* rather than a pension.<sup>13</sup>

Parker's indignities continued in 1887 when he again applied for an increase. His original pension application, medical history, affidavits, and supporting documentation that had been provided to Congress in 1880 in support of the bill drafted in his own name were "never returned – are reported lost."<sup>14</sup> With no records to call on, Parker's final appeal for an increase in his payment was again denied. Where pension files for complex cases such as Parker's maintained at the National Archives and Records Administration can easily run into the hundreds of pages, Parker's file amounts to less than a dozen.

Parker relocated back to Wheeling at 2001 Main Street – adjacent to the B.&O. tracks on which he had labored – where he remained until his death on May 23, 1891, nearly thirty years to the day of the accident that cost him his legs and his livelihood. His body was returned to Cameron for burial.

With the loss of the documentation on this case, we may never know the full story of the railroad accident on May 27, 1861, that claimed the life of Samuel Hartley and changed the life of William C. Parker. Whether or not history recalls Parker as the first amputation of the Civil War, his dogged determination to seek just compensation for his sacrifice ensured that Congress recognized his loss as amongst the very earliest of the Civil War. His story illustrates the perils of labor during wartime, and that a surgeon's amputation saw was active not only on the battlefield, but also on the homefront.

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*Jon-Erik Gilot has worked in the field of public history for nearly 20 years. A contributing historian at the popular Emerging Civil War blog since 2018, his research has been published in books, journals, and magazines. His first book for the Emerging Civil War Series, John Brown's Raid, was recently published by Savas Beatie Publishing. Jon-Erik earned a History degree from Bethany College and a Master of Library & Information Science from Kent State University. Today, he serves as curator at the Captain Thomas Espy Grand Army of the Republic Post in Carnegie, Pennsylvania, and works as a business archivist and records manager in Wheeling, West Virginia.*

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## End Notes

- 1 For more information on Hanger, see <https://www.battlefields.org/learn/articles/story-james-e-hanger-amputee-turned-entrepreneur>.
- 2 Prechtel-Klusens, Claire. "A Reasonable Degree of Promptitude: Civil War Pension Application Processing, 1861-1885." *Prologue: Quarterly Publication of the National Archives*. Spring, 2010, Vol. 42, No. 1.
- 3 Reid, Whitelaw. *Ohio in the War: History of the State during the War and the Lives of Her Generals*. Moore, Wilstach & Baldwin: Cincinnati, OH. 1868. 46.
- 4 "Terrible Railroad Accident Near Benwood," *Daily Intelligencer*, Wheeling, Va. May 28, 1861.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 *ibid*; 1860 Census.
- 7 "Congress Resumes," *Wheeling Daily Intelligencer*, Wheeling, WV, January 06, 1892.
- 8 Index to the Reports of Committees of the House of Representatives for the First and Second Sessions of the Forty-Sixth Congress, 1879-'80. Washington, DC: GPO. 1880. 233 – 235.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 William C. Parker pension file. NARA.
- 12 Laws of the United States Governing the Granting of Army and Navy Pensions, Together With Regulations Relating Thereto. Washington, DC: GPO. 1919. 38.
- 13 William C. Parker pension file. NARA
- 14 Ibid.

## The Forks of Wheeling - The Neighborhood of Elm Grove

by Ryan Stanton.

As I started thinking about Elm Grove for this article I began reflecting on my own memories of “the Grove.” Recollections of visiting the Elm Terrace Shopping Plaza for Louis Hot Dogs, Stone Church Video, and even the grand opening of



A group of young adults pose under the Elm Grove Stone Arch or “Humpback” Bridge, ca. 1900. OCPL Archives.

McDonald’s in 1992. During the late 1990s, I at-

tended Bridge Street Middle School, and I often found myself noticing the “hump” bridge, historical markers, old homes, and the nostalgic feel of the school itself with its gigantic hallway clocks and aged woodwork from years of students. I can remember field trips to Elm Grove lanes and when Kruger Street had a Farm Fresh and a Convenient Store.

Today, In the heart of Elm Grove, you'll find a vibrant community supported by dedicated long-standing businesses. Patsy’s Pizza, Reisbeck’s, Wheelcraft, and the iconic Wakims Bar, which is proudly celebrating its 100th anniversary, are not just establishments, but cherished institutions that serve as hubs for socializing and reminiscing. [Ed. As of Oct. 14, 2024, it was announced that Wakims Bar is for sale]. Their rich histories intertwine with the fabric of Elm Grove, shedding light on the community's past and preserving its heritage for future generations.

During my daily journeys, as I meander through the familiar paths of Elm Grove, my gaze often falls upon the serene expanse of Stone Church Cemetery. Established in 1787, those hallowed grounds have been witness to the passage of time and the lives of countless individuals who have contributed to the fabric of this enduring community.

Imagine standing in this very spot over 10,000 years ago and witnessing a bustling prehistoric village. The air would have been filled with the sounds of people going about their daily activities, the clinking of tools, and the scent of wood smoke from a crackling fire. Fast forward to 200 years ago, and you would have heard the rhythmic clatter of wagon wheels and the lively commotion of horses transporting goods along the newly constructed National Road. Jumping ahead to 100 years ago, the distant hum of car engines on the National Road would have signaled the dawn of a new era, while the sounds of a thriving business district echoed through the air. Throughout the ages, Elm Grove has been a safe haven for people to call home and build their lives.

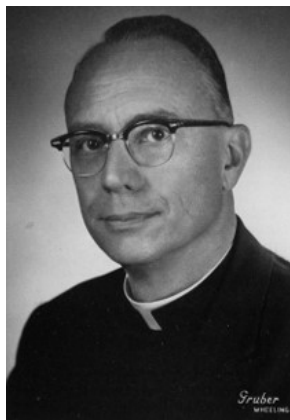
Throughout the years, I have been intrigued by numerous places, people, and events as a history enthusiast. One of my earliest interests in history began when I picked up the book “Elm Grove - A History in Pictures” in 1999, compiled by Jack Maynard. As I flipped through the pages filled with photographs of families, homes, and businesses, I developed a deeper appreciation for history and the Elm Grove community. These photographs transformed a mere location into something meaningful and tangible. This book also helped me realize that history can be explored through photographs. Even though I have never met Jack Maynard, I can confidently say that his dedication to collecting these pictures and documenting family stories has greatly contributed to my understanding and teaching of history. His second book reignited my passion again in 2007 when I was about to graduate from West Liberty State College and truly delve into the study and presentation of history.

I quickly realized there was so much to learn about Elm Grove, as a lot had changed in a short time. Many of the buildings and businesses were unrecognizable due to the construction of Interstate 70, which demolished a large section of Elm Grove's residential and business district.

The boundaries of Elm Grove stretch from Peters Run Road to approximately Wheeling Park, but who were the first to live within those boundaries? Elm Grove has a rich history spanning thousands of years, with a diverse geography and the intersection of two creeks drawing in various cultural groups. The area has hosted at least two prominent prehistoric Native American settlements. Among the earliest inhabitants of Elm Grove were the Paleo Indians, who arrived in the area before 13,000 BCE.

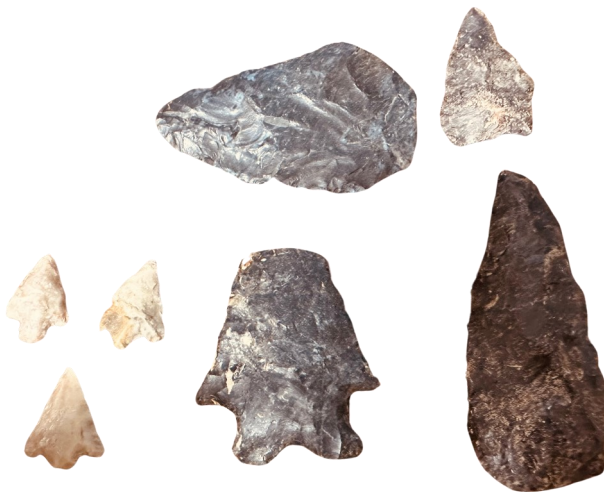
During an archaeological dig from 2002-05, archaeologist James Vosvick helped recover over 45,000 objects dating from the Late Woodland to the Late Prehistoric Period. These artifacts included ceramics, lithic tools, and a diverse faunal assemblage. A thick midden, defined as an old dump of domestic waste that could contain animal bone, human waste, and botanical material, was also discovered. It was found that homes were built in this area from the post molds of houses and unearthed palisaded walls.

During the Early Woodland Period (1,000 B.C.), signs of civilization can be traced back to research conducted by Father Clifford M. Lewis, an avocational archaeologist from Wheeling College. In 1962, Lewis interviewed the descendants of Mr. Isaac Jackson Linton, a farmer in Elm Grove who had a garden at the location of present-day St. Marks Lutheran Church. In that area, there was a mound that he found bothersome, so he had it leveled in 1896. According to Linton's descendants, the mound had a cone-like shape, and over 300 years' worth of tree growth on top of it. As the mound was being leveled, various artifacts such as bone beads, arrowheads, copper earrings, ovate blades, tubular pipes, slate gorgets, hematite, and axes were discovered. The family remembers that the collection of artifacts recovered from the mound



Father Lewis was one of the early editors of the Review.

was sold to an antique dealer in St. Clairsville, Ohio. Unfortunately, records of the artifacts and their whereabouts have disappeared.



Woodland Period projectile points found near Big Wheeling Creek in Elm Grove. S. Duffy collection.

In the vicinity of Bridge Street Middle School, Mill Acres, and Springdale, evidence of ancient campsites from the Archaic period has been unearthed. According to Vosvick, the builders of these campsites were most likely transient hunting and gathering groups. Other than lithic flake materials, no other artifacts were recovered from these sites, which is consistent with the theory that the Native Americans traveling through Elm Grove during this time were from a preceramic time with a nomadic nature, therefore leaving behind very few objects.

The Cedar Rocks Petroglyphs, a notable site originally documented in the 1940s, are believed to have been destroyed over time. These petroglyphs, carved into sandstone and overlooking Elm Grove near the current site of Cardinal Health, depicted a variety of detailed animal figures. Rumors have circulated about the potential preservation of some petroglyphs in a private resi-

dence in Elm Grove, yet no definitive confirmation of this claim has been obtained.

Elm Grove was an ideal location for a prehistoric village due to its advantageous position at the confluence of Big Wheeling and Little Wheeling Creeks. The plentiful wildlife, timber, fish, and fauna in the area made it a perfect place for settlement, both in prehistoric times and today, as Elm Grove continues to thrive due to its



Monument Place postcard showing the Shepherd Mansion. OCPL Archives.

prominent location. Additionally, this area of Ohio County was noted for being safer from larger, warlike groups that would have used more commonly traveled paths.

Elm Grove has undergone many transitions and name changes over the years. During the frontier days, David Shepherd received a Royal Land Grant to claim the Forks of Wheeling Creek in 1774. One year later, Shepherd constructed a stockaded blockhouse and mill on the property. In 1777 (known as the Bloody 7's), Fort Shepherd was attacked and burned down. It would be rebuilt two more times, in 1786 and 1790. David Shepherd's son, Moses, inherited the land and, along with his wife Lydia, built a stone mansion on the site of Fort Shepherd in 1789. This mansion

still stands today and has been owned by the Shriners organization since 1926.

Moses Shepherd was known for his engineering and construction skills and, along with Lydia, had a desire to expand the area into a thriving community. Through their political connections and numerous trips to Washington D.C., they befriended Congressman Henry Clay. Moses was awarded a contract to construct America's first highway through present-day West Virginia. This led to some controversy and even a feud, as is often the case in neighborhoods.

In 1811, the Feay brothers, local entrepreneurs with a vision, undertook the construction of a stone house that still stands to this day in the neighborhood of Burkham Court, nestled just off Peters Run Road. This stone house was crafted to serve as a welcoming tavern for travelers along the National Road. The brothers strategically oriented the house to face the Northeast, aligning it with their anticipation of the road's projected path. However, their foresight was not enough to account for the Shepherd's ambitions. The Shepherds, with their own aspirations in mind, altered the road's course, bypassing the Feay brothers' house and instead directing it toward their stone mansion for all to marvel at while also building their competing tavern. Although slightly off the original path, the Feay family still used their stone house as a tavern.

Moses Shepherd constructed a large "S" bridge that is no longer standing across Little Wheeling Creek just west of Peters Run Road to route the road toward their mansion. As the road approached the corner of their estate, it took a sharp 90-degree turn. Moses built a second stone bridge to cross the fork of Little and Big Wheeling Creeks. This bridge, built in 1817, is the oldest one in the state. It is currently undergoing an extensive restoration project, scheduled to be completed in 2024. Both the changing of the route and the building of these two bridges

were unauthorized by the Federal government, and the Shepherds would never be reimbursed for the cost.

The area was originally called the “Forks of Wheeling.” However, when the Shepherds established their plantation, which included a mill, tavern, and general store, Moses renamed the town Shepherdstown in 1806 and then Shepherdsville in 1822. In 1858, due to the abundance of Elm Trees in the area, the name was changed to Elm Grove. Unfortunately, the original elms died a few years later due to a blight.

The Shepherd’s Stone mansion was a place where famous politicians rested. It entertained Congressman Henry Clay and two Presidents, Andrew Jackson and James K. Polk, as well as the revolutionary Marquis de Lafayette on their travels.

Today, the most significant tree in Elm Grove is a witness tree located at the eastern corner of the old Shepherd mansion. This sycamore tree, at least three hundred years old, has witnessed Native American history, frontier life, the rise of Elm Grove as a business community, the construction of Interstate 70, and present-day observations. Despite being largely cut down, the stump of the tree continues to sprout leaves.

Elm Grove was previously the location of the County Infirmary and Poor Farm. In 1870, the county bought 220 acres of land near Big Wheeling Creek. The infirmary building stood where Bridge Street Middle School is located today. Constructing the infirmary required building an iron bridge to cross Wheeling Creek for easier access to the property. Although the original bridge no longer exists, it is known today as the Junior Ave. bridge.

In 1917, a significant change took place as the county decided to relocate the poor farm to the Schmulbach estate at Roney’s Point. This estate was originally owned by Henry Schmulbach, a well-known entrepreneur and brewer. Following his passing in 1915, his wife Pauline Bertschy inherited the entire estate and subsequently decided to sell it.



County commissioners believed that Elm Grove was a "growing community," and that the poor farm should be situated in a more rural area with land suitable for cultivation and farming.



The Poor Farm, ca 1889. OCPL Archives.

The Schmulbach estate was purchased for \$125,000 and the infirmary building was used as the first Elm Grove Junior High until the early 1920s.

Elm Grove played a crucial role in the development of transportation, serving as a vital stop along the National Road for weary travelers and stagecoaches. The area nurtured numerous transportation businesses, including the JL Kimmons carriage shop, which was situated near the present location of Pizza Hut. The Kimmons family was known for their expertise in wagon repair, and horseshoeing, and later expanded to selling building materials. Like many other business owners in Elm Grove, the Kimmons family resided within walking distance of their shop, creating a close-knit community.

Elm Grove also played a vital role as a railway stop for passengers and cargo. Today this can be seen by the remnants of railroad viaducts and the old Elm Grove train station that is current-

ly being used as a veterinary's office.

The automobile would have a huge impact on the layout of Elm Grove and many businesses would thrive from the traffic that passed through. From service stations, auto repair, hotels, and restaurants - Elm Grove took care of everyday local commuters and weary travelers.

In the 20th century, Elm Grove experienced a significant transformation following the post-World War II boom. The landscape of the area shifted as numerous old farms were repurposed into housing developments. Notable examples of this transformation include the evolution of Leopold Miller's farm into Mill Acres and the conversion of Elm Terrace, originally belonging to HP Schmitt, into the Elm Terrace Shopping Center, established in 1964. The shopping center, which now stands as a prominent commercial hub, previously served as HP Schmitt's alfalfa field before its redevelopment. Additionally, the present-day location of the Elm Grove Crossing Mall once referred to as Thornburg's Bottom, was also the location of Wheeling Machine.

Through photographs, Elm Grove appears to be an all-American town, where children, teenagers, and adults can roam freely and safely. This was evident in their visits to the mom-and-pop stores along Main Street, the Princess movie theater, the Elm Grove Drive-in, and the Big Dip Inn for recreation.

When reflecting on Elm Grove as a community and neighborhood, it's important to acknowledge that its history extends far beyond the arrival of the Shepherds or the construction of the National Road. Elm Grove boasts a rich legacy that stretches back to prehistoric times and encompasses the vibrant cultures of Native Americans. This neighborhood has been a witness to thousands of years of human civilization.

*Ryan Stanton is a 2002 graduate of Wheeling Park High School. In 2006 he graduated from West Liberty State College with a bachelor's degree in history and later earned a master's degree in social studies education from West Virginia University. For 15 years, Ryan has been a social studies teacher at Wheeling Park High School where he teaches AP U.S. government and politics and the history of Wheeling.*

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Elm Grove storefronts, ca. 1927. OCPL Archives.

## **North Wheeling At The Turn Of The Twentieth Century by David T. Javersak**

To those not familiar with present-day Wheeling, the descriptive “North Wheeling” seemingly refers to Warwood. Long-time residents, however, know North Wheeling to be the area between North Park Road and the Fort Henry Bridge, but for this essay, North Wheeling will extend to 10th Street.

### **The Neighborhood**

The primary roads in 1900 were Main Street and Market Street from 4th to 10th Street. Other addresses were Pike, Coal, 1st, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th, and 10th. Construction of I-70 eliminated most of the 900 blocks of Main and Market.

What was the North Wheeling of 1902, its residences, its industries, and its commercial parts?

Wheeling was home to a much larger population in 1900 (38,878) than in the census of 2020 (26,896). The North Wheeling neighborhood’s population was about 4,800, and there was a mix of residences from tenements to the mansions of many of the city’s business and civic leaders, especially in the 800 and 900 blocks of Main Street. A compendium of Wheeling’s elite families, *The Blue Book*, lists three pages (the most in this early 20th Century edition) of names still familiar today: Stifel, W.A. Wilson, Alfred Paull, Christian Hess, Henry List, Fred Faris, and Clara Welty. These large Victorian structures were built in various styles—Queen Anne, Second Empire, or French Renaissance—and many in the 800 block still survive, while most of the 900 block is gone.

Still standing, however, are the Virginia Apartments, designed by Frederick Faris and completed in 1902. Including tenements, flats, boarding houses, upscale apartments like The Severn on 10th, homes atop family businesses, worker homes, and the Victorian mansions at least 92 domiciles stood on Main Street alone. With this large population in North Wheeling, which encom-



From Wheeling landmarks, 1903. Nicoll's Art Store. OCPL Archives.

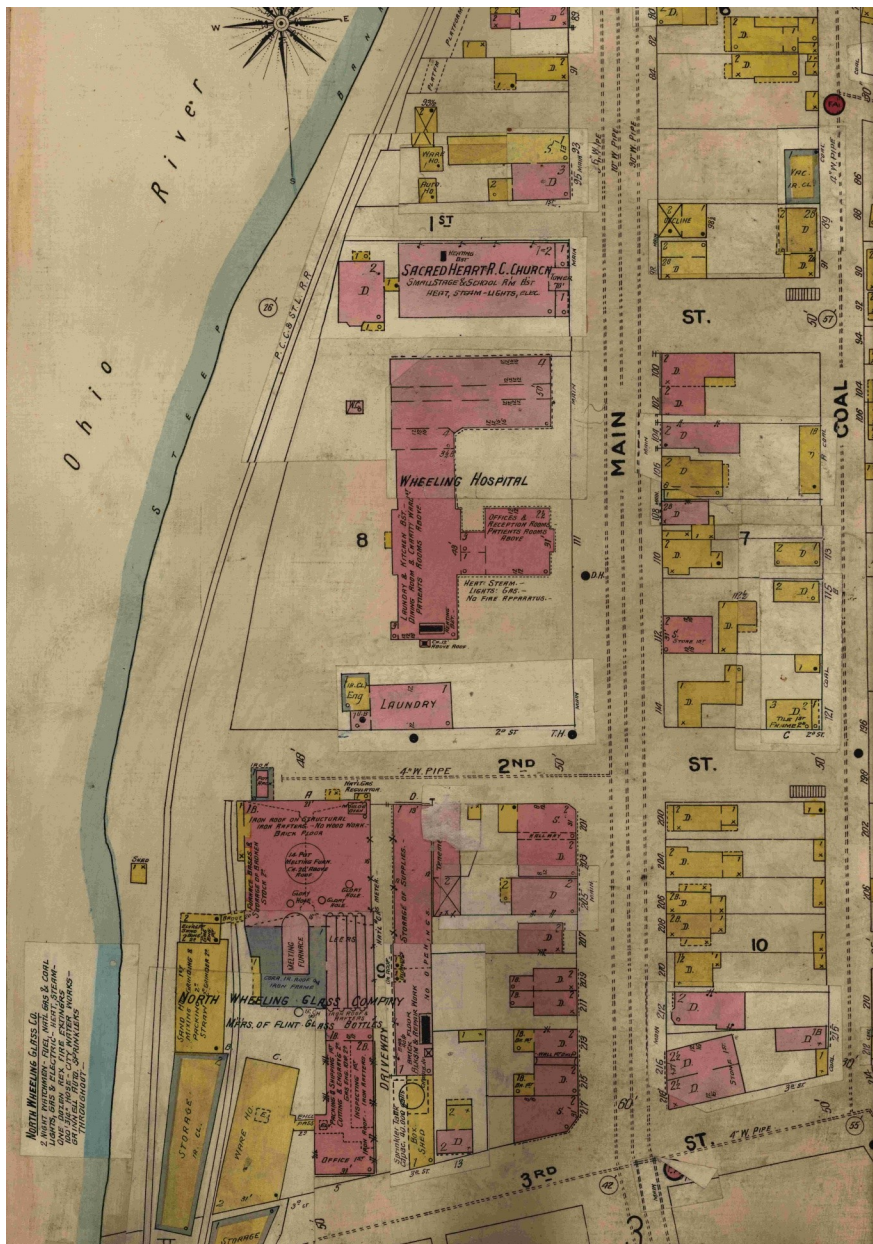
& Co. (shoes); Kirk's Photo at 1005 Main; Florence; Crittenton Rescue Home at 849 Main; Wheeling Hospital at 109 Main; 24 grocers; 1 wholesale grocer; 4 barbers; 12 boarding houses; 6 butchers and meat markets; 1 bone mill on Grandview; 12 dress-makers; 12 saloons; 3 harness makers; 2 stock yards; 1 cobbler; 1 wood working shop and paint store; 1 drug store; 3 liveries; 2 carriage shops; 2 public schools; and an orchard east of Market St.

## Schools

Wheeling schools were city operations until 1933, when county schools became the norm in West Virginia, and they were segregated until 1954. On the corner of Fifth and Main stood Washington Public School, an elementary institution with 647 students, a principal and 17 teachers. A few blocks south, where the Montani Towers stands, was Lincoln School with an enrollment of 130

passed the city's first ward (1st to north side of 9th), there were different shops, stores, and businesses to meet the community's needs.

The 1902 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map showed the following: White Swan Laundry at 30-32 Tenth; Wheeling Creamery at 1006; Main Wheeling Decorating at 447 National Road; N. Hotel & Sample Room (wines, liquors, & cigars) at 401 Main; Alexander



1902 Sandborn Fire Insurance Map of North Wheeling showing Wheeling Hospital and North Wheeling Glass.



No. 66 ETCHED.  
"Before Taking."



Cuts of No. 66.

Showing, Opposite Sides\* of Same Bottle.

No. 66 Etched, per doz. \$3 50  
 No. 66 Plain, " " 2 50  
 Capacity 24 oz.  
 Four Dozen in Barrel.



No. 66 ETCHED.  
"After Taking."



No. 73 ETCHED.  
Capacity 22 oz.



No. 97 ETCHED.  
 No. 97 Etched, per doz. \$3 50  
 No. 97 Plain, " " 2 50  
 Capacity 23 oz.  
 Four Dozen in Barrel.

Nos. 72 and 73 Etched, per doz. \$4 50  
 Nos. 72 and 73 Plain, " " 3 50  
 Four Dozen in Barrel.  
 Caps lift off.



No. 72 ETCHED.  
Capacity 22 oz.

students of African ancestry, as were its teachers and principal. To put these numbers into perspective. Wheeling High's enrollment was only 270 because the majority of children in the early 20th Century did not complete high school; they became employees at the many factories and mills in what was then the most industrial city in West Virginia and the upper Ohio Valley.

## **Sports**

Sports were not part of education systems in that time: there were no playing fields of any kind on the maps of the early 1900s. There were several athletic clubs: the White Lily Athletic Club, North End Athletic Club, and the Authentic Athletic Club. The best place to find physical education was the Turner Society at 909 Market Street. Founded in Germany in 1811, the Turners came to the United States after the failed Revolution of 1848, and because Wheeling became home to many German immigrants, a group was established here. The Turners advocated gymnastics as a sport, and its members advocated physical education in schools. To promote these ideas, they sponsored public festivals to showcase their sport. A good deal of entertainment in the early 20th Century was home based: music, especially piano and voice, billiards, and cards to name a few. In the mansions in the 800 and 900 blocks of Main, for example, many ladies from these homes often met to play cards, like the North Main St. Euchre Club.

## **Businesses**

Only a block north of Washington School, at Fourth and Main, was the internationally-known J. L. Stifel & Sons calico works with 70,000 square feet of floor space and its 200 foot high smoke stack. The Stifel Boot trademark was known in Asia, Africa, Latin America, as well as Europe and the United States. During World War I and II, the factory converted to wartime production, supplying clothing for American armed forces and European allies. During WWII, the company was the nation's largest supplier of military textiles, earning it five "E" Awards from the War Department. The first of these awards was the first granted to any





J. L. Stifel & Sons Calico Works, Fabric Inspection, Circa 1950. OCPL Archives.

West Virginia corporation and the first given to any American textile company. Stifel & Sons remained a fixture of North Wheeling until its closure in 1957.

Nearby, W.A. Wilson, whose family lived at 500 Main Street, operated a huge planing mill and lumber yard. This company, now located on the Peninsula, was founded in 1840, making it among Wheeling's oldest extant business. Most of the company was situated on the east side of Main, but the lumber yard on the west

side held 400,000 pieces of stock. In addition to its huge store of lumber, Wilson planed and sawed unfinished stock and made sashes and blinds. Once advertising itself as the "largest paint house" in West Virginia, it remains a family-owned enterprise.

In 1878, North Wheeling Glass opened in an area bounded by 2nd and 3rd streets. Until its closure in the early 1920s, it produced various kinds of bottles: prescription vials, pocket flasks, and very whimsical glassware: cartoonish faces, bulldogs, elephants, police clubs, ears of corn, and scantily clad women. The Ohio County Public Library once displayed a number of the rarest of these bottles, from the collection of Thad Podratsky (see page 30).

Only a block south, at 4th and Alley, across the street from Stifel, the Riverside Pottery operated a large ceramic business with 8 kilns for firing its creations, plus a laboratory, a mould shop, and various storage facilities for the pressed ware produced there.

## Transportation

The Wheeling of 1902 was a very compact city, and its transportation system was the best in West Virginia. A trolley line ran

along Main Street and tied the city to Warwood and towns to the north. The 1902 Sanborn shows no garages or parking lots, but there was the Elig Carriage Company at 937 Market; the Schramm Harness and Collar company at 1043 Main; the Coffland Company stock pens; the Goodhoe stockyards; the Otterson Livery at Market and 9th; as well as the Taylor & Lee Livery adjacent to Turner Hall. Horse-drawn transportation still reigned supreme. Down along the Ohio River, the P.C.C. & STL. RR ran north to Holidays Cove (Weirton did not yet exist) and south to Parkersburg. Nearby there was a loco house, scales, a storage facility for railroad supplies, a large railyard to store rolling stock, and a turntable. Just to the north, near the Top Mill, the Wheeling and Lake Erie Bridge crossed the Ohio to Martins Ferry, coming from the Peninsula area by way of two tunnels thru Wheeling Hill: the Terminal Bridge. Still in 1902, steam-powered river boats, for cargo transfer and passage service, were important parts of the city's transportation network with the landings stretching from 9th St to 23rd St. The National Road, not yet renamed US Route 40, came down Wheeling Hill to 7th and by taking Main or Market to 10th St. travelers could cross the Suspension Bridge to Wheeling Island. The facilities for maintaining wagons and tending to horses existed between 9th and 10th. Today some of that space is occupied by the city's parking garage on 10th.

### **City Services**

In the early 1890s, Wheeling built a waterworks north and west of the Top Mill. This facility, designed by the city's Frederick Faris, pumped water from the Ohio River to a reservoir above 8th St; it operated until 1925, when a new plant was erected in Warwood. (Warwood was not part of Wheeling until 1920). In the 600 block of Main stood the Vigilant Fire Engine House, built in 1891 by the North Wheeling business, W.A. Wilson & Son. It housed two large pumpers, pulled by horses stabled on the same property. The structure remains intact, but currently un-

used. The ward had some less appealing municipal services: a garbage plant and the city's dump, east of 1st St. At the east end of 8th was the city's workhouse and its guardhouse.

## **Churches**

Of Wheeling's many churches, several were located in North Wheeling, although many of the well-to-do families, as well as German immigrants and Catholics, attended downtown churches like First Presbyterian, Fourth Street Methodist, St. Matthew's Episcopal, First English Evangelical Lutheran, St. James Lutheran, St. Alphonsus German Catholic Church, or St. Joseph's Cathedral. The Wheeling City Directory 1901-02 lists three churches in this ward: North Street M. E. Church on the corner of 5th and Market, the Wayman A. M. E. Chapel on the northeast corner of Market and Alley 6, and the Ebenezer Church at 45 10th Street. Before the Sacred Heart Church was built at 1st and Main, Catholic worshippers could also attend Wheeling Hospital's Chapel.

## **Modern North Wheeling**

Change – history's only constant – came quickly to North Wheeling: liveries, stockyards, and carriages were replaced by automobiles, trucks, garages, and parking lots. W.A. Wilson moved; North Wheeling Glass closed as did Riverside Pottery, and Stifel & Sons lost too many sales to new clothing styles and foreign competition. Families also moved: to Woodsdale, Pleasant Valley, and other neighborhoods along National Road, renamed U.S. Route 40, soon a major east-west highway in the fast growing labyrinth of American roadways.

In 2023, only a few businesses still exist: Carney & Sloan, National Tire & Wheel, East Wheeling Clay Works, and a few small enterprises. Wheeling Hospital now sits along Interstate 70, with a new housing development in its former space at 109 Main. There are too many vacant lots and dilapidated structures.

The vitality of the neighborhood has largely faded, but there is one vibrant place on Main: the Bethlehem Apostolic Temple led by Bishop Darrell Cummings. The Temple distributes food to the needy and at Thanksgiving, Christmas, Easter, and the start of the new school year provides holiday foodstuffs and school supplies to area families. At its weekly services, this most diverse group of congregants in the city try their best to put their faith into positive, productive actions.

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*Dr. David Javersak grew up in Weirton, West Virginia, and was educated at West Liberty State College, the University of Hawaii and West Virginia University. He is dean emeritus of liberal arts and professor emeritus of history at West Liberty University.*

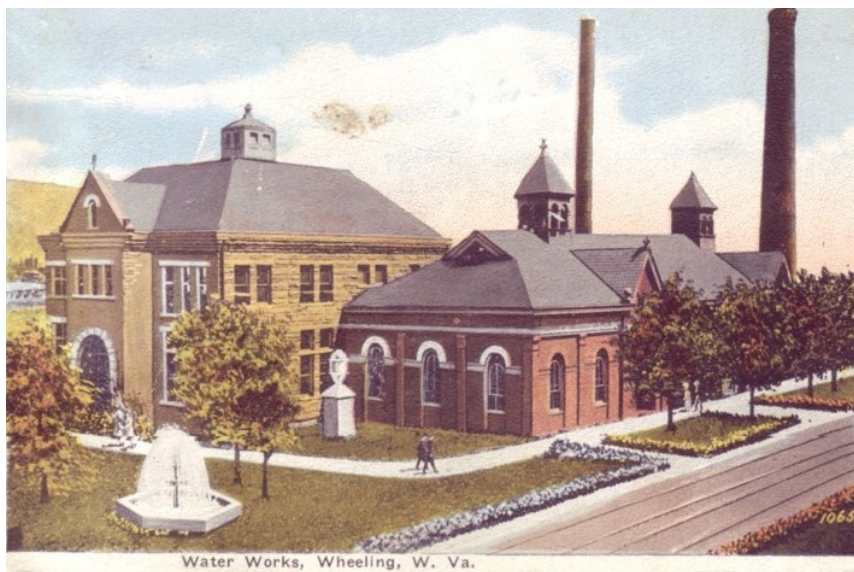
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Website of Ohio County Public Library, [www.ohiocountylibrary.org](http://www.ohiocountylibrary.org)



Water Works, Wheeling, W. Va.

OCPL Archives.

**CENTRE FOUNDRY,**  
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**CASTINGS & MACHINERY**  
 OF ALL DESCRIPTIONS FOR  
**ROLLING MILLS,**  
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Old and new promo material for Centre Foundry. OCPL Archives.



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**Compacted Graphite  
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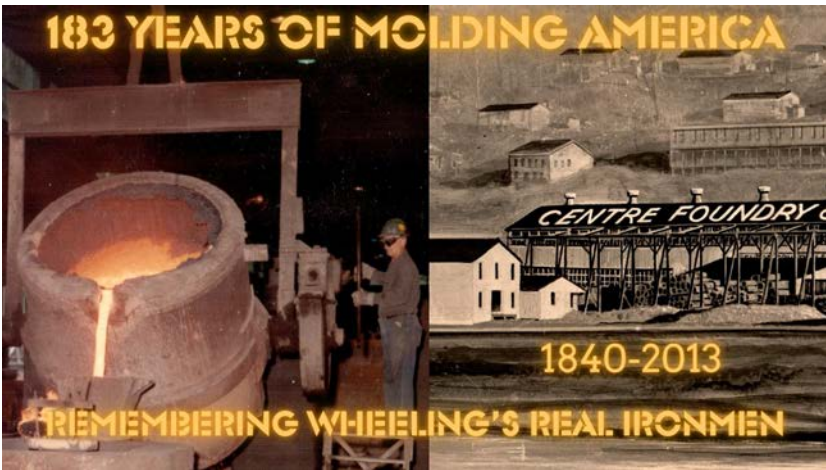
Centre Foundry, in the forefront of compacted graphite technology, has 60 years of experience producing ingot moulds.  
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## 183 Years of Molding America: Remembering Wheeling's Real Ironmen by Seán P. Duffy



Most of we kids who grew up in Warwood passed a place called Centre Foundry & Machine Company thousands of times without really knowing what went on behind its sun-bleached corrugated metal walls. Turns out his remarkable little plant had been doing business in Wheeling for nearly two centuries by 2023 when that business was unceremoniously ended.

The foundry was born in 1840 when Martin Van Buren was president and Rebecca Harding, who would later expose the harshness of life for workers in the iron mills as a groundbreaking writer, was a nine-year-old child living in Centre Wheeling, near the location of the foundry, where some of the men she later wrote about who would “skulk along like beaten hounds” likely walked to work. There was as yet no wire bridge suspended over the Ohio River and Wheeling would remain a Virginia city for another quarter century.

Over time, even as its men forged monstrosly heavy iron castings and ingots, Centre Foundry crafted, for example, cannon balls for Union troops,<sup>1</sup> nail machine parts for La Belle,<sup>2</sup> castings for the Suspension Bridge,<sup>3</sup> decorative iron trim for shutters and doors during the restoration of West Virginia Independence Hall,<sup>4</sup>

and a life-sized steelworker who now stands in Steubenville.<sup>5</sup>

As the keystone of a region known as “The Workshop of the World,”<sup>6</sup> Wheeling made quite an array of “things,” such as glass, tile, steamboats, stogies, and beer. But what should be first on any list is what Centre Foundry did best—they made iron. Those laborers were, with all due respect to the beloved semi-professional football club, Wheeling’s REAL Ironmen.

### The Iron Archive



Frank VanSickle

Sadly, in Sept. 2023, operations at this time-tested foundry came to a screeching halt. And in May, 2024, the Ohio County Public Library’s Archives team and the video team from Wheeling Heritage had the privilege of a guided tour of what was left of Centre Foundry with veteran guide



Frank VanSickle. See video of our tour by Johnathon Porter and Dillon Richardson of Wheeling Heritage.

Centre Foundry’s last owners then donated numerous old patterns as well as a rich collection of archival photographs, blueprints, ephemera, and ledgers that are now part of the Library’s archival collections. Many of these artifacts have been installed in our new exhibit, “Molding America: Wheeling’s Real Ironmen” alongside artifacts from OVGH and OVMC under the banner: “A Fond Farwell to Two Wheeling Stalwarts.”

Stalwarts indeed. But how did we arrive at Centre Foundry — one of our city’s most durable industrial businesses —closing?

## Baggs Foundry

It all started in 1840, when James and H. Andrew Baggs erected a foundry on the corner of John and Fourth Streets (now 16th and Chapline). Baggs Foundry and its 10 employees produced small iron castings using sand molds to make things like iron stoves and boiler grates.<sup>7</sup> The name "Centre Foundry" was in use by Baggs as early as August 1853.<sup>8</sup>

In 1855, the company was purchased by Alexander and Charles Cecil, who moved it to what is now 2011 Main Street in Centre Wheeling. After the Civil War, with J.R. McCourtney and Edwin Hobbs running things, cast iron and heavy machinery was manufactured for rolling and cut nail mills, as well as parts and engines for steamboats. The foundry was incorporated in 1881.<sup>9</sup>

To make "gray iron castings,"<sup>10</sup> Centre Foundry used patterns, typically made of wood, packed into an iron box known as a "drag" and filled with special hardening silica "green sand" and clay. When the pattern was removed, a void remained that was then fired and hardened using a "blackening agent." A cupola furnace was used to melt iron. Master moulder William McElroy led the effort to make large castings as well as cast iron house fronts and gates.<sup>11</sup>

By 1881, an English immigrant pattern-maker named John Young had acquired a controlling interest in the company. Though Young died in 1892, the Young family would own the company until 1979, when Dyson-Kissner-Moran Corporation took over.<sup>12</sup>

During the late 19th-century, Centre Foundry continued making nail machines, castings, rolls, and nail plate shear, shifting to molds and castings of 500 pounds and heavier after the turn of the century. Advertisements of the period boasted "cast-iron house fronts," "ornamental fencing," "window lintels and sills," "ore pulverizers," "nail plate sheers," "gearing, pulleys, and all kinds of machinery castings."<sup>13</sup>





The Main Street location. OCPL Archives.



Crew at the Main Street location. All photos, OCPL Archives.



Crew at the Warwood location, 1928. All photos, OCPL Archives.



The Warwood location, 1955. All photos, OCPL Archives.

In 1923, the foundry moved from Main Street to its 11-acre site in South Warwood, retaining the name “Centre.” By 1927, the company employed 85 men and made 20 tons of castings per year. During this time, they made repair parts to the specifications of purchasers all over the United States. By 1928, employment had increased to 100 and by 1938, the company employed 150 people making 800 train car loads of cast iron pots, stamping and drawing dies, and machinery castings per year.<sup>14</sup>

### **The CWW Group**

In 1964, Centre Foundry acquired Washington Mould, Machine, and Foundry of Washington, Pennsylvania and in 1967 Wadsworth Foundry of Wadsworth, Ohio. This expansion significantly diversified the product portfolio for Centre Foundry to include ingot molds, massive grey iron castings of up to 70 tons, slag pots, and blast furnace runners. Yet by 1979, both subsidiaries were closed, largely because they could not competitively meet new environmental standards.

At the Warwood location, Centre Foundry long produced ingot molds and castings, primarily for the steel industry. “That’s what my father did when he first started there,” explained Frank. “Ingot molds were used by the steel companies. They could pour their alloys [and] steel into it...and what was good about that was, once it cooled, it would shrink. The iron molds that we sent to them, they would dissipate the heat of the steel, and also could be re-used over and over...and that was the reason why we were so good at what we did.”<sup>15</sup>

“The Specialty Steel companies ... could take their product and roll it into different sizes to make railcar wheels, or depending on the alloys in these rolls, they might be making surgical instruments, or space shuttle parts, airplane parts, appliances, etc.”<sup>16</sup>

Even through the 1960s, the melting facilities consisted of old-style cupolas. During the nineteenth century through mid to late twentieth centuries, cast iron was produced using coke and lime-

stone to melt pig iron at 2,300 degrees in preparation for casting. This was not a clean process, producing prodigious amounts of air pollution. But a cleaner method existed.<sup>17</sup>

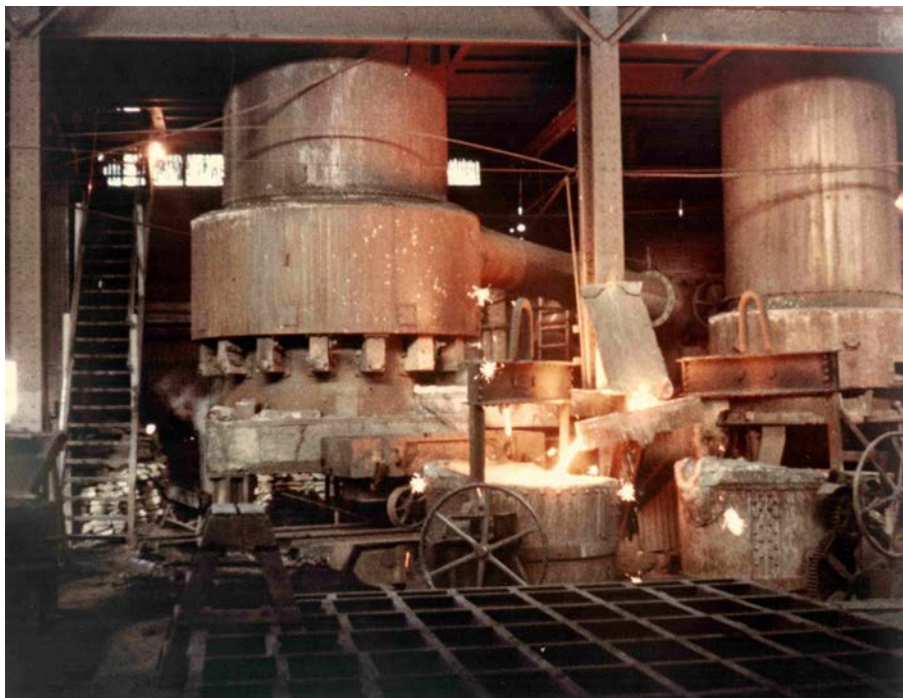
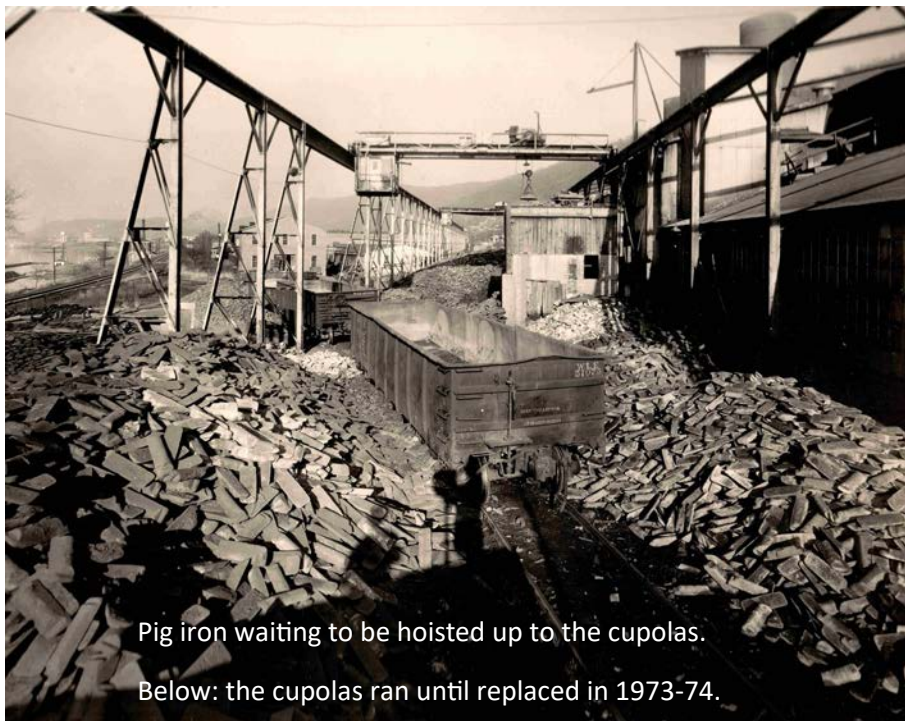


The cupola furnaces still stand at Centre Foundry. An effort is being made to save one for display.

### **Cleaner Air - Replacing the Cupolas**

In 1973-74, two modern, clean-burning, electric Ajax Channel Induction furnaces with a total capacity of 55 tons, were installed on more than 2 million pounds of concrete. They were supplied with electricity from power stations located both north and south of the plant. This eliminated cupola use (for the most part) and helped the foundry to meet federal air quality standards under the Clean Air Act.<sup>18</sup> The original transformer is still there today. “69,000 volts come down off the hill from AEP,” Frank recalled.<sup>19</sup>

Note: An effort is underway involving the author, former Centre Foundry employees, and others, to save one of the cupolas to pre-





## Centre Foundry & Machine Co.

Founded in 1840, Centre Foundry & Machine Company's Wheeling Plant has become one of the nation's top manufacturers of massive grey-and-ductile-iron castings for the steel, rolling-mill, and alloy-producing industries.

A subsidiary plant in Washington, Pennsylvania, adds to Centre's flexibility with facilities for casting and heat-treating items of

higher production. Complete machine-shop facilities are available.

A recently added Electric Furnace Division at Centre's Wheeling location provides for customers requiring limited quantities of specialty castings in materials from grey and ductile iron to more exotic Ni-Hard, Ni-Resist, Cobalt

A modern Quality-Control Laboratory,

featuring atomic absorption analysis and photomicrography, permits all of Centre's plants to better serve its customers through rigid quality standards.

P.O. Box 4068 Warwood  
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(304) 277-3600



GRAY, DUCTILE AND ALLOY IRON CASTINGS UP TO 80 TONS  
MACHINING AND ASSEMBLY OF FINISHED PRODUCTS

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The new electric furnace, 1973-74.

serve it as a monument to our industrial heritage, much like the Clinton blast furnace at Station Square in Pittsburgh. For more information, scan at right.



## **The Iron Hall**

By 1973, Centre Foundry had its own lab for testing sand and iron. By that same year, Centre Foundry workers had spent two years experimenting with the original plans of architect Ammi B. Young to reproduce cast iron trim on exterior steel doors for the rebirth of Wheeling's Custom House as West Virginia Independence Hall. Although the trim could not be reproduced in the same way it was originally created in Italy, with skilled craftsmen creating patterns in wood (the modern version used plastic), the end result was remarkably accurate. After the iron trim was installed on the steel, the entire door was painted to resemble wood grain, as was done with the original doors.<sup>20</sup>

## **Dump Kids**

That same year, Centre Foundry donated some of its property at North 24th Street in Warwood for the city to build a playground, behind which, over a small embankment of sand there was a huge sand pit where Centre foundry dumped sand and blocks of petrified sand from their molds. It was full of huge lumps of what looked like black glass [according to Frank, these were "slag caps" or "taps"—basically hardened slag material that had been skimmed off the iron. Frank had something to do with that mess].

"My dad was a truck driver for a long time before he became 'company.'" he said, "And I went with him as a little kid...He'd back that truck up and he'd have these slag caps—we call them taps—and he would travel up to 24th Street and dump those. He backed up to the edge and scared me to death. I thought he was gonna go over the edge...When it would slide out, it would

bounce on the back end and I'm thinking, 'Oh my goodness! We're going over! So, that was a treat.'<sup>21</sup>

The effect this dumping created was that of an apocalyptic desert landscape that proved irresistible for us kids. We played in it at every opportunity -- and always for longer than we played in the playground itself. We dump kids are proud of our title.

### **The Process**

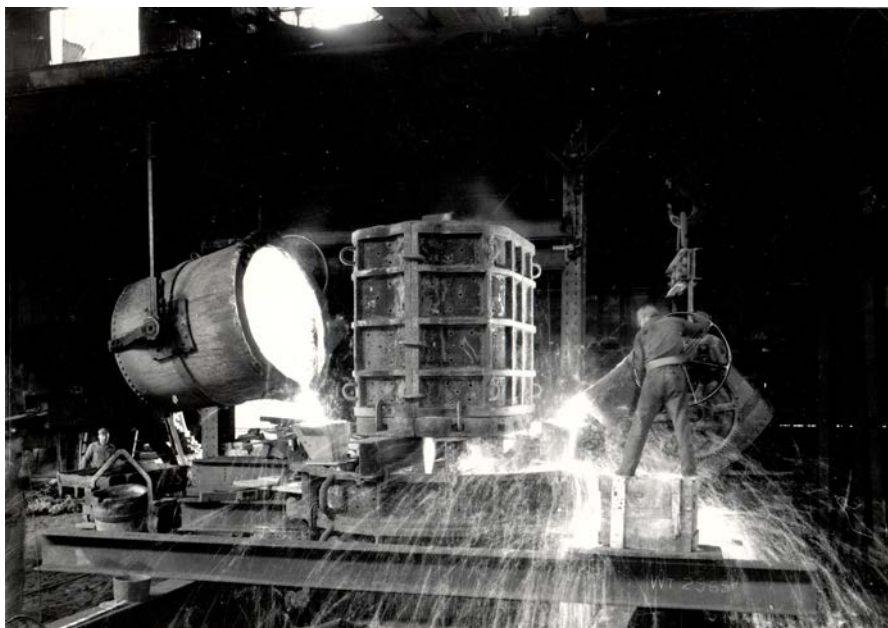
Back at Centre Foundry, Cast iron was refined around the clock from "buttons" and scrap steel from blast furnaces and factories all over the Ohio Valley and Pittsburgh area. Hoisted by cranes outfitted with huge electromagnets, this iron was dropped into the vertical channels of the furnaces, a process known as "charging." Alloys were added to adjust the chemistry and a method called "pushing" was used to break the crust on top of the molten iron to release impurities. "We had [electro] magnets there that picked up anywhere from 10,000 pounds [of scrap] to 65,000 – I've seen a magnet pick up," Frank said.<sup>22</sup>

When all is balanced, the liquid iron is poured into a ladle or "tipped." The ladle is ten feet in circumference, holding up to 50,000 pounds of molten iron. Impurities are again skimmed off using a wooden hoe. The iron is then carefully poured into a mold with risers to allow air to escape and left to cool. The molten iron was poured into a runner cup, which was lined with 4-inch ceramic tile that ran down inside the flask. The tile left a void so they could pour the iron down and it came in at the bottom. After cooling, with the sand, risers, and drag removed the casting was then cooled and cleaned by a "chipper," whose job it was to remove sand and various coatings that were present on a casting. In the old days, hand tools such as a hammer and a chisel were used. In modern times a pneumatic hammer, chisel, or grinding wheel.<sup>23</sup>

In 1979, with the Wadsworth subsidiary already closed, Dyson-Kissner-Moran Corporation bought out Centre Foundry and its







Pouring, skimming, and ladling molten iron over the years.



remaining subsidiary, Washington Mould, ending the Young family's 98-year ownership.<sup>24</sup>

### **The Steelworker**

In 1989, Centre Foundry had the honor of making a tribute to the metal workers of the Ohio Valley. Created by artist Dimitrius Akis, the "Ohio Valley Steelworker Statue" was cast at Centre Foundry. Depicting a steelworker wearing silvers and pouring molten steel from a ladle, it stands near the Steubenville Public Library. The Steelworker has an iron rod with a test cup at the end, trying to get a sample.<sup>25</sup>



In the 1990s and early 2000s Wheeling-Pittsburgh Steel upgraded to continuous casters, meaning they no longer needed Centre Foundry, which was left with only smaller, specialty steel companies as customers.<sup>26</sup>

Frank told us about a surprising additional function of Center Foundry: it was used by law enforcement agencies to dispose of drugs, weapons, and other contraband when a case was concluded and the evidence was no longer needed. The FBI even used it to dispose of files from the infamous Paul Hankish prosecutions.<sup>27</sup>

### **The Old Street Car Barn**

One of the stops on our tour was at what used to be (until 1949), the streetcar barn for Wheeling Traction Co. Even though it went unnoticed for all those years, there was still a sign up in the rafters on which could barely be seen the words "PULL DOWN TROLLEY." Of course, the "trolley" is actually the pole(s) on top of the streetcar connecting to the overhead electrical grid that powers the car to move along the track. So the sign was telling crew to lower the trolley before backing into the barn, which once

had trenches that allowed mechanics to access the bottom of each vehicle for repairs. Amazingly, that sign had been up there collecting a thick layer of dust for decades, and now it is part of the OCPL's transportation exhibit.<sup>28</sup>

### **Centre Foundry and the United Steelworkers**

On September 24, 1952, Centre Foundry employees, after 82 years without a union to represent their interests, voted to join the United Steelworkers of America. Local 4842 was born with Stanley Wilson elected first president. When the company ceased operations on August 31, 2023, 37 union employees lost their jobs. "I was in the union for 25 years." Frank stated. "Had I not had the injuries I had I probably would have stayed there, but my back wouldn't take it. Foundry work was very hard...My shoulders were shot. And I took a foreman's position... I got along with everybody. I was ex-president of the union. I knew the contract... and one thing I'm proud to say is that in all the years that I was 'in the company' I negotiated every contract – never had a strike."<sup>29</sup>

### **The End of the Iron Age**

Trends with steel and specialty steel had been spiraling downward in recent years. "[Our customers were] all steel companies." Frank explained. "Wheeling Steel; Wheeling-Pittsburgh; Weirton; US Steel; Standard Steel. And of course, over the years, once the steel companies started to go out of business, you had major companies like US Steel and Standard Steel. Republic went out. We used to make molds for Shenango. They're all gone."<sup>30</sup>

But the sudden end of Centre Foundry took employees by surprise. Many felt blindsided. On August 31, 2023, just one day after signing a contract extension with the union employees, the company announced that Centre Foundry and Machine "would be ceasing operations" because the company had been sold. The painful process of emptying the foundry of its iron, patterns, and tools began.<sup>31</sup>

## The Last Pour



Last pour at Centre Foundry. 09-01-2023.

Watch video of The Last Job Ever Poured at Centre Foundry. Courtesy Frank VanSickle.



Asked for his parting thoughts, Frank said: "I'm gonna miss the place. It's heart-wrenching to know that it's not a foundry anymore. All the patterns are gone, all the scrap is gone, the employees have moved on..." His fondest memory was when employee Dave Zdonczyk was saved by CPR training used by Donnie Waddle, electrician Carl Miller, and a security guard.

The men got awards for saving Dave when he had a heart attack in shower. “You know,” Frank recalled, “when you work with these guys, day in, day out, six days a week...you get to be with them more than you are with your family. So they are your family. And it would be traumatic to see someone lose their life in front of you like that when you're so close to them. Everyone stood up and did their part and the man was alive. That's the one thing about that place. Everybody had to work together, and they did, and you know, if someone was down and out, we'd all chip in to help. That's the part I'm gonna miss...

I do miss it. That's it.”<sup>32</sup>

Special thanks to Jim Yuncke (former Controller at Centre Foundry), Tom Hoffman, Jr., MarySue Szymialis, Frank VanSickle, Laura Carroll, Ellery McGregor, Johnathon Porter, Dillon Richardson, and Sandra Caldwell (McClellan Signs).

*Seán Patrick Duffy is the programming director and local history specialist at the Ohio County Public Library and the Executive Director of the Wheeling Academy of Law and Science (WALS) Foundation at the First State Capitol in Wheeling, where he manages the Reuther-Wheeling Library and Labor History Archive. He earned a BA in History and an MBA from Wheeling Jesuit University, and a JD from the American University. He is the author of three books and numerous articles on local history.*

## End Notes

1-Though this has been reported by secondary sources like WTRF, no corroborating primary evidence has been found so far, though the idea seems likely.

2-See ad, Album 1, Centre Foundry Collection, OCPL Archives.

3-See note 1.

4-*Wheeling News-Register*, July 8, 1973, p. 21.

5- See, for example, AtlasObscura.com.

6-*Wheeling Register*, April 5, 1928.

7-Doman, D. "Centre Foundry & Machine Co., Wheeling, West Virginia, 1840-2001." Compiled 2001.

8-*Wheeling Daily Intelligencer*, Aug. 8, 1853.

9-Facsimile of original Articles of Incorporation, Album 1, Centre Foundry Collection, OCPL Archives.

10-*Wheeling Register*, April 5, 1928. (continued on page 56)



Frank VanSicle (L) and Jim Yuncke (R) visit the exhibit, October 2024.



Don't miss the new exhibit at the Ohio County Public Library: "A Fond Farewell to Two Wheeling Stalwarts," which features patterns, blue-prints, and other artifacts from Centre Foundry, as well as the contents of two time capsules (1912 and 1980) from OVMC and OCGH). The exhibit will be in place until spring 2025.



Tour photos by OCPL.

### Additional Centre Foundry Photographs & Videos

Historical photos of Centre  
Foundry on Flickr:



Tour photos by Heritage.



Photos by  
Frank  
VanSickle.



View additional videos at: [www.youtube.com/@archivingwheeling5518](http://www.youtube.com/@archivingwheeling5518)



**End Notes continued.**

11-Ibid.

12-Doman.

13-*Callin's Wheeling City Directory* clippings, album, Centre Foundry Collection. OCPL Archives.

14-Doman.

15-OCPL Archives interviews with Frank VanSickle, July 24, 2024 and July 31, 2024.

16-Ibid.

17-Doman.

18-“Ohio Valley Made: 165 Years of Centre Foundry.” Valley Magazine. Nov. 2005, pp 16-18.

19-OCPL Archives interviews with Frank VanSickle, July 24, 2024 and July 31, 2024.

20-*Wheeling News-Register*, July 8, 1973, p. 21.

21-OCPL Archives interviews with Frank VanSickle, July 24, 2024 and July 31, 2024.

22-Ibid.

23-Ibid.

24-Doman. See also brochure, Centre Foundry Collection, OCPL Archives.

25-OCPL Archives interviews with Frank VanSickle, July 24, 2024 and July 31, 2024.

26-“Ohio Valley Made: 165 Years of Centre Foundry.” Valley Magazine. Nov. 2005, pp 16-18.

27-OCPL Archives interviews with Frank VanSickle, July 24, 2024 and July 31, 2024.

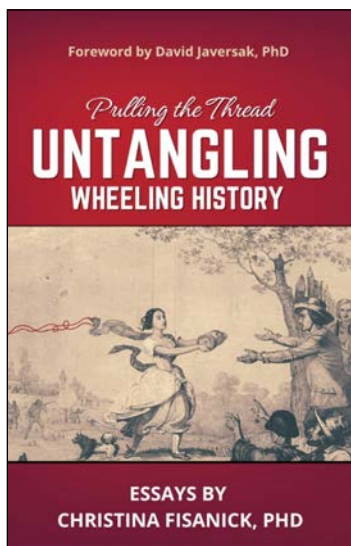
28-Gwinn Transportation Collection , OCPL Archives.

29-OCPL Archives interviews with Frank VanSickle, July 24, 2024 and July 31, 2024.

30-Ibid.

31-*Wheeling Intelligencer*, September 7, 2023.

32-OCPL Archives interviews with Frank VanSickle, July 24, 2024 and July 31, 2024.



**Book Review:** *Pulling the Thread: Untangling Wheeling History*, essays by Christina Fisanick, PhD. Calhoun County, Alabama: North Meridian Press, 2024.

The history of Wheeling, West Virginia can often be difficult to uncover, vague in its veracity, and challenging to interpret — full of twists and turns but never dull. In her latest public history literary endeavor, Christina Fisanick delves into unraveling the intricate threads of a select pastiche of events, occurrences, and

people who shaped the growth and development of the City and some of the Upper Ohio Valley.

Inspired by her literary Muse, Rebecca Harding Davis, Fisanick organizes the book into six sections that feature 34 essays which effectively weave historical events/happenings of yore (Indigenous people of the Ohio Valley) with contemporary circumstances (installation of The Stag public statue at Oglebay Park). The book also includes an original poem, “Where I’m From” full of local references and slated to be publicly performed as a libretto.

The essays and observations are well-researched/documentated, but not boringly pedantic and dry. Her enthusiasm for Wheeling shines through the expository storytelling nature of the essays which effectively interpret and present well-known and little-known facts and historical threads. Fisanick’s range of emotions, related to her love of Wheeling’s past, are welcomingly evident to the reader as each essay’s unique historical properties unfold with humor, empathy, admiration, and sometimes amazement.

Dr. Fisanick notes that making connections “across time and space” is critical to understanding our past, present, and future and

in this book fruitfully demonstrates skill and expertise in unfolding the historical narratives that engage us all in uncovering, appreciating, sharing, and loving our City's history.

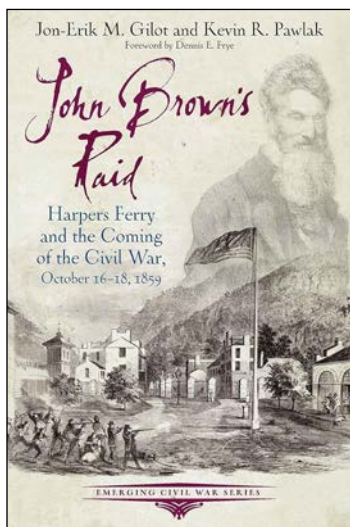
Review by Dr. Charles A. Julian, PhD

October 9, 2004

Visit the author's website: <https://christinafisanick.com/>

Get a copy of the book:





**Book Review:** Gilot, Jon-Erik M. and Pawlak, Kevin R. *John Brown's Raid: Harpers Ferry and the Coming of the Civil War, October 16-18, 1859.* The Emerging Civil War Series; El Dorado Hills, CA: Savas Beatie LLC, 2023.

A recent addition to the Emerging Civil War Series, which presents short but concise overviews of battles and events of the Civil War, *John Brown's Raid* is a well-researched and well written account

of the act that many believe made the Civil War inevitable. Years later, Frederick Douglas, abolitionist, orator, and a former slave said this: “When John Brown stretched forth his arm the sky was cleared. The time for compromise was gone, the armed hosts of freedom stood face to face over the chasm of a broken Union, and the clash of arms was at hand.” (124)

The first three chapters of the book cover John Brown's early life; his anti-slavery activities of the 1830's and 1840's, including his vow to “... consecrate my life to the destruction of slavery” (4); his actions in Bleeding Kansas in the 1850's; and the planning of the raid on Harpers Ferry.

The next three chapters cover the raid itself, from the time Brown and his followers started toward Harpers Ferry to Brown's capture in the engine house by U.S. Marines. The authors go far beyond the standard histories of the raid which mostly focus on Brown and the engine house. They detail the assaults by portions of Brown's “army” on the armory and other buildings. Also detailed is how the citizens of Harpers Ferry and local militias fought back before the Marines arrived.

The final two chapters tell the story of the trail and execution of

John Brown. The impact on both the North and South is also discussed.

The three appendices give a walking tour of locations in Harpers Ferry associated with the raid; a driving tour of the area; and brief biographies of those who accompanied John Brown on the raid.

I enjoyed this book very much and highly recommend it to others. The writing is clear and crisp. The authors go beyond the usual story of the raid to enhance one's understanding of what happened at Harpers Ferry. Whether you are an expert on the Civil War or a casual student, this book should be on your reading list.

Review by Jay H. Ferris

Oct. 15, 2024.

Visit Emerging Civil War website: <https://emergingcivilwar.com/>

Get a copy of the book:



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