

The Forgotten History of North Braddock and Braddock – A Tour

by Ernie Spisak

Part one of a six part series

Introduction

A sign reading, "Welcome to Historic Braddock" greets visitors to this 150-year-old mill town. Those who read the welcome sign chuckle, and think, historic? A similar sign should welcome visitors to North Braddock. Similar signs welcome visitors to the Civil War battlefield. What does one find when entering North Braddock or Braddock? They find no battlefield, campgrounds or historical buildings. They find no visitors center or bus tours. So where is the history?

Today, there are few mileposts identifying the historic sites, however, in spite of centuries of development, these sites do exist. So, join me in a historic tour of North Braddock and Braddock. As reference points, we will travel on the existing streets and avenues of these towns. It is important to understand the terrain upon which you will be traveling. The Monongahela River is key to understanding the terrain and history soon to be revealed. Steep hills and cliffs form the south bank of the Mon. Flatlands form the river's north bank. These flatlands extend northward for approximately one and a quarter miles. At this point, the ground slopes gradually up hill to the north.

Part One – The Battlefield

Our first stop on the forgotten history tour will be at the 235-year-old Battlefield. Yes, this is a battlefield. To find it, begin near the north bank of the Mon River on Sixth Street. Travel northward up Sixth, crossing over the old Baltimore and Ohio Railroad tracks. Continue on and cross over Braddock Avenue. You will notice that the street begins to rise. Continue passing under the overpass of the Pennsylvania Railroad. Now you are in North Braddock.

Continuing further up Sixth, you will find a large concrete monument on your right. The monument, devoid of any markings, is anchored into the hillside of Baldrige Field. This is part of the field where General Edward Braddock was defeated in July of 1755, as his column of British troops, clad in bright red uniforms, were making their way down river to dislodge French troops at Fort Duquesne. As the Red Coats tramped through the woods, Indians of the Delaware tribe attacked the surprised Brits. This is only a portion of the field of battle.

To locate the main portion of the battlefield continue up Sixth until it

intersects with Baldrige Avenue. Turn right onto Baldrige and continue straight until you are at the intersection with Jones Avenue. Turn right and proceed south down Jones Avenue until it intersects with Bell Avenue. As you drove down Jones Avenue, you were passing over another portion of the battlefield.

Turn right onto Bell Avenue and park near the funeral home near the corner. Keep in mind that Baldrige Field extended eastward from Sixth Street to where you are now. Near the funeral home sits two empty lots. These lots once held Scott High School and its football stadium. Now walk to the corner of Bell and Jones and walk south down the street until you see a large statue of George Washington.

You are now standing on the 235-year-old Battlefield. Try to ignore the present day environment. There are no streets, buildings or statues on this field. Dense forests and winding Indian trails surround you. At times, the thick trees blot out the sunlight. After crossing the Mon River, near the present day Edgar Thomson Mill the British troops moved slowly through the forest you are standing in.

Suddenly, in this hot steamy forest, the Indians attacked the column from all sides. The panicked troops tried to fight back. The battle extended up Jones Avenue past North Avenue and Kirkpatrick Avenue. General Braddock fell wounded, and George Washington led the column up Sixth Street, turned right on present day Route 30, and headed for Uniontown. So you see, the battle of Braddock's Defeat actually occurred in North Braddock. For decades, this area, this battlefield, was known as Braddock's Field.

I graduated from Scott High School in 1963 and not one teacher ever informed us that we were attending school on a historic landmark. Today, the high school and football stadium are nothing but empty lots. George Washington's statue still stands but nobody knows why, and the monument on Sixth Street will soon crumble. A history, not documented and identified, is soon forgotten.

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The Country House

Our next forgotten historic site is just a hop, skip and a jump from George Washington's statue. From the statue, walk north up Library Street to the

corner of Bell Avenue. Turn right and there you will see Schleifer's Funeral Home. In past years this establishment went under the names Lucas', and before that Lesko's Funeral Home. Although there are no markings, today, you are standing in front of a 219-year-old structure. In 1791, thirty-six years after Braddock's defeat, a Mr. Wallace purchased 328 acres for a farm. At this location, in the middle of Braddock's Field, he constructed his home. By 1804, the country home was known as the mansion. The property changed hands a few times and by 1827, this stately home became known as the Kirkpatrick Mansion.

After marching with General Washington in America's War for Independence, the Marquis de La Fayette returned to France. In 1827, La Fayette returned to America. On May 28, after traveling down the Mon from Elizabeth, Pa., the Frenchmen stopped at Braddock's Field and spent the night at the Kirkpatrick Mansion. Considering its age and the Frenchmen's visit, this structure is an historic site, although it has no such markings.

The Civil War Camp

Eighty-six years after America freed itself from England, it entered into the great Civil War. Once again, our next historic site is void of any markings. By 1861, the dense forests of Braddock's Field disappeared, and two small villages of North Braddock and Braddock emerged. The general area, however, is still referred to as Braddock's Field.

Come with me to locate our next historic site, Camp Copeland. After leaving the Kirkpatrick Mansion, turn left onto Jones Avenue and continue south passing under the railroad overpass until reaching Braddock Avenue. Turn right onto the avenue and continue west until reaching Fourth Street. Turn right and travel north up Fourth Street. Notice how the ground rises sharply. About three quarters up, you will notice Mills Avenue. Continue on, until reaching the crest of the hill where Fourth intersects with Camp Avenue. Stop or park your car and look northward. As Fourth Street descends you will see the Pennsylvania Railroad, and across the rails, the ground continues rising northward.

You are now standing on the site of the third historic landmark. In August of 1863, on this ground, the Union Army established Camp Copeland. The camp sat on the Mills Farm and stretched from Mills Avenue up to Camp Avenue, down Fourth Street, crossing the rails and extending into what is known today as North Braddock.

Once again, ignore the present day environment. You are among thousands of Union soldiers. Hundreds of tents dot the landscape, and the smell of campfires fill the air.

You are still on Braddock's Field. At its peak, Camp Copeland held six thousand soldiers. Many, of not all of the fences on the Mill's farm were torn down and used for firewood. In addition to the hundreds of tents pitched on this ground, eighteen buildings and eight kitchens served the young recruits.

In present day North Braddock, northwest of the railroad stood eight hospitals and eighteen more buildings containing thirty-two separate quarters. This portion of the camp lay along present day Hawkins Avenue. Many young soldiers boarded trains and headed off to war. The war ended, and in 1865, all remnants of the camp were removed. The Pennsylvania Railroad established Copeland Station at this location.

It is ironic that I was born and raised in a house on Hawkins Avenue, just east of the campsite. In later years, I resided in a home that saw on Hawkins Avenue just east of the camp hospitals. As a young adult, I visited friends who resided on Camp Avenue. As the two previous stops, this one also lacks any identification of its historic significance. Two years after the war, in 1867, Braddock incorporated, and thirty years later, North Braddock followed suite.

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The First Heat

With the Union reunited, the country experienced growth and prosperity. The railroad industry during this period expanded. This period in history takes us to our next stop. Drive south down Fourth Street, then, turn left onto Braddock Avenue. Proceed east up the avenue until reaching Eleventh Street. At its inception, Braddock ended at Thirteenth Street, Today, Twelfth and Thirteenth Streets do no exist.

On your right near Eleventh Street sits the fire department, the post office and a Union Hall. On your left sits the Good Shepherd Church, formerly St. Michaels. Continue until reaching a sign reading, "Welcome to the Mon Valley Works." You are now in North Braddock at our next historic site, Andrew Carnegie's first steel mill.

Anticipating the demand for steel rails to accommodate the railroad industry, Carnegie, in 1873, purchased acres of land in Braddock's Field, present day

North Braddock. On this land, the Scotsman began constructing his first steel mill. He named the mill the Edgar Thomson Works after J. Edgar Thomson, the president of the Pennsylvania Railroad. Two years later, the mill produced its first heat of steel.

In the beginning, Englishmen and Irishmen provided the labor for Carnegie's mill. As the demand for steel increased so did the size of the mill. At times, the mill operated six or seven blast furnaces producing the pig iron that scores of Bessemer converters transformed into steel. With the demand for steel increasing, Carnegie recruited immigrants from Eastern Europe. These Slavish and Polish families streamed into Braddock. These strangers, in a strange land, resided in row houses close to the mill. The neighborhood became known as the Bottoms. This mill provided the nucleus from which North Braddock and Braddock developed. In the 1990s, this mill became an official historic landmark.

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The First "Gift"

Sixteen years after the Edgar Thomson Mill produced its first heat of steel, "organized labor," unions began flexing its muscle. To arrive at our next historic site, proceed west down Braddock Avenue away from the mill. Turn right off the avenue at Library Street, and proceed about a half a block. On your left sits our next historic milepost.

Carnegie, in 1889, in an attempt to fend off a steel strike, constructed his first public library. The three story stone edifice is currently one hundred and twenty one years old. In addition to the reading rooms and stacks of books, the library also contained public baths and showers, a bowling alley, barbershop, poolroom, auditorium and swimming pool. It is uncertain if men working twelve-hour shifts in the mill used this facility, but it is possible that their families took advantage of the facility. The Scotsman's library provided services to Braddock and its surrounding communities up through 1974, when it closed. It sat empty and decaying for eight years. Due to the determination of a few community people, the library reopened in 1982.

The French Chateau

A hop, skip, and a jump gets us to our next historical milepost. Drive or walk north up Library Street, pass under the railroad overpass, and continue up Jones Avenue. Jones Avenue is named after Captain William Jones, first superintendent of the Edgar Thomson mill. Stop at the corner of Jones Avenue and Bell Avenue. Yes, we have been here before visiting Braddock's Defeat and the home that La Fayette spent the night in.

At the intersection of Bell and Jones stands a stately three-story French-style home. This red brick home, built in 1893, housed Charles Schwab, the first president of the Carnegie Steel Corporation. For decades, this 117-year-old structure became known as the Schwab Mansion. During the nineteen-fifties and sixties, the North Braddock School District used his home as its administrative offices.

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Part six of a six part series

Rows of Desperation and Hope

Our next stop encompasses a fine block long neighborhood in Braddock. To arrive at this location, drive south down Jones Avenue and Library Street to Braddock Avenue. Turn left onto the avenue and proceed east until approaching Ninth Street. Proceed down Ninth crossing over the old Baltimore and Ohio Railroad tracks, then over Talbot Avenue until reaching Ninth and Washington Avenue. Turn left onto Washington and stop your car. You are now at our last historic site, the old neighborhood called The Bottoms.

During the mid eighteenth century and well into the early Twentieth Century, the length of the Bottoms began at Ninth Street and ended at Thirteenth Street. This unique neighborhood's width ran south to north beginning at River Road and extending to Washington Avenue, Talbot Avenue, and ending at the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. Cherry Way ran behind Washington Avenue, and Pine Way ran behind Talbot Avenue. What you see today is the remains of a neighborhood that housed Carnegie's immigrant steelworkers.

At its inception, this neighborhood sitting very close to the mill was crowded and filthy. The housing stock paints a portrait of the environment the mill

workers and their families dealt with on a daily basis. For instance looking east toward the mill clusters of row houses lines both sides of Washington and Talbot Avenues. A Row usually consisted of three or four dwellings. Behind these rows sat another similar cluster. A courtyard separated these houses. An outside privy sat in the courtyard. Large brick or wooden passageways connected each cluster of row houses. The dark passage was led to the courtyard behind the front row. Each house within a row consisted of two rooms on the first floor and two on the second floor. Small coal stoves warmed the houses. This pattern of row houses continued on Talbot Avenue. The cluster of row houses on the right side of Washington Avenue sat very close to the Pennsylvania and Lake Erie Railroad.

Interspersed along Washington and Talbot Avenues sat small grocery stores, butcher shops, a few barbershops, and most likely on or two funeral homes. At the corner of Thirteenth Street sat a small bar. Directly across Thirteenth Street sat the mill gate. More bars and small stores could be found along Talbot Avenue. The Braddock Hotel, a two story stone structure, (still standing) stood at the corner of Eighth Street and Talbot Avenue. Eventually, the Slavish and Polish Social Clubs opened their doors in the Bottoms.

As you have done previously, try to ignore the present environment and with my assistance, stroll east down Washington Avenue. In the early years the sidewalks may have been dirt or brick. The constant roar and hissing of the blast furnaces and Bessemer converters echoed through out the Bottoms. The din of the mill never stopped. Acidic smoke filled the air and particles from the smoke fell to the ground. Black smoke and cinders from the passing coal fired locomotives added to the gray sky. Houses sitting close to the railroads shook with every passing train. The courtyards were filthy with cinders. Walking along you could see the footprints of passer by from the dust of the mill.

Strolling down Talbot Avenue in the evening, the sky glowed from the Bessemer converters and the din of the mill infiltrated the row houses, stores, and the Slovak Club. Looking through the window oil lamps lit the club and shadowy figures stood at the bar having a beer or a glass of whiskey to clear their throats of the constant mill dust. To compensate for the filthy environment, most of the women hung white lace curtains in the

windows of the row houses. On Sundays, these families walk up Eleventh Street, crossed over Braddock Avenue and attended mass at Saint Michaels Catholic Church, (Good Shepherd Church today). This church blesses many a weddings, and its funeral bell tolled often. Not a week passed without an accident in the mill injuring or killing a mill worker. Contributing to this disparaging existence, fire constantly damaged these immigrant's homes. In 1890, one fire destroyed forty homes on Twelfth Street.

By 1901 Carnegie sold his mills to J.P. Morgan, thus creating the United States Steel Corporation. As the Steel industry expanded, so did the Bottoms. Now, more Polish and Slavish immigrants swarmed into the Bottoms for work in the mill. To accommodate this influx, developers hastily constructed more row houses, void of heating and indoor plumbing. In the courtyards, new privies accommodated the newcomers. The immigrant community now expanded outward west of Eleventh Street. Over-crowding and ethnic tension encouraged the English speaking families, mostly the Irish, to move out the Bottoms and establish neighborhoods west of Ninth Street.

For decades, the Edger Thompson Mill prospered. Well into the Twentieth century, this mill dumped its industrial footprint, acidic smoke, soot, dust, cinders, and the roar of the furnaces down on the Bottoms. Moving through the decades, the iron and steelworkers union fought for better wages and working conditions. The immigrant families continued to grow. The adults learned to speak English, and their children walked up Washington Avenue to attend the Carnegie Elementary School. By the mid nineteen twenties a small percentage of black families, possible lured northward from the south began to settle into the Bottoms. These families settled in a row of houses located in a large cinder field close to the Pennsylvania and Lake Erie Railroad. Eventually, River Road cut through this neighborhood. Today, River Road, like The Bottoms, does not exist.

So ends our hometown history tour. As you witnessed, most of these sites lack any type of official historical marker, and they never will be recognized. The growth of industrial, commercial, and residential development over the years trumped the desire to identify historical sites. For the "Old Timers" aware of this history I hope this tour brings back memories. For those who never knew the history of their hometowns, please share it with others, so it will continue to live.

Of all of our stops, it is my opinion that The Bottoms, is the most significant in the history and traditions of these two small towns. The Bottoms transformed Braddock's Field into the mill towns I lived in. From the diverse ethnic populations that occupied the row houses emerged cultures I grew to admire and understand. From the struggles of the Unions sprung up a proud working class, in which I took my first breath as a Baby Boomer. From this smoke covered hellish environment of four or five blocks, came that prosperity of the nineteen fifties and sixties I remember. From all of this, I benefited and continue to benefit. Yes, The Bottoms is the most significant in the history of my two hometowns.

What Once Was
Memories of North Braddock and Braddock
Part One of a Four Part Series
by Ernest Spisak

Introduction

The old cliché, "Boy, the old town sure has changed!" rings true today for North Braddock and Braddock. Hawkins Avenue, a main artery running through North Braddock reveals empty lots where houses once sat, and abandoned homes that once sheltered families. The landscape along Braddock Avenue consists of a few struggling businesses, and blocks of empty gravel filled lots. Strangers comment on the depressing nature of these two towns, and ask, "how could any one live here?" Old timers pass through, and sadly lament, "remember when..." Now, the halcyon days are only a memory. For those who never knew, or others who have forgotten, take a moment to understand what once was.

Part One – North Braddock – the 1950s

In January of 1946, I took my first breath, entered the Baby Boomer Generation, and began life on Hawkins Avenue in a modest wooden frame house. Similar dwellings lined both sides of the avenue. The Pennsylvania Railroad ran directly behind the homes on the opposite side of the avenue. The rails separated North Braddock from Braddock. Day and night, passenger and freight trans rumbled through the neighborhood. An occasional scent of manure indicated that a long, slow train pulling livestock had just passed by. Along the brick laden avenue, streetcar tracks ran east and west. The red and yellow 64 trolley stopped in front of my house. Within a block and a half of my home, small businesses flourished. At the intersection of Hawkins and Fourth Street, west of my house, passengers boarded trains at the Copeland Station. Locals referred to the intersection as the "corner." Near the station and close to the railroad tracks stood the firemen's bingo hall. At least once a week, neighborhood women filled the hall in hopes of "getting a bingo." Adjacent to the hall, a small newsstand sold cigarettes and booked the daily numbers. Next to this "establishment" was Hammermeisters Bar, and then came the Star-Lite Dairy. Gatties Drug Store, equipped with a small soda counter, sat directly across the street from the dairy store. Andy Farmer's Bowling Alley sat next to Gatties. On most weeknights, bowling leagues attempted to knock down the duckpins or ten pins. Angie's Italian Restaurant sat directly across the street from the dairy

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Memories of North Braddock and Braddock
Part two of a four part series
by Ernest Spisak

Part Two – Braddock – The 1950s

The hustle and bustle along Braddock Avenue spoke volumes of the town's prosperity during the decade of the 1950s. At the start of the decade, 16,488 individuals called Braddock home (1950 census). At least one hundred retail establishments lined both sides of the busy avenue. A trip to the avenue unearthed a treasure chest of opportunities for shopping and entertainment. Shoppers from North Braddock, Rankin, Swissvale, Turtle Creek, East Pittsburgh, Bessemer Terrace and Forest Hills all flocked to Braddock. Two banks sat across from each other at the corner of Library Street and Braddock Avenue. With cash in hand, shoppers strolled up and down the avenue "window shopping," and purchasing needed items. Near the banks, two "department stores," Penney's and The Famous, provided apparel and dry goods.

Adults, and especially children, marveled at the store's intricate payment system. In Penney's, clerks accepted cash payments, placed them in a small wire cage that ran on electric cables. The cage moved along the cable to the main office on the second floor, and then returned to the sales counter with change and a sale receipt. Vacuum tubes hung from the ceilings in The Famous. They connected with each sales counter. Clerks placed payments into a small round cylinder, placed the cylinder into the tube, and whoosh, off it went to the sales office, then, quickly returned with a receipt. It was well worth the purchase just to watch the process.

Other purchases along the avenue were not as entertaining. Mozeik's Hardware, at the corner of Second Street and the avenue provided the items and expertise needed for home repairs. Further up the avenue, paint and wallpaper establishments encouraged home decorating. Thompson's and Kwellers sold furniture, and Ohringers, on the corner of Seventh Street and the avenue, provided furniture and appliances. During the holiday's one could find Santa and his elves working inside the big display window in Ohringers. Braddock Avenue sparkled during this time of year. All along the avenue, strings of colored lights hung from pole to pole adding to the festive mode. Lighted wreathes and red bells hung from the poles on both sides of the avenue. The bells became a Braddock tradition that marked the opening of the holiday season.

store. Toot's Bar lay on the portion of Fourth Street leading down to the railroad underpass. The 64 trolley stopped near the "corner."

On Hawkins, just east of the "corner," George's Market catered to the neighborhood. At the back of the well-stocked establishment, a butcher provided any type of meats or poultry. Families phoned in their orders, ran up weekly tabs, and a neighborhood boy delivered the groceries. Just up the avenue from the grocery, a little bell rang when entering Stella's Confectionary. Aside from the vast assortment of penny candies, and paper products, a row of stools and the soda counter lured both young and old to partake in a soda, milk shake, sundae or and ice cream cone. In between treats, the pinball machine provided entertainment. Who can forget the bing, bing of the machine. At the eastern end of Hawkins, Pendro's Bar served the neighbors, Doctor Tongue extracted teeth, Foxies Dry Cleaners kept the clothes neat and pressed, and most neighbors frequented Dom DePalma's Barber Shop.

The neighbors in North Braddock and Braddock mirrored each other. The homes, in these small mill towns, were well kept, and a day did not go by without seeing an adult or child sweeping the ill dust from the sidewalk. Families in each block knew each other, and informed parents of any mischief their children caused. The social order of extended families was common in these close-knit surroundings. In many situations, young boomers resided with their parents and grandparents. Often, aunts and uncles also lived on the same block. It was common for young children to eat supper with parents and grandparents under the same roof. Coming of age was comfortable, secure and exciting in these small mill towns. Students walked to neighborhood schools. Under smoked filled skies, young Boomers played pick up games in back yards and alleyways. Under the din of the pinball machine, youngsters purchased penny candy and ice cream. Adults sat on front porches, and children sat along the curbs to watch the firemen's parade move down the avenue. Most everyone visited the firemen's street fair at the Fourth Street "corner." Around Independence Day, kids lit sparklers, and transferred caps from their play pistols and taped the caps to the streetcar tracks along the avenue. The pop, pop, pop echoed through the neighborhood as the trolley passed over the rows of caps. Yes, life flourished along Hawkins Avenue, as did all of North Braddock during the decade of the fifties. The future looked bright and prosperous for the towns' 14,724 residents (1950 census).

During all seasons, four five and dime stores, located in the block between Eighth and Ninth Streets, attracted customers seeking bargains. Kreasges, Authenwrights, Neisners and Woolworth's catered to the various needs of the communities. During the Easter season, baby chicks and ducks, dyed various colors, were much sought after bargains in these stores. Two bakeries, Neils and Guenthers, helped the residents celebrate the seasons with cakes, pies, cookies and various types of breads.

Clothing establishments up and down the avenue did a brisk business. Of the many, a few come to mind. Women had their pick from Saks, Jasons, Fashion Spear, the Bell Shop, the Nola Shop and Ellis Hat Shop. Jack and Jill specialized in children's clothing. At least three establishments catered to the well-dressed men, Standard Sports War, Carlytons, and the Working Men's Store always drew a crowd. Tom McCann's and the S & S Shoe Store provided the latest in footwear. Numerous shoemakers shops dotted the avenue repairing those old comfortable shoes, not yet year for the trash. Along the avenue, an enticing aroma lured the well-dressed pedestrians to Shubs kitchen supply store. Near the entrance of Shubs, a large machine with a silver cylinder slowly spun around roasting shelled peanuts. The aroma drifted up and down the avenue. With a fresh bag of peanuts, one could stroll past one of three movie theaters, the Capital, The Paramount, or The Times to see what was playing on any given day. The Easter Monday Cartoon Show always packed the house with kids carrying bags of Easter candy.

While the mills and factories prospered, more Baby Boomers emerged, and more businesses opened their doors along Braddock Avenue. Sadowskies Hobby Shop carried the much sought after Lionel train sets, and Sols Sporting Goods outfitted the aspiring athletes. The Hallmark Card Store always had a card for every occasion. The Braddock Hospital, established in 1905, treated emergency cases, nursed the ill back to health, and delivered more Baby Boomers. On the second and third floors of the brick buildings on the avenue, doctors scheduled appointments for their patients. At least four drug stores, Millers, Hollanders, Sun and the Physicians Pharmacy, provided medications for the sick.

Healthy and in good spirits, visitors to the avenue admired the new cars in the show room of Superior Motors, located near Thirteenth Street. Several blocks west of the auto dealer, DeNardos, Schmidts, DeRoys, and Lincoffs Jewelry stores provide that special gift for a loved one. A glance at the sidewalk clock in front of DeNardos suggested it was time for a bite to eat. But, for dessert, nobody could beat Isaly's skyscraper ice cream cones or

Klondike's. Almost directly across from Isaly's, a three story red brick structure housed Braddock's police and fire departments.

Aside from the large supermarket at the corner of Fourth Street, mom and pop food stores, Cudea's Italian Foods, Bell's Market and Sam Bollis Fresh Poultry store, catered to those with a more discriminating taste. After hours of shopping, adults found relaxation in the many Social Clubs and bars scattered along the mile long avenue. The Moose, Slovak Social Club, and the Polish Falcons always drew a crowd. For the general public, the Victory Bar, The Brandywine, The Tropics, The Rainbow Bar, and Ferdies, just to name a few, provided a place to socialize. DeNardo's clock informed the shoppers and merrymakers when it was time to go home.

We all went home, and with every passing year grew older as a new decade approached.

What Once Was
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Part three of a four part series
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Part Three – Braddock – The 1960s

As DeNardo's clock struck one minute past midnight on January 1, 1960, not much had changed in North Braddock and Braddock. Fire and smoke from the mill still filled the sky, and most factories ran three shifts. Although North Braddock's population dropped by 1,523 and Braddock lost 4,151 residents, the decline went unnoticed (1960 census). Once again, the future for these towns and their residents look bright and prosperous.

The old close-knit neighborhoods of the fifties remained intact. The houses in North Braddock and Braddock stood in good repair, but the mill dust still needed swept from the porches and sidewalks. Along Hawkins Avenue, Dom the barber continued cutting hair, Foxie cleaned and pressed clothes, Stella's doorbell rang when a customer entered and left with an ice cream cone, and George's Market still served the neighborhood, but the grocery boy lost his job. The Fourth Street "corner" stayed busy as neighbors purchased medications from the drug store, bowlers strived to roll that perfect game, women called out bingo and the beer garden served up ice-cold drafts. However, the landscape on the Fourth Street corner changed

slightly. The Copeland Train Station closed, as did Angie's Italian Restaurant. Bad omens?

As did the drop in populations, these slight neighborhood changes went unnoticed. During the late fifties, the auto dealer on Braddock Avenue moved away. However, at the start of the sixties, Braddock Avenue bustled with excitement, as streetcars moved slowly down the brick laden avenue, and shoppers jammed the sidewalks. Customers returned to the familiar stores they came to know and trust during the 1950s. Business boomed, and the future shined bright. The newly elected president, John Kennedy promised to lead the country into a "new frontier."

For the teenagers in these two mill towns, "the new frontier" emerged when they entered high school. They soon became Scott High Raiders or Braddock High Tigers, and relished in continuing there friendly football rivalry. The legendary "game" occurred annually during early November. Prior to the contest, both teams boasted of undefeated records. The bragging rights of each town hinged on the outcome of this game.

By 7 p.m., Scott High Stadium overflowed with fans. On occasions, mounted county sheriffs assisted with crowd control. Red and white pom-poms filled one side of the bleachers, and blue and white shakers filled the opposite side. Outside the stadium, the drum cadence of the Braddock High School Marching Band grew louder, as it marched up Library Street toward the field. Most often, Braddock won, but in my senior year, 62-63, Scott won by one point.

Nineteen sixty-three simultaneously marked a new beginning for Boomers, and a lingering series of changes for Braddock and North Braddock. Some recent high school graduates found employment in the mills and factories. Other graduates entered college and still others joined the service and found themselves in the jungles of Vietnam. A significant percent of graduates found their "new frontier" residing in the every-expanding suburbs, miles away from the mills and factories surrounding their hometowns.

A stroll down Braddock Avenue in 1963 found the three movie theaters closed, but most of the establishments we came to know remained opened for business. One year later, bus fumes replaced the clanging of the streetcars. In August of 1963, a portion of Kennedy's "New Frontier" emerged about ten miles east of Braddock and North Braddock. In this location, the Eastland Shopping Center opened. The old familiar Penney's Department Store on Braddock Avenue moved to this new shopping center. Shortly thereafter, The Famous Department Store on the corner of Library Street and Braddock Avenue closed its doors. Bad omens?

Between 1967-68, "old timers" noticed changes in their neighborhoods. Now, strangers occupied houses where friendly neighbors once lived. Along Hawkins Avenue, Stella stopped selling ice cream and Dom no longer cut hair. The drug store and market closed.

During this same two-year period, the hustle and bustle along Braddock Avenue now faded into the lonesome shuffle of a few solitary shoppers. The five and dime outlets no longer provided bargains. Plywood now covered the display windows of Sadowskies Hobby Shop and Sols Sporting Goods. Now, the majestic seven-story Ohringers building lay empty. The empty storefronts stood waiting for new merchants to move in. A few did, but quickly closed. In 1967, Braddock celebrated its one hundred year birthday, and nobody came to the party. The exodus of residents and businesses continued throughout the decade. By 1970, both communities lost a total of 6,021 residents. The populations for North Braddock totaled 10,038, and Braddock entered the new decade with a population of 8,682 (1970 census).

What Once Was
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Conclusion
by Ernest Spisak

Part Four – Braddock – The Seventies and Beyond

The decade of the seventies marked the end of the "glory days" for North Braddock and Braddock. Cherished traditions, now, faded into memories. Volunteer firemen eliminated their parades and street fairs. Children no longer stood in front of a display window to watch Santa's elves tickle his big toe. A walk down Hawkins Avenue on a summer evening found many of the houses in need of repair. Front porches, once filled with adults and children watching a parade, now lay empty and lifeless. For rent signs in both towns outnumbered the for sale signs.

As bleak as the future appeared, still the old timers could look forward to the annual football contest between North Braddock and Braddock High Schools. However, a Federal Judge, in 1971, eliminated the last bastion of pride remaining in these two mill towns. The judge ordered the school districts of North Braddock, Braddock and Rankin to merge into one, the General Braddock District. This decision, finalized the end of an era, and for

some, is considered General Braddock's Second Defeat. The debris from this battle, to this day, lay exposed for all to see.

In 1975, the rows and rows of empty storefronts along Braddock Avenue painted a disparaging glimpse of the future. Now residents of North Braddock and Braddock went elsewhere to purchase that special greeting card. The doctors moved their offices, and all the drug stores lay empty. The shoe stores and clothing establishments all followed the Famous to the Eastland Shopping Center. Only one bakery provided goodies, and J. Roy's New and Used Furniture Store replaced those of the past. Isaly's and Oaks no longer fed the shoppers. John's Victory Bar drew its last cold draft, and closed its door forever. The large silver tumbler outside of Shubs stopped tumbling. Now, the odor of decaying storefronts replaced the aroma of freshly roasted peanuts. By 1979, DeNardo's clock stopped ticking.

Over the next twenty years, more businesses closed, and more residents fled the decaying neighborhoods. Like vultures circling high above the dead, the "caterpillar" sat waiting to demolish another storefront along Braddock Avenue or abandoned house in either town. The "big cats" systematically found their prey, leveling one or two buildings at a time. Contractors did not rush in to fill the vacant lots with new structures. Now, only 6,410 individual call North Braddock home, and just 2,600 hardy souls resided in Braddock (2000 census).

Of these combined populations, only a handful of Boomers who graduated from Scott and Braddock High Schools still live in their hometowns. Now, lacking a sense of what once was, strangers pass through my hometown and tell those remaining Boomers how terrible these abandoned houses and empty lots look. Then they ask, "How could anyone live here, it is so depressing." What is depressing is the insensitivity of those making such a comment.

"They do not see families sitting on front porches, or see young children playing in backyards. These strangers no longer hear the pop, pop, pop, of a streetcar passing over a row of exploding caps. As they pass by an empty lot, the sound of a small bell does not ring, announcing the arrival of a customer. At the corner of Hawkins Avenue and Fourth Street, these "visitors" cannot purchase the daily paper, play the daily number, or bowl a game of ten pins. All they see is a series of empty lots. Walking past another empty lot, these strangers would not hear the roar of the crowd that once filled the high school football stadium.

For those who never knew what once was, or conveniently forgot their past, a drive down Braddock Avenue reveals blocks and blocks of empty lots. The visitors do not see shoppers darting in and out of stores, restaurants or banks.

These strangers in a strange land cannot park the car, and walk up the avenue to purchase a bag of freshly roasted peanuts.

Sixty years have passed since thousands of World War II veterans and their young Baby Boomers worked and played under the smoke filled skies of North Braddock and Braddock. The history of these two towns will not be found in the local library. The oral history is found in the minds of "we few, we happy few, we band of brothers" who never left our hometowns.