In the early 19th Century, as the Nation moved west, Wheeling flourished as a manufacturing and transportation center. With access to river and rail transportation and natural resources, industrial expansion drove much of its growth into areas south of Wheeling Creek. By the 1830s, English, Irish and German craftsmen, artisans, and entrepreneurs began a South Wheeling, then known as "Ritchlevtown." Business pioneers experimented with new mechanization, and South Wheeling’s glass, pottery, tobacco, beer, and cut nails would impress custom for years.

Polish, Ukrainian, Hungarian, Czech, and Greek immigrants were drawn to the factory jobs, making the area the most ethnically diverse in the city. By 1900, many skilled workers were displaced by mass production techniques. Daily life also changed. "Grimey row houses" were packed along "smelly, dimly lit" streets and poor working conditions gave rise to the Ohio Valley Trades and Labor Assembly, the nation’s oldest labor organization. South Wheeling became the base for strong union activity which supported environmental, cultural and educational improvements.

This tour highlights several sites in South Wheeling’s industrial district, and the remaining factory structures and buildings will provide a glimpse of life in a once thriving blue-collar neighborhood.

A WALKING TOUR: SOUTH WHEELING’S INDUSTRIAL HISTORY

#1 La Belle Nail Works 35th and Wood Streets 1862-1930

Built in 1852, La Belle was once one of the largest producers of "cut nails." Their innovative production process integrated rolling mills, furnaces, and nail machines all under one management. The skilled German masons and two puddlers that worked there admired Abraham Lincoln and in August 1860, workers raised a "Lincoln/Hamlin pole" near the factory. During the Civil War, a cannon named "Old Garibaldi" was made and shot every Independence Day thereafter. The cannon still sits just inside the plant’s western gate.

By 1874, LaBelle employed around 400 hands. However, in the early 1880s the industry faced troubles. The "Great Nail Strike" of 1883-1885 forced plans to convert from iron to steel tin plate and resulted in the puddlers and nailers losing their jobs.

In 1959, LaBelle joined the Wheeling Stel Corporation, producing masonry and flooring nails until its closing in 2010. The building was added to the National Register in 1997. Scenes for the History Channel’s series The Men Who Built America were filmed here in 2009 using former employees and local actors.

#2 Uncede Brewing Co. ULR 3705 and 36th Streets

Founded in 1901, the four-story brewery was constructed on the block near La Belle Nail Works. The brewery had a 124-barrel beer kettle, hydraulic mash tub, and beer cooler. It could produce 40,000 barrels of beer a year. It was state of the art, with its own lighthouse and boiler house using two, 200-horsepower boilers. Uncede also had good employer relations; workers enjoyed working, drinking beer while working, but could be fined if they got too drunk. Brewery workers were even allowed to carry a ten gallon pail, "a growler," of beer home. In 1902, Uncede's slogan was: "Eternal vigilance and union labor is the price of good beer." The brewery was hurt by competition with Schumacher and Reynaud Breweries and by state prohibition (though Ohio County was largely against it) in 1912. Varnished by 1928, the building was sold by the Uncede Brewing Company for production. It was later severely damaged by fire and eventually demolished in 1967.

#3 Uncede Brewing Company 206 East and 31st Streets

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#4 Wheeling Tile (formerly Wheeling Pottery) 6th and Chapleff to 31st and Eifft

Wheeling Tile Company formed in 1913 due to changing market conditions and the expansion of the commercial and home tile industry. The company produced handmade viozzi, wall, ceramic and floor tile. By 1934, they had a large plant in South Wheeling and warehouses in New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, San Francisco and Dallas.

Before it became Wheeling Tile, it was Wheeling Pottery, organized by George K. Wheat in 1879. Wheat had remodeled the remnants of his family’s tenancy into a then-modern pottery and mint with several other local potteries, like LaBelle Pottery. Their factory was at 3101 and Wood Streets. They created fine scores of translucent china and porcelain goods. The censuses call their products “first-class in every respect” since they “will not craze.”

#5 Southern Theater 3200 Eifft Street

This theatre started in 1923 as a motion picture house, or “ nickelodeon” with a seating capacity around 480. The Southern provided free movie viewings for children’s groups and alternated pictures every day. In the silent film era, movies were both entertainment and education for immigrants and American customs. The most popular features were comedies and melodramas. Admission prices were affordable; in 1930, admission was 10 cents. The Southern operated throughout the evenings, catering to many factory workers.

Eleanor Sieber, Wheeling native and famous soprano of the Metropolitan Opera, was born in a house across the street from the theater and had fond memories of the Southern as a child. Eleanor recalled that the theater "drew me like a magnet," and she would often sneak on stage to "pantomime the show." When singing at the Met as an adult, she "could breathe in the special smell of the theater and feel myself for a moment back at the little nickelodeon.”

#6 Weather Mixing 1900 Black Jack Street

This is one of the many intact sections of brick row houses in the industrial district. Many dwellings are of the Italianate style, built during the mid-19th century. They have a simple, rectangular appearance, with side gable roofs. Many streets in South Wheeling had attached "row" houses that were built by some of the early factory owners and the early workers. Often, these row houses were occupied by workers, their families, and especially single males boarding with immigrant families. By the late 1880s and into the 1890s, almost all of these structures housed workers from the Wheeling Pottery Company across the street. These were mostly skilled "potteries," but after 1900, the houses were home to semi-skilled workers at other factories.
The history of the Augsburger, a glass manufacturer and decorator in the region of Augsburg, Germany, is examined. The company operated from 1953 to 1990, producing glassware for the European market. The text highlights the company's role in the glass industry and its impact on the local economy. The Augsburger's influence on the European market is discussed, and its contributions to the art of glassmaking are acknowledged. The text also includes a table that lists the company's key personnel and their roles, along with their years of service. The table is formatted in a clear and concise manner, making it easy to reference the information. Overall, the text provides a comprehensive overview of the Augsburger's history and its significance in the glass industry.