

**#23 Bloch Brothers Tobacco 1879-Present**  
39th-41st along Water Street

Local dry good store owners, Aaron and Samuel S. Bloch, noticed men chewing on stogie clippings in 1879. They decided to flavor scrap tobacco cuttings and market them as "chewing tobacco." In 1884, the Bloch's moved their business to the 39th-41st Water Street location and named their new product "West Virginia Mail Pouch." Their "Mail Pouch" barn painting advertising scheme made them a nationally known product.

Always progressive employers, they encouraged employees to unionize, started a health plan for their workers paying \$3.00 a week if they missed work, established an 8-hour workday and offered unemployment benefits for up to 13 weeks.

At its peak, the company employed over 500 workers and produced 20 million packages of tobacco each year. The Bloch family sold the company in 1969 and it is currently thriving under the leadership of Swisher International.



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# A WALKING TOUR: SOUTH WHEELING'S INDUSTRIAL



*The most important resource of South Wheeling is its people, an amalgam of immigrant groups that came to Wheeling for jobs and a better life.*

—Margaret Brennan

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 settling in South Wheeling, then known as "Ritchietown." Business pioneers experimented with new mechanization, and South Wheeling's glass, pottery, tobacco, beer, and cut nails would impress customers 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. "Grimy row houses" were packed along "smoky, 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 houses will provide a glimpse of life in a once thriving blue-collar neighborhood.



**#1 La Belle Nail Works**  
31st and Wood Streets 1852-2010

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 nailers and iron 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 trouble. The "Great Nail Strike" of 1885-1886 forced plants to convert from iron to steel tin plate and resulted in the puddlers and nailers losing their jobs.

In 1920, LaBelle joined the Wheeling Steel 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 2011 using former employees and local actors!

**UNEEDA BREWING CO. #2 Uneeda Brewing Company**  
COR. 31st & JACOB STS. WHEELING, WEST VA. SE Corner 31st and Jacob Streets



Founded in 1901, the four-story brewery was constructed on the block near La Belle Nail Works. The brewery had a 150-barrel brew 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 icehouse and boiler house using two, 100-horsepower boilers. Uneeda also had good employee relations; workers could drink beer while working, but could be fired if they got too drunk! Brewery workers were even allowed to carry a two gallon pail, a "growler," of beer home. In 1902, Uneeda's slogan was: "Eternal vigilance and union labor is the price of good beer." The brewery was hurt by competition with Schmulbach and Reymann Breweries and by state prohibition (though Ohio County was largely against it!) in 1914. Vacant by 1928, the building was used by the Wheeling Tile Company for production. It was later severely damaged by fire and eventually demolished in 1976.



**#3 Klieves Lumber Company**  
NE corner 31st and Eoff Streets

Bernhard Klieves was born in 1836 in Germany, the son of a carpenter. After emigrating in 1858, he entered a partnership with his brothers to form the Central Planing Mills, or Klieves, Kraft & Co. Since its founding in the mid-1860s, Klieves was the leading lumber manufacturer in South Wheeling and provided planed lumber for a variety of private and public purposes. In 1912, Klieves and Scott Lumber provided the lumber to build a huge 1,500 feet long wooden tabernacle near 26th Street, which could hold 8,000 people, for evangelist Billy Sunday. By the 1920s, the company expanded their lumber and building supplies to include acid tanks, wallboard, and hardware. They also contracted various building services, such as millwork, roofing, and painting. The former company site is located under the I-470 overpass.



**#4 Wheeling Tile (formerly Wheeling Pottery)**  
31st and Chapline to 32nd and Eoff

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 vitreous, wall, ceramic and floor tile. By 1934, they had 3 large plants 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 tannery into a then-modern pottery and merged with several other local potteries, like LaBelle Pottery. Their factory was at 31st and Wood Streets. They created finer wares of translucent china and porcelain goods. The owners called their products "first-class in every respect" since they "will not craze."



**#5 Southern Theatre**  
3301 Eoff Street

This theater started in 1913 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 about American customs. The most popular features were comedies and melodramas. Admission prices were affordable; in 1920, admission was 10 cents. The Southern operated through the evenings, catering to many factory workers.

Eleanor Steber, 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 "would breathe in the special smell of the theater and feel myself for a moment back at the little nickelodeon."



**#6 Worker Housing**  
3100 Bloch Jacob Street:

This is one of the most intact sections of brick row houses in the industrial district. These 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 factories, particularly La Belle, for their workers. Over the years, 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 "potters," but after 1900, the houses were home to semi-skilled workers at other factories.

**#7 August Koch family**  
3307 Wood Street

This was the house of August Koch, a glasscutter and packer at the Hobbs Glass Company. Born in 1831 in Germany, Koch sailed with his family from Bremen to New York, arriving in Wheeling in 1834. As a young boy, he worked as a cigar maker. Because he lived in a heavily German and pro-Union working class neighborhood, he signed with the Union army in 1863, but it is unknown whether he ever served in the Civil War.

He worked at Hobbs until he retired around 1900. August's son took up his father's trade, working at Hobbs as a glasscutter. August Koch, Jr. lived in this house until his retirement in the 1920s. By the time of the Great Depression, he worked as a watchman for the local junkyard. This is one example of several generations of working class artisans living close to the factory sites in South Wheeling.



**#8 Schmulbach Brewery (1882-1914)**  
33rd and Wetzel Streets

The first brewery in South Wheeling was owned by Frank Zeigler who sold it to Nail City Brewing in 1875. In 1878, the company produced 8,000 barrels of beer, a very popular beverage with the local German population. By 1881, a young man named Henry Schmulbach had obtained controlling interest in the firm.

Schmulbach was an innovative brewer who used cheap natural gas, because it enabled the brew masters to produce a consistent drink. In 1890, the brewery was considered the largest in the state, producing 200,000 barrels of beer. Schmulbach had a hand in many business ventures in Wheeling, including building Wheeling's first skyscraper. Also a colorful character, Schmulbach was accused of killing Hamilton Forsythe on National Road, after Forsythe stole his buggy. The trial was a social event and he was found not guilty. Schmulbach died August 12, 1915.



**#9 Schmulbach Brewery Sites**  
33rd-36th Sts between McColloch and Wetzel Sts

This complex of buildings represents German beer-making from 1890-1914. The irregular brick building at 3300 McColloch Street was the main office. The hipped roof building next to the office, now Kennedy Hardware, was the carriage house for horses and beer wagons, one of which was driven by Valentine Reuther.

The three-story structure at 33rd and Wetzel Street was the fermenting house; the exterior is decorated with terracotta designs featuring faces of gods, wheat and hops. The adjacent two-story structure, now used by Tri-state Machine, housed the keg-washing works and features the Schmulbach Crest on its facade. Behind this building was the boiler room and cooper shop. Brick tunnels opened into hillside caves and were rediscovered in 1942 but destroyed by the relocation of WV Rt. 2 in 1975. Further south and west of Wetzel St. were the freezing tanks and the ice factory. The B&O Railroad lines ran parallel to McColloch Street, along its western border.



**#10 Valentine Reuther**  
3300 Wetzel Street

Valentine Reuther immigrated to Wheeling from Germany in 1899. After working at the Riverside Mill, he worked in the stables (the building that is now Kennedy Hardware) driving beer wagons for Schmulbach Brewery and lived on Wetzel Street. Reuther organized brewery workers, helped halt the construction of a Carnegie Library in Wheeling and became

President of the Ohio Valley Trades and Labor Assembly in 1909. He advocated industrial unionism, organizing all workers regardless of skill, race, ethnicity, or gender. Valentine was a Christian Socialist, believing that the "test of Christian values was whether you lived by them." At home, he encouraged active discussion among his children around the dinner table, discussing politics, unions, and civil rights. Reuther sang with the local Beethoven Singing Society and the family often sang German folk songs from the stoop of their front porch.



**#11 Hobbs-Brockunier Glass Company**  
36th and McColloch Streets

In 1845, James B. Barnes and John L. Hobbs started a company that produced flint and colored glassware in cut, plain, and molded varieties. In 1864, the firm revolutionized the industry by developing iron molds for pressed glass. They were most famous for their patterns, such as: Daisey & Button, Blackberry, Frances Ware, and especially Wheeling Peachblow. Hobbs held many patents on glass tableware, bar goods, lamps, and chandeliers. A Hobbs chandelier received acclaim at the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition in 1876. The South Wheeling factory's production in the 1870s and 1880s rivaled New England and Pittsburgh. About four hundred carloads of ware were shipped annually throughout America, Cuba, South America, Australia, and Europe. Hobbs glass was famous across the nation as well as in international markets, but closed in 1891.



**#12 Northwood Glass Company**  
36th & McColloch Sts

In 1901, Harry Northwood revitalized the old Hobbs, Brockunier glass factory. Early production of colored opalescent lines sold as lemonade and wine sets. Their novelty pieces were sought after by Victorian families and Northwood workers. In October 1903, the theft and investigation of \$500 worth of ware resulted in the arrest of eight boys. One boy, when asked if he had gotten all he needed, responded: "No sir; I need two more salts to fill out my set!"

From 1908-1915, Northwood's prize product was iridescent ware, with one thousand barrels of glass produced each week. Northwood gained a reputation as the "King of Carnival," because this glass was often sold to carnivals to serve as prizes. They later made "Luna Glass," opaque white glass used for large ceiling fixtures, a number of which are still found in South Wheeling homes. After Northwood's death in 1919, the company struggled, eventually closing in 1925.



**#13 Michael Owens**  
36th and Wood St., St. Mary's Church

Born to poor Irish immigrants, Michael Owens grew up in South Wheeling near St. Mary's, the Irish Catholic Church where he attended reading club as a child and learned to debate while working split-shifts at Hobbs-Brockunier Glass Company. Owens would later revolutionize the glass industry with innovations in glass bottle-making and window glass.

He opened a state-of-the-art glass bottle factory in Fairmont, WV and his Charleston factory would become the world's largest producer of window glass. His leadership at Owens-Illinois, Owens Corning, and Libbey-Owens-Ford corporations led them to great success. He was a devout man, shared his riches with the Catholic Church and has a community college named after him. Owens passed away in 1923. He was honored as a member of the National Inventor's Hall of Fame in 2007.

Until recently, a single rose was mysteriously placed at the Owens monument in Mt. Calvary Cemetery every year on Owens' birthday.



**#14 Coeey Bentz Department Store**  
SW Corner 36th and Jacob Streets

The Coeey Bentz Company, organized in 1897 by William R. Coeey and Herman Bentz, was a popular retail store. Besides selling furniture, they also ran a funeral home. After the Benwood Mine Disaster in April 1924, recovered bodies were taken to a temporary morgue

here. By 1923, the company operated out of this five-story structure and was known by the tagline "Your Home Furnishings Store Out of the High Rent District."

The company was the premier retail department store on the South Side. They sold a variety of home appliances, furnishings and toys at Christmas. Like downtown department stores, Coeey Bentz became a winter wonderland with its renowned "Toyland" window displays, train displays and a live Santa Claus. Many car accidents occurred outside its display rooms when people slowed down to gaze at the yuletide displays. Sadly, the company closed in 2002.



**#15 John L. Hobbs House**  
3530 Eoff St

This structure was the home of John L. Hobbs, one of the owners of the Hobbs-Brockunier Glass Company located at 36th and McColloch Streets. The house was built in the Classical Revival style that was popular during the mid-1800s and was probably one of the larger homes in South Wheeling at the time of its construction.

Hobbs became one of America's foremost glassmakers of his time. His company developed the first lime-based glass method that replaced lead without sacrificing beauty and brilliance. Hobbs held the first patent for a pressed glass chandelier that was produced in his factory and became very popular. One of the chandeliers crafted by his company is now hanging in the Wheeling Room at West Virginia Independence Hall. The house has been vacant for several years but was recently purchased with plans for restoration.



**#16 Walter Reuther**  
3536 Eoff St, Trinity Lutheran Church

Walter Reuther is the most famous person from South Wheeling. He attended services, here, at the Trinity Lutheran Church and bragged about his perfect 7-year Sunday School attendance record. The house where he grew up on Wetzel Street was demolished for Route 2 construction.

Working at the Northwood Glass Company at age 9, Walter was struck near his eye with a hot blowpipe, leaving a terrible scar. He dropped out of high school to work at Wheeling Corrugating but got fired for trying to organize the shop. Reuther was a key UAW organizer during the 1930s. He rose to fame when he was attacked by company thugs outside Ford Motor Co. at the "Battle of the Overpass." Reuther became UAW President in 1946 and CIO president in 1952. He was one of America's leading labor liberals, advised U.S. Presidents, and was featured on the cover of Time Magazine, twice. Reuther was killed in a tragic plane crash on May 9, 1970.



**#17 Albert C. Wheeler**  
3634 Chapline Street

Albert Wheeler grew up in the vibrant German "gemeinschaft" in South Wheeling's factory district. He worked for some time in Augustus Pollock's stogie factory. Pollock actually referred to Wheeler as "King of the stogiemakers" because when he was young, Wheeler was able to roll 1500 to 1800 stogies per day!

After a strike following Pollock's death in 1906, Wheeler opened his own small stogie-making shop at 3634 Chapline Street. He had 14 employees and boasted he could sell 100,000 hand-rolled stogies a day. During WWII, he supplied 35 stogie companies with tobacco. Wheeler, in 1964, said he fondly remembered some of Wheeling's most famous businessmen, Anton Reymann, Henry Schmulbach, and Bill Lias. His grand home is still standing at 3536 Jacob Street and he reportedly seasoned his tobacco in a small building behind that house!



**#18 Wheat Family**  
3724 Chapline Street

This is one of the oldest homes in South Wheeling. The residence is a classic Greek Revival house, popular from the 1830s-1850s. The Wickets were a leading commercial family in Ritchietown. In 1832, James M. Wheat came from Alexandria, and in 1837,

opened the Wheat Tannery on the banks of the Ohio River.

His son, George K. Wheat, started making trips on flatboats selling merchandise to Louisville and Cincinnati in 1852. He established the Wheeling Pottery Company in 1879. In 1898, he incorporated the Suburban Brick Company, which produced 20 million bricks a year! George's son, H.L. Wheat continued the family's entrepreneurial spirit. In 1881, he organized H.L. Wheat & Company, a wholesale Queensware business. After moving to St. Paul, Minnesota, he returned as general manager of the Wheeling branch of the Pabst Brewing Company.



**#19 P.J. Gast Bakery Office**  
3728 Eoff Street

Peter Gast worked for the A.W. Kunckle Bakery at 3728 Eoff Street. Taking over the business in 1919, Gast became known for his baked bread and sweet treats. Early in the Depression, his bread sold for 5 cents. The bakery's worst time came in the flood of 1936, when water almost reached the first floor's ceiling! After floods in 1937, 1938, and 1942, the family moved the plant to 3600 Wetzel Street. The new factory was mechanized with large conveyer belts, automatic ovens and wrappers. By the 1960s, the company had over 20 delivery trucks serving the Tri-State area and 105 employees. Production workers were members of the American Bakers and Confectionery Local No. 462. Owner John Gast was President of the South Side Improvement Association and was Wheeling's mayor from 1959-1963. Gast Bakery closed in 1984.



**#20 Worker Housing**  
3900 Block Wood Street

According to various sources, this distinctive brick row house section was called "glass house row" and later "the flats." In the late 19th century, there were two main sections of brick row houses built for the workers at the Hobbs Glass Works. One section was located on the 3600 Block of Wood Street (now the park and swimming pool), and the other section can be seen here. As now, most of these were apartments where glass workers boarded with other families, often only having a small room to themselves. Most of the single boarders would have lived on the 2nd floor of this row, while the families lived on the bottom floors. By the 1890s and into the early 20th century, the variety of workers that lived here included glass snappers and helpers, potters, tobacco strippers, and general laborers.



**#21 Mozart Park Incline**  
43rd Street, Hillside

Opened in 1893 by Henry Schmulbach, Mozart Park provided affordable working-class leisure in South Wheeling. There was a roller coaster, casino, bowling alley, outdoor stage, 3-mile bicycle track, garden, and concession stands. The park also had the state's largest dance hall, holding 5,000 people. A large mug of beer and sandwich cost 5 cents each! The park hosted German singing societies, operas, vaudeville shows and a parachute jump. One attraction, a zoo, failed after a frenzied crowd killed and ate a caged bear on display!

Schmulbach eased travel to the top-of-the-hill location by building a 205-yard electric incline near 43rd Street. On average, the incline could carry 1,200 persons every hour with cars running every two minutes. Schmulbach kept prices low to cater to working class guests, with the initial cost being 15 cents which included park admission. The incline was discontinued by 1907, and the park was closed in 1917.



**#22 Wheeling Traction Company**  
43rd and Jacob Streets (picture location)

Wheeling was the 3rd U.S. city to have an electric streetcar system. By 1887, horse-drawn cars were replaced by the Vanderpool model, which ran one direction and required a turntable. Later, Wheeling adopted double track, steel passenger cars and by 1889, the lines extended south to Benwood where an electric car barn and station stood at 42nd and Water Street.

The two streetcar lines created an intricate web through South Wheeling, making it a tight fit for automobiles, horses, and children playing. Often the streetcar company was a target for working class discontent. The company's rates often changed, and its city franchise led to allegations of bribery and political corruption. During a streetcar workers' strike in 1899, an angry mob set fire to the company's Benwood barn, and workers antagonized those riding the cars in South Wheeling.