

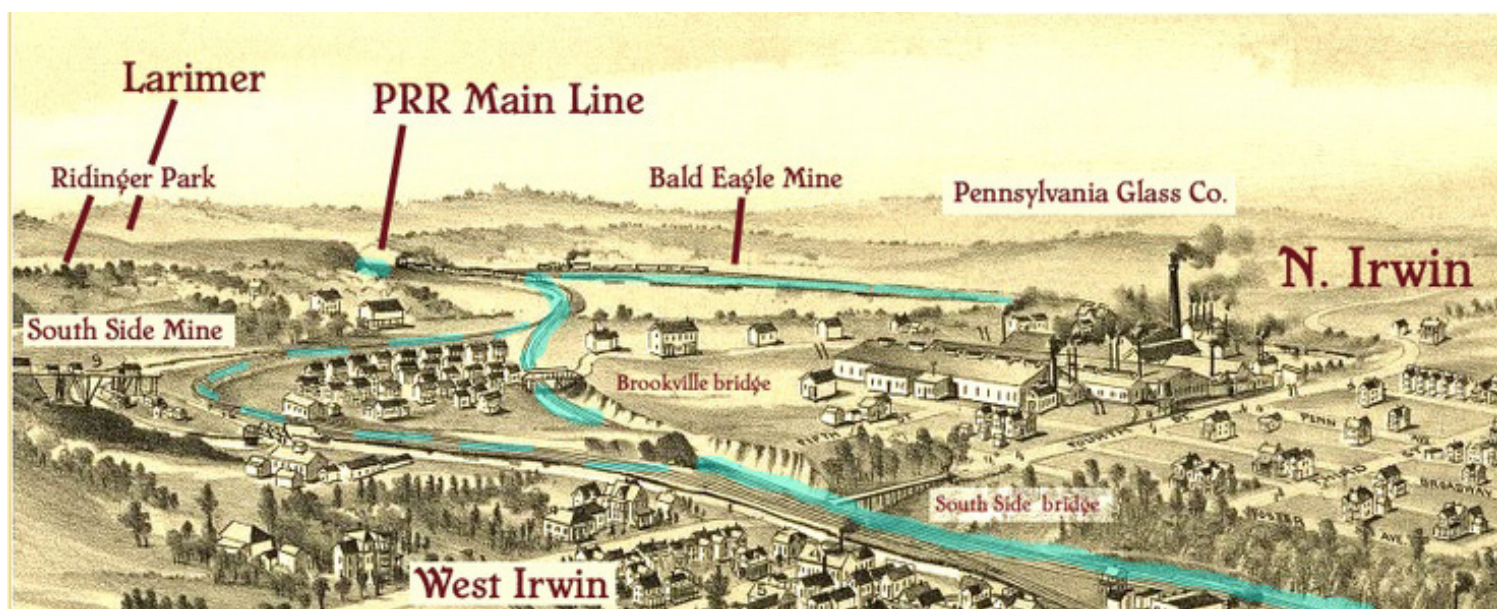
*We* preserve our local history, promote the history of the Norwin Community and embrace the opportunity to educate the Community about the people, places and events that comprise the history of Irwin, North Irwin, and North Huntingdon Township.

## Historic Hospitality

by Bob Cupp

*Did You Know?*

### IRWIN'S GRAND OLD HOTELS SERVED A BUSTLING COMMERCIAL CENTER



#### THE COMMERCIAL CENTER

By 1908, salesmen could patronize four different trolley lines to reach the Irwin area's coal patch towns. The Pittsburgh, McKeesport and Greensburg Trolley Line, which later became part of West Penn Railways, provided trolley service or connections to points throughout Westmoreland, Fayette and Allegheny Counties. A livery stable was also available for those who preferred to travel by horse and buggy.

Irwin grew up along the Pennsylvania Railroad's main line. The rapid growth of the coal industry allowed the town to develop into a thriving community, which quickly became a Westmoreland County commercial center. People came here to transact business, shop at a wide variety of stores, do their banking or get a good night's sleep. Salesmen arrived by train and traveled throughout the region on the far-reaching trolley system.

All this commercial activity resulted in extensive demand for sleeping accommodations in Irwin. There were only three hotels here when the town was incorporated in 1864. By 1891, the number had grown to eight.

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# Historic Hospitality *(continued)*



## **ORIGINAL IRWIN HOTEL**

*The original Irwin Hotel was located on Main Street, north of the more recent Irwin Hotel on the opposite side of the street.*

*(Courtesy of R. Scott Carlton)*

One of the early hotels, the **Guffey House**, was on the corner of Oak and Second Streets; that property is now occupied by the old Immaculate Conception school building. It had 19 sleeping rooms, two handsomely furnished parlors, a large dining room, a reading room and a bar.

The original **Irwin Hotel** was located on Main Street, north of the more recent Irwin Hotel. It was one of the largest and best furnished hotels in town. The proprietor, Michael Clohessy, moved to Irwin in 1872, purchased the building from Jonas Miles and, after extensive remodeling, opened what was said to be one of the most pleasant and convenient hotels in town.

The Irwin Hotel was described by William Gordon Bennett in 1891: *“Everything has been arranged with a view to securing pleasure and convenience to the guests. The rooms, 62 in number, of which 26 are sleeping rooms, are all well and handsomely fur-*

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## **COMMERCIAL HOTEL**

*This vintage photo of the Commercial Hotel was taken shortly after it was opened in 1889 by T. C. Patrick in what was previously known as the Cort Building. After the original Irwin Hotel burned down, the Commercial Hotel was renamed the Irwin Hotel and was known as such until it also burned down.*

*(Courtesy of R. Scott Carlton)*





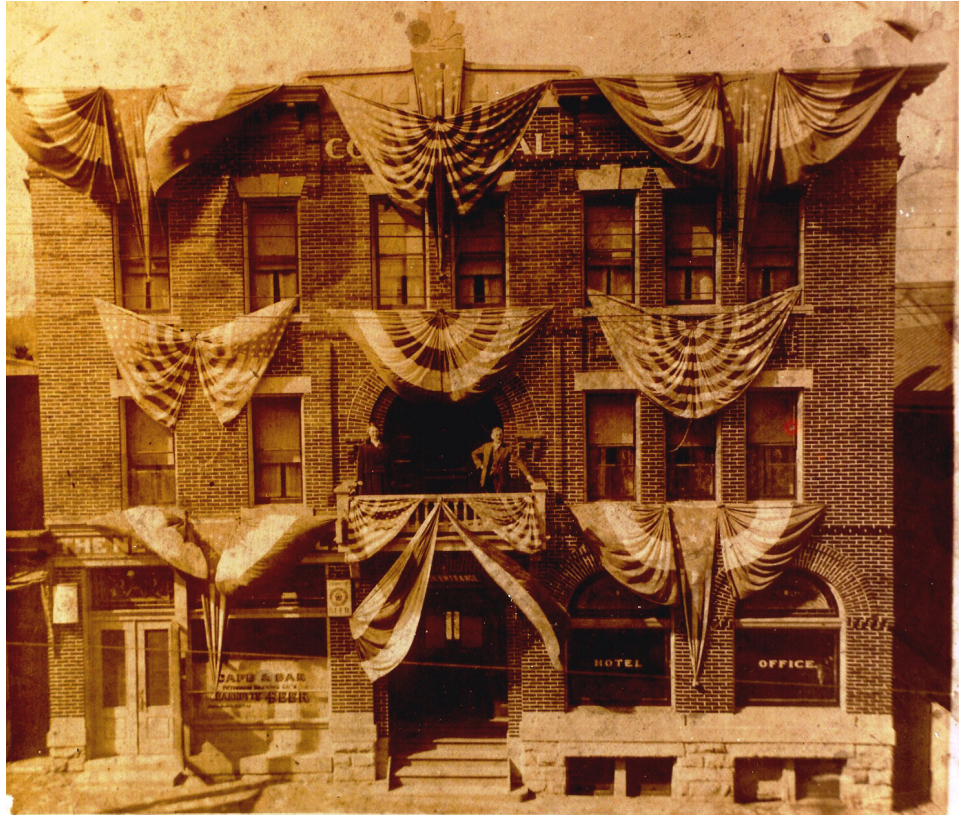
# Historic Hospitality *(continued)*

nished; the carpet, of which was used 2,000 yards, with 300 yards of oil cloth, is of excellent quality. The entire building is fitted with electric lights, mountain water and all modern improvements, and the genial landlord expends every effort for the comfort of his patrons.”

In 1889, T. C. Patrick opened the **Commercial Hotel** in the Cort Building. This Main Street hotel claimed to be the “headquarters for commercial men.” Previously, the building had been used as a hotel by Joseph McQuiston. Shortly after Mr. Patrick took possession, the hotel was enlarged and remodeled; there were 42 rooms, 36 of which were sleeping rooms.

In 1891, the Commercial Hotel was described in *Industries of Irwin and Vicinity*: “The rooms are bright, cozy and cheerful, and are very handsomely and tastefully furnished and supplied with electric lights and every modern convenience. Mr. Patrick is a model landlord, thoroughly understanding what a hotel should be, and exerting every effort to make the hotel a model one. The dining room management is deserving of much praise.

The people of Irwin show their appreciation of Mr. Patrick’s efforts, a number preferring to take their meals there than have



## COMMERCIAL/IRWIN HOTEL 1915

After the original Irwin Hotel burned down, the Commercial Hotel was renamed the Irwin Hotel, and was known as such until it burned down in 2009. The hotel was decorated for some special occasion in this 1915 photo. (Courtesy of R. Scott Carlton)



## IRWIN HOTEL 2006

Until it burned down, the exterior of the Irwin Hotel appeared much as it did over a century ago. Long-time owner and manager, R. Scott Carlton, proudly displayed old Irwin hotel photos on the wall behind the horseshoe-shaped bar. (Bob Cupp Photo)

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# Historic Hospitality *(continued)*

*them prepared at home. Commercial men, who, a few years ago avoided Irwin on account of the lack of good hotels, now seek it, saying that we have the 'best hotels in the county'.*"

In 1904, the Commercial Hotel advertised the availability of rooms for the rate of \$2.00 per day with "special terms for regular boarders." Ed Brown, the pro-

prietor at the time, spent \$5,000 on reconstruction, redecorating and refurnishing the hotel. The ad stated, *"The dining room is large and airy and bedrooms finished in white. All conveniences expected by guests are at hand. The traveling public will find the table supplied with the best and all accommodations first-class."*

The **Jones Hotel** was a large frame structure on North Main Street. Its convenient location near the railroad station, combined with the successful efforts of the owner, Job Jones, who settled in Irwin in 1872, made it one of the most popular hotels in town. Jones began his hotel career in 1885 as proprietor of the American House. In 1889, he opened his own establishment, known as the Jones Hotel. As with most of the hotels in town, a room was made available there for salesmen to display their samples.

R. E. Shepp was the proprietor of **Hotel Shepp**; he noted that, "Transients or boarders will find this a home-like hotel." Its advantages included its convenience to the railroad depot, and the fact that it was newly remodeled and refurnished.

The **Crescent Hotel**, Alex McKim Proprietor, advertised, "This hotel has been newly furnished and offers the best accommodations. Its location – Main and Water Streets, one minute's walk to the P. R. R. Station, is a convenience that is appreciated by the traveling public."

Peter Shaaf was the proprietor of the **Hennessy House**, located on Oak Street between Second and Third Streets. In 1904, it ad-



## **IRWIN HOTEL BURNS 2009**

*R. Scott Carlton operated the hotel and bar for the last three decades of its existence. The property is now part of the Lamp's development plans. (Bob Cupp Photo)*

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# Historic Hospitality *(continued)*

vertised, “*First-class accommodations, with fine bar attached, under new management.*” The hotel could be reached by telephone at “Bell Phone 45.”

Lee and Pauline Bertani purchased the “ageless” **Arlington Hotel** in 1935, breathing new life into it. The hotel, located at 211 Oak Street, dated back to the turn of the century.

The **Brunswick Hotel** stood at the corner of Main and Second Streets as a testament to the vision of Thomas C. Patrick, who opened this fine hostelry in 1895. The brick and stone building was built at a cost of \$80,000. Soon after its opening, trolley service to Jeannette and Greensburg became available at its door.

The hotel was the pride of Irwin; its reputation promoted the town far and wide. By 1904, L. Bruce Patrick, the builder’s brother, had become proprietor and manager, sustaining the Brunswick as one of the leading commercial hotels in the region.

During the roaring twenties, the Brunswick was known for its fine dining and dancing. The large dining room, with its high ceiling and tall windows, was patronized by salesmen and local residents.

By the late thirties, the kitchen was remodeled to a state-of-the-art condition. In the forties, it became a prime brunch desti-

nation for the local Sunday “after church” crowd, as well as a popular spot for social gatherings. In the fifties, permanent guests occupied the rooms, and the building was finally demolished in 1957 to make room for a parking lot across from the Irwin Post Office.

John Bricker and his son, Edward, were the proprietors of the **Hotel Albion** at 207 Main Street. The hotel boasted of having all modern improvements, including electric light and water with special attention to table service, choice wines and liquor at the bar, and large airy rooms.



## **BRUNSWICK HOTEL**

*The elegantly furnished Brunswick Hotel was an architectural delight. It was a popular destination for travelers who ranked it high among Western Pennsylvania’s best hotels. (Norwin Historical Society Photo)*

Built in 1895 by the Bricker family to accommodate railroad passengers, this attractive building was originally known as the **Bricker Hotel**. Over the years, it changed hands many times. At one time, H. P. Good had a meat market and grocery store where the bar was later located.

As the popularity of the automobile grew, travel by trolley and railroad declined. Southwestern Pennsylvania’s street railway

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# Historic Hospitality *(continued)*



service finally came to an end in 1952. The Lincoln Highway bypassed the downtown and the need for Irwin's hotel accommodations was greatly diminished. Guest rooms were eventually converted into apartments for permanent residents. One by one, the grand old hotels closed, signaling the end of an era.

Only two of the early hotels survived into the 21st century as symbols of that golden age of rail transportation.

In the mid-2000's, Tod and Susan Evans purchased the Albion Hotel building, and operated their new establishment as "**Major Tom's**" in honor of Tod's father, Tom Evans. He was a highly decorated soldier in Patton's Army during World War II, advancing from the rank of Private to Major by way of battlefield commissions. There were seven apartments above the re-

## MAJOR TOM'S 2006

*Built in 1895, this Main Street building was originally known as the Bricker Hotel, and later became the Albion Hotel. In the mid-2000's, Tod and Susan Evans operated a remodeled bar and restaurant here called Major Tom's. (Bob Cupp Photo)*

modeled bar and restaurant. Tod believes a hidden room in the basement may have been used as a speakeasy during Prohibition days. Unfortunately, Major Tom's has since closed, and has also passed into Irwin's history.

After the Turnpike opened in 1940, motels were built all along the Lincoln Highway in Irwin and North Huntingdon to accommodate weary turnpike travelers. Conley's had changed since the 1940's, but it was still built around the original "*Conley's Court*" structure. *Quality mattresses were important to travelers and Conley's advertised "Serta Perfect Sleepers".*

The Penn-Irwin rooms featured

knotty pine walls and tile bathrooms with a large neon sign above the office.

Most of the old motels remained along the Lincoln Highway until the 1970's. According to the Lincoln Highway – Pennsylvania Travelers Guide, "*The Penn-Irwin was one of three hotels run by a Mr. McCauley. That's why the room numbers here run from 39 to 54. The Royal Plaza had 1 to 38, and the Penn State had the higher numbers.*" The Penn State and the Royal Plaza were both destroyed by fire. Another motel, the Pine, had 21 rooms; there's a Kentucky Fried Chicken at that location now. Many of the

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# Historic Hospitality *(continued)*

old motels have been replaced with fast food restaurants.

A few miles farther west at the top of Jacktown Hill were the Jacktown Hotel, Gebert's Hotel and Adrilee Motor Hotel where the Georgetown Inn was more recently located. Across the road to the west was the El Dorado, a restaurant and nightclub with tourist cabins. It later became Ben Gross and then Chesterfield's, minus the cabins. Proceeding west there's Park's Motel; when the Park family purchased it in 1954, it was known as Uncle Frank's Cabins with outdoor toilets and a hot dog stand.

Because the turnpike ended at Irwin / North Huntingdon, a number of other motels also opened for business along the Lincoln Highway. There were Lutzenhizer's Cabins beside the Hiland Terrace Motel, Lincoln Cabins at the entrance to the Penn Lincoln Cemetery, Boggs Motel in Stewartsville, Bucks Cabins, the Staging Post Inn, and Green Gables Motel where Doug's Motel is now located.



*PENN-IRWIN MOTEL (above) and CONLEYS MOTEL (below)*  
(Norwin Historical Society Photos)



*JACKTOWN HOTEL (below lt) COLONIAL MANOR HOTEL (below rt)*  
(Norwin Historical Society Photos)





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**2018**

**SUMMER**

**We've moved to 219 Main Street, Across from the Lamp Theater  
and are open during special Irwin events!  
STOP IN FOR A VISIT!**