Crock-full of Crubro

Dear Pittsburgh History,

I was pleasantly surprised to receive a phone call from a friend informing me of the inside back cover-piece entitled “Historic Preservation” in your Summer 1992 issue. Vinton Cruikshank was my grandfather and my father, George, was the “& son” in the last version of the [jelly, pickle and prepared food] business that was known as V.W. Cruikshank & Son. It was fun to learn new things about my family, including the change in the spelling of our name over a century ago. I have amassed quite a collection of Crubro [the company name formed from “Cruikshank” and “brothers”] jars and other containers dating back to the Allegheny, Pa., days, with the crown jewel being an A.F. King portrait of my great-grandfather, Frank Cruikshank, Sr., who really was the inspiration for the company. It was a fine company and, although few remember today, I’m told the products were first-rate.

There were many reasons for why the company was “gone” by 1956, the most notable being my grandfather’s health and my father’s lack of interest in the business. When the company was sold, a new one known as Cruikshank Brothers Investment Co. was formed with the primary intent being to invest the money from the sale of the business in local Pittsburgh companies, which my grandfather believed in. It is interesting to note that, even today, my family has continued to hold those fine Pittsburgh stocks (Pittsburgh Plate Glass, Equitable Resources, Duquesne Light and others) with the same belief that Pittsburgh is not only a great place to run a business but has tremendous public companies to invest your nest egg in.

Thank you for the article, as it’s great to see a fine Pittsburgh institution, albeit long gone, remembered once again, and, yes, we bought Heinz stock as well.

Ronald G. Cruikshank
Pittsburgh

From the Editor: After receiving Mr. Cruikshank’s letter, we put him in touch with the Historical Society’s Museum Programs Department. The photograph shows what happened next: that’s Mr. Cruikshank, a Ketchum Communications executive, donating a Crubro Co. stoneware pickle crock, 10 1/4 inches high, to the Historical Society’s collection which the Museum can use to document local business history.

Heard of Mayer Field?

Dear Pittsburgh History,

I read the half page entry on the inside back cover of the Winter of 1992-93 issue. You will recall it related to the area’s “three” airports: Bettis, the Allegheny County Airport, and our current new airport. I have a question which relates to an airport, but not one of the above mentioned.

I am 74. When I was about 9 years old my Dad took me on one of our Sunday afternoon trolley adventures. (We had no car.) On one great day we went by trolley and bus to Mayer Field, an airport. We began from Wilkinsburg and I believe took three different trolley lines and finally a roadway bus. We came home the same way. It was my first view of an airplane on the ground. There were several “two wingers.” Rides were available, but we had not that kind of funds. Dad did buy me a small balsa wood glider from a vendor at the field. Can you tell me precisely where that Mayer Field was?

Charles R. Siple
Monroeville, Pa.

Editor’s reply: Mayer Field was located southwest of Pittsburgh, just north of Bridgeville, at the present site of the Great Southern Shopping Center. It was founded in 1919 by Caspar Mayer, a local brickyard proprietor. According to William F. Trimble’s High Frontier: A History of Aeronautics in Pennsylvania,
Mayer bought a biplane "and hired a pilot to begin a successful flying school and passenger business. Exhibitions were immensely popular at Mayer's Field. A regular feature was G.H. Phillips, 'the Human Fly,' whose weekend performances included a headstand while the airplane looped the loop." Research by the Historical Society's Library staff found that Mayer Field was sold in the 1940s.

Another important regional airport was Rodgers Field, located north of Pittsburgh near Fox Chapel. The field was named after Pittsburgh aviator Calbraith Rodgers, who made the first transcontinental flight in 1911: New York to California in seven weeks!

Junction with Céloron

Dear Pittsburgh History,

I am writing about the "History on My Doorstep" article, in which Stephen Finegold reported on the adventures of Capt. Pierre Joseph Céloron (Spring 1992, p. 3-13). This was an excellent excursion into the early days of Western Pennsylvania, and I enjoyed it very much.

On page 11, Mr. Finegold wrote "that a bit of interesting trivia" was that "right around the corner" from his house is present-day Junction Pharmacy, at Forbes and Braddock avenues, in an area that was once a golf course. He wrote that it "probably derives its name from its turn-of-the-century legacy as 'the junction' — where golfers crossed over Braddock from one side of the course to the other."

Probably most of the people who live near that pharmacy are newcomers to the area and may not know the true origin of its name. But I grew up in Wilkinsburg, living there from 1925 until 1951, and I recall that the Junction Pharmacy had the best chocolate frosts of any drug store in the East End! I also know the store got its name from the junction point of several trolley lines which met at that corner. Coming in from the east on the Forbes "main line" were the 63 Trafford City, the 64 East Pittsburgh/Wilkinsburg, and the 66 Wilkinsburg via Forbes. In addition, there was the joint Pittsburgh Railways/West Penn Railways freight service which operated from Greensburg and Uniontown to the freight terminal in the old Exposition Building downtown near the Point. This service consisted of two-car or three-car trains which traveled only at night. Plus, coming in from the south on Braddock Avenue was the 67 Swissvale/Rankin/Braddock which joined the others as they proceeded west on Forbes to downtown Pittsburgh.

There was a third route, the 78 Oakmont/Verona, which came through Wilkinsburg via Montier Street, Swissvale, Franklin, and Kelly avenues, and then Peebles Street to Forbes. At the junction, the 78 line went over to Braddock and south to the Regent Square commercial district, where it was switched back to make the long trip to Oakmont. Double-ended cars with trolleys at each end were used on this route.

In the late '20s and early '30s, all trolleys were manned by a motorman and a conductor, who collected fares at the center entrance of the car. At the junction, the 78's cars engaged in some elaborate switching operations, since there was only a single track connecting the west-bound line on Forbes to the south-bound Braddock line. The conductor would leave the car, throw a switch, and the car would proceed to the east-bound track, round the corner to Braddock to the north-bound track, where another switch was thrown so the car moved over to the south-bound track headed to Regent Square.

During the Depression, conductors were eliminated to save money, and the one-man "front entrance" car became the norm. To prevent traffic tie-ups, Pittsburgh Railways "double-tracked" the switch area from Forbes to Braddock. This also eliminated tie-ups when Kennywood Park picnic cars made that turn from Forbes onto Braddock en route to a day of fun.

The junction was a busy place for many years. The first route to disappear was the 78 Oakmont/Verona, after World War II. Then freight service died out due to competition from trucking lines. Sometime in the '60s, the 66 Wilkinsburg via Forbes began showing up only occasionally and then vanished. The remaining routes were eventually converted to bus lines by the Port Authority of Allegheny County. The only remaining trolley junctions today are those associated with PAT's light rail transit system to the South Hills.

The Junction Pharmacy lives on, though, and many consider it a well-known landmark. It must be close to 90 years old. But I doubt if anyone there these days knows how to make a chocolate frost.

Charles W. Little
Pittsburgh

Correction

In our photograph credits in the Winter 1992-1993 issue, the source of the picture of the Civic Arena under construction, pages 176-177, was incorrectly identified. The photograph came from the Pennsylvania Room at the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh.