

Pitcairn's History by J. Glew

Contributed by Administrator
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History of Pitcairn: A Personal Perspective by J. Glew of Aliquippa, Pa February/March 1960 The town of Pitcairn, once a great and flourishing town, has become a semi-ghost town located on the main line of the Pennsylvania Railroad and 3 ½ north (sic) of the great and flourishing town of Monroeville. Pitcairn was once known as Glewstown 75 years ago which contained 1 log house, 1 small frame store, and very prosperous blacksmith shop. Then the name was changed to Dogstown when a few more houses were built and all the newcomers had dogs. It was changed again around 1892 to the name of Walurba and later changed to the present name of Pitcairn in 1894. Pitcairn's main revenue and employment was the Pennsy's railroad yards which many commuter trains left this station daily. The main railroad yards served freight transfers east and west to all parts of the United States and also freight cars and an engine round house for engine repairs and also contained and built our east and west "hump" with electrical control for switching freight to all points. However, the greater part of this great enterprise has been moved to Conway and is now known as the largest and most progressive railroad yards and freight center in the United States. However, Pitcairn claimed this title once, but still remains rich in historical fare. At the extreme east end of the railroad was old Massside which was known in the early days as a wayside freight station operated by my grandfather, John Vaughn, around 1876 or 1877. Today, a steel bridge crosses the east end of the railroad yards. However, at one time there was only an open crossing there with a small wooden bridge crossing Old Turtle Creek used for horses and wagons and also pedestrians. My grandmother Vaughn was killed at that particular railroad crossing by what was then known as the Philadelphia Express. She was going over to the small store in Glewstown. Her body was found 50 yards over in Old Turtle Creek which flows between Pitcairn and the railroad yards. My grandfather, John Vaughn, 3 years later, was killed at the north end of the railroad yards. He had come to our house at Old Wall where he made his home. He would take a walk everyday and sometimes cross the railroad tracks to visit an old Scotchman by the name of John McAntire who operated a company supply for the coal miners such as groceries and mine tools for the Boyd Coal Mines which supplied coal at this point to all railroad locomotives which were known as the Boyd Tipple for all engines that used coal at this time. I heard my father tell my grandfather not to go across because he might get killed. Three years after his wife was killed, he was killed by an empty freight car being shuttled by a pole car to make up trains to go east and west. So both grandparents were killed by the same railroad and in the same yard. The old Boyd Tipple, which was in sight of our home in the town of Old Wall where we lived, was quite an historic sight. Four loaded cars coming down or incline 50 feet high and would pull 6 or 8 empty cars back up to the top of the hill to be loaded for the trip down again to a large coal bin and dumped there, which always kept a large supply on hand to supply all the railroad engines. Occasionally, a loaded trip of coal would jump the track on this tipple and crash to the ground and then all the residents nearby had their supply of winter coal free. This old-time coal tipple had been discarded and removed and all it leaves today is memories of a past. However, in memories of the past we still have east end railroad yards, or as it was known then, Mass Side, the old cannonball hole in the side of the hill large enough to build a small house inside this hole. It was called the old Proving Grounds. All U.S. arsenal cannons were tested there around 1861-1864. One large cannon using an 8-inch ball was tested there. It was bolted down to a flatcar and followed outside the railroad outside the town of Savittsville where it is now mounted on a concrete pedestal at the home of John George where it can be seen today. This large cannon was later abandoned, it being not tactical enough during the civil war to move from place to place. Where it was tested, the old hole in the hill remains which in the past was a great place for weary bums who were traveling by freight or as some called it "riding the rods." Some of them wintered there. They had the inside of davostone, stoves and bunks, or anything that looked like furniture. And to interview these strange people, you would find they were from all parts of the United States and had some strange stories to tell of why they were there.