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Resurrection Through Community: The Collapse
and Rebirth of Phoenixville, PA

Julie Pesta
American Studies Program
Senior Thesis
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Spring 2012

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my deep gratitude to Professor Scott Tang, my reader and thesis advisor, for his constant advice and support throughout this past year. His willingness to give his time and energy made this project possible and has been greatly appreciated.

I would also like to thank my second reader and academic advisor, Professor Davarian Baldwin, who was willing to give his support and help, even while working on a book during his sabbatical.

I wish to thank Rob Frees, Manny DeMutis, Ed Kraft, and Josie Bachi, whose input through interviews, emails, and phone conversations made this project possible. Without their willingness to help through personal anecdotes, familial evidence, and opinions, I would not have been able to truly capture the story of Phoenixville.

I would like to thank the Phoenixville Historical Society, the Borough of Phoenixville, the congregations of B’Nai Jacob, St. Ann’s and Sacred Heart for their help in collecting data and evidence.

I am particularly grateful for the academic and emotional support given throughout this year. Their connections within Phoenixville, as well as their own experiences, greatly helped the formation of this project. Their ability and willingness to help in the gathering of information, and their support through this entire project has been greatly appreciated.



The Phoenixville Mural embodies the past, present and future of Phoenixville and its community.

While walking down Bridge Street in downtown Phoenixville, one sees an eclectic mix of boutique shops, restaurants, bars, and art galleries. It might seem like an average small town in America. Once you reach the corner of Bridge and Main Streets, however, you are struck by the bold presence of the Phoenixville Mural. Created in the 1990s, the mural on the side of the popular Steel City Coffeehouse reflects stories shared by local residents. The most prominent feature is the imagery of steel and iron production, paying homage to Phoenixville's lucrative steel industry and the history of the town. The figures in the mural are portrayed as active in the raising of flags and posters that represent the history of the town. The mural, taken as a whole, is a declaration of the industrial past and the community-driven creation and change of Phoenixville. Located at one of the most frequented

intersections in the downtown area, the mural is a representation of Phoenixville's past, present, and future.

I was born in Phoenixville, and although I moved away over ten years ago, I have a general knowledge of the town and its complex and difficult history. When picking a topic for my thesis, I wanted to explore the evolution of a town from its birth to the height of its success, and from its decline to the birth of a new era. I learned from family and close friends that Phoenixville was a town that had felt the highest of highs and the lowest of lows. It thrived during the industrial era and was greatly affected by the decline of American industry. This history of ups and downs is common in many other cities, but what stood out to me was that the recent changes and growth of Phoenixville was community driven.

Personal narratives were essential to truly understand the story of Phoenixville. These narratives provide context, perspective, and depth in a way that historical documents and data cannot. The point of this project is not to simply analyze the growth of a town from settlement to present, but to find a perspective that gives the general history more insight. Through research using a variety of sources, I looked at how the sense of place felt by the residents of Phoenixville progressed throughout its history. If it changed, I wanted to know why it changed and how it affected the sense of place for future residents. I quickly realized that the Phoenixville that people visit and live in today is completely related to the past and its complex progression through history.

The story of Phoenixville is complex and to fully capture the sense of place, I used a variety of sources, such as magazine and newspaper articles, data from the

Historical Society, statistics from the U.S. Census Bureau, and oral histories. Through the beginning stages of my research, I met several individuals, such as Manny DeMutis and Rob Frees, who were prominent players in the Phoenixville revitalization. Manny DeMutis is one of the major developers and minds behind the current renovation of the Bridge Street parcel of the former steel site, and Rob Frees is a member of the Community Development Corporation (CDC) as well as a third generation business owner in Phoenixville. The correspondence I had with residents of various ages and professions gave the story of Phoenixville life and depth that would not have been possible through archives and data.

The data that I did use in my research was crucial to the project as well. It gave accurate and significant evidence to the anecdotal information I received. In addition to numerous local and regional newspapers and magazines, statistical data from the Census Bureau was helpful in analyzing and understanding the changes in employment and population from decade to decade. I also used my background in architectural studies to interpret the physical landscape of Phoenixville in a way that might not have been done on first glance of the town. With knowledge of various architectural styles and their social and economic implications, I was able to look at the buildings that compose Phoenixville's downtown landscape and make claims about the diverse group of people that have populated Phoenixville throughout its history.

This project is divided into three sections, each describing and analyzing the major eras in Phoenixville's past. The first section focuses on the early history of Phoenixville. Settled in the 18th century, Phoenixville was a town geographically

destined to be a center of trade and industry. It is located at the confluence of the Schuylkill River and French Creek, which provided an easy means of transportation as well as the ability to harness the water for power. The industry in Phoenixville had humble beginnings with French Creek Nail Works, a small operation that quickly grew into the leading produce of nails to the country by 1830. Throughout the 19th century, French Creek Nail Works became Phoenix Iron Works and changed ownership several times. With each change, the company grew stronger and larger. At its height, the corporation employed over two thousand employees and was producing several major products. The Griffen Gun and the Phoenix Column were the greatest successes of Phoenix Iron Works, and they gave the company international recognition and demand for its products.

As the company grew, so did Phoenixville. Immigrants from many countries flocked to Phoenixville for the ample employment provided by the burgeoning steel and iron industry. Arriving from all over Europe, including Italy, Ireland, Czechoslovakia, these immigrants formed an incredibly diverse population. The tolerant beliefs of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania aided this settlement, but the largest draw for immigrants was the industry. The heterogeneous population had a tremendous effect on Phoenixville, creating a place with diverse architecture, religion, and culture. Influences from all over the world were present when walking down the streets of Phoenixville, and the sense of community was felt in churches, bars, and various neighborhoods.

Phoenix Iron Works remained internationally successful throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, surviving the Great Depression, two world wars, and the social

changes of the post-war era. This success could not last forever, and when the steel industry began to decline, Phoenixville could not avoid the economic effects. The community was also affected by the social changes of the 1950s and 1960s. The American dream was no longer living in a small town with work, residence and entertainment in one place. The ideal was suburbia and a shift to the monotony that accompanied these developments. Small downtowns were not desired, and Phoenixville suffered through the second half of the 20th century.

The economic and social struggles of the latter part of the 1900s are discussed in the second chapter of this paper. Phoenix Steel Corporation, formerly Phoenix Iron Works, had been the identity of Phoenixville for over a century. The sense of place was unmistakably tied to industrial success and blue-collar values. The residents of Phoenixville tried as hard as they could to keep the corporation operating. But sadly, after almost ten years of struggling to stay above water, Phoenix Steel Corporation closed its doors for the last time in 1987.

A major era and piece of Phoenixville had ended, and the residents needed to find a way to deal with that loss and move on. Many residents were left unemployed and with little to no options of other employment in the area. Phoenixville was not the only town affected by the disappearing steel industry and the surrounding areas of Pottstown, Spring City, and Norristown were in similar situations. The steel industry had played such a central role in Phoenixville for so long that many residents had a difficult time accepting that the industrial age was gone. Phoenixville needed a new plan. But what was the next step? And would Phoenixville be able to make it through these difficult economic times?

The strength of the community was shown during this period through the resilience and determination of the residents. Even when making ends meet was a struggle, almost the entire population remained in Phoenixville, unwilling to leave the community. These were some incredibly difficult years that in the end made the bond between the residents even stronger. Phoenixville began to move away from manufacturing, and new businesses began to come into the town. Those on the borough council knew that changing the economic identity of Phoenixville was going to be a slow process and that it needed to be slow. The economy itself was going to need time to recover, but the residents did as well. Bringing in new businesses and people quickly could alienate residents that had only known Phoenixville as the industrial success. To keep everyone working towards a common goal—restoring the reputation of Phoenixville—changes needed to be made carefully and organically.

The 1990s were years of gradual but monumental change for Phoenixville. The revitalization process that began in that decade is central to the third chapter. In these years, a few major businesses, as well as small shops, restaurants and investors came to Phoenixville. Through the presence of institutions such as the local chain restaurant Iron Hill Brewery, the renovation of the Colonial Theater, and a coffee shop with space for live performances, the new identity of Phoenixville became clear. With space for nightlife, performances and culture, Phoenixville would work towards becoming a haven for arts and entertainment. During the next twenty years, galleries, boutique stores, restaurants, and bars would open throughout Phoenixville.

Taking the direction of promoting art, culture, and a social scene all within a walking distance of housing and retail was a lofty goal, but Phoenixville was able to do this successfully. The key to their success was using the past to help the community and town get to the present. The original foundry building from Phoenix Iron Works was restored as part museum and part event space. Elements of the industrial era are seen throughout the town in the architecture, artwork and the residents and are a way to celebrate the past. Those who live in Phoenixville today are still connected with the Phoenixville of the past, whether through past generations or representations of it throughout the downtown area.

On the surface, the story of Phoenixville may seem common. It was a town built around industry and manufacturing that prospered for many years from the turn of the 18th century through World War II. After over a century of international success, Phoenix Steel Corporation began to fail and despite the valiant efforts of the corporation, the borough, and the residents, it did not survive. Phoenixville suffered greatly for many years, struggling to get through the economic and financial strain caused by the loss of the hub of their economy. However, during these difficulties, the community was resilient and determined to revitalize Phoenixville. The revitalization was a slow and delicate process to ensure that the Phoenixville's past identity as a strong, industrial core remained a part of the changing sense of place.

Growing up in Phoenixville, I always felt and witnessed the bond created by belonging to this community. Earlier this year I was reminded of just how strong that bond is when my grandfather passed away. My grandfather lived in Phoenixville for the majority of his life and was involved in the town. He wrote for

local newspapers, served his country in World War II, and even worked at Phoenix Iron and Steel for a short two weeks. I spent much of my childhood listening to his stories about Phoenixville during the Great Depression, the Cold War, and everything in between. When I returned to Phoenixville for the funeral services, dozens of people I had never met before were present and telling their own stories about my grandfather. People who went to high school with him, sat in the pew next to him at the Slovak church, or lived down the street from him all came to pay their respects and share their memories. This is when I realized the true strength of the Phoenixville community.

My grandfather's generation had seen it all: the thriving international success of Phoenix Iron and Steel, to the emotional effects of the twentieth century wars, and the eventual demise of the local industry. This community stayed together through the best and worst times, and they never gave up hope in each other or in Phoenixville. I realized not only the importance of their perseverance as a single community, but also the significance of their personal and individual narratives. These people possessed stories and experiences that archival research, books or statistical data could express.

One of the first owners of French Creek Works, Lewis Wernberg, is credited with giving Phoenixville its name. The embers and flames of the furnaces at the plant reminded him of the mythical creature, the phoenix, and fittingly renamed the company Phoenix Iron Works. What started out a humble beginning quickly became a flourishing industry. After years of success, the industry and Phoenixville became a wasteland of past success. Today, a revitalized identity and economy breathes new

life into the community. It is only appropriate that Phoenixville, a town named after a creature that was reborn from the fire and ashes of its own destruction, should do the same.

***CHAPTER 1:
THE BIRTH OF A TOWN***

Phoenixville thrived during the industrial area of America, experiencing a lucrative steel industry, a diverse population, and immense growth. The downtown was filled with restaurants, bars, churches, and shops with ethnic influences. It was impossible to walk through the various neighborhoods without witnessing the sense of community that Phoenixville nurtured. With residents from Northern and Eastern Europe, ranging from unskilled factory workers to owners and managers, Phoenixville was a model of diversity. The Phoenixville community was built on strength and pride. But how was this citizenry formed? And how did Phoenixville become this successful industrial hub?

Phoenixville as a town, industrial center, and community has a unique identity that has been preserved throughout its history. Its geographic location, which is an important aspect of this identity, contributed to the town's historic, as well as ongoing importance. Sitting at the confluence of the Schuylkill River and French Creek, Phoenixville is positioned perfectly for the import and export of goods and services. The location also makes the town easily accessible to both businesses and tourists. When one studies the town's past, though, one realizes that accessibility to European immigrants had arguably the most significant impact. The advantageous location led to industrial development, and the town quickly became a popular destination for immigrants. The acceptance of ethnic and religious diversity resulted in a large working class community, one that was invested in Phoenixville and its success. The diverse population created the town's ethnic enclaves and its unique architecture, which one can still see around town today. It also contributed to the massive growth of the Phoenix Steel Corporation. Without

its accessible location, diverse population of workers, and commitment to collective prosperity, Phoenixville would not have become an industrial success.

Phoenixville sits less than thirty miles northwest of Philadelphia in Chester County, Pennsylvania. Chester County was one of the original counties founded by William Penn in the mid-seventeenth century, and agriculture thrived there because it benefited from several important watersheds in the area. Along with proximity to Philadelphia via the Schuylkill River, the temperate climate and fertile soil were two reasons for the economic prosperity of early Phoenixville, or Manavon as it was known when it was still a small unincorporated village. Although their livelihood was tied to agriculture, the early population soon became involved in industry as well. James Starr, noted as the first settler of Phoenixville, brought a large amount of property and built his own gristmill in 1734. This mill became the center of early development of Phoenixville and helped create the town's industrial identity.

The industry in Phoenixville, which had its origins in the colonial era, survived the trials of the Revolutionary War and continued to grow throughout the 1700s and early 1800s. The gristmill built by Starr expanded to include an iron and nail factory. As the industrial economy and village population grew hand in hand, the need for municipal government arose. Regulating criminal activity was nearly impossible, and everyone had to endure living in a place that lacked paved roads and adequate schools. The residents realized that a successful town required a plan for expansion and a taxation system to support infrastructural development.

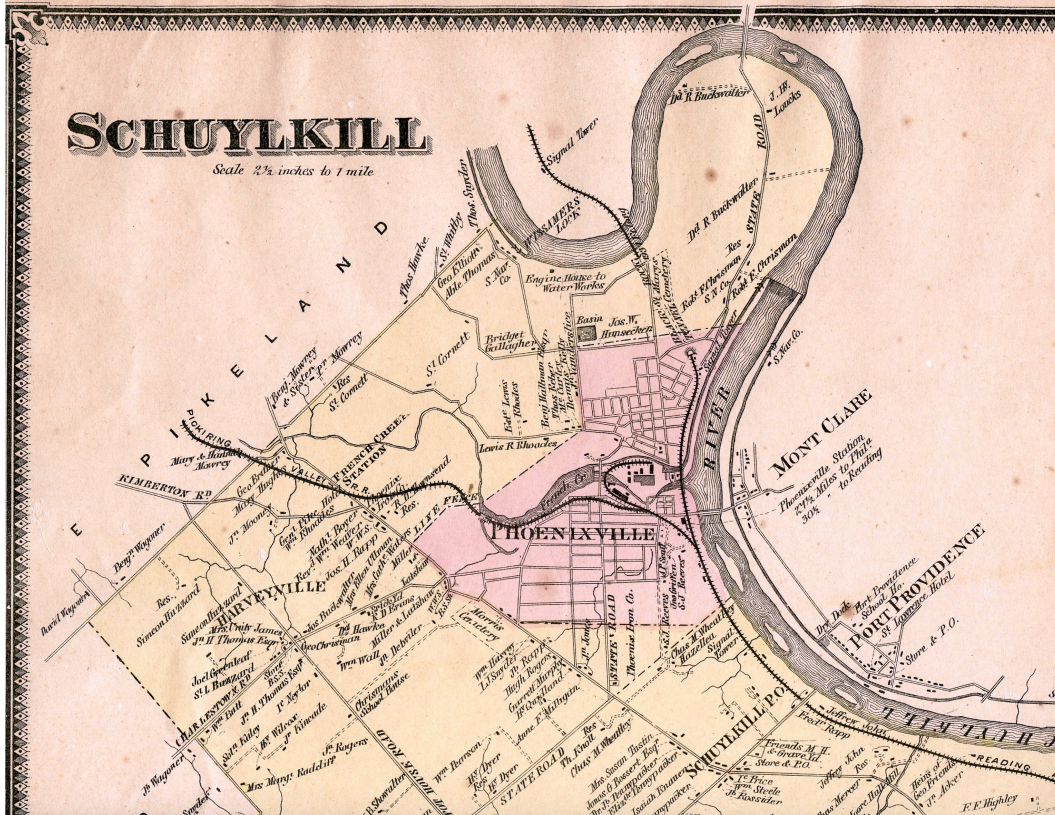
Although some resistance to incorporation existed, mostly from the iron and nail factory of Reeves, Buck, & Co., Phoenixville was officially incorporated as a borough

on March 6, 1849. The town would continue to grow and prosper for the rest of the century, and the town's prosperity was closely tied to the success of the iron industry.



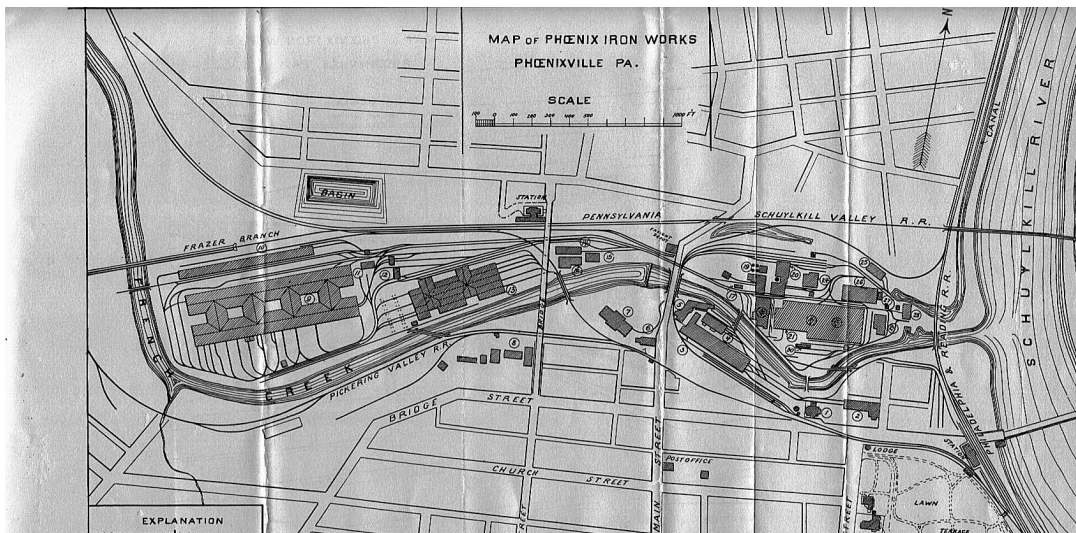
Map of Chester County from the Melish-Whiteside Maps 1817-1820

Although Phoenixville was not yet established as a township when this map was drawn, Phoenix Iron Works is prominently marked.



1873 Map of Schuylkill Township

This map from 1873 highlights the area within Schuylkill Township belonging to Phoenixville in light pink. The Pickering Valley Railroad is indicated by the thick black line that parallels French Creek. The railroad has tracks that lead directly through Phoenix Iron Works and to one of the main buildings.



1890 Map of Phoenix Iron Works

This map wonderfully depicts the building layout of Phoenix Iron Works as well as the roads and tracks throughout the property for transportation from one building to another as well as outside the property.



1923 Map of Phoenixville Borough

This map shows the expansion of the borough throughout the previous century as well as the increase in railroads and transportation routes.



1995 Map of Phoenixville

There are some slight differences in the physical boundaries of the borough from 1959 to 1990, caused by the creation of and subsequent restructuring of district lines.

INDUSTRIAL SUCCESS

At the center of the town's affluence throughout the 19th century, the iron industry remained an integral part of Phoenixville's history and identity. What began as a small gristmill built by James Starr expanded quickly throughout the Industrial Revolution. In 1790, this small mill was transformed into a successful nail factory through the harnessing of waterpower from French Creek. John and Benjamin Longstreth renovated the old mill and built the nail mill where the Foundry Building now stands.

For the next several decades, French Creek Nail Works, as it was known, continued to expand and periodically changed ownership. It was the first nail factory in the country and was also the first to produce nails by machine in the early 1800s.¹ In 1813, the company became known as Phoenix Iron Works, and within the next ten years, it began using steam engine technology and grew into the largest nail factory in the United States. George Thompson, owner of the factory during this time, made many changes that greatly improved Phoenix Iron Works. He bought the land surrounding the factory and built houses for the employees on his new property.² In this short period of time, Phoenix Iron Works became a consistently prosperous and profitable company, amidst ownership changes and continuous expansions. The employee base was growing steadily, as was the population of the small village of Manavon, which it was still called at the time. During these few decades, the effect of the company on the residents and the village itself was

¹ "The Iron Works- The Early Years", *Phoenixville Historical Society*, http://hspa-pa.org/iron_works.html, September 24, 2011.

² Pennypacker, Samuel. *Annals of Phoenixville and its Vicinity*. (Bavis and Pennypacker, Printers ,1872), 136.

apparent. In a piece about the history of Chester County written in 1824, Joseph J. Lewis expressed the potential and integral effect Phoenix Iron Works would have on the town of Phoenixville:

“Phoenix Works, situated upon French Creek, at its confluence with the Schuylkill and one of the first nail factories of the kind known in the United States. The little village that has grown up around is of uncommon beauty and already contains about forty families. When the river shall have been rendered completely navigable, this place, I presume, from the eligibility of its location, must become of considerable importance as a landing.”³

Phoenixville was a town with strong economic promise and a community willing to help make it as successful as possible. With these two elements in place, Phoenixville continued towards success.

There were several technological and industrial developments that helped Phoenix Iron Works continue to succeed: water and steam-powered machinery, land expansion, and the unique production of nails using this machinery. The 1820s and early 1830s marked another stage of development in the company. The opening of the Schuylkill Navigation Canal, and later the Philadelphia and Reading Railroads, gave Phoenix Iron Works access to large amounts of coal, allowing them to increase manufacturing of nails and the new production of iron. The increased production required a physical expansion of the property as well. A new mill was built in 1837 that used furnaces and engines. Samuel Pennypacker, a resident and author of Phoenixville in the 19th century, claimed that Phoenixville was the first place in the world to manufacture nails with the coal technology that they had. These impressive

³ Pennypacker, 138.

developments of the late 1830s led the way for Phoenix Iron Works' continued success throughout the 1840s.

Another ownership change in the 1840s put Reeves and Robert Buck in charge of the company. Now under the name of Reeves, Buck, and Company, the corporation expanded further with a new source of capital from Buck. A new product was added to their repertoire: iron rails for the Pennsylvania Railroad. Now manufacturing a major product in high demand, the iron works at Phoenixville continued to grow at an seemingly exponential rate. The new capital and need for the iron rails allowed Reeves, Buck, and Company to augment the existing infrastructure by constructing blacksmith shops, a foundry, and a new furnace among other things.⁴

In these tremendous years of expansion, many immigrants were flooding into the area. Both skilled and unskilled laborers were able to find employment either as workers at the iron mills or in many of the service jobs in the town. From 1846 to 1848 the population almost doubled, increasing from 1,680 people to 3,337.⁵ Reeves, Buck, and Company and Phoenixville as a town and community experienced great economic success and growth during the first half of the 19th century. Although the company changed ownership quite often, the consistency of its success was indisputable, and was continuing through the rest of the century.

The next twenty years brought even more success to Reeves, Buck, and Company, and to Phoenixville. The company was expanding its production and productivity, making it one of the most prosperous iron mills in the country at the

⁴ "Iron Works- The Early Years."

⁵ Pennypacker, 143.

time. In 1855, it became incorporated as the Phoenix Iron Company with David Reeves as the president and founder. During this decade, "Phoenix Iron Co. was the largest employer in Chester County with more employees than the next seventy-five businesses combined in Chester County."⁶ Under the new firm, Reeves hired John Griffen in 1885. Griffen was a "distinguished as well for his inventive genius as for his thorough theoretical knowledge of the principles of mechanics."⁷ With Reeves and Griffen working together at Phoenix Iron Company, the firm would be internationally recognized because of two monumental inventions: the Griffen Cannon and the Phoenix Column.

John Griffen contributed greatly to the success of Phoenix Iron Company, but he will forever be known for the Griffen Gun. Made of rolled iron rods, the Griffen Gun was an incredibly popular rifle, originally produced at Safe Harbor, Griffen's previous employer.⁸ Griffen brought the product to Phoenixville and they began to manufacture them for the United States Army. Unlike other rifles of the time, the Griffen Gun was able to fire exploding shells with a high resistance to combustion, giving the Union a large advantage in battle. The popularity of this gun compared to other was due to the unique manufacturing process employed by Phoenix Iron Company as well as Griffen's innovative mind. Phoenix Iron Company used a rolling process, which made the guns durable, accurate, and reliable in all types of battle. During the Civil War, Phoenix Iron Company produced over one thousand of these

⁶ "Iron Works- The Early Years."

⁷ Pennypacker, 164.

⁸ Safe Harbor was associated with David Reeves and the Reeves family and was at one point incorporated with Reeves, Whitaker, and Company until Reeves and Whitaker's partnership ended.

rifles, which contributed to a large part of the company's production and capital.⁹

The Griffen Gun was instrumental in both Griffen's individual success, but also to the national recognition of Phoenix Iron Company as an influential and prominent company in the production of iron goods.

While the Griffen Gun put Phoenix Iron Company on the map as a national producer of new and reliable iron products, the crown jewel of the company's success was the Phoenix Column, patented by Samuel Reeves (David's son) in 1862. The column, using wrought iron instead of cast iron, was much more stable because of the ability to rivet the iron. The columns were stable, durable, and much lighter than cast-iron structures, and able to support large structures without load-bearing walls. The columns were used in tall buildings, elevated train tracks and in bridges. Bridge building was just beginning in the late 19th century, and Reeves was a part of this movement.

Reeves organized Phoenix Bridge Company as a small subset of Phoenix Iron Company after the early success of his column. What made his idea of bridge building different than others was his distancing from the concept of a "bridge as a highly individualized work of art."¹⁰ Reeves and Phoenix Bridge Company produced a series of wrought iron bridges using the Phoenix column that could be shipped to any location and assembled by a local team. The company would be sent the necessary dimensions of the bridge and would construct the parts accordingly.

"Each bridge was reassembled at the plant to ensure a good fit, and then

⁹ Hazlett, James C.; Olmstead, Edwin; and Parks, M. Hume; *Field Artillery Weapons of the Civil War*. U.S: Associated University Presses, Inc., 1988.

¹⁰ Winpenny, Tom, *Without Fitting, Filing or Chipping*. Easton, PA: Canal History and Technology Press, 1996.

disassembled and shipped to the erection site.”¹¹ Phoenix Bridge Company was able to provide their services all over the country and was even used internationally. The use of the Phoenix Column in the bridges made them incredibly sturdy and inexpensive, as well as easy to assemble. While mostly used for wrought iron truss railway bridges, Phoenix columns were able to withstand heavy loads and were often used for structural supports. They were used in 1893 in Chicago’s Old Colony Building, which at seventeen stories was the city’s tallest building at the time. Thus, the success and influence of Phoenix Iron Company was seen throughout the country and even internationally.

Phoenix Iron Company continued to have an economic impact in the 19th century and much of the 20th century. Phoenix Bridge Company continued to manufacture and ship bridges throughout the country until the early 1900s. In the first decade of the 20th century, the company was landing contracts for major bridges in Manhattan and Quebec. This success continued throughout the next couple of decades, but the reputation of the Phoenix Bridge Company suffered with the collapse of the Quebec Bridge.¹² Even though there was speculation about the actual cause of the incident, the company was not able to overcome this hardship, especially while competing with larger companies and new construction materials. Phoenix Bridge Company succeeded in that industry because of its dominance in technology, but it was eventually edged out by superior competition.

While the national and international success of Phoenix Bridge Company waned in the middle of the 20th century, Phoenix Iron Company continued to thrive,

¹¹ Winpenny.

¹² Winpenny.

and the social implications within Phoenixville were significant. Phoenix Iron Company and its subsets were responsible for the huge population increases in Phoenixville and the diverse ethnic groups that resided there. Phoenixville was growing consistently throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, and its population was well-employed and living well as industrial workers. With the notable success of Phoenix Iron Company, Phoenixville experienced consistent population growth from 1850-1950 and as a company, Phoenix Iron was able to expand and grow.

Phoenixville Thrives Industrially and Socially

Chester County saw steady and notable increase in population throughout 1850-1950. The area was known both for the agricultural value of the land, as well as the industry and manufacturing establishments. Both of these characteristics were major pull factors for new immigrants to the country. However, as far as Phoenixville was concerned, the steel industry was enough to maintain a consistent growth in population for almost a century.

Immigrants had been moving into Chester County and Phoenixville for years, but when Phoenix Iron Company began to expand in the late 1800s, the influx was astounding. From 1850 to 1900, the population of Chester County almost doubled, and was showing consistent growth of about 7%-9% every decade.¹³ This population growth was a result of the expansion of Phoenix Iron Company and

¹³ "Census: 1850-1900." *Social Explorer*.

<http://www.socialexplorer.com/pub/reportdata/htmlresults.aspx?ReportId=R10241303>

manufacturing employment throughout the county. Simultaneous growth was occurring in manufacturing establishments. From 1890 to 1900, the number of manufacturing establishments increased by almost 90%, growing from 496 establishments to 924.¹⁴ It seems apparent that these concurrent growths helped spur further increases in both population and manufacturing establishments.

What is particularly interesting about the population increases in Chester County's history is that it continued to grow throughout the first half of the 20th century. There was a 17.8% increase in population from 1920-1940 even as the Immigration Act of 1924 and other immigration limiting policies were put in place by the United States government.¹⁵ These policies placed quotas or even specific numerical limits on the amount of immigrants from particular regions of the world, particularly Eastern and Southern Europe. These regions were the main origins of the immigrant families most prominent in Chester County and Phoenixville. The fact that the population continued to increase despite these limits on Phoenixville's immigrant pool shows that the industry in the area was so successful that native-born Americans were migrating to the area for employment. The iron industry in Phoenixville was expanding at such a consistent and successful rate that Americans from other regions were moving to Chester County for the bounty of employment opportunities as salesmen, factory laborers, clerks, etc.

¹⁴ "Census: 1890-1900", *Social Explorer*.

<http://www.socialexplorer.com/pub/reportdata/htmlresults.aspx?ReportId=R10241312>

¹⁵ "Census: 1920-1940", *Social Explorer*.

<http://www.socialexplorer.com/pub/reportdata/htmlresults.aspx?ReportId=R10241316>

A Diverse Social Landscape: Ethnicity and Religion

During the 19th and 20th centuries, the racial demographics as a percentage of the increasing population remained consistent between census data collections. For almost one hundred years, there was consistently a 90% white and 10% “colored” or black population.¹⁶ While the town had many immigrants and second-generation ethnic residents, they were mostly from Eastern and Southern Europe, which meant that they were “white” in the nation’s racial classifications. By the late 1800s, most of the residents of Chester County and Phoenixville were second-generation ethnic Americans—native-born with foreign parents. While not necessarily racially diverse, the Phoenixville area included large variety of ethnic enclaves that were represented throughout the community.

Statistics presented by the Census Bureau provide qualitative evidence of the ethnic diversity in Phoenixville, but the numerous places of worship throughout the town provide physical evidence. As early as 1794, Phoenixville had several places of worship to serve the town’s many religions, such as the Mennonites, Episcopalians and the Quakers. By 1850, Roman Catholics, Methodists and Presbyterians joined the mix as well. Within these major religious denominations, there were several sects based on ethnicity. For example, there were four Catholic churches by the early 1900s: St. Ann’s, St. Mary of the Assumption, Sacred Heart (Slavic) and Holy Trinity (Polish). The Roman Catholic churches were in high demand in Phoenixville

¹⁶ “Census”, *Social Explorer*.

<http://www.socialexplorer.com/pub/reportdata/htmlresults.aspx?ReportId=R10241318>. April 15, 2012.

with a constant flow of Eastern Europeans moving to the area from their birth countries as well as emigrating from other areas of the United States.

Churches played a critical role in community formation within a town such as Phoenixville. In a place characterized by ethnic diversity and rapid population increase, churches served as a common ground for people of similar backgrounds. They gave workers and their families an opportunity to feel at home in a new place and provided many amenities. In addition to religious services and spiritual guidance, churches provided educational opportunities, places for social gathering, and help for those in need.

But their establishment took quite a bit of work and a lot of pride and desire from the residents. The major Catholic churches were all established in the late 1800s up until 1910 and were built out of necessity for the large and constantly increasing immigrant population. The first, St. Mary of the Assumption was established in 1840, due to a high demand for a place of worship for the migrant populations that were quickly occupying Phoenixville. St. Mary's did not have any particular ethnic heritage, showing that it was to serve as a church for immigrants of many different ethnic backgrounds, but a common faith.

As new workers continued to move to Phoenixville, ethnic enclaves began to form. Bars, restaurants and neighborhoods reflected the clustering of families of the same birth country or ethnic origin. Once the residents began identifying with their ethnic groups, people wanted churches that were specific to their heritage. St. Ann's, Sacred Heart, and Holy Trinity were all established between 1900 and 1910 and were formed by the Irish, Slovak, and Polish residents, respectively. A common

thread between all of these churches was that they were established and built because of the drive and desire of the residents to bring their hopes to fruition. The people of Phoenixville wanted church services in their home language and in the tradition of their homelands, and they made it happen at any cost.

The Slovak and Polish residents of Phoenixville used the little free time they had after working ten-hour shifts at Phoenix Iron Company to help excavate the land and build the first churches. Finding the money to build, furnish, and maintain these buildings was a constant struggle, but the factory workers and their families were willing to donate and help in anyway that they could. Holy Trinity was started because of local fundraising organized by the few Polish families in the area. This desire is significant to the growth and history of Phoenixville because it represents a passion to create a stable and successful community for future generations. The residents of Phoenixville were proud of their heritage and of their new home and it was greatly shown in the work and struggle they invested in building these groups and the physical buildings.

The number of places of worship and organizations shows the pride and determination of certain ethnic groups, as well as highlights the tolerance present in the area. In addition to the various Catholic organizations that were supported, the Jewish Congregation of B'nai Jacob was given an official charter in 1912 after being locally supported in various homes and buildings for almost a decade.¹⁷ There were also Episcopalian, Baptist, Presbyterian, and several other Christian sects with organizations and regular services.

¹⁷ Congregation of B'Nai Jacob Centennial Brochure, Congregation of B'Nai Jacob. March 17, 2012.

While this religious and ethnic tolerance is characteristic of Pennsylvania's Quaker heritage, I believe it holds more significance in the context of Phoenixville. The support felt throughout the community for different ethnic and religious organizations to succeed and grow shows that there was a common ground or similarity between these groups, and that was Phoenix Iron Company. The residents of Phoenixville were all bound by their occupation and the secondary sense of community that provided them. The factory provided residents of different ethnic and religious histories to come together and work towards a common goal, creating an incredibly tight-knit town built on respect and understanding. There must have been some misunderstandings. Thinking that these differences in culture and heritage did not create a friction or even animosity would be naïve. But the success of these ethnic and religious organizations relied on the success of the town, which was dependent on the success of the iron company.

Many residents and new immigrants used the diverse employee population at Phoenix Iron Company as an educational tool. The factory itself was split into many sections and departments for the different types of work that was being done in each department. Similarly, the employers often organized workers by their native language for easier management. However, some employees requested to be put in the English speaking departments as a way to learn the language quickly and effectively. Many factories during this time period used language as a way to disperse their employees throughout the departments, but often times the managers and owners would mix employees of different languages in one department.

Phoenix Iron Company, however, took a different approach. They created a work environment that would allow their employees to feel comfortable during their work, maybe with the assumption that if their employees were happy they would produce more efficiently. At this time, managers and owners in other industries feared that this comfort and camaraderie amongst workers would encourage unionization. But Phoenix Iron Works believed that bonds between employees could work to the advantage of the company. I feel that the approved requests to transfer employees to different departments support this plan of efficient employees. My great-grandfather asked to be put to work with the English speaking employees and he was granted that request showing that the managers of Phoenix Iron Company were, at some level, concerned with their employees as people and humans, not just cogs in the wheel of manufacturing.

The workers and their families integrated themselves into the social landscape of Phoenixville in various ways. The workers lived in neighborhoods close to the factory and residents who worked in businesses downtown lived in close proximity to their businesses. The neighborhoods, while somewhat created by division of labor, had ethnic implications as well. Phoenixville was comprised of immigrants from many different areas, but they were all tied together by the success of Phoenixville as a whole because they were all partially responsible for that success. One point that has been made clear throughout the story of early Phoenixville was the strong sense of community felt by all who lived there.

The ethnic and cultural diversity of the Phoenixville community was shown through the presence of various congregations, as well as stores and clubs catering

to the vast array of ethnicities present at the time. Phoenixville also experienced diversity in socioeconomic status. While this is mostly known and interpreted through Census data, the physical landscape of Phoenixville also aids this analysis. The presence of various styles and representations of architecture shows that there was a portion of the population with the worldly knowledge and money to show their wealth through architecture. By looking at different buildings in downtown Phoenixville, it is possible to notice ethnic and socioeconomic diversity as well.

Architecture plays a crucial role when discussing the history of a town or region, and this holds true in the story of Phoenixville. As discussed previously, Phoenixville had a richly diverse population with various ethnicities and religions represented. In addition to ethnic heterogeneity, Phoenixville experienced a *mélange* of socioeconomic classes as well. While ethnic diversity can be seen through various churches, restaurants, and social clubs throughout Phoenixville, the range of classes can be seen through the architectural landscape of the historic downtown district. By looking at the styles and locations of certain buildings, we can see that Phoenixville was filled with influences from all over the world and had architecture that represented people of various socioeconomic statuses.

Phoenixville has the county's largest registered historic district, and it is filled with impeccably well-maintained residential and commercial buildings.¹⁸ Most striking about Phoenixville's downtown area is the eclectic mix and blending of almost every major architectural style in early American history. From Romanesque and Federal to Late Victorian and Gothic Revival, distinctive buildings dot the landscape of Phoenixville. The architecture of this area is significant not only to the history of Phoenixville, but also as a pathway to the future. The rich architectural beauty that comprises Phoenixville gave the borough and its residents a unique attraction to spark the revitalization process. Being able to showcase the exquisite buildings and homes was an instant way to blend the past and the present, and to bring people into the borough. The eclectic collection of buildings also showcases the diverse class history of Phoenixville. There was a range of building types such as townhomes, mansions, small storefronts, and public buildings. These buildings were constructed in varying architectural styles that often represented the social status of the owner or resident. The beauty of this historic architecture has provided a sense of pride for the residents both in the past and today.

As do most towns, Phoenixville grew outward from the factory complex of Phoenix Iron Company. Commercial growth took place in the downtown with an uprising of service businesses to fill the needs of the factory workers and owners. Storefronts began to spring up throughout the downtown taking on their own unique architectural style. Phoenixville contains one of the largest collections of

¹⁸ Gelbert, Doug, *A Walking Tour of Phoenixville*. (Kindle edition, 2011). February 23, 2012.

Italianate commercial buildings in Chester County.¹⁹ The Italianate style is easily identifiable with characteristics such as tall, slender windows, low-pitched roofs and porches or balconies with columns. There is also an ornamental element to the Italianate style, which incorporates decorative brackets underneath the roof that were often made of iron. Using this style in Phoenixville made sense when the success and large scale of the Iron Company is taken into account.

While often thought of as a producer of larger columns and projects, Phoenix Iron Company also participated in the production of ornamental iron works. In addition to these small details on the commercial buildings of downtown Phoenixville, Phoenix Iron Company was also employed by the city of Philadelphia to make the “cast iron screens for elevator shafts and archways, and wrought-iron grilles, transoms and guards for doors and windows” of Philadelphia City Hall.²⁰

¹⁹ Gelbert, 167.

²⁰ Clegg, Miriam. “Old Buildings with a Bright Future,” *HSPA*, http://www.hspa-pa.org/Phoenixville_old_buildings.html, 4. November 11, 2011.



Italianate downtown (Courtesy of [A Walking Tour of Phoenixville](#))

The Italianate style was popularized in the United States in the mid to late 19th century. It was mostly used during this time for small villas or country homes of the rich in the United States as well as in Europe. However, builders in Phoenixville used this style to create an incredibly unique downtown business district. Almost all of the buildings in downtown Phoenixville were “mixed-use” with residential space on the floors above the storefronts. This was very common of the 19th and early 20th centuries and has recently been making a comeback in the development of new towns as well as the redevelopment of older cities. Phoenixville’s historic and maintained architecture is perfect for such a comeback. With little to no renovation, Phoenixville developers and planners were able to seamlessly mesh past with present through this mixed-use style of building.

While many storefronts represented the Italianate style it was not the only architecture that was prominent in Phoenixville's downtown commercial center. Many buildings had strong elements Federal and Greek revival architecture. During the mid-1800s to early 1900s, there was an architectural movement in the United States to bring back the great architecture of past centuries. The Federal style was identified by symmetric bays, dormer windows, dentals (ornamentation underneath the roof) and is characterized as "light" with higher ceilings and proportions. This style was very common in the 19th century because of its classic colonial elements, but small improvements that made the house brighter, more spacious and generally more comfortable to live.



The Mansion House- Federal Style (Courtesy of [A Walking Tour of Phoenixville](#))

The Neoclassical and Greek revival styles are also seen throughout the architectural landscape of Phoenixville. Both of these particular styles are representative of the prominent political thought at the time. While trying to solidify the political ideologies of democracy and the issue of slavery, these architectural styles reminded the United States citizens of the origins of democracy. The Neoclassical and Greek revival architecture represented the strong, solid foundation that a country must be built upon. Identifiable by use of strong columns, symmetry and rationality these two particular architectural styles were almost perfect physical representations of the American idea of a strong community.

These particular architectural styles were most often used for public buildings, which directly relates to their political purpose. In Phoenixville, schools, libraries, and banks were constructed in these styles and are scattered throughout the landscape. While these particular buildings are not necessarily near each other geographically in Phoenixville, it is impossible to not be able to recognize their similarities and overwhelming power.



National Bank of Phoenixville in the Neoclassical Style (Courtesy of [A Walking Tour of Phoenixville](#))

Another piece of Greek Revival architecture with significance is Nailers' Row. These houses were built specifically for the workers at Phoenix Iron Company, and were some of the first houses of this kind built. When immigrants and workers were moving to Phoenixville with great speed, there was consequentially a shortage of affordable housing options. Instead of building tenements or apartment buildings for these workers, the owners of Phoenix Iron Co built row homes for the workers and families to live in comfortably. While not fancy or luxurious, they were affordable, simple and reasonable.



Nailers' Row (Courtesy of [A Walking Tour of Phoenixville](#))

The residential architecture in Phoenixville is one of a kind because of the mix of styles apparent throughout the borough. While many of the factory owners and managers built mansions in the Italianate, Gothic and Victorian styles, the newly rising middle class constructed their homes in an eclectic way. The wealthy residents of Phoenixville used their homes to showcase their financial success using the newest styles of architecture to build grand homes. The middle class was a new class in the United States, and to a certain extent struggled to show their socioeconomic class. These residents were wealthier than the factory laborers but were nowhere near as wealthy as the owners and managers of Phoenix Iron Company. Because of this confusion of how to show their middle class, they created

a very interesting mix of architectural styles that were being showcased in popular magazines.

The most impressive of the residential buildings are without a doubt the mansions built by the owners and managers of Phoenix Iron Company. While John Griffen was superintendent of the company, he built a mansion that was a departure from typical residential architecture of the time. Most architects had only focused on the building of public buildings in towns, but with a quickly rising upper echelon of society, there grew a demand for architecturally interesting homes. Griffen's Whitestone is a perfect example of the Italian Villa style of architecture.



Whitestone 1858 (Courtesy of [A Walking Tour of Phoenixville](#))

It is apparent from the image that this was in no way a typical house of the mid-19th century. Unlike many homes, which were traditional of a Colonial or Federal style, and fairly simple, Whitestone takes a new direction. Griffen's home still contains certain elements of traditional United States architecture at the time such as the use of a bay system and dormer windows on the third floor. But the tall tower in the middle of the home is very recognizable of the Italian villa style.

Griffen definitely wanted to show his wealth as well as his innovation when deciding to build his mansion in this style. While other mansions peppered the landscape in the area surrounding Phoenix Iron Company, none were as unique as John Griffen's Whitestone. The Vanderslice mansions, for instance, are incredibly grand and overlook the valley where Phoenix Iron Works used to be. They were inhabited by mill owners and businessmen and were in the Second Empire style. This style was commonly used amongst the wealthy during this era because of its decorative elements and European influence.



Vanderslice Mansions, North 4th Street (Photograph Courtesy of [A Walking Tour of Phoenixville](#))

As a town, Phoenixville is characterized by an eclectic mix of architectural styles that parallels its socioeconomic diversity. When these residential and commercial homes were built, they signified the wealth, culture, and experiences of those who inhabited them. It showcased Phoenixville as a successful town with worldly influences and appreciation. This architecture was left by the wayside when Phoenixville hit an economic depression in the 1970s and 1980s but was somehow preserved. Because of this preservation, the town was once again able to use this architecture to showcase its beauty, history, and persistence. Through the restoration and recognition of these buildings by the Historical Society, Phoenixville was able to reclaim its downtown and residential areas as beautiful and worthwhile.

This was a major aspect of the revitalization and truly helped keep Phoenixville a town worth visiting and settling in.

The industrial era was the defining moment in Phoenixville's early history. What started out as a small settlement of devoted people grew into a thriving hub of industry in Pennsylvania. There were several towns in Chester County experiencing industrial success during this time, but few gained the national and international recognition that Phoenix Iron Company did. This growth had a large impact on the cultural and social growth of the population and community of Phoenixville. Creating a plethora of jobs, Phoenixville was a haven for immigrants as well as second-generation ethnic Americans to put down roots and start families. This led to a population with great ethnic and socioeconomic diversity. While these ethnic groups had neighborhood groups and churches, the population of Phoenixville was a singular community bound together by strength and pride in the success of the town. Industry and market demands are unpredictable, but the community that grows from is permanent.

***CHAPTER 2:
Inevitable Combustion***

A walk through downtown Phoenixville during the 1970s revealed a scene that barely resembled the prosperity of past decades. Bridge Street was littered with closed storefronts and abandoned buildings, and just a couple of blocks away loomed the deteriorating buildings of Phoenix Steel Corporation. What was once a town bustling with life was now a shell of its former self. This change did not happen overnight. After the steel industry's success during World War II and into the 1950s, Phoenix Steel and plants across the country entered into a decline lasting several decades. This decline drastically changed Phoenixville and tested the community.

The mid-twentieth century marked a time of change for cities and towns throughout the United States. Two World Wars had put the country through the ringer economically, socially, and politically. Small cities and towns either thrived or failed. In the post-war era moreover, many American families no longer wanted to live in large, densely populated, and allegedly dangerous cities. They yearned for life away from the city and sought the solace of homogeneity. Concurrently, much of the industry that built American cities and towns were being moved to foreign countries to cut costs or maximize profits. The combination of an industrial and societal shift destroyed many towns throughout America, and Phoenixville's struggles are representative of this.

Phoenixville remained an economically successful town throughout the first half of the twentieth century. Phoenix Iron Company, known during this time period as Phoenix Steel Corporation, thrived during both world wars and employed 2,500 employees, many of which were Phoenixville residents. Soon after the end of WWII, Phoenix Steel Corporation suffered greatly. Two major factors led to its decline:

increased foreign and domestic competition and a shift to aluminum and reinforced concrete products. Even a successful company was unable to survive these circumstances. Phoenix Steel Corporation struggled to hold onto its success in the steel industry throughout the post-war era into the 1970s, but this drained the corporation's capital and profits and eventually led them to declare bankruptcy in 1976.

Phoenix Steel Corporation was struggling to stay afloat for much of the 1960s and 1970s. Except for a successful year during the height of the steel shortage in 1974, Phoenix Steel had experienced consecutive unprofitable years for almost a decade.²¹ In 1976, Creusot-Loire, a giant French based engineering company bought Phoenix Steel with high hopes of its future success. This hope would not last long however. Creusot-Loire kept the open-heart furnaces and seamless pipe mills in Phoenixville open, as well as a small rolling mill in Claymont, Delaware, that Phoenix Steel had opened some years before.²² Even with help from Creusot-Loire, Phoenix Steel was not immune to the influences of national and international markets, and a decrease in market demand for steel pipes as well as similar markets opening abroad drastically hurt the corporation. In 1984, Phoenix Steel filed for bankruptcy under Chapter 11 of U.S. Code, which allowed the corporation to continue operating while its debts were reorganized.²³

²¹ Hall, Christopher G.L. *Steel Phoenix: The Fall and Rise of the U.S. Steel Industry*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1997.

²² Hall, 185.

²³ Diaz, Idris Michael. "Phoenixville Mill Will Be Closed By March Third." *Philadelphia Inquirer*, February 13, 1987. http://articles.philly.com/1987-02-13/business/26176364_1_french-banks-inventory-reorganization-agreement

Under this reorganization, the firm was bought by Guardian Ventures and brought out of bankruptcy in 1985.²⁴ Simultaneously, Creusot-Loire hit financial trouble in France and was forced to liquidate all assets in 1984.²⁵ This created a major issue with Phoenix Steel, because the corporation now owed almost \$8.5 million to four separate French Banks. Under the reorganization of 1984, Phoenix Steel agreed to pay the French banks \$1 million on a quarterly basis and keep the value of their inventory above \$24 million.²⁶ Unfortunately for Phoenix Steel, the costs to keep the Claymont mill running to feed the production of the Phoenixville plant was too much and resulted in a drop in value of the inventory. The French banks issued a statement to Phoenix Steel that if the value of the inventory was still under \$24 million after a grace period of forty-five days, the banks would seize all of their inventory.²⁷

Phoenix Steel had given up almost all hope. Don Durocher, spokesman for Phoenix Steel, announced in February that the corporation would shut down the plant completely on March 3rd of 1987. This official shutting down of the mill would lay off 175 union workers and end an era that defined Phoenixville as a community. In the last minute of negotiations with the French banks, Phoenix Steel representatives came to an agreement that would prevent the seizing of the

²⁴ Diaz, Idris Michael. "Phoenix Steel Announces New Accord on Debt." *Philadelphia Inquirer*, March 13, 1987. http://articles.philly.com/1987-03-13/business/26220095_1_unsecured-creditors-involuntary-bankruptcy-debt. April 4, 2012.

²⁵ Reuters, "Creusot-Loire Liquidation." *New York Times*, December 13, 1984. <http://www.nytimes.com/1984/12/13/business/creusot-loire-liquidation.html>. April 4, 2012.

²⁶ Diaz, "Phoenixville Mill."

²⁷ Diaz, "Phoenixville Mill."

corporation's inventory. Under this agreement, Phoenix Steel's unsecured creditors would relinquish almost \$8 million of the debt owed to them in exchange for receiving a share in "net operating profits and net proceeds from the planned sale of the company."²⁸ This plan would allow Phoenix Steel the necessary funds to pay off debts to creditors without the possibility of being sued for involuntary bankruptcy.

The technicalities of the situation of Phoenix Steel at this time were incredibly complex. The corporation was in serious financial trouble, and it looked as though there was no hope of the corporation surviving. The fact that the management and administration of Phoenix Steel were always fighting to keep the plants running is significant. Instead of filing for bankruptcy under Chapter 7, which would give the owner of the debts power to sell off its inventory and assets and then distribute the money to the creditors, Phoenix Steel and its representatives were willing to do almost anything to keep the mills operating. The determination of the employees to keep Phoenix Steel open emphasizes the effects the corporation had on the community as a whole. Steel had always been a part of Phoenixville, and some would even argue that Phoenixville was defined by its industry. People closely involved with the corporation were unwilling to entertain the thought of Phoenix Steel not functioning as a mill, and this determination is shown through the desperate attempts to negotiate agreements with creditors and banks.

These valiant efforts made by Phoenix Steel were not sufficient, and in March of 1987, the corporation shut down. Although the plants were no longer operating, the potential sale of the plant was still an option. In fact, the corporation had been

²⁸ Diaz, "Phoenix Steel Announces New Accord on Debt."

talking to several prospective buyers for the past couple of years. A group of investors led by Robert Serlin were in partnership with Phoenix Pipe and Tube (PP&T) and were the chosen company to take control of the Phoenix Steel plant. Serlin and PP&T were interested in reopening the property as a plant with employment opportunities for former Phoenix Steel workers. In March of 1988, the sale became official and Toltec Developers and PP&T controlled the former Phoenix Steel Corporation property.²⁹

PP&T and Toltec submitted a plan with their partners Redwing Associates to divide the property into four lots to include PP&T small manufacturing site, residential units on French Creek East, commercial space, and some green space.³⁰ When the former owner of Phoenix Steel, Ron Anderson, sold the corporation, he gave employees the sense that the reopening of the plant would provide job opportunities for them. In the meantime, the workers were without jobs and without many opportunities elsewhere. The workers were able to apply for relief through Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA), which helped them when Phoenix Steel lost the market for steel pipes to foreign producers. TAA provides up to 52 weeks of unemployment benefits and reemployment services to workers whose hours were drastically reduced or were fired due to increased foreign completion. The workers of Phoenix Steel qualified for these benefits in 1982, but the services ran out in 1985. When the plant shut down in 1987, the workers tried to apply for TAA relief again, arguing that the increase in foreign imports is what led Phoenix

²⁹ Kaufman, Daniel. "Plans Are Made For Steel Mill Property." *Philadelphia Inquirer*, December 3, 1989. http://articles.philly.com/1989-12-03/news/26156741_1_site-plan-steel-mill-sketch-plans. April 4, 2012.

³⁰ Kaufman, 1.

Steel Corporation into bankruptcy. The Labor Department did not grant them relief and upheld this decision after two appeals. The bankruptcy of Phoenix Steel not only left workers unemployed but, because of the debt it was in, the corporation did not disburse pension funds.³¹ Former employees were left stunned about their current situations and could only hope that another manufacturing company would buy the property and offer employment.

When Phoenix Pipe & Tube and Robert Serlin were in the final stages of negotiating with Phoenix Steel for the property and the plant, an officer of the maintenance and production workers' union, John Vogle, set up a meeting. Vogle and Union lawyer, Lynn Saionz, wanted PP&T to recognize as the Union as the "exclusive bargaining representative of production and maintenance employees at the Phoenixville facility."³² PP&T met with them, but would not come to an agreement on terms of employment or recognizing the union as representatives of the workers in negotiations. When PP&T opened in March of 1988 without speaking to Union representatives, the union filed unfair labor charges, arguing that PP&T was violating the workers' right to a representative and fair negotiations.³³ PP&T wanted non-Union employees at their plant and tried whole-heartedly to get around it but, even after an appeal, the National Labor Relations Board ruled in favor of Union Local 2322 and ordered PP&T to cease and desist the unfair labor practices.

³¹ Sama, Dominic. "A Year Later, Phoenixville Recovering." *Philadelphia Inquirer*, March, 10, 1988, http://articles.philly.com/1988-04-10/news/26254199_1_steel-mill-new-businesses-tax-base/2. April 5, 2012.

³² "National Labor Relations Board, Petitioner, v. Phoenix Pipe & Tube," December 17, 1991, <http://federal-circuits.vlex.com/vid/composed-linden-phoenixville-37424753>. April 9, 2012.

³³ "National Labor Relations Board," 1.

The union workers and representatives were devastated when Phoenix Steel was shut down for good but were hopeful that Anderson, the former owner, would sell the plant to a similar company. Throughout almost a year of unemployment, former Phoenix Steel workers attended union meetings to be kept abreast of the situation with the plant with the hope that the new owners would provide job opportunities. The purchase of the property by PP&T provided employment opportunities as well as hope for the union workers. While PP&T tried to hire non-union workers, they were unsuccessful and ultimately negotiated with the union. However, PP&T only employed 50-60 people at the time and was significantly smaller than Phoenix Steel, thus leaving many former workers looking for employment.³⁴

Many workers throughout the decline of Phoenix Steel Corporation were left unemployed, and the effect of the closing was felt throughout the community. It marked a frightening reality that a major era of Phoenixville could be coming to a close. While PP&T was a small manufacturing plant, it still kept a spark of hope for Phoenixville that industry might come back to the town. However, not everyone in the community shared this hope in the return of the steel industry. The town experienced small, but significant success in other areas, and some residents saw a new and brighter future for Phoenixville.

The decline of Phoenix Steel Corporation was representative of a larger, national decline of the steel industry. The American steel industry was in high demand and successful during World War II, but in the post-war era, demand began

³⁴ "National Labor Relations Board," 1.

to decline while production costs increased. During the late 1950s and the 1960s, the steel industry was not growing as quickly as it had in the past due to several factors. One of the main reasons for the decline in growth was the surge of substitute materials, such as plastic, cement, and aluminum. These products were not only cheaper to produce, but since the plants manufacturing them were not as large as the steel corporations, their overhead costs were much lower than those in the steel industry.³⁵ The steel industry was faced with competition from smaller domestic plants that were utilizing new technology.

The increase of more efficient and affordable product was compounding with an increase in foreign production. The technology utilized by the major steel plants in the United States had become standardized and was being used by developing countries around the world, beginning with the rebuilt Western Europe and traveling to Japan, Brazil and Korea. Steel production and technology was inexpensive and in high demand due to the need for new infrastructure in these countries. United States steel corporations suffered because these countries were now providing the same product for a much cheaper price and usurping what little demand was left in America.

Phoenix Steel Corporation and steel plants throughout the United States suffered greatly because of these global and national factors. Examining the issues and complexities of Phoenix Steel's slow decline and eventual closing gives a case study of the steel industry as a whole. The decrease in demand for the products steel plants were manufacturing, the increase in substitute materials being produced

³⁵ Backman, Jules. "The Steel Industry: Problems and Solutions", *Challenge* 21, no. 3 (July/August 1978), 7-12, www.jstor.org. April 24, 2012.

domestically and abroad, and the increase in foreign production and trade led to a slow collapse of the steel industry. As a nation, the U.S. was greatly affected, but looking at Phoenixville as an example provides insight into how these larger, international factors affected individual communities.

In addition to the closing of Phoenix Steel Corporation, the residents of Phoenixville and the surrounding areas lost Valley Forge General Hospital, which was another major employer of the region. VFGH was one of the largest and most prominent military hospitals throughout WWII. Treating mostly veterans of both world wars, the hospital grew in size and reputation and began treating patients with various statuses and medical problems. VFGH employed about 1,800 military and civilian personnel for various jobs from the medical profession to entertainment and janitorial services. Similar to Phoenix Steel Corporation, VFGH provided the consumer and income base to help downtown Phoenixville thrive. The hospital played a large role in the economy of Phoenixville and when it closed in 1974, the effects were felt throughout the town.



Valley Forge General Hospital (Courtesy of HSPA)

Only two short years after Valley Forge General Hospital closed its doors, Phoenix Steel Corporation faced incredible economic hardship. 1976 marked the beginning of a decade long process of accruing debts, bankruptcy and loss of faith in Phoenix Steel. In 1987, the corporation closed after a tumultuous financial spiral that left hoards of workers unemployed with very few options. Phoenix Steel had been forced to cut back on staff throughout the late 1970s and 1980s, and some employees were able to find work in nearby towns. Pottstown, Spring City, and Colleagueville offered employment opportunities, and a few manufacturing operations such as AP deSanno, BF Goodrich and Firestone provided relief for some.³⁶ This relief was short-lived, and due to the continuously declining steel industry, these companies also shut down within a few years.

The closing of these industries so soon after Phoenix Steel and VFGH folded was devastating to the community, and the once burgeoning area of industry was now a “manufacturing wasteland.”³⁷ For the first time in decades there was an uncertainty of unemployment, similar to the current economic situation. This uncertainty was an issue with which the residents of Phoenixville had very little experience. In the early 1970s, a man could graduate from high school and find a stable union job at Phoenix Steel and quickly begin making \$18 to \$20 an hour. Phoenixville had experienced tremendous success throughout the past, but the industry was not immune to the ebb and flow of the market.

³⁶ Josie Bachi, telephone interview with author. April 12, 2012.

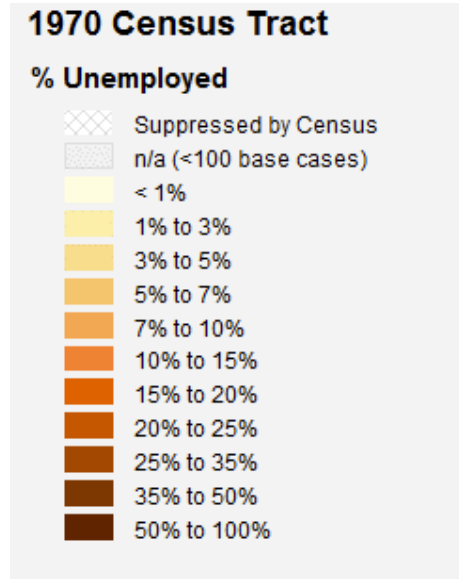
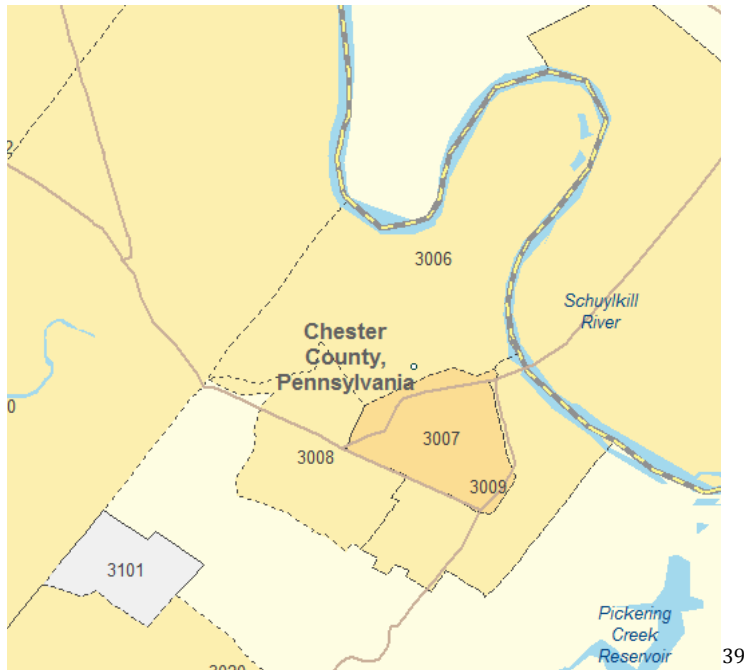
³⁷ Rob Frees, telephone interview with author. April 13, 2012.

Perseverance

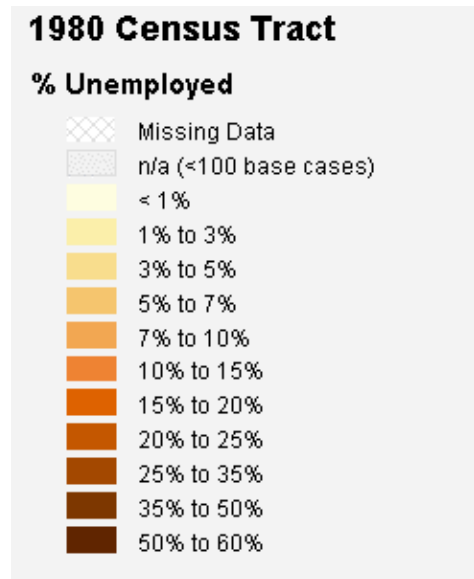
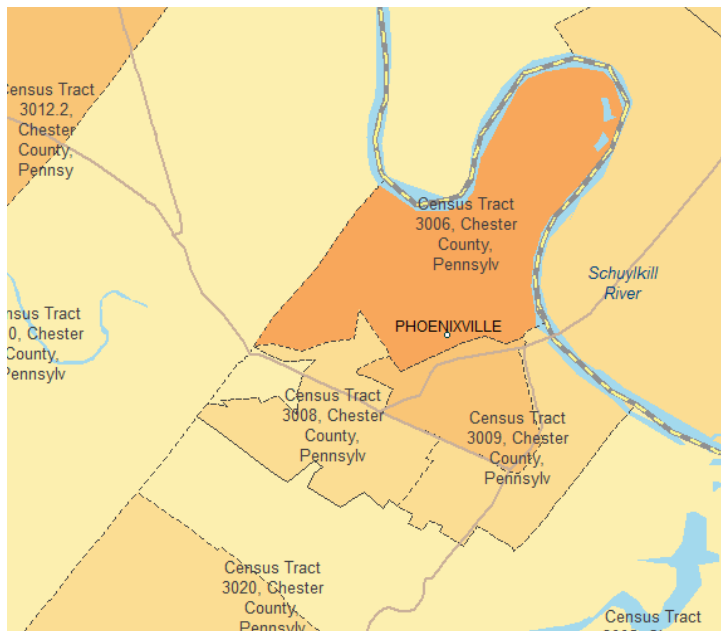
The difficult economic situation in Phoenixville was felt by all, and many residents struggled to make ends meet for quite sometime. While many families could no longer afford to live in Phoenixville and decided to relocate, a majority of people stayed. Residents who were able to stay struggled greatly, but the population of Phoenixville was resilient and made what sacrifices they could. Resident and businessman Rob Frees notes small changes that were apparent even to him as a young man during this time. He and his brother had a paper route that they ran daily, and as the industry was waning, families had to unsubscribe from local papers. Families were in such dire conditions that 15 cents a day was money that could not be wasted on unnecessary items.³⁸

Those residents that did remain in Phoenixville struggled to find work and looked south towards Exton and King of Prussia. Some were fortunate enough to find employment in the pharmaceutical and technology sectors that were growing just south on Route 29. The decrease in population coupled with the dramatic increase in a commuter population greatly affected the social environment of Phoenixville. From 1970 to 1980 the population decreased from 14,823 to 14,165 a 4% decrease. Although this seems minute, the unemployment rate increased from 2.4% in 1970 to 5.7% unemployment in 1980.

³⁸ Rob Frees.



% Unemployed, 1970



% Unemployed, 1980

³⁹ Phoenixville Borough includes Census Tracts 3006-3009

From 1970-1980, the percent of people unemployed in Phoenixville increased significantly. In Census Tract 3007, which represents downtown Phoenixville, the percent unemployed increased from 3.4% in 1970 to 6.4% in 1980.⁴⁰ Many of the residents living in this tract were clerical, sales and professional, or technical workers whose businesses and services were no longer needed when the factory and hospital workers were left jobless.⁴¹

We also see a significant increase in the percent of unemployed people who lived just outside of downtown Phoenixville and to the north in Census Tract 3006. The percent unemployed increased from the 1% to 3% range to the 7% to 10% range. This was a very dramatic increase for one census tract in a single decade, but makes sense when one takes into consideration the type of workers who lived there. This area of the Phoenixville borough was where a majority of the skilled laborers and craftsmen of Phoenix Steel Corporation lived. The corporation itself was located in this tract as well as the Vanderslice mansions in which many of the owners and high-level managers resided. After looking at the types of workers who lived in this area, it is not hard to believe that the unemployment percentage would increase this much, but it is still difficult to imagine what effect this must have had on the neighborhoods and the economy of downtown Phoenixville.

⁴⁰ "1970-1980 Data Map", *Social Explorer*.

<http://www.socialexplorer.com/pub/maps/map3.aspx?g=0&mapi=1970+Census+Tract&themei=1>. April 25, 2012.

⁴¹ "1980 Data Map", *Social Explorer*.

<http://www.socialexplorer.com/pub/maps/map3.aspx?g=0&mapi=1970+Census+Tract&themei=1>. April 19, 2012.

The dramatic increases in unemployment were startling, but Phoenixville residents stayed strong. The fact that a majority of residents remained in Phoenixville despite obstacles and struggles to find employment shows the resilience of the community. The residents were not yet willing to leave the strong, determined and passionate community and would sacrifice what they could to stay in Phoenixville. The town itself had also provided resources and attractions that kept people from abandoning it even in such difficult times. The physical location was a major draw to keep people from leaving because it allowed a relatively easy commutes to towns and cities throughout Southeast Pennsylvania. Phoenixville hospital, the YMCA, and a Carnegie library are just some of the other institutions that kept families from abandoning Phoenixville when they could.⁴²

Phoenixville was a successful town in almost every way. It had a booming industry and economy, a flourishing and diverse population, and a proud and dedicated community. Over the course of less than a decade, this image was gone and its sudden departure left the residents in shock. Unemployment rates climbed and people were searching for employment anywhere. Streets that were once bustling with energy and people were now desolate. This drastic and quick shift in the economy of Phoenixville led to a major change in the sense of place for the residents.

⁴² Rob Frees.

A Changing Identity

During the late 1980s, Phoenixville experienced drastic changes in the economy and in the community. The bankruptcy of Phoenix Steel Corporation and its eventual closing and sale were devastating blows. According to the Philadelphia Inquirer, the corporation “had long been the borough’s main employers and its single largest source of tax revenues.”⁴³ Phoenix Steel employed over a thousand local employees in the height of the steel industry, but just 175 steelworkers remained when the corporation closed its doors in 1987.

The displaced workers were clearly an issue, but the borough as a whole was incredibly affected by the bankruptcy. When it closed, Phoenix Steel owed \$80,000 in back taxes to the borough and \$190,000 to the school district.⁴⁴ In addition to the monetary consequences to the borough from the closing of the corporation, the site itself was a negative presence. The large property was described in the Philadelphia Inquirer “as an eyesore on 175 acres.”⁴⁵ The empty and desolate landscape (except for the few buildings being used by PP&T) and deteriorating buildings served as a constant reminder of what Phoenixville used to be and how that identity had collapsed.

Phoenixville needed to change its course, and the change had to be gradual. Neither the officials nor activists within the community wanted to alienate a part of the population by changing too quickly. “Some people still consider Phoenixville to be a gritty blue-collar steel town. Those same people don’t realize the steel plant is

⁴³ Sama, 1.

⁴⁴ Sama, 1.

⁴⁵ Sama, 1.

gone forever and isn't coming back," said Scott McArdle, a local real estate agent.⁴⁶ But how does one change this perception without alienating the people who already live there? Given the drastic change officials wanted to see in Phoenixville, it was important to make sure that no one was left behind in this transition. Realistically, the steel industry was never coming back to Phoenixville, but a portion of the population believed it could. In moving forward, it was important not to alienate that faction of the community.

As mentioned earlier, the community was divided by beliefs and hopes for the future of Phoenixville. One group believed that the steel industry was going to resurge and save Phoenixville from its dismal state. This group included Union Local 2322 members and representatives, former employees, and those with personal connections to the corporation. The common sentiment was that Phoenixville was created by Phoenix Steel and would be saved by the steel industry. Albert DiArchangelo, president of union wholeheartedly believed this. "Without the steel mill there would not be a Phoenixville. People have spent their lives there. The future is there and we need another chance," DiArchangelo said.⁴⁷ Many people agreed with this belief, and the presence of the Phoenix Steel property perpetuated it. As long as the buildings were physically there, people were constantly reminded of that era and gave them hope that it could return.

⁴⁶ Rettew Jr., Bill, "Revitalizing Phoenixville: Part Two of Four (Image vs. Reality)", *The Phoenix*, December 25, 2003. <http://www.phoenixvillenews.com/articles/2003/12/25/special%20features/10741678.txt>. March 23, 2012.

⁴⁷ Sama, 2.

The other side of this divide believed that Phoenixville as a community needed to move forward and soon. Borough Manager William Herman led this belief and was able to make infrastructure changes to move towards something new for Phoenixville. The steel industry in America was over—foreign competition might have initially destroyed it, but new and better technology and materials made it obsolete. The property served as a constant reminder of Phoenixville being left in the dust frustrated those who understood this. This was not to say that the past should be completely forgotten. Herman was quoted saying, “for years the borough put all of its eggs in one basket and now its gone. Let’s pay our respects, bury the thought of the mill and move forward...into the 20th century.”⁴⁸ It would be impossible to ignore or forget the significance of the steel industry on Phoenixville; it was the drive behind the town’s success. Herman wanted the borough to progress in a different but ultimately successful way.

PP&T was not the only new business that took residence in Phoenixville, and Herman wanted this to continue. Housing developments were constructed and proposed throughout the borough, provided enough units to increase Phoenixville’s population during unstable economic times. Acme grocery store, Pizza Hut, and an investment group all chose Phoenixville in the late 1980s showing signs of progress. While these businesses were taken for granted in most towns, Phoenixville welcomed them and the future business they could attract. This shift from manufacturing to service-based business faced some skepticism, but the change proved successful. The tax base in Phoenixville doubled each year from 1985-1988

⁴⁸ Sama, 3.

as opposed to the five years prior to 1985 when “the market value of properties in the borough fell an average of 12% to 14% a year.”⁴⁹ Although Herman faced quite a bit of opposition, he continued on this path because he knew it would be the best for Phoenixville.

Many members of the community took issue with these plans because Herman completely abandoned the idea of the steel mill ever opening again. CDC member and life long resident, Rob Frees once again uses the steel site property as a reason of this continuous hope of the steel industry coming back. As long as the buildings were physically present, these hopes were not going to die. When the remaining buildings were torn down by 1990, the community was able to see the property as potential growth and progress towards the future, not a return to the past. A kind of “catharsis”, Frees said, allowed the community to believe that something good could come out of the property, even if it was not industry.

Once the physical property of Phoenix was gone, it allowed the community to change their perception of the potential of Phoenixville. Herman’s changes and push to change the identity of Phoenixville was beginning to be shared by the residents of Phoenixville. Residents and officials alike agreed that the outside perception of Phoenixville needed to change. While those in the borough could physically see the changes and feel the small, but present, effects of new businesses coming in, the surrounding area did not share this view.

The surrounding communities looked down on Phoenixville for quite some time during the 1980s and even into the 1990s. Although many towns along the

⁴⁹ Sama, 2.

Schuylkill in this area faced similar hardships, Phoenixville was a bit slower to react and bounce back. This has to do with aforementioned refusal to believe the industry was over. While residents, former steel workers and Phoenix Steel management tried to keep the plant running and find new industry to bring in, other places began to move towards the future. When Herman became Borough Manager and began to make this shift, small businesses came to Phoenixville, which was a success, but helped fuel the negative perception of the town felt by outsiders. The businesses (Acme, Pizza Hut, etc.) were taken for granted by towns with successful and sustainable economies that didn't rely solely on one industry. In Phoenixville, these were big steps. Phoenixville was headed towards something great, but at times, it was considered the "laughing stock of the area."⁵⁰ While this could have been a discouraging setback, the community never lost hope or faith in the potential of Phoenixville. There were cynics and skeptics, of course, but the resilient town never faltered in its support and passion.

Another facet of distorted external opinions was the perception of criminal activity in Phoenixville. Increased crime rates are often the result of economic struggle and the disappearance of employment, and this was the case throughout Chester County. Articles in the Philadelphia Inquirer at this time spoke about this effect in Phoenixville in particular. Noted as a "haven" for gambling as well as a period of increased drug trafficking, many larger publications gave Phoenixville an association with illegal behavior.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Rob Frees.

⁵¹ Henry, Meredith M. "Rebirth of a Struggling Steel Town: Phoenixville Seeks to Rise by Going Residential", *Philadelphia Inquirer*. 28 March 1986.

When residents were asked to reflect back on this time, the feelings were not shared. A few residents stated that they were not aware of an increase in crime, but that if there was it was not large enough to become an issue.⁵² While Phoenixville was struggling, the close-knit community made criminal activity rather difficult. "In Phoenixville everyone knew everyone else," states Frees, attributing the small community to keeping crime from becoming a problem.⁵³ He went on to say that crime goes hand in hand with financial and economic struggles, but that these small increases were insignificant. The criminal activities that were noticed, such as siphoning gas, are problems similar to those that Phoenixville had after the recent recession in 2008. People become desperate when prices of everyday necessities increased and that led to petty crimes.

Similar to outside communities judging and looking down on the businesses that were moving into Phoenixville, false perceptions were made about the quality of life. The picture painted of Phoenixville at this time was not attractive and that was going to become an issue if it persisted. Media representations through publications and word of mouth in the county perceived Phoenixville as a struggling community with a lackluster economy and dangerous living situations. The borough was going through an era filled with obstacles and setbacks, but because of the persistence of Herman and the borough, as well as the residents, this did not last. Local economies go through ups and downs as does criminal activity and

<http://thephoenixvillesteelsite.blogspot.com/2011/01/history-of-phoenix-steel-site.html>. March 27, 2012.

⁵² Ed Kraft, Josie Bachi, E-mail correspondence with author, April 11, 2012.

⁵³ Rob Frees.

unemployment. What did not fluctuate in Phoenixville was the determination and devotion of the residents. This resilient nature would be their saving grace.

The plans put into motion by Herman and the borough as well as the shift in economic culture changed the identity of Phoenixville. While some residents were hesitant to these changes, there was no way of stopping them from happening. Change is an incredibly hard thing to accept, and in the case of Phoenixville, this change was a departure from everything that made it successful. The steel industry had been declining for many years at this point, but it was hard for residents to believe that the industry that dominated the physical landscape as well as defined their sense of place would be gone. The steps that were being made towards a new Phoenixville were different, but enough people saw the exciting potential that they held and the community strove towards a better Phoenixville. It would be many years before this process would really take off, but Phoenixville would soon see the tremendous effects that it would have on their lives.

Phoenix Steel Corporation and the thriving steel industry in America had created a strong and growing economy in Phoenixville. The community rallied behind the town's success and formed a bond that seemed unbreakable. This was put to the test when Phoenixville and the steel industry faced an intense decline in the 1960s and 1970s. Increased competition from foreign competitors and new products created a shift in the national market that Phoenix Steel could not survive. The new technology that was needed to keep up with the competition was too expensive for the already struggling finances to afford. The economic decline had an immensely negative effect on Phoenixville as a town and a community. Employment

was scarce and families were struggling to make ends meet. Instead of crumbling under this pressure, the community remained strong in their commitment to Phoenixville. They never lost hope in the potential of Phoenixville and strove for a better future. This community driven change was an incredible example of the irrepressible vigor of the Phoenixville residents.

CHAPTER 3:
The Blueprint of Rebirth

The landscape of downtown Phoenixville changed drastically in the 1990s and early 2000s. Bridge and Main Streets had transformed into the home of local restaurants, stores, and newly renovated facades. The streets and sidewalks were renovated, and there was a sense of renewal in the air. Stores that were once run-down and empty were becoming places of business, art, and entertainment. These changes in the town were vast, but the process of revitalization was executed in a way that made them seem natural and organic. Phoenixville was a much different place at the turn of the 21st century than it was in the 1980s. What made this change exciting and successful was the community that was behind it. The transformation of downtown Phoenixville was started, supported, and continued by the residents.

As a town and a community, Phoenixville struggled greatly during the 1970s, 1980s, and to a certain extent the 1990s. The final closing of Phoenix Iron Company coupled with the shutting down of Valley Forge Hospital forced many Phoenixville residents into unemployment. The few jobs that were left after these closings fought to survive, but business in the town was based on the success of the industry in the area. As the number of customers dwindled, restaurants and other service-based businesses shut their doors. This put the residents of Phoenixville in a financially and emotionally difficult situation. Many had to leave the area because of money problems or for job opportunities elsewhere. Many families, with strong and multi-generational ties faced tough decisions during this time. While a large number of people did leave the area, there was an equally strong group with the determination to stay and help Phoenixville through this dark age.

Throughout its history, Phoenixville and its residents have held strong through difficult times—from the British invading during the Revolutionary War, to the struggles of the Great Depression, to the effects of deindustrialization and its accompanying unemployment. It is a characteristic of Phoenixville natives that has anchored the revitalization process starting in 2000. Those who persevered and remained resilient throughout difficult economic times did so because they knew the rich history of Phoenixville and were determined to help it rise from the ashes into glory again.

The revitalization has been a long and ongoing process, but it was not the only kind in the area. Other towns such as Manayunk and Wayne had also set their sights on a more economically successful future through revamping their downtowns. In the beginning, Phoenixville thought it would try to model itself after these other towns—they were doing well and the changes made seemed to be successful. However, it did not take long for the people of Phoenixville to see that they had their own identity that would set them far apart from the rest.

Phoenixville's revitalization really began with three rather lucky circumstances: the funds and programming to renovate the Colonial Theater, the re-opening of Steel City Coffeehouse, and the introduction of Iron Hill Brewery to downtown.⁵⁴ The Colonial Theater had been a landmark in Phoenixville for many decades, but it is most notably recognized for its appearance in the cult film *The Blob*.⁵⁵ In the late 1990s, a small group was formed to help restore the Colonial

⁵⁴ Manny DeMutis, Interview by Julie Pesta, Steel City Coffeehouse, July, 2011.

⁵⁵ "History", *Colonial Theater*. <http://www.thecolonialtheatre.com/about-the-colonial/history/>. January 12, 2012.

Theater to its former glory as a cultural space for residents of all ages. Soon after this project began, the Steel City Coffeehouse opened as a place to relax and to host live music and other performances. From these two projects alone, Phoenixville began taking on an “arts and entertainment” vision during the revitalization. With venues such as the Colonial Theater and Steel City Coffeehouse and affordable housing, developers and invested residents saw that this could be Phoenixville’s niche.⁵⁶

Manny DeMutis is a lifelong resident with strong family ties to the area and has also been a major player in the revitalization process. DeMutis believed that adding the Iron Hill Brewery to the Colonial and Steel City would form a combination of businesses that would lead Phoenixville to a successful turnaround. Iron Hill is a popular local chain that offers a wide selection of handcrafted beers and fresh, local food. DeMutis noted that with these three attractions Phoenixville was able to attract and accommodate up to one thousand visitors on a weekend night. When planning the revitalization of a town, it is important to bring people into the town and spark their interest in that place. Once the customer base is present, investors and businesses would see the place as a site filled with opportunity. This was the seemingly simple process that Phoenixville has followed throughout the past decade.

It has been more than a simple equation that has pushed Phoenixville into its current success. Since the first moves to revitalize the town businesses, restaurants, apartments, and office spaces have been opening on a fairly steady basis. While not

⁵⁶ DeMutis.

all of these businesses stayed open or became successful, there was one thing that remained constant: the motivation and desire of the residents. They were prepared and willing to commit and invest in the revitalization of Phoenixville. The revitalization was community driven and support that starts from the bottom has the potential and determination to achieve the loftiest of goals.

Phoenix Steel Site

Starting in the early 1990s, the borough of Phoenixville was seeking to gain access to the abandoned Phoenix Steel Site. Officials and residents understood that this site could be the driving force of Phoenixville's economy; it just needed to be developed properly. Before development could even be an option, however, officials and developers needed to know what was in that site. After closing its doors in 1987, the property was bought by Redwing Associates, but remained undeveloped. Having been abandoned for almost ten years, and in disarray before that, Redwing Associates owed almost \$500,000 in back taxes.⁵⁷ Redwing Associates were in dire straights, and the borough council had to take action.

In 1996, Redwing Associates defaulted on their Small Business Administration mortgage, giving SBA control of the property. The Small Business Administration is a Federal program that helps businesses and developers such as

⁵⁷ Prusher, Ilene R. "Phoenixville Seeks a \$200,000 Grant to Assess Cleaning Up Steel Mills Site", *Philadelphia Inquirer*, February 19, 1995.
<http://thephoenixvillesteelsite.blogspot.com/2011/01/history-of-phoenix-steel-site.html>. April 25, 2012.

Redwing Associates through loan programs and assistance.⁵⁸ SBA awarded the property to the Delta Group, a development group that had previously presented a rough plan to develop the land into commercial space.⁵⁹ This move by the SBA was somewhat of a surprise to the borough council since they were also interested in purchasing the mortgage. After they received word of this decision, the borough council voted to begin eminent domain proceedings.⁶⁰ Through this vote, Phoenixville Borough would gain control of the property through condemnation, as long as the owners did not file a preliminary objection. The Delta Group, however, hoped that the land would not get condemned so that the property would remain under their control. They felt that the process of condemning and completely rebuilding the site from scratch would cost the borough money that it simply did not have.⁶¹ This issue was pertinent but was not addressed because of additional interest in the property.

Just a month after the borough council voted for the condemnation of the steel site, another bid was placed on the property. This time however, it was by a business interested in reclaiming the site as an industrial center. Valley Forge Steel hoped to buy the mortgage of the property with the intention of opening a steel tubing manufacturing company. VF Steel planned to invest \$150 billion and bring

⁵⁸ "What We Do", U.S. Small Business Administration, <http://www.sba.gov/about-sba-services/what-we-do>. April 25, 2012.

⁵⁹ Smallwood, Lola. "Borough to Condemn Phoenix Steel Property", *Philadelphia Inquirer*. May 16, 1996. <http://thephoenixvillesteelsite.blogspot.com/2011/01/history-of-phoenix-steel-site.html>. April 25, 2012.

⁶⁰ Smallwood, 1.

⁶¹ Smallwood, 1.

between five and six hundred jobs back into Phoenixville.⁶² They placed their bid in 1996, but much to their dismay, the Small Business Association awarded the bid to the Delta Group. McNally of Valley Forge Steel wanted to appeal this decision and presented their plans directly to the borough. “We could not determine why the Delta Group’s plan to build a strip mall was accepted over our high bid,” he said.⁶³ SBA’s decision to give the bid to the Delta Group showed that they had a specific plan for the site that the Delta Group had agreed to implement.

The borough council and the residents of Phoenixville were concerned with the Delta Group’s ownership, specifically in relation to their plans with the Foundry building. The Foundry was a symbol of the success Phoenixville once had and what created its identity. The borough council wanted to make sure that this iconic building at least remained a part of the landscape. In order to do this, the borough council reworked the conditions and the wording of the condemnation plans to only include the Foundry and the 50 acres surrounding it.⁶⁴

After the condemnation of the Foundry property, Delta Group and the Borough of Phoenixville were in a private-public partnership to restore the area. The expenses to assess the environmental damage and clear the area were going to be immense. It was going to be necessary to apply for any available Federal funding possible.

⁶² Smallwood, 1.

⁶³ Smallwood, 1.

⁶⁴ Smallwood, 1.

With such avid interest and determination from the borough and local government, Phoenixville applied for several loans and grants that would help to fund the development of the former steel property. The Brownfields Economic Development Initiative (BEDI) is exactly what Phoenixville needed, and the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) agreed and awarded them \$2 million in BEDI funding. According to the HUD website, a “brownfield” is an “abandoned, idled or under-used real property where expansion or redevelopment is complicated by the presence or potential presence of environmental contamination.”⁶⁵ These abandoned industrial sites are often expansive and in locations that are able to sustain new development. In the case of Phoenixville, this was even truer because the former Phoenix Steel Corporation site was in the heart of the downtown.

With the BEDI grant, Phoenixville had the funding for the predevelopment study that was necessary to begin process of the revitalization of the steel site. The BEDI competitive program was just over a decade old, showing the newly found importance of these redevelopment and revitalization programs. The officials and administrators at HUD were aware that these sites can be catalysts in the revitalization of a town but often are not used because of the immense costs of making the land usable.

In addition to receiving the BEDI grants, a local government often sought funding from the Section 108 Loan Guarantee Program. Both of these grants were

⁶⁵ “Brownfields Economic Development Initiative”, *Department of Housing and Urban Development*, http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/program_offices/comm_planning/BEDI I. April 25, 2012.

part of the larger Community Development Block Grant. This grant was a more flexible umbrella program that provides communities with the necessary resources to tackle the numerous issues and processes involved in beginning redevelopment projects. The Section 108 Loan is “a source of financing allotted for the economic development, housing rehabilitation, public facilities rehabilitation, construction or installation for the benefit of low- to moderate-income persons, or to aid in the prevention of slums” as defined by the HUD website.⁶⁶ After a town or community is awarded funding through BEDI to environmentally prepare an allotted piece of land for development, that community then uses the funding from the Section 108 program to begin development.

These types of funding programs are absolutely necessary to communities throughout the country. The Department of Housing and Urban Development has expanded these programs in the past decade to help rebuild and revitalize towns and cities just like Phoenixville. These funds and programs allow communities such as Phoenixville to be proactive about a wasted expanse of land and turn it into the center of a revitalization project.

The implications of receiving these funds were significant and showed the potential of Phoenixville. The grant programs that the Borough of Phoenixville applied for were in the early stages of existence under the Department of Housing and Urban Development. HUD’s acceptance of Phoenixville’s application showed that people outside of the community felt that the town was a worthwhile project.

⁶⁶ “Brownfields Economic Development Initiative.”

Industrial towns such as Phoenixville were all experiencing similar economic hardships and were attractive projects to take on.



This photograph was taken in the late 1980s, after the final closing of Phoenix Steel Corporation. The site was completely abandoned with machinery, products, and materials left to decompose.



The site was not environmentally sound due to the deterioration of industrial materials and products left strewn throughout the property.
(Photographs courtesy of Phoenix Steel Site Blog)

The Delta Group had large-scale plans for the steel site and was excited about the space at their availability. In 2000, Phoenixville Property Group (PPG), a subset of the Delta Group, proposed their Master Plan to the borough council. PPG presented 1.5 million square feet of mixed-use space to create a true live, work, and play atmosphere. To help spark traffic in this new commercial and residential area, PPG also proposed the French Creek Parkway as the “spine of the development”.⁶⁷ PPG and the Delta Group for the remainder of their time with the steel site emphasized the strength and importance of the public-private partnership with the borough in making this development successful. Of almost \$250 million in funding for the French Creek Center, only \$30 million was from tax dollars, the rest from a

⁶⁷ McKee, Jason B. “Steel Site ‘Master Plan’ Detailed at Meeting.” *The Pheonix*, November 20, 2000.
<http://www.phoenixvillenews.com/articles/2000/11/20/today's%20stories/1098458.txt>. March 12, 2012.

combination of public and private funding.⁶⁸ With this amount of funding and PPG and Delta Group working continuously to keep support coming both publicly in the media and financially, hopes were high and people were optimistic about the future of the steel site. For the first time in decades, the people of Phoenixville were looking at the steel site as a key to their future, not a constant reminder of their broken past.

Members of PPG and the Delta Group and borough officials were not the only ones who saw the exciting potential of the French Creek Center and the uplifting effect it could have on Phoenixville. When the site was cleared and almost ready for development, PPG gave a tour of the site to state officials. The tour was organized by former borough councilman and Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources Anthony DiGirolomo to show government officials outside of the borough the impressiveness of the site development. The most emphasized and well-received points made during the tour were the public-private relationships and the integration of different types of uses.⁶⁹

As a development project, PPG was integrating funding and programs for funding at all levels of government. DiGirolomo was a strong advocate of this relationship because it opens more doors for funding and tax exemptions such as brownfield redevelopment. After the tour he said, "The French Creek Center can be used as brownfield redevelopment model because it brings together local, state,

⁶⁸ Wylen, Bert, "The Phoenixville's Renaissance", *Route 422 Business Advisors*, February 2005. http://www.deltaorg.com/pdfs/Rt.422_biz_advisor-pville_2-05.pdf. April 25, 2012.

⁶⁹ Rettew, Bill Jr. "PA Officials see PPG's Prospects", *The Phoenix*. February 14, 2004. <http://www.phoenixvillenews.com/articles/2004/02/14/today's%20stories/10968848.txt>. Herein referred to as "PA Officials". April 25, 2012.

county, federal and private funds to develop and revitalize a part of Phoenixville that is considered unusable”.⁷⁰

The process of integrating funds, groups and organizations allowed Phoenixville to progress at a steady rate throughout the early stages of the revitalization. What was significant about the BEDI funding was that it permitted the borough council and the Delta Group to use Phoenix Steel Corporation both physically and symbolically. The BEDI allowed them to use the property, which was located in the heart of downtown Phoenixville, but they were also able to use some of the old buildings to keep the presence of Phoenixville’s history in the community. By keeping and renovating the Foundry building as well as the superintendent’s building on the property, the developers and borough council were able to show the residents and community that they respected Phoenixville’s past and wanted to showcase this history to anyone who visits Phoenixville. Creating this balance between preserving and respecting the past was one of the most difficult challenges of the revitalization of a town, but in Phoenixville, federal funds and grants and the determination and involvement of the borough council and the residents made sure that it became a reality.

In addition to integrating funding programs, the plan for mixed-use space had become a very efficient and economic way to develop in recent years. “This inclusive integration of commercial, residential and retail is exactly the type of use that this administration is trying to accomplish in downtown centers across the

⁷⁰ Rettew, Bill Jr. “PA Officials.”

Commonwealth,” said Klothen, another state official.⁷¹ These types of developments were being encouraged throughout the country, not just Pennsylvania. Combining retail, corporate, and residential space into one land development creates an environment conducive to sustained growth. By integrating them closely together, as PPG planned to in the French Creek Center, the success of one area feeds into another and it continues in a cyclical pattern.

This tour and strong support from Congressman Jim Gerlach and other officials immensely helped gain more support and funding for Phoenixville’s revitalization and specifically the French Creek Center. In 2003, these realities came closer to fruition when PPG started to sell individual parcels of land to builders to develop the land in accordance of their Master Plan. This plan was able to take effect with relative speed because of the government and private funding PPG received for this particular project.

John MacPhee was the project manager for PPG and French Creek Center and was a very prominent voice in the story of the revitalization. The main idea behind the French Creek Center was to create a “complete live, work and play environment for smart growth” and to reestablish “a strong tax base with commercial development”.⁷² The Master Plan of the space included corporate offices, residential space, commercial and retail space as well as green spaces and a trail along French Creek that would connect to the historic trails in the surrounding regions.

French Creek Center would consist of four major components that help build a live, work and play community. The Shoppes at French Creek would consist of

⁷¹ Rettew, “PA Officials,” 1.

⁷² Wylen, 2.

mixed-use buildings with retail space on street level, with residential space above and parking below. This dynamic use of the space would help jumpstart the economy of the French Creek Center and provide both commercial and residential tax bases. The Manor at French Creek was an independent residential community for senior citizens (ages 62+) that was founded in 2005.⁷³ In addition to these residential options, French Creek Center would also include condominium units at The Quarters at French Creek. The Quarters would have 272 total units with hardwood floors, brand new furnishings and a high quality of living.⁷⁴ The last part of the buildings of the French Creek Center puzzle was the Gateway at French Creek. The Gateway would provide office suites in prime downtown location.⁷⁵



This elevation of the Shoppes at French Creek show how the individual structures of French Creek Center will be mixed-use space.(Courtesy of Delta Organization)

⁷³ “The Manor at French Creek”, Delta Organization, http://www.deltaorg.com/devel_projs/delta_devel_projects_manor-at-fcc.pdf. March 27, 2012.

⁷⁴ “The Quarters at French Creek”, Delta Organization, http://www.deltaorg.com/devel_projs/delta_devel_projects_townhouses-at-the-quarters.pdf, March 27, 2012.

⁷⁵ “The Gateway at French Creek”, Delta Organization, http://www.deltaorg.com/devel_projs/delta_devel_projects_gateway-at-fcc.pdf. March 27, 2012.



Photograph of the Manor at French Creek (Courtesy of Delta Organization)



The Gateway Building (Courtesy of Showcase.com)⁷⁶

⁷⁶ "100 French Creek Parkway- French Creek Corporate Center", Showcase.com, <http://www.showcase.com/property/100-French-Creek-Parkway/Phoenixville/Pennsylvania/712932>. March 27, 2012.

The French Creek Parkway was a part of the development that PPG and MacPhee felt was integral to the overall success of the space. A large road connecting Routes 29 and 23 would run four lanes wide going both directions. The thought process behind this road was to relieve some of the traffic that already plagues the borough as well as allow for more of the retail and commercial development to flourish. A lot of comparisons were made between Phoenixville and towns like Conshohocken and Manayunk, but MacPhee discussed the issues that plague those towns that he hopes FCC will help Phoenixville avoid.

“Conshohocken is destination because of the intersections of two major highways, but there’s no real sense of place there. Manayunk has a great sense of place relative to the retail district, but that retail is disconnected from other business and from the residents to a large extent.”⁷⁷

By implementing a strong multi-use development so close to the downtown, PPG and the Delta Group hoped Phoenixville could combine a unique sense of place, accessibility and economic success into one package.

French Creek Center as a mixed-use development systematically fit into the imagined final plans of the revitalization of Phoenixville. The goal was to create a space where people could walk to work and their social life from their homes. The implementation of certain parts of FCC did not fit in as well physically as they did in theory. It is apparent from the photographs of the already built structures that these buildings do not mesh with the current architectural landscape of Phoenixville. Instead of blending in the with historic and eclectic architecture that defines downtown Phoenixville, the Gateway Building is large, modern and overbearing and

⁷⁷ Wylen, 4.

the Manor at French Creek looks like a residential development one could find in suburbs and small towns throughout America. Ideologically, French Creek Center fit in with the overall scheme of Phoenixville's revitalization, but in execution some of the buildings fell short.

Major players in the revitalization of Phoenixville believe that creating a place where people can live, work, and play was essential. This idea seemed incredibly novel when one looked back to the recent past of Phoenixville as a bedroom community, but Phoenixville had already fulfilled this criterion earlier in its history. In its early and successful years, Phoenixville was a community that provided its residents with everything they needed: employment, affordable housing, entertainment, and a sense of place. By returning to this plan, those involved in the revitalization are repeating their historical success. There would be one major shift in this plan however. Without the industry and employment of Phoenix Steel Corporation, the town needed a way to separate and distinguish itself from surrounding towns. Therefore, a strategy was implemented to create an arts and entertainment community that would draw both a consumer base as well as investor interest.

Arts & Entertainment

The Colonial Theater and Steel City Coffeehouse were two of the first attractions to open in Phoenixville's downtown in the early 2000s. These businesses were unique to Phoenixville because of their focus was on entertainment as

opposed to retail. Between independent and classic films at The Colonial and live events and performances at Steel City, over five hundred visitors were brought into Phoenixville on an average weekend night. In combination with Phoenixville's affordable housing, these two popular attractions made downtown an ideal area for young artists and entertainers. Developers and involved community members quickly saw that this could be Phoenixville's niche. Other towns in the area, such as Wayne and Manayunk, were also undergoing revitalizations at the time. An arts and entertainment plan for Phoenixville was a great and distinctive way to create a unique identity that would parallel the proud history of Phoenixville and its residents.

The grand plan of using arts and entertainment to jump-start the revitalization has proved to be quite successful. A lot of this success was due in part to Phoenixville's ideal location and its demographics. Located in the middle of four highway crossings, Phoenixville is conveniently accessible to thousands of residents in neighboring towns, such as Valley Forge, West Chester, Souderton and Kimberton. These towns are home to a wealthy population of people and highways made Phoenixville an attractive and new place to that population to spend their money. Phoenixville's blend of entertainment for all ages, highly rated restaurants and shops as well as its lively and hip atmosphere made Phoenixville a distinct market for residents outside of the borough. This was beneficial for Phoenixville because it brought interest and people into the town, which sparked interest from investors and developers to come and build in Phoenixville. In addition, the people visiting Phoenixville from these areas were from a high-income bracket, with

average yearly incomes of \$80,000.⁷⁸ Money of this caliber coming into Phoenixville could have only positive outcomes for the revitalization and its progress.

The Colonial Theater

The Colonial Theater had been a landmark institution in Phoenixville since its beginning in the early twentieth century. It started as a successful cultural oasis for the residents of Phoenixville and quickly expanded into one of the more popular theaters in the county. Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, the Colonial held many screenings and ground breaking events such as D.W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation*, the Great Houdini and the first talking movie, *The Jazz Singer*.⁷⁹ Throughout this long and rich history, the theater experienced expected ups and downs. But just like Phoenixville itself, the Colonial Theater remained alive throughout the difficult trials and tribulations of the mid-1900s.

In 1958, The Colonial Theater received national recognition and popularity through the cult film *The Blob*. The movie was filmed in and around Phoenixville and one of the most popular scenes features the extras running out of the Colonial Theater.

⁷⁸ DeMutis.

⁷⁹ "History", *Colonial Theater*.



The Colonial Theater as featured in *The Blob* (Courtesy of Colonial Theater website)⁸⁰



Current Colonial Theater Façade (Courtesy of Colonial Theater website)

But despite this recognition, the theater struggled to compete with the larger chain theaters that were becoming popular towards the 1960s and 1970s. The theater

⁸⁰ "History", *Colonial Theater*.

maintained a consistent local following, but it was struggling financially. Many owners, such as Knudsen, Breneman, and LaRosa tried to bring the Colonial theater back to its former glory.⁸¹ They put their money and their lives into making the Colonial Theater a successful cultural outlet for residents in the area by attempting to attract live performances and up and coming films. After painstakingly trying to keep the Colonial Theater alive, the theater closed its doors in 1985.⁸²

Like many other storefronts in Phoenixville the site remained abandoned and disheveled for over a decade. After this bought of disrepair, however, a small group of committed people began to work towards the goal of restoring the Colonial Theater to its former identity as a community cultural experience. Barbara Cohen and the Phoenixville Area Economic Development Corporation (PAEDCO) joined forces with Mary Foote and Trish Himes to create a vision and a plan in 1996.

Foote and Himes, who were frequent visitors to The Colonial Theater, formed the Association for the Colonial Theater, or ACT. They felt that the Colonial was a cultural landmark worth saving and that the community support would be there. "People in Phoenixville are uniquely generous, and with the help of volunteers from the community, we got to work".⁸³ While ACT was an important stepping stone for the Colonial, enlisting the help of the Phoenixville Area Development Corporation (PAEDCO) in 1997 helped jump start the renovations by creating a strategic business that included a multi-phased program with exterior, interior and structural

⁸¹ "History", *Colonial Theater*.

⁸² "History", *Colonial Theater*.

⁸³ Haine, Susan. "A Little of the Old, A Little of the New, A Lot of Heart", *Local Living: Destination Phoenixville*. <http://www.locallivingmag.com/2009/11/destination-phoenixville-pa/>. August 18, 2011.

renovations to help bring back the success and individual identity of the Colonial Theater.

On October 1, 1999, The Colonial Theater opened its doors to a new audience and to a new era of Phoenixville. Many prominent people in the community, including Mayor Leo Scoda marked this date as the beginning of the revitalized Phoenixville. “We went through rough times. But what was significant was that we held together”, said Scoda.⁸⁴ The message that is repeatedly conveyed by many in Phoenixville is that the community made this transition possible. Without the generosity and dedication of the residents to provide both financial and moral support, Phoenixville would not have been able to begin this amazing evolution.

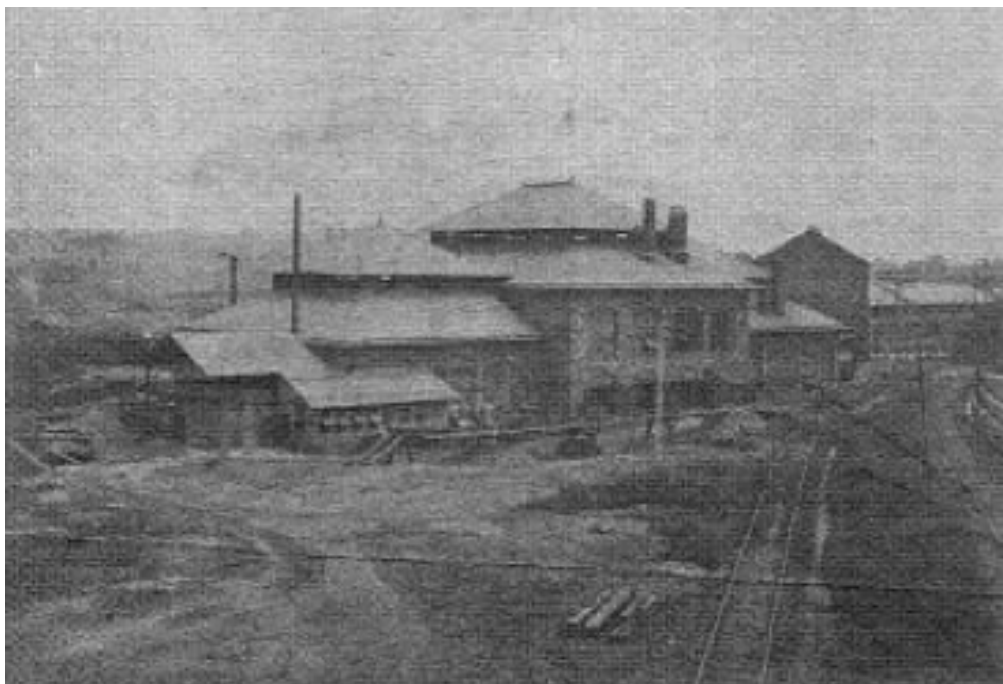
The Colonial Theater benefitted from a community driven to better the town with an administration that stood behind it. The Phoenixville population saw the potential in the Colonial Theater and helped in any and everyway they could to renovate the space. This community pride and determination would also be demonstrated in the revitalization of the Foundry Building of the former Phoenix Steel Corporation.

The Foundry had been a major part of the revitalization of Phoenixville from its earliest conception in the late 1980s. The Foundry, even when dilapidated, had beautiful architectural elements. The Foundry would it be a great building to

⁸⁴ Haine.

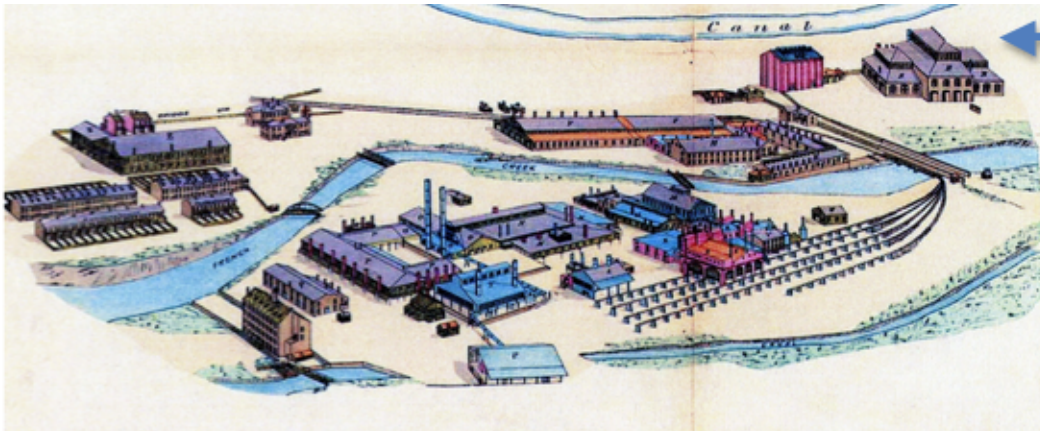
renovate because of location, size, and beauty, but also because it was iconic of the success of Phoenix Steel Corporation. Using the Foundry as a starting point or focus to the revitalization of the steel site property would have significant symbolical influence throughout the community. The renovation of this building had the potential to be the flame that sparked the rebirth of Phoenixville.

Throughout the nineteenth century, Phoenix Iron Company expanded greatly with domestic and international success. To accommodate this success, expansion on company ground was necessary. In 1882, the foundry housed the machinery that poured the iron castings to create the famous Phoenix column. It continued to produce until “well into the 1970s and is considered Phoenixville’s and Northern Chester County’s most important symbol of the town’s illustrious industrial past”.⁸⁵



Foundry Building, 1882 (Courtesy of HSPA)

⁸⁵ “About the Foundry”, Phoenixville Foundry website, <http://www.phoenixvillefoundry.com/about.php>. April 25, 2012.



Drawing of Phoenix Iron Company- Foundry located in top right corner (Courtesy of HSPA)

Architecturally, the Foundry is a unique blend of Romanesque and Richardsonian styles that were both prominent at the time. It was a large and commanding building that symbolized the great success of Phoenix Iron Company. The double-tiered roofs and clerestory windows allowed for maximum natural light during the entire day, which was necessary for the work that was done there. Both its architectural style and functionality shows the innovation and power of the company and Phoenixville. Although iconic in both architecture and meaning, the Foundry was abandoned in the 1980s with the rest of Phoenix Iron Company. The decline of the steel industry left the company in shambles, but the Foundry remained a symbol of financial power and success for Phoenixville. Once abandoned however, its symbolic powers became more harrowing than uplifting. The Borough needed to change this perception and for this reason, a decision was made to restore the entire building.

The Foundry has always held a strong symbolic role in Phoenixville and this was continued through the renovation process. However, instead of representing past industrial success, it now represents rebirth and the beginning of a new era of progress. The Phoenixville Area Economic Development Corporation (PAEDCO) bought the property in 1998 and began raising funds to restore the iconic building. Under the direction of Barbara Cohen, fundraising and planning began with great amount of heart behind it. “I fell in love with the building in 1991...and saw it as a way to re-invent Phoenixville’s economy”, stated Cohen in an interview.⁸⁶ She was not the only one who felt this way, because PAEDCO received a grant from the county to purchase to building and raised over \$800,000 for renovations. What made this fundraising effort even more impressive was that a majority of the money was raised through private donations from local contributors. Once again, the commitment and resilience of Phoenixville residents created change.

⁸⁶ McKee, Jason. “New Year Promises New Things for Former Foundry Building”, *The Phoenix* December 29, 2000.
<http://www.phoenixvillenews.com/articles/2000/12/29/today's%20stories/1226724.txt>. April 25, 2012.



Foundry Building before renovations (Courtesy of Carnevale Eustis Architects)⁸⁷

In 2000, after several years of raising and borrowing money, “State Senator Jim Gerlach and Representative Carloe Rubley announced the appropriation of \$850,000 for the foundry restoration project”.⁸⁸ The money was used to continue the interior and exterior renovations, a “symbols of steel” garden which would include restored Phoenix columns, landscaping and more. It was very difficult to receive grants like this from the Department of Economic Development, but Phoenixville showed promise for the future. Senator Gerlach spoke to the pride and devotion of the Phoenixville residents after appropriating these funds.

“I don’t live here, but I am so impressed by the community leaders and organizations committed to the future. There is pride for the past, but also the commitment to more the borough forward...it I very

⁸⁷ Carnevale Eustis Architects, “Iron Foundry Building, Phoenixville, PA. <http://www.cearchitects.com/index.php/casestudies/details/22>. April 25, 2012.

⁸⁸ Jones, Jonathon. “State approves \$850k for foundry”, *The Phoenix*. May 17, 2000. <http://www.phoenixvillenews.com/articles/2000/05/17/today's%20stories/447583.txt>. April 25, 2012.

encouraging to see so many people committed to making Phoenixville be the very best.”

Both legislators were able to see that the community was going to ensure the success of Phoenixville. The plans to make the Foundry Building a visitors' center and part of the Schuylkill River Heritage Foundation also made it a great place to invest money. Through renovations, the foundry would bring in visitors from all over the area to learn and relive Phoenixville's past industrial success. As Cohen predicted, these visitors sparked the interests of investors and developers to bring money and business back into Phoenixville.

Renovations of the building and property continued steadily throughout the next several years and proved to be incredibly successful. In the early 2000s, several developers and business owners showed interest in buying the Foundry building. However, there was debate about what would open in the building. A museum was a definite addition as part of the visitors' center, but with 13,000 square feet of space, there was room for much more.

Merchants in the downtown area were concerned with what direction the Foundry would take when it opened. The merchants and their businesses needed and wanted more foot traffic downtown, and opening restaurant or retail space in the Foundry would greatly improve that. Many of these owners, including Ellie Acampora, felt that those involved with the Foundry needed “to work more closely with the business owners”.⁸⁹ They felt that it was taking too long to get the Foundry

⁸⁹ Quay, Michael. “Merchants Concerned”, *The Phoenix*. September 4, 2003. <http://www.phoenixvillenews.com/articles/2003/09/04/today's%20stories/10110455.txt?viewmode=fullstory>. March 25, 2012.

off of the ground, but everyone involved continued to view this project with hope and potential.

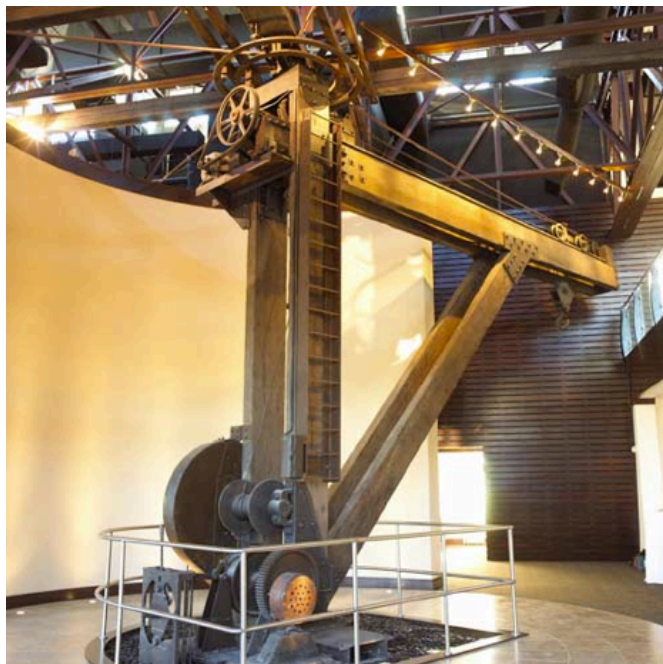
The renovation of the Foundry building was complex and was a significant project to everyone involved in the Phoenixville community. From preserving the historical essence of the physical building to making the space useful in modern times, there were large implications. After years of determination and hard work and over \$5.2 million in private and public funding, Phoenixville Foundry renovations were completed in 2007.⁹⁰ The Schuylkill River Heritage Center at Phoenixville was opened in the building as a museum and visitors' center. The Heritage Center holds exhibitions, videos and is open for all to learn about the rich history of Phoenixville and its role within Chester County and the Schuylkill River's history.

As for the rest of the 18,000 square feet, the Phoenixville Foundry is now a large event space with three facilities that can be used for any event, large or intimate. The most impressive aspect of the Foundry is the amount of space and the unique and individualistic atmosphere. With options between two ballrooms, a mezzanine and the Heritage Center, a potential customer has a vast array of choices. The common thread between all of the interior spaces is the integration of the original architecture and even machinery with an incredibly modern interior.

⁹⁰ "The Foundry", *Schuylkill River Heritage Center at Phoenixville*, <http://www.phoenixvillefoundry.org/foundry.html>. March 10, 2012.



Cupola Ballroom (Courtesy of Foundry Website)



Restored Iron Crane located in Mezzanine (Courtesy of Foundry Website)



West Wing Ballroom (Courtesy of Foundry Website)



The Heritage Center set up for a cocktail party (Courtesy of Foundry Website)

The renovation of the Foundry building was time consuming, expensive, and surrounded by tension and chaos in the community. While these factors clearly created setbacks and struggles for those in charge of the renovation, they ultimately aided the meticulous end product. The flawless combination of historical and modern space with modern amenities made the Foundry a sought after destination for people in the Mid-Atlantic region. A reservation for the space must be made well in advance due to increasing interest from residents of New Jersey and even New York City. When one takes a step back from the physical renovations of the Foundry building, it can almost be seen as a microcosm for the revitalization of Phoenixville. Although time-consuming and stressful, the determination and pride of those involved proved stronger than the eminent struggles. Through this struggle to push through deterrents and chaos, a perfect balance of old and new was reached.

Process Slows Down

In the first few years of the 21st century, Phoenixville gained regional attention for its revitalization plan, its arts and entertainment tract, and its use of private and public funding. *Philadelphia Business Journal* published several articles praising Phoenixville for its progress and plans to move forward. The revitalization was bringing back to the town jobs, revenue, and people. Attractions such as reasonable housing, good schools, and a great sense of community made Phoenixville a desirable destination. These new improvements created huge interest

in the real estate market, and many investors believed that Phoenixville might be the next hot spot.⁹¹

Financial support from the Elm Street and Main Street programs underscore the significance of public funding to a town's revitalization. Both programs are state incentive grants that are earmarked for revitalization efforts. The Main Street Program awards grants to municipalities and establishes a local organization with a "professional downtown coordinator" that is "dedicated to downtown revitalization and the management of downtown revitalization efforts".⁹² This program funds up to \$115,000 over a period of 5 years in addition to up to \$250,000 (or 30% of project costs) for infrastructure components.⁹³ By providing public funding to towns and communities in the process of revitalizing their downtown/business center, Main Street can help with necessary infrastructure issues as well as community development.

In addition to the Main Street Program, Phoenixville also received public funding through the Elm Street Program. This program differs from Main Street because the grants are targeted towards the residential areas that surround the downtown center of the town being revitalized. "The reasoning behind the program is that our restored downtown commercial areas will be far more attractive to visitors and customers if the neighborhoods adjacent to them are just as

⁹¹ Kostelni, Natalie, "From Steel to Steal", *Philadelphia Business Journal*. June 6, 2005. <http://www.bizjournals.com/philadelphia/stories/2005/06/06/focus1.html?page=all>. August 18, 2011.

⁹² "Main Street Program", Pennsylvania: State of Innovation, <http://www.newpa.com/find-and-apply-for-funding/funding-and-program-finder/main-street-program>. April 25, 2012.

⁹³ "Main Street Program."

appealing.”⁹⁴ Elm Street combines the revitalization of commercial and/or business districts with that of residential areas in hopes that the two will feed into one another. The program awards up to \$225,000 in grants to be put towards “physical improvements to residential and mixed use areas”, i.e. façade refurbishing, sidewalks, streetlights, etc.⁹⁵ This program often works in tandem with the Main Street Program and provide the necessary infrastructure and funds to create a well-rounded revitalization process.

In Phoenixville, these programs were combined with astounding private financial support that allowed the revitalization to hit the ground running. From 2002 to 2005, Phoenixville attracted \$20 million in private investments, which shows the potential and faith people had in its revitalization and future success.⁹⁶ The revitalization was moving ahead, and people, businesses, and investors were showing their excitement about the future of Phoenixville through private funding.

The revitalization was off to a tremendous start, and funding helped transform the downtown businesses with physical improvements. The steel site, however, was not doing as well. The Delta Group and Phoenixville Property Group (PPG) were the owners of the property, after a bit of struggle and tension with the borough council and competing developers. In November of 2000, PPG presented a

⁹⁴ “Elm Street”, Pennsylvania: State of Innovation, <http://www.newpa.com/find-and-apply-for-funding/funding-and-program-finder/elm-street>. April 25, 2012.

⁹⁵ “Elm Street.”

⁹⁶ Kostelni, “From Steel to Steal”.

master plan to the borough council. This plan included 1.5 million square feet of mixed-use space with extended-stay suites, commercial, and retail space, and a senior living center.⁹⁷ The “spine of the development” would be the French Creek Parkway: two four-lane roads that would provide access to a new retail corridor and residential space.⁹⁸

Implementing PPG’s plan faced obstacles from the very beginning, namely with French Creek Parkway. Funding for this part of the plan was to come from Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT), which allocated almost \$6 million in funds for the parkway.⁹⁹ In May of 2002, this funding was put on hold due to some confusion about PPG’s plans and progress. Andrew Warren, the southeast regional director of PennDOT stated, “I’ve been told that in the last six months, there’s been some slowing down with the project. There was an indication that PPG might not be ready for the funds in 2004.”¹⁰⁰ PPG was hit incredibly hard by this decision from PennDOT because it held significant influence on the ability of PPG to progress in its plans. The French Creek Parkway was intended to help French Creek Center begin and take off, so without the money and support of PennDOT, PPG became concerned about their ability to obtain loans for initial construction.

The original plans put into motion for the French Creek Parkway had been undergoing changes for a couple of years, and this inconsistency caught up to the

⁹⁷ McKee, Jason B. “Steel Site ‘Master Plan’ Detailed at Meeting.”

⁹⁸ McKee, Jason B. “Steel Site ‘Master Plan’ Detailed at Meeting.”

⁹⁹ Roberts, Tony. “French Creek Center struggles to stay afloat”, *The Phoenix*, May 30, 2002.

<http://www.phoenixvillenews.com/articles/2002/05/30/today's%20stories/4285554.txt>. February 20, 2012.

¹⁰⁰ Roberts, Tony.

company. Over the next few years, PPG faced criticism and skepticism from other developers, the borough council, and the residents of Phoenixville. The lack of consistency and cooperation was beginning to worry everyone involved in the revitalization of the steel site property. Project Manager John MacPhee has made a few significant changes to the original master plan that is frustrating to many involved. MacPhee claimed that infrastructure plans were taking longer than expected, but that progress was being made. \$50 million had already been invested in French Creek Center for the Gateway Building, Manor at French Creek, and Quarters at French Creek, but that the PennDOT funding retraction was a major setback.

MacPhee felt that the reaction he was receiving from the community and the borough council was uncalled for. "I was yelled at and berated as opposed to receiving constructive feedback as to what (the planning commission) wanted," he said.¹⁰¹ Getting French Creek Center started and successful was his top priority, but resistance from the borough council and the residents was inhibiting this. In particular, the council suggesting to change the order in which the development would be built, as well as the issue of cleaning up the site.

In the case of ensuring the environmental safety and integrity of the particular site in question, Barry Cassidy was PPG's main opponent. Cassidy was the Executive Director of Main Street- Community Development Cooperation (CDC) and he was very vocal about PPG's treatment of the land. The Development of

¹⁰¹ Rettew, Bill Jr. "MacPhee discusses PPG's status", *The Phoenix*, September 6, 2005. <http://www.phoenixvilleneews.com/articles/2005/09/06/today's%20stories/15162510.txt>. March 3, 2012.

Environmental Protection accepts various methods for the cleaning of a particular site for development. PPG chose an acceptable form of this, which entails placing several feet of soil on top of the existing area, as opposed to total remediation or cleaning of the property. Cassidy was upset, stating at one point: “Just because you can do something doesn’t mean you should.”¹⁰² This was clearly an issue of expenses, but Cassidy was adamantly opposed to PPG taking the easy way out of the environmental clean up of the parcels in question.

This argument between Cassidy and PPG escalated when Cassidy placed signs opposing PPG and Delta Organization in his Main Street CDC office. In addition to the environmental issue, Cassidy felt that PPG was not the right company to be involved in Phoenixville’s project. “Based on their performance, which I observed at the hearing, I no longer felt they were capable of completing the revitalization project.”¹⁰³ A letter followed this public reaction against PPG’s plans and motives from the legal representation of PPG telling Cassidy to “desist from any activities intended to strain or damage PPG’s contractual relationships with its partners.”¹⁰⁴ The developers went even further to state that Cassidy would be held accountable for any monetary losses or damages felt by PPG. Even after these threats, Cassidy felt that he was right in his opposition to the developer’s plans about the development of the parcels as well as the environmental clean up. Soon, PPG and

¹⁰² Williams, Karin. “Top 10 of 2006: PPG Saga: Site still grounded”, *The Phoenix*, December 28, 2006. <http://www.phoenixvillenews.com/articles/2006/12/28/today's%20stories/17641780.txt>. March 10, 2012.

¹⁰³ Williams, Karin. “This is strictly business”, *The Phoenix*, May 8, 2006. <http://www.phoenixvillenews.com/articles/2006/05/08/today's%20stories/16601251.txt>. March 10, 2012.

¹⁰⁴ Williams, Karin. “Top 10 of 2006.”

Delta Organization would realize that Cassidy shared similar views about the environmental, as well as developmental issues, to others in the community.

The biggest controversy surrounding the PPG changes to the master plan had to do with the building of commercial space before residential space. According to the original plan put forth by PPG, the commercial, retail, and office space would be constructed and developed first, and the additional condominiums and residential units would follow. This was very important to the borough council during the initial presentation because the tax base and traffic that the office and commercial space would provide would feed into the downtown and provide the demand necessary for the residential units. The PPG plan revisions that were made public in early 2005 stated that the residential units would be developed first, and the borough council did not agree with these changes.

To force PPG to develop the commercial space first, the borough council planned to approve the plan for that property before approving that of the residential space. Delta Group partnered with Brandywine Financial to help fund and progress in the development of the steel site parcels, and both companies threatened to not move forward until both plans were approved. PPG combined the residential and commercial plans into one “all or nothing plan” in October of 2005, and the CDC was not pleased. They felt that PPG’s integration of these two plans was a way for them to build the residential space before developing the commercial space. The emphasis of the CDC and the borough council was sustainability of the revitalization program. If the commercial space was not developed in a clear and successful way, the residential development would not follow and the creation of a

live, work, and play community were essential to the revitalization process. A Conditional Use hearing was ordered with the Borough and CDC, to try and create a plan that PPG would compromise with in order to move forward.

PPG, Delta Group, and their partners at Brandywine Financial argued that they cannot build something that is not in demand, and Phoenixville has more demand for residential units than for commercial units. Bruce Moore at Brandywine Financial showed his frustration with this at a borough council meeting by saying, “This is not Valley Forge here, people. There’s not a whole line of people lining up outside Phoenixville to rent retail spaces.”¹⁰⁵ In an attempt to compromise and move the project forward, the CDC created a list of conditions for the plan put forth by PPG. Rob Frees, a CDC board member, commented on these conditions:

“By the virtue of its ability to take a macro-view of the situation, the CDC wanted to be able to consolidate the concept of the master plan into something that was manageable. The master plan is a balanced plan, the terms were live, work and play and that constituted the three CDC conditions.”¹⁰⁶

The changes proposed by the CDC were attempts to keep the general development of the steel site balanced, with a final goal of creating a sustainable revitalization project.

Although most of the conditions put forth in the hearing were related to the necessity of the commercial development, some discussed Statewide Health Remediation. One of the major conditions was that PPG could “complete construction of the residential component, but only one third of those homeowners

¹⁰⁵ Williams, Karin. “Top 10 of 2006.”

¹⁰⁶ Williams, Karin. “This is strictly business.”

would be permitted to move in prior to the completion of the retail component.”¹⁰⁷

In addition to this, the retail section must be constructed before residential permits will be issued, really emphasizing this importance of commercial space to the CDC and the borough. Office space was also a major concern of the CDC and they suggested that the commercial and retail space would remain under commercial deeds (deed restricted). The CDC and the borough want to ensure that the space remains zoned and permitted for commercial and retail space, so that it cannot be turned into residential space. Rob Frees was quoted drawing attention to the importance of this office space to the overall revitalization process:

“The office space creates tax ratables and creates traffic for the downtown. The retail space benefits from that, as does the residential. In the day and age when gas is \$3.05 a gallon, the concept of being able to live somewhere and walk to work holds great appeal.”¹⁰⁸

Frees and the other members of the CDC know and understand how crucial the commercial aspect was to the overall and future success of the Phoenixville revitalization and want to make sure that PPG and the developers were doing whatever they can to ensure this success.

The tension between the CDC/borough council and PPG had grown significantly through 2005 and 2006. What once was a prime example of a public/private relationship through funding and support had deteriorated significantly. CDC President, Manny DeMutis said in November of 2006, “In fact we

¹⁰⁷ Williams, Karin. “This is strictly business”, 2.

¹⁰⁸ Williams, Karin. “This is strictly business”, 3.

believe that the public/private partnership with PPG is nonexistent. It's over."¹⁰⁹

The constant changes and resistance to compromise from PPG and Delta Group have severely discouraged the CDC and the borough towards the future of the steel site property. After the conditions were put forth, PPG appealed the decision made by the Borough Council during the Conditional Use hearings.

The following year and into 2007 was filled with court dates and appeal hearings, but not much hope for PPG. The borough council had granted conditional use approval for the commercial development of Parcel O, but did not approve the development of Parcel Q, which was originally intended for extended-stay suites until PPG revised the plan to develop townhomes instead. The council felt that the changes made to the plans for Parcel Q were a complete shift from the original master plan and did not promote the sustainable project they felt Phoenixville needed. The court upheld the borough council's decision, ruling that PPG could "proceed with the originally approved [Master] Plan or may proceed with that Plan as amended," which would mean adhering to the conditions put forth at the Conditional Use hearings.¹¹⁰ Almost a full year after PPG's appeal, the courts made a ruling. But where would PPG go from there?

On the former Phoenix Steel Site, progress stalled for some time. With the Court upholding the borough council's decisions, PPG had some major decisions to make on their own. From the time this decision was made until the end of 2007, not

¹⁰⁹ Lawrence, G.E. "CDC: What is PPG's Role?" *The Phoenix*, November 20, 2006. <http://www.phoenixvillenews.com/articles/2006/11/20/today's%20stories/17488983.txt>. March 20, 2012.

¹¹⁰ Lawrence, G.E. "Court nixes PPG's appeal", *The Phoenix*, July 5, 2007. <http://www.phoenixvillenews.com/articles/2007/07/05/past%20stories/19962189.txt>. March 20, 2012.

much progress was made on the properties of Parcels O and Q. The community was not pleased. After the excitement and hope that the purchasing of the steel site brought to the residents of Phoenixville, seeing it remain undeveloped was a constant reminder of what was not being done for the revitalization of Phoenixville. Seeing the barren property remain that way was a source of anger and frustration for the residents who were genuinely confused as to the state of Phoenixville.

The next couple of years seemed to renew hope as the borough and CDC expressed optimism about the future of the steel site. "The Borough's Master Plan for the site and special enabling zoning regulations...have been extended now by council for application to the site by Council for fifteen years."¹¹¹ This would mean that the land could be developed with the same zoning exceptions and tax breaks for up to fifteen years and would be a huge draw for developers to choose the steel site. In addition to extending the zoning regulations, the borough council also will have more input into the development of the land. Phoenixville Property Group was still the property owner, but it was expected to transfer all of its holdings to Brandywine Financial due to loan defaults and financial issues. The transferred property included all of its original holdings, except for Parcel Q, which was already defaulted to Republic First Bank.¹¹² Main-Street CDC is very pleased about this transfer of holdings because Brandywine Financial was worked to form a close relationship and partnership with the CDC.

¹¹¹ Lawrence, G.E. "Piecing together the Revitalization Puzzle", *The Phoenix*. September 13, 2008.
<http://www.phoenixvillenews.com/articles/2008/09/13/today's%20stories/20120331.txt>. March 17, 2012.

¹¹² Lawrence, G.E. "Piecing together the Revitalization Puzzle."

While hopes were high during this time for the future of the steel site, the national economy was not concerned with Phoenixville's big plans for revitalization. Because of the success that had taken place in other parts of the downtown besides the steel site, however, Phoenixville was able to retain a relatively stable consumer base. Many businesses that had opened in Phoenixville over the past decade were able to weather the recession of 2008 and this greatly helped Phoenixville stay on track in its revitalization.

Companies and restaurants such as Black Lab Bistro were able to persevere and come out of the trying times on top. Rob Frees noted that the residents and businesses have stuck it out both in the 1970s and in 2008, "out of either courage or desperation, I'm not sure which."¹¹³ Of course, some businesses were not as fortunate as others, but it did not take long for new businesses to fill the voids. When Manny DeMutis took control of one the steel site parcels, a similar sense of hope and renewal was brought back to the property.

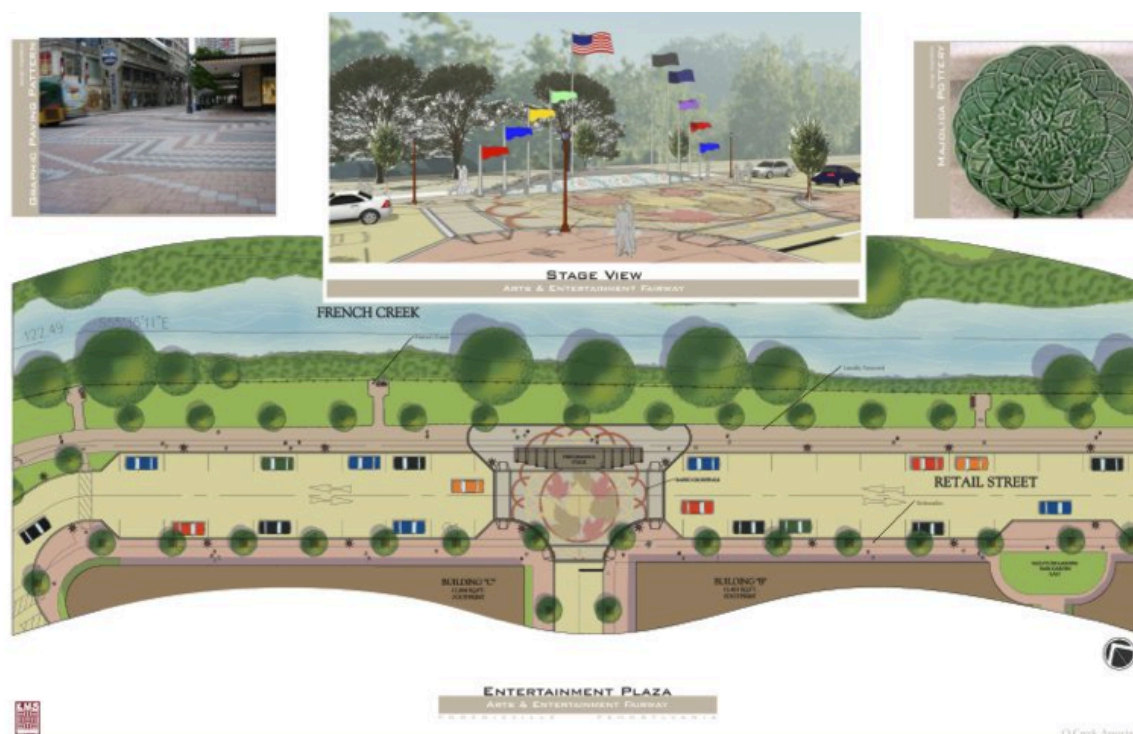
In early 2011, the DeMutis Group submitted plans to develop the Bridge Street parcel of the steel site property into a large mixed-use space. This would include 30,000 square feet of office space, 90,000 square feet of retail, and 275 apartments.¹¹⁴ DeMutis had been a significant player in the revitalization effort as a life-long resident as well as President of Main Street- CDC. He was a constant voice throughout the struggles with PPG that everyone must remain focused on moving

¹¹³ Rob Frees.

¹¹⁴ Jusinski, Lynn. "Lifting the Curse: DeMutis Group Hopes to Develop Steel Site Parcel", Phoenixville Patch, February 2, 2011. <http://phoenixville.patch.com/articles/lifting-the-curse-demutis-group-hopes-to-develop-steel-site-parcel>. March 19, 2012.

forward towards the common goal of rebuilding Phoenixville. The frustrations and tension put aside, DeMutis was prepared to progress with his plan for the mixed-use development on Bridge Street.

In addition to this mixed-use space right in the heart of Phoenixville’s downtown, DeMutis also wanted to improve the Schuylkill River Trail that would seamlessly mesh into the arts and entertainment feel of Phoenixville. “The Fairway” would create a “festival atmosphere” with attractions such as a stage, overlooks onto French Creek, café areas, and gorgeous landscaping.¹¹⁵



Sketch for The Fairway, with Mural Stage in the center (Courtesy of The Phoenixville Steel Site)

¹¹⁵ “The Fairway—The arts and entertainment trail”, The Phoenixville Steel Site, <http://thephoenixvillesteelsite.blogspot.com/2011/04/fairwaythe-arts-and-entertainment-trail.html>. April 10, 2012.

This plan made it through Phoenixville Planning Commission hearing in late June, and will progress forward to the next Planning Commission hearing. While there were many conditions made to the plan, the Commission agreed that The Fairway would be a great use of the steel site. This plan came about at a rather serendipitous time for DeMutis and the community, as many residents were voicing concerns with disappearing green space throughout the revitalization. Among many concerns, including what the Bridge Street development would do to business downtown, residents voiced concern about the use of space along French Creek.

Many concerns voiced by community members of Phoenixville were related to the local economy from the recession. Residents were confused as to the reasoning behind developing a large, mixed-use space on the steel site when there were still open storefronts on Bridge Street. During an open meeting with residents and business owners, DeMutis emphasized that no one was abandoning the downtown in any way. DeMutis and Main Street- CDC were concerned with bringing in the right kinds of businesses to downtown Phoenixville. The goal behind the entire revitalization from the beginning has been keeping Phoenixville unique and different than every other town in the area, so that people are continuously attracted to the area. To do this, however, CDC and PABA needed to be selective about what businesses are being brought into Phoenixville and that this is the reason not all the storefronts are filled. “The challenge to developing is

remembering what we are, but not betraying who we were and remaining pertinent to the marketplace.”¹¹⁶

Residents were also questioning whether Phoenixville will be able to remain afloat during the next few years with the economy fluctuating as it has since the recession. DeMutis has always been confident about Phoenixville’s resilience, and it has rarely faltered. He focused on Phoenixville’s identity and its rich history of perseverance in business and in the community. He went on to say that past and continued success of small businesses in the area has created a sense of stability among potential retailers and investors that will keep Phoenixville going. “Why would Iron Hill come to Phoenixville? Everyone thought they were crazy. To date, Phoenixville is the highest grossing Iron Hill location per square foot.”¹¹⁷ DeMutis’s consistent faith and belief in the strength and potential of Phoenixville is what has made him such a successful developer throughout the years. His unwavering belief in what a great place Phoenixville is has earned him the trust and respect of business owners and residents throughout the town and makes him an ideal person to head the steel site projects.

The borough council supported this view when the development plan for the Bridge Street parcel was unanimously approved in a conditional use hearing.¹¹⁸

There were a few concerns as to how this plan would mesh into the current

¹¹⁶ Pilgren, Rachel. “Residents React to Steel Site Proposal”, Phoenixville Patch, July 11, 2011. <http://phoenixville.patch.com/articles/phoenixville-meeting-in-a-nutshell-possible-police-force-cuts-new-development>. April 11, 2012.

¹¹⁷ Pilgren, Rachel.

¹¹⁸ “Steel Site gets conditional use approval from Phoenixville Borough Council”, The Phoenixville Steel Site. <http://thephoenixvillesteelsite.blogspot.com/2011/08/phoenixville-steel-site-gets.html>. March 28, 2012.

downtown landscape, but overall the council felt that the plan was a move in the right direction for the steel site. The borough council even showed its support to this project by offering a LERTA tax abatement project.¹¹⁹ LERTA or Local Economic Revitalization Tax Assistance Act states that local municipalities, school districts and counties can offer tax abatements on improvements to property for up to ten years.”¹²⁰ This is significant because it showed the borough council’s trust and faith in the development of the Bridge Street parcel. “The LERTA was a big deal when it came to planning the project. In the days of very competitive financing arrangements the borough took a big step by saying you are open for business by opening LERTA.”¹²¹ The support shown by the borough for the DeMutis plans show their commitment to a project that is dedicated to the plan and ideology set forth by the borough. The plan for the mixed-use development on Bridge Street was created around helping a sustainable revitalization take shape.

For example, DeMutis was and is genuinely invested in bringing in retailers and businesses that would create an identity for Phoenixville that would last for a significant amount of time. The borough stood behind him and agreed that Phoenixville needed small businesses that will draw people to Phoenixville as opposed to Wayne, Manayunk, or West Chester. In order to do this, DeMutis has been incredibly selective with the stores and businesses that can buy retail space both in his new development and in downtown Phoenixville. Some of these

¹¹⁹ “Steel Site gets conditional use approval...”

¹²⁰ “LERTA Application,” *Borough of Phoenixville*, <http://www.phoenixville.org/PDF/Applications%20&%20Forms/LERTA/LERTA%20PROGRAM.pdf>. April 25, 2012.

¹²¹ “Steel Site Project gets conditional use approval...”

businesses included clothing boutiques, such as Best Friends, and Diving Cat Studio and Gallery, which sells the work of local artists. In addition to ensuring that businesses are unique to the community, DeMutis wanted to make sure that these business owners were fully committed to the future success of Phoenixville.

To do this, the residential units in the Bridge Street development will be for rent, but the retail space will be for sale only. “We will be offering the retail units for sale to ensure that many of the retailers will be able to purchase the retail space and remain part of the Phoenixville community for years to come.”¹²² If retailers and business owners are required to buy their store space, then they have a long-term and vested commitment to the neighboring businesses as well as the community as a whole. This requirement also makes sure that the businesses that are moving into the community are fiscally stable and have had previous success somewhere. This assures that the businesses that move to Phoenixville will be successful, not just because of the consumer base in Phoenixville, but also because they will theoretically have the skills and plans to run their store well. While meticulous and time-consuming, being selective and specific about what businesses join the Phoenixville community and how they become a part of it, is integral to the sustainability of the town.

The first decade of the 21st century proved difficult at times for the development of the former Phoenix Steel Corporation steel site. Owners were changed, plans were made, revised and denied, and tensions were high. But after over a decade of waiting and hoping, construction and progress is taking noticeable

¹²² “Steel Site Project gets conditional use approval...”

steps towards the rebuilding of the property. While some were skeptical about the outcome of the steel site property, the community as a whole was hopeful and determined that Phoenixville would persevere. The property that was once an open sore of disappointment and loss, was now the source of hope and promise. This mindset continues to push the community towards an even better future for Phoenixville.

A revitalization project as expansive as the one in Phoenixville will always face difficult obstacles in planning, development, etc. In Phoenixville, most of these struggles arose in the implementation of the former Phoenix Steel property renovation. While the private and public funding made the possibility of large scale change possible, putting it into action was much more difficult. The Phoenix Steel site went through a series of owners and plans until Manny DeMutis gained control of the Bridge Street parcel. Now that a developer with a definitive plan and a strong sense of the Phoenixville community was in control of a large portion of the property, the future looked bright for the steel site. The rest of downtown Phoenixville was experiencing commercial success with increased popularity of its restaurants, stores, art galleries, as well as entertainment and social outlets. Phoenixville seemed to be on the pathway to overall economic success after decades of financial distress.

The disputes over the development of the steel site, the concerns about what businesses were brought to Phoenixville, and the attention paid to every part of the revitalization could have been seen as unnecessary if one looked at the process haphazardly. However, when Phoenixville's past economic struggles and the

difficult times of the residents is taken into consideration, these concerns show the importance of the revitalization to the town, as well as the community. From the time the first plans were made towards the new identity of Phoenixville in the late 1980s, members of the community were intimately involved. The transformation had a profound effect on the residents of Phoenixville and they made sure they were a part of it. The community propelled the revitalization forward and their direct involvement was what made the process successful.

CONCLUSION

Phoenixville began as a small settlement on the Schuylkill River that quickly grew into a center of industry. A town with superb location and access to transportation and water power, Phoenixville expanded rapidly due to the success of Phoenix Iron Company. The industry gained national and international recognition for its innovative column and bridge technology. The success of Phoenix Iron and Steel was constant throughout much of the 20th century, but when deindustrialization plagued the United States, the corporation and the town suffered greatly. After several years of unemployment and economic recession in the 1970s and 1980s, Phoenixville began to turn a corner. The community and the local government created a new identity for Phoenixville that incorporated the industrial success of its past while bringing it into the 21st century. After a long process of redevelopment, renovation, and recruiting of businesses and investors, Phoenixville has become a prime destination for people of all ages to live in and visit.

The late 1990s posed a few issues with developers and funding of the former steel site, but the past decade has shown progression that reignited the hope and energy of the community. The revitalization was so successful, in fact, that when the 2008 recession hit the nation, Phoenixville's businesses and residents were relatively unaffected when compared to similar towns in Chester County. The community has remained resilient and their strength and trust in Phoenixville has made it possible for the revitalization to continue on a path towards success. The community has created and benefitted from numerous additions to Phoenixville

from stores and restaurants, to events and festivals. For instance, First Fridays take place on the first Friday of every month and transform the historic downtown into an open gallery of music, art, and entertainment. Stores, bars, restaurants, and galleries open their doors to the community and provide deals, new foods, artwork, and more for anyone in the area. They have become one of the highlights of Phoenixville's arts and entertainment plan and draw thousands of visitors into the town every month.

Events such as this are driven by the community and the residents and emphasize the community's role in Phoenixville's success. From this study of Phoenixville's revitalization in relation to its past success and struggles, it is shown how integral a determined and proud community is to any town or city. Phoenixville could have easily remained a desolate town after Phoenix Steel closed its doors and unemployment spiked. The reason Phoenixville was able to bounce back from this troubling time was because the residents spurred change. The community never lost hope or faith in Phoenixville's potential and they were dedicated to helping it live up to its potential. The Colonial Theater renovations are a perfect example of transformation spurred by local residents. Two women came together and raised monetary and community support from other residents and began an incredible project to recreate the beauty and experience of the Colonial Theater.

By studying the story of Phoenixville, one can see the vital role that ordinary citizens can have in the revitalization of their place. The community of Phoenixville believed in their own strength as a group and acted to change their future, as a community, and as a town. This grassroots movement in Phoenixville was

encouraged and supported financially through private funding from investors and businesses, as well as through public funding from regional and federal loan programs. This joint funding made Phoenixville's revitalization possible and helped it become successful. Phoenixville utilized everything in its power to transform into a vibrant destination.

The key to the revitalization of Phoenixville was staying true to the industrial past and success while adopting a new identity within the larger community. A traditionally blue-collar and manufacturing town, Phoenixville did not lead many people to envision a modern and trendy downtown. Phoenixville was able to make this transformation because homage is paid to the industrial. The Foundry is a prominent piece of the landscape and it wholly represents Phoenix Steel's influence and role in Phoenixville's identity with its architecture, Phoenix columns, and its size. The new stores and buildings were carefully selected and renovated to fit into the arts and entertainment strategy, while architecturally representing the eclectic past and style of Phoenixville.

Phoenixville was able to begin a successful revitalization process with help from its own community, public and private funding, and remembering its past while moving forward. Towns in Chester County and the surrounding area have experienced similar revitalization processes, and by using the strategies mentioned throughout this thesis, other towns could also experience a revitalized economy. Phoenixville did come across some luck in timing as well as a renewed interest in small towns and places to live, work, and play. However, I believe that if the community is dedicated to the process, and the local government and developers in

the area are committed to a unified plan, towns throughout the country could engage in a revitalization like Phoenixville's.

The revitalization process has been time-consuming and, at times, frustrating. However, the same community that remained strong and hopeful during the difficulties of the 1980s was resilient during the recent struggles as well.

Researching Phoenixville's story through historical data, statistics, and personal narratives have shown the importance of an irrepressible community to the continued success of a town. Phoenixville was not always successful or well thought of, but the residents that remained a part of the community did so with the belief that the town would recover eventually. The revitalization is far from over, and with the help and support of the community, the process will continue on a path towards success.

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