

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

1980s

More industry, train service lost

At a recent Progress Pottstown luncheon, borough officials expressed optimism about Pottstown's future. The following is one of a series about where we've been in the last five decades.

Pottstown manufacturing jobs continued to nosedive in the 1980s, starting with the closing of the Firestone Tire plant in 1980. Not only did Firestone provide more than 2,000 good-paying jobs, it was a benevolent corporate presence that supported numerous civic activities.



Commentary by
Thomas Hylton

Other manufacturers like the Clow Corp., Lincoln Underwear, Sunset Manufacturing, and Kiwi Shoe Polish either closed or moved out of town.

The downtown also continued its decline, with the closing of Ellis Mills, J.C. Penney, and the New York Store as well as numerous other stores on High Street. Pottstown's last movie theater, the Towne, was demolished for a proposed mini-mall that never materialized.

Meanwhile, the demolition of the Shuler House and adjacent businesses in 1975 for an aborted redevelopment project left a gaping 2-acre hole downtown in front of the former Reading passenger station that remained throughout the 1980s.

The abandoned passenger station symbolized the loss of train service in 1981 to Philadelphia and Reading, as SEPTA declined to maintain its aging

trains and other operating equipment in the face of declining ridership.

To revitalize the downtown, the borough obtained \$1 million from Montgomery County for streetscape improvements on High Street, including new paving, streetlights, and trees.

The borough also received state funding to hire a Main Street Manager, which led to the formation of a downtown improvement district, called PDIDA, in 1987.

Meanwhile, The Mercury led a three-year campaign raising nearly \$500,000 to plant more than 2,000 street trees on High Street and in older Pottstown neighborhoods. Civic leaders formed a non-profit called Trees Inc. to manage the tree planting.



TRAIN SERVICE from Pottstown to Reading and Philadelphia was terminated by SEPTA in July 1981.



DEMOLITION of historic buildings continued with the loss of the 1923 Pottstown High School in 1982.

Shift to Radials Forces Firestone to Close 6 Plants

By IVER PETERSON
Special to The New York Times

AKRON, Ohio, March 19 — The Firestone Tire and Rubber Company, responding to declining demand and a consumer shift to radial tires, will close five tire factories and a synthetic rubber plant by October, the company announced today.

A total of 7,265 hourly and salaried workers will be idled, and 1,575 others who have already been laid off will not be rehired. Firestone described the move as

a major restructuring of its North American tire operations.

The closings did not come as a surprise from a company that had a loss of \$13.8 million in its fiscal first quarter, ended Jan. 31. And the closings did not come as a surprise in an industry that has long been suffering from production overcapacity. In January, Uniroyal Inc. announced the closing of two of its five tire plants, resulting in the loss of 3,300 jobs. Last fall the Mansfield Tire and Rubber Company of Mansfield, Ohio, declared bankruptcy.

"The realignment is intended to meet changing market conditions by eliminating unneeded capacity that has been used mainly for the production of bias-ply tires," Richard A. Riley, Firestone's chairman and chief executive officer, said at company headquarters here today.

Bias-ply tires, in which the supporting cords run at angles to the width of the tire, have been increasingly displaced by radial tires. Their cords parallel the di-

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POTTSTOWN LOST more than 2,000 jobs when the Firestone plant closed in October 1980. Other major employers like Clow Corp., Lincoln Underwear, and Sunset Manufacturing also closed. Kiwi moved to Douglassville.