



KIDS TALES FROM JAIL

Bristol Historical & Preservation Society

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KIDS

TALES FROM JAIL

The “Mom and Pop” Businesses of Bristol’s Past

A Mom and Pop Store is defined as “a small retail business, typically family-operated”. The fate of these types of shops is a topic very much of the moment. Searching “Mom and Pop Shop” in Google News on January 22, 2020, pulls up the following headlines:

New York Times

The Loss of Mom-and-Pop Stores That Can’t Compete With Amazon

pymnts.com

How Mom And Pops Can Survive Retail Apocalypse

cleveland.com

Which do you prefer: Your local Mom and Pop store, the big-box chains or online shopping?

The Athletic

How Nike, Adidas and E-commerce threaten the survival of mom-and-pop soccer shops

Westport [MA] News

New year brings small business closures in Westport

newportri.com

After six decades, iconic Thames Street store Music Box closes



A Grocery Store in Bristol during the 1930s

While it is easy to point fingers at the big box stores and at steadily increasing rent and insurance costs, it is important not to forget that there are other historical changes that have impacted these businesses.

For example, in previous centuries, travel was not as easy as it is now. Dry goods, grocers, and drug stores were located on almost every corner because people needed to carry their purchases back home with them. Also, new immigrants often faced a culture

of bigotry and resistance from local businesses. It was easier to shop at a business run by someone with a similar background and language who lived in your own neighborhood.

This issue of *Tales from Jail* celebrates the rich history of independent businesses in Bristol’s past. We hope it starts you thinking about the changing role of small businesses in our community.

The disappearance of small, independently owned businesses from towns like Bristol is a topic too complex to sum up here. A wide variety of historic and modern-day economic reasons have caused the problem.

Shopping local is my favorite! I can get in a good walk on the way!



BICYCLE
DIGATI
DRUGSTORE
FIREWORKS
HARDWARE
ICE SKATES
MACARONI
MOLASKY
MOM AND POP
PASTIME
PHARMACY
PONY
RESTORATOR
TOPAZIO
WARDWELL

Can you find these
names and places?



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Attention KIDS members: Would you like to contribute to a future issue? Let us know!!!

Email us at info@bhps.necoxmail.com or call 401-253-7223

The Bristol Macaroni Company

Type: Macaroni

Location 1: Corner of High & Washington Streets

Location 2: 430 High Street

Original Proprietor: Gaetano Lombardi

Dates of Operation: c.1917-1951

On September 7, 1917, shortly after 10 pm, the Bristol Macaroni Company, located at the corner of High and Washington Streets, caught on fire. Unfortunately, there were no fire hydrants near the building and when the fire company did manage to get a hose to the site, the connections leaked. It took over 45 minutes to put the fire out and the damage was severe. After the fire, proprietor Gaetano Lombardi decided to move to a larger space at 430 High Street.



Enrico Topazio & Sons Dolce e Pastecieria

Type: Bakery/Ice Cream

Location: 141 Bradford Street

Original Proprietor: Enrico Topazio

Dates of Operation: 1929-1965

BH&PS Historian Rei remembers: "I remember back in the summers of the late 1950s waiting for the sound of the harness bells and the clop, clop, clop of the hoofs of the pony pulling Mr. Topazio's ice cream wagon. All the kids affectionately referred to him as "The Pony Man". He was a quiet, elderly man with white hair and a very full walrus mustache, and he wore a newsboy cap. His ice cream, which cost a dime, was a real treat. In addition, the privilege to be allowed to stroke the pony's mane and neck (only with permission) was a big bonus. Mr. Topazio was in the ice cream business for a really long time. My father also purchased ice cream from him when he was a young boy during the 1920s. Sadly, Mr. Topazio gave up his ice cream route sometime around 1960. Eventually a modern Mr. Softy ice cream truck replaced "The Pony Man". The Mr. Softy truck had a music box but it just wasn't the same for me as the sounds of the bells and the pony's hoofs. And there was no



Yum!



Bristol Fireworks Company

Type: Fireworks

Location: 13 Wheeler Avenue

Original Proprietor: Giuseppe Giorgio

Dates of Operation: c.1920-1926

On August 9, 1926, shortly after 11 am, the residents of Bristol heard a loud explosion. It came from an unlicensed Bristol Fireworks Company on Wheeler Ave. The explosion occurred when proprietor Giuseppe Giorgio was working overtime to fill a large order earmarked for Portland, ME. The exact cause of the explosion is unknown, but it killed four people, injured more than a dozen others, and caused thousands of dollars of property damage. Houses all over town shook, hundreds of windows broke, and two nearby houses and a barn burned down.

Fireworks in Bristol? I'd better cover my ears...



But did you also know that this may not have been the first explosion caused by the company? A small notice six years earlier in the *Bristol Phoenix* reported that on August 9, 1920, a series of explosions occurred on Wheeler Avenue. Four or five small explosions were heard coming from a shed, which was full of handmade "Italian fireworks". According to the *Bristol Phoenix*, "A man named Giorgio, who manufactures Italian fireworks in another place farther south in the same street, rented the building ... to store the manufactured products."

Hmmm...could this Giorgio be Giuseppe Giorgio, proprietor of the Bristol Fireworks Company? What do you think? Coincidentally, this smaller accident happened exactly 6 years to the day before the fatal explosion of August 9, 1926.

Wardwell Lumber

Type: Hardware/Lumber

Location 1: Corner of Thames and Bradford Streets

Location 2: 319 Thames Street

Original Proprietor: William T. C. Wardwell

Dates of Operation: 1830-1993

Wardwell Lumber, Bristol's oldest business, opened its doors on Thames and Bradford Streets in 1830, selling coal from schooners that docked in Bristol Harbor.

The business did well and expanded to sell wood and paint. During its 163 year history, six generations of Wardwells continually grew the business while keeping service to the community as one of their main goals.

This is a photo of the inside of Wardwell Lumber. They also had an amazing selection of hardware!



Molasky's Department Store

Type: Department Store

Location 1: 53 Bradford Street

Location 2: 44 State Street

Original Proprietor: Jacob Molasky

Dates of Operation: 1900-c.1979

BH&PS Historian Rei remembers:

"Mr. Molasky owned and operated a clothing store in Bristol, which was literally the proverbial "organized mess". Because you could never find what you were looking for by yourself, you just told Mr. Molasky what you were looking for and he would go right to it. He always knew just where all his inventory was. When visiting the store during the month of February, you had to listen to his personal experience about being stranded in Providence during the "Great Valentine's Day Blizzard" in 1940, which occurred for two days starting on February 14. This store was also the site of Bristol's very first Post Office."

Does my dinner bowl count as a "restorator"?
What if I put it in the dining room?



Did you know?

Throughout Western history, most food was made and consumed at home. Eating out was mainly for travelers.

Traveling by wagon or on horseback was a slow process. By necessity, travelers went to inns, taverns, and saloons where they were served the same food that the innkeeper's family and staff were eating. There were no menus and travelers often ate together at shared tables.

Things began to change in the early 1800s, starting in France. Following the French Revolution, many chefs employed in aristocratic households found themselves unemployed. In Paris, these chefs began opening restaurants that served fine cuisine, thereby creating a new way of dining. The word "restaurant" derives from the French verb "restaurer" which means "to restore" or "to revive".

At around the same time, advances in steamship and railway technology brought about a change in travel. A market for luxury tourism developed and with it, a new precedent of eating away from home.

Having experienced European restaurants, American travelers returned home and told others about them, causing the idea to spread. Interestingly, there were a variety of regional names attached to such establishments, including the eating saloon. Other names for restaurants included "eating house", "restorator", "dining room", "dining hall", and "victualing house".

Did You Know?

The Golden Age of the American Drugstore (1850-1950) began with the introduction of scientific methods to the process of creating and dispensing drugs. During this time, when people needed a medication they would go to the drugstore first. This practice was especially common in rural areas or in lower-class communities, where people didn't have the \$3 or \$4 needed to go to the doctor. Local pharmacists treated (among other things) cuts and bruises, goiters, hernias, constipation, diarrhea, rashes, and ringworm.

Patrons would also go to their local drugstore to purchase a fountain drink to cure physical maladies. The fountain drinks contained extracts of various drugs, flavored and carbonated to make them more palatable. Drugs like cocaine and caffeine are the most famous, but bromides and plant extracts were also commonly dispensed. By the 1920s, most drugstores offered a complete soda fountain ensemble.

By the 1960s, the development of drive-in restaurants and self-service soda vending machines had signaled the end of the drug store soda fountain. This change, combined with the creation of the first self-service drug stores and the creation of the Food and Drug Administration, ended the golden age of the drugstore and altered the role of the pharmacist forever.

Soda fountains used to look like this!



Hope Hardware

Type: Hardware

Location 1: 425 Hope Street

Location 2: Corner of Wood & Congregational Streets

Original Proprietor: James St. Angelo

Dates of Operation: 1943-2011

BH&PS Historian Rei remembers:

"Tools, nails, screws, curtain rods, fishing gear and rods, kitchen knives, and more were available here along with wallpaper sample books. After you chose a wallpaper pattern, Florence, one of the owners, would ask for the dimensions of the room, ceiling height and the number of windows and doors. Once you told her, she would immediately know how many rolls of wallpaper you needed to order. My first pair of ice skates (double runners) came from this store as well as my first pair of roller skates. The roller skates were the kind you needed a skate key to clamp them to your shoes."



DiGati's Bicycle

Type: Bicycles

Location 1: 43 Bradford Street

Location 2: 13 State Street

Original Proprietor: Leonard DiGati

Dates of Operation: 1912-c.1946

Also owned State Street Bowling Alley & Pool Parlors, c.1920-1940



I love bicycles! Do you think I could learn how to ride one? I could go twice as fast because I have four feet. I wonder how I would steer....

Leonard "Ned" DiGati was born in 1884, in Palermo, Italy. He came to Bristol in 1893 at the age of 11, and remained here in Bristol until his death in 1966. He owned a bicycle sales and repair business and worked very hard fixing bicycles, baby carriages, and wheeled carts. He also ran a bowling alley and pool parlor, and, briefly, a restaurant on State Street. He was a well-known and a familiar sight riding around town on his own bicycle.





Pandora's Amazing Box of Bristol History

Hey, History Kids! I was searching through the Amazing Box of Bristol History and found two photographs. One is of the building that housed the first movie theater in Bristol, which opened in 1912 and was called the Pastime Theater. In the beginning, movies had no sound, so theaters had someone playing background music on a piano during the movie. (I don't think I could manage to do that! Could you?) Unfortunately, the theater burned down on February 5, 1934.



The other photograph is of the second Pastime Theater, built for Mr. Lon Vasil, who opened it on December 4, 1934. It was built of steel and cast concrete in the Art Deco style. Miss Osterberg sold the tickets and if she thought children were too young to see certain movies, she would tell them they would have to have their mothers come to the theater with them! This theater was torn down in September, 2006, to make space for an addition to the Andrews School. A group of local citizens organized to try and save the Pastime Theater from being torn down. They hoped to turn it into the Pastime Center for the Performing Arts & Cinema. Their valiant efforts, however, did not succeed. Speaking of theaters and movies, do you have a favorite movie? Mine is *101 Dalmatians*. Now, go out and make history!

