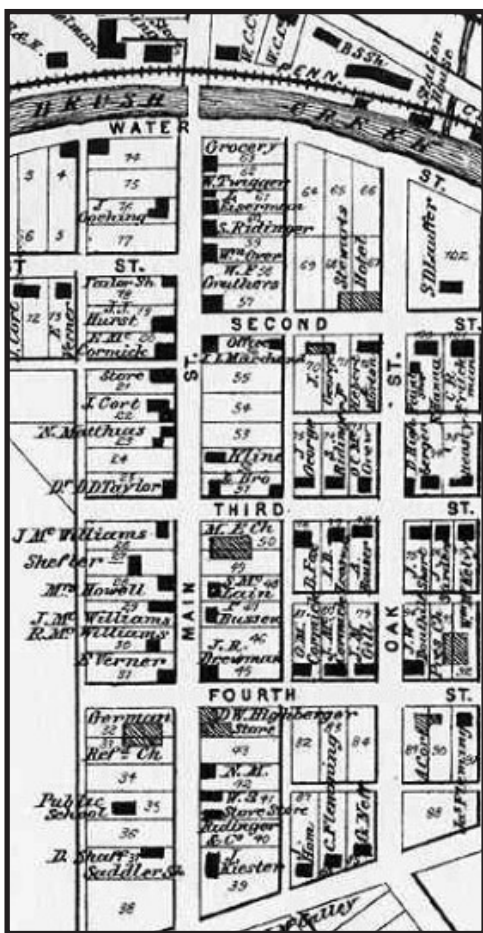


2021 FALL NEWSLETTER



Memories of Growing Up In Irwin

BY BOB CUPP

Early in the 1900's, Tom and Lena Schiavo emigrated from Sicily and settled in Irwin, where they opened a Main Street produce business next to Lohr's Hardware. Tom traveled to Pittsburgh by horse and buggy to buy fresh produce and peddled it in the rural areas surrounding Irwin. The new residents worked hard and prospered in the fast-growing community.



The Schiavo family purchased the Brunswick Hotel in 1938. It was located at the corner of Main and Second Streets across from the current location of the Irwin Post Office.
PHOTO COURTESY OF BARRY SCHIAVO

In 1938, the Schiavos purchased the Brunswick Hotel at the corner of Main and Second Streets, across from the present location of the Irwin Post Office. The brick and stone structure, built in 1895, had been one of the leading commercial hotels in the region.

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During the roaring twenties, the Brunswick was known for its fine dining and dancing. The large dining room, with its high ceiling, tall windows and seating for over 200 people, was patronized by both travelers and local residents.



Tom, Lena and their four boys and seven girls lived in the hotel. Born in 1928, Barry Schiavo was the second youngest of the eleven children. “Shiv,” as he was known in high school, retained vivid memories of growing up in downtown Irwin.

As with most boys of that era, sports were an integral part of Barry’s life; he loved to play football, basketball and baseball. “We spent a lot of time playing baseball in the meadow beneath the trolley trestle that connected Irwin with Larimer,” Schiavo reminisced. The team at bat would share their ball gloves with the team in the field because not enough kids had their own gloves.

“We played football on a vacant lot on Second Street. Irwin would play against teams from Penglyn and Shaftern. There was a rivalry between the ‘uptown’ kids who lived above Sixth Street and the ‘downtown’ kids who lived between Sixth Street and the railroad, but sports brought us together and helped to make us good friends.”

Barry attended Norwin High School, where he lettered in football and basketball during his junior year. Norwin won the Westmoreland County Basketball Championship that season. Schiavo was described in the 1946 Norwin Yearbook

After playing high school basketball, Barry Schiavo continued to play for the Immaculate Conception Basketball Team in the Irwin Church League. They played their games at Irwin’s Sixth Street School (left to right):

Back Row: Larry Filtz, Jack Murray, Frank Benish, Tom Parry

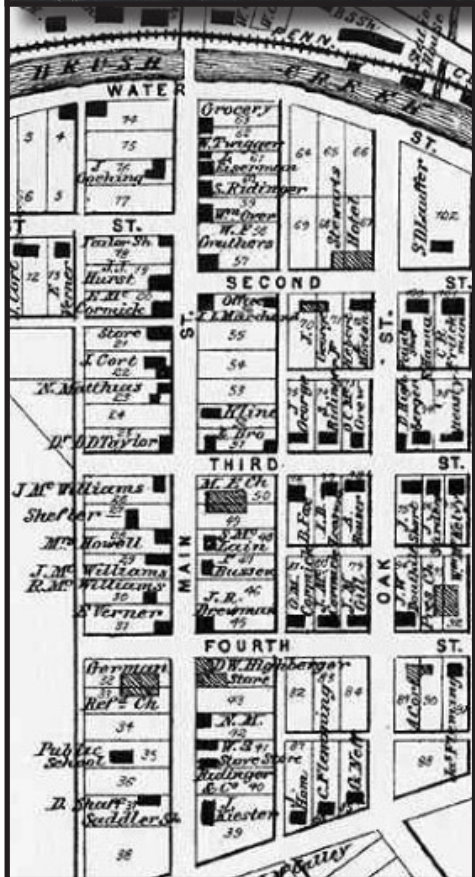
Middle Row: Ray Zepeck, Jerry Pringaman, Ned Hensler, Rudy Zavora, Connie Downey

Front Row: Barry Schiavo, Clyde Knightich, Billy Knoll

PHOTO COURTESY OF BARRY SCHIAVO

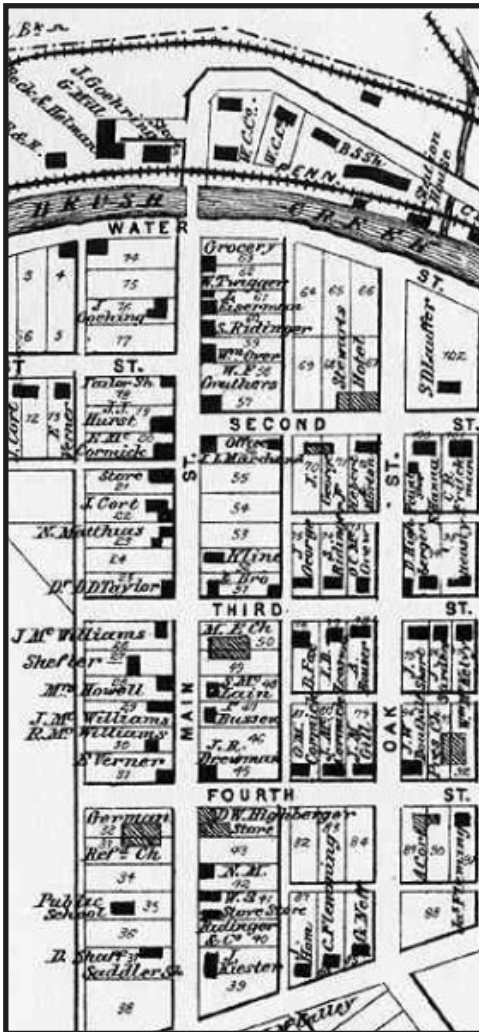
as “a constant scorer, proving his worth many times throughout the season.” The following year, Norwin was disbanded and the Irwin residents returned to Irwin High School to form the first graduating class there since 1916.

Amazingly, in their first year playing together at Irwin High, the basketball team won the 1947 Pennsylvania State Class B Basketball Championship. A junior, John Abraham was the only member of the squad with any varsity experience, having played for Norwin in his sophomore year. The other



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four starters were Lewis Allshouse, Thomas Butler, Robert Cervi and Richard Schade.

Although ruled ineligible to play his senior year, Schiavo was a staunch supporter of the Irwin Basketball Team and always remained extremely proud of their accomplishments. With Allshouse and Richard Sistik the only senior players, the team brought fame to Irwin that season with a record of thirty wins and only one loss. "The whole town turned out to honor the team with a parade," Schiavo warmly recalled.

Of course, the teenage years weren't all fun and games for Barry. "When we were kids, during summer vacations we'd ride the trolley to Jeannette to work at McKee Glass or Jeannette Glass. I made \$26.00 a week then. My job was to hold the mold for the glass blowers who made fancy glassware. The afternoon shift would get so hot, we'd have to swallow salt tablets.

"All the Schiavo children worked in the hotel; the girls cleaned the rooms. It was a big hotel with 80 rooms on three floors. My mother was always doing laundry and my father ran the bar." Barry also ran errands for the hotel guests and tenants. "I saw a few things I probably shouldn't have seen, but we won't go into that," he said with a mischievous grin.



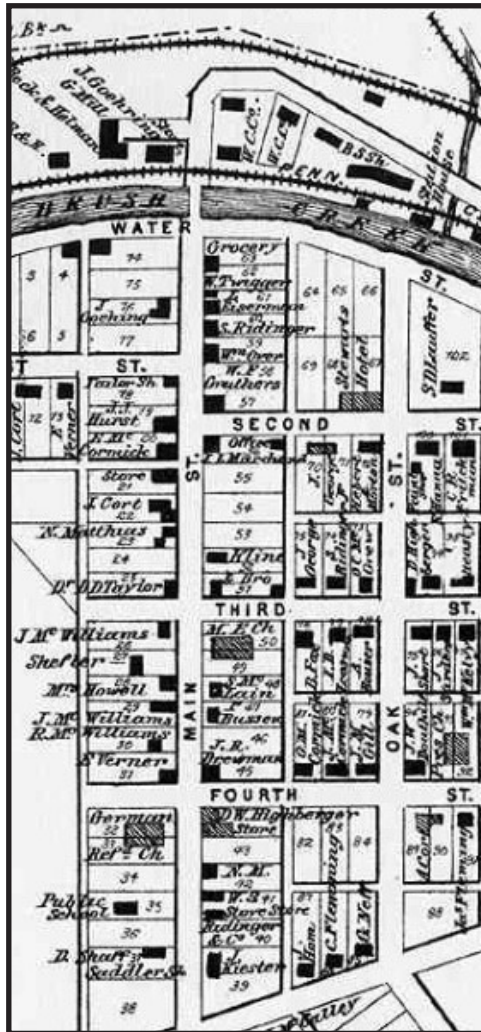
The Brunswick Hotel was conveniently located near the railroad station, making it an ideal place for businessmen to spend the night.

"Dad would open the bar at 7:00 a.m. and stay open until 2:00 a.m. When I turned 18, I started tending bar. Coal miners often came into the bar and I heard a lot of stories about tough times working in the mines."

During the forties, the Brunswick became a prime brunch destination for the

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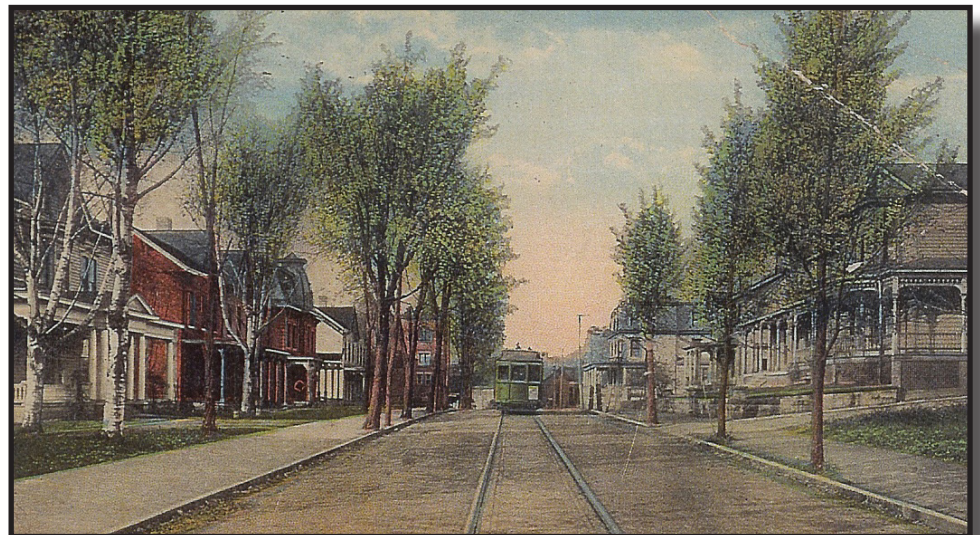
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local Sunday “after church” crowd, as well as a popular spot for social gatherings. Saturday night dances were also held there. Schiavo remembers Willie Hamilton as a long-time disc jockey at the Brunswick. “Even when I wasn’t old enough to dance, I loved to watch the couples jitterbug.

“Bobby Whitehead was our cook. We had meals for the tenants if they wanted to eat. Bobby lived right in the hotel. He was a tough old guy; he’d let us kids hit him in the belly.”

“At one time, a sewing club met there daily to make clothing for poor people. The hotel served them lunch in the dining room.”

Schiavo recalled a happy childhood, growing up in downtown Irwin. “There were lots of things to do in town. We used to go to the movies at the Alladin Theater and the Lamp. I remember going to the Alladin to see Frankenstein. One of my friends got so scared when Frankenstein came out of a coal mine, he ran right out of the theater.”



This is a view of Irwin’s South Main Street in the “uptown” section of town. There was a friendly rivalry between the “uptown” kids who lived south of Sixth Street and the “downtown” kids who lived north of Sixth Street.

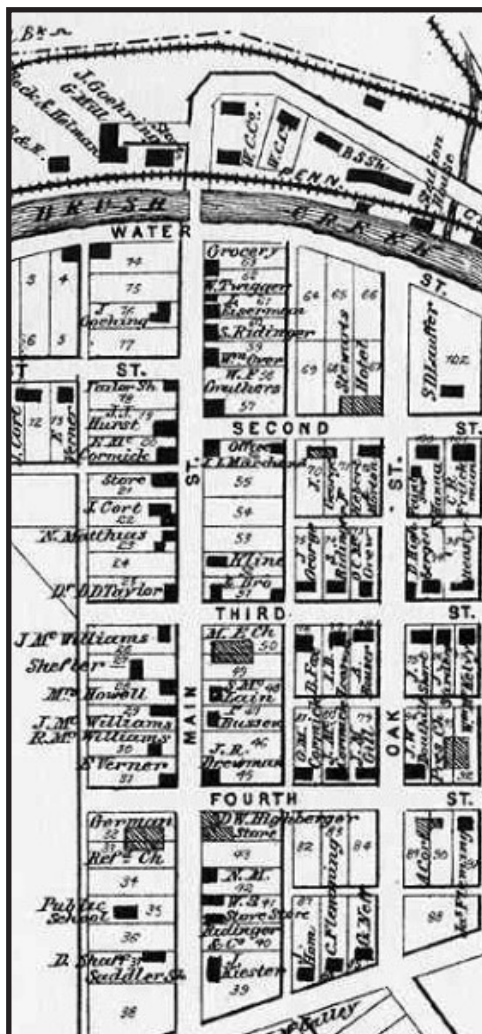
“In those days, you could take the trolley to Jeannette to see a movie, or to Manor to go roller skating. We only had one vehicle in the family. If you wanted the car, you had to make a reservation, but you could buy gas for 11 cents a gallon.”

According to the 1947 Irwin High School Yearbook, Barry “cut a neat rug on the dance floor;” his specialty was the jitterbug. He recalled, “I loved to dance and, back then, every town had a ‘swing shanty.’ They were the



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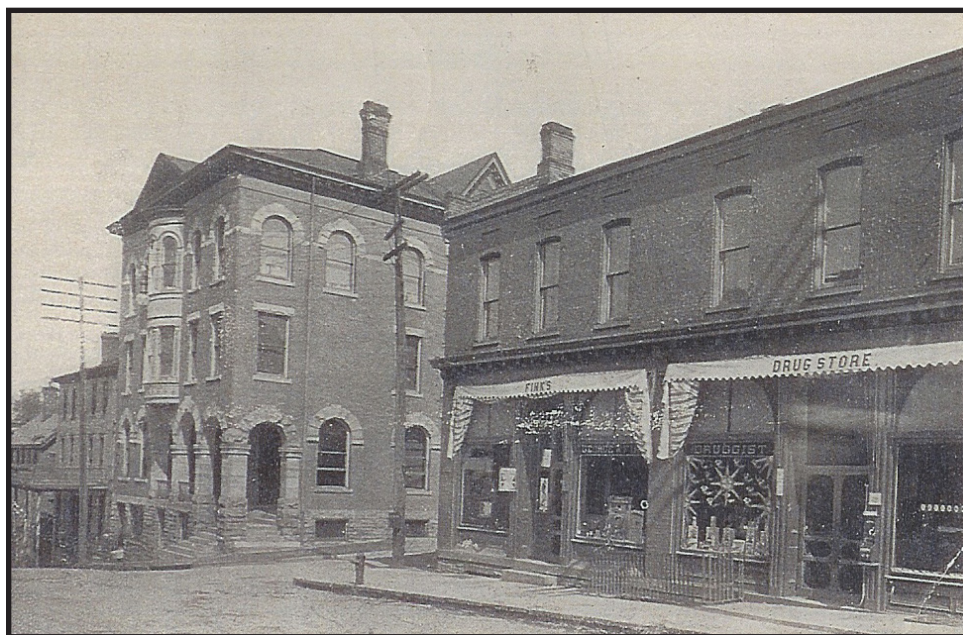
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equivalent of teenage nightclubs today. Most of them had a soda fountain where you could get a banana split for 25 cents. We would often go dancing across the street from the hotel at Tony's Spaghetti House."

Schiavo also frequented swing shanties in Shafton, Trafford and Wilmerding, where he met his future wife, Rose Marie; they were happily married for more than a half-century.



Fink's Drug Store was located at the corner of Main and Second Streets opposite the Brunswick Hotel. At one time, there was a pool room in the basement which Barry frequented.

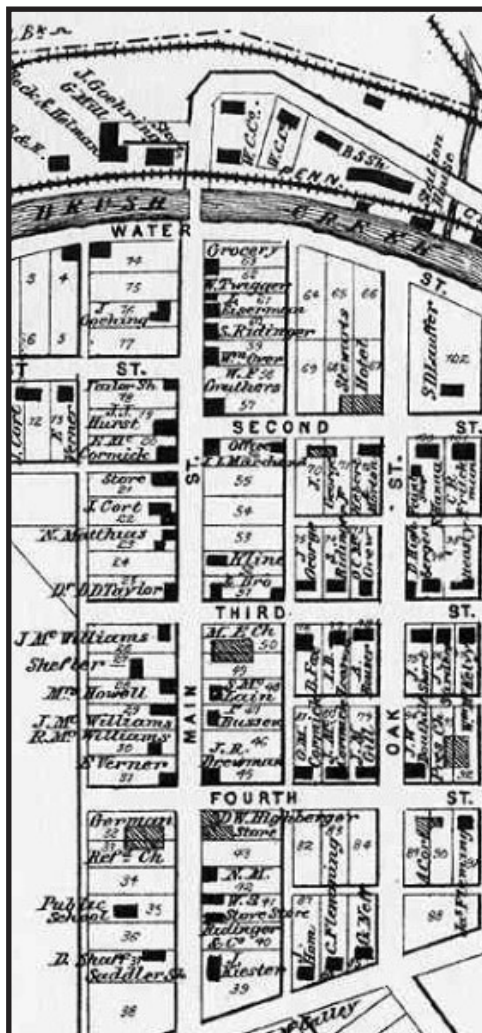
In the 1950's, permanent guests occupied the hotel rooms; the Schiavo family sold the building to Irwin Borough in 1957 and moved to California. The old hotel was soon demolished to make room for a public parking lot.

Schiavo and his family returned to the Irwin area in 1975. He purchased a bar and apartment building in Pitcarin, where he was the proprietor of Barry's Bar for over three decades. "I've been tending bar for 60 years, but I never smoked or drank," Barry said proudly. "I attribute it to my basketball coach, Don Rose. If he heard about you smoking or drinking, he'd kick you off the team.

"There was a lot more discipline in those days, both at home and in school. The Irwin principal was a real disciplinarian. If you got out of line, he'd take you in the office and whack you with a paddle." Schiavo also had a great deal of respect for Norwin basketball coach, Joe McMunn, and football coach, Roy McMunn. "They were men of principle – fine gentlemen and family men."

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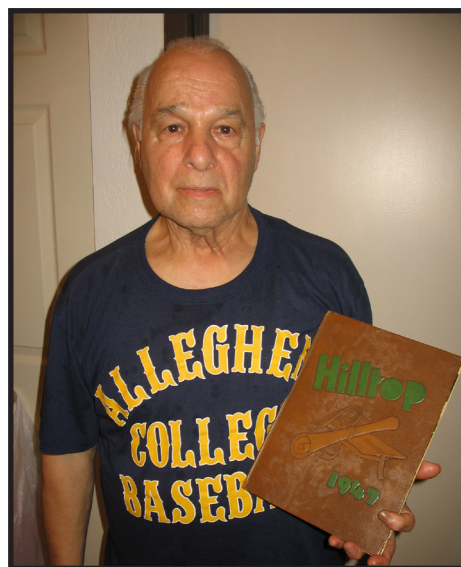


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With the passing of over a half-century since the Brunswick Hotel was demolished, Barry and his older sister, Rose, were the last surviving members of the Brunswick Hotel's Schiavo family.

Schiavo recalled many of the old Irwin businesses of his youth. "My favorite store was Jules Green's Clothing Store. He had a nice line of men's clothing; I bought all my good clothes there. The Sugar Bowl was a popular teen hang-out, and I have fond memories of Candy Land, owned by the Gellis family.

"Bergad's Drug Store was across the street and later moved into the building previously occupied by Fink's Drug Store. We used to shoot pool and play cards in the pool room that operated in Fink's basement. Of course, most of these places are long gone. Everything seems to get torn down these days."



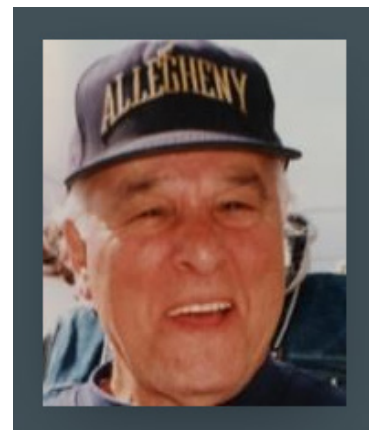
Barry Schiavo had fond memories of growing up in Irwin. His 1947 Irwin High School Senior Yearbook remained one of his most prized possessions throughout his life.

Barry Schiavo was described in the 1947 Irwin High School Year Book as "a wonderful friend to all." After all those years, the 78-year-old Schiavo still referred to many Irwin residents, including several members of Irwin's 1947 State Championship Basketball Team, as "good friends." Next to his family, he treasured those lasting friendships more than anything else.

"If you had a friend back then, you had a friend for life," he explained. "That bond of loyalty is something you wouldn't experience growing up today. The people in Irwin were good to me; they were honest, hard-working and sincere. I wouldn't want to have grown up anywhere else."

Sadly, Mr. Schiavo passed away in 2018 at the age of 89. Although he is no longer with us, his memories of the Brunswick Hotel and growing up in Irwin remain as a lasting legacy.

*Thanks for the Memories,
Barry!
1928 - 2018*





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