

Leetsdale History



(Adapted from: "Riverfront, Greenway, and Parks Master Plan", J.T. Sauer & Associates, LLC. September 2007)

The area known today as Leetsdale Borough has been active since the late 18th century, when it was a fur trading post and frontier settlement. Daniel Leet was a Major in the Virginia Division of the Army during the Revolutionary War. Leet spent the unforgivable winter at Valley Forge with George Washington and later returned to reside in present day Washington County, Pennsylvania. When Washington County was created by the State of Pennsylvania on March 28, 1781, Daniel Leet became one of the five original county commissioners. After purchasing the land at public auction in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Major Leet returned to Washington County to raise his family and had no interest in settling his newly acquired land. However, William Leet, Daniel's brother, became the overseer and landlord. By 1809 considerable stagecoach traffic was traveling through the area and required a place that could accommodate travelers. A two-story inn was built and with modifications it still stands today.

Leetsdale has been deeply rooted in the industrial history of the Pittsburgh area. One of the first major industrial operations to open in Leetsdale Borough was the Harmony Brickworks, founded by a religious separatist group, the Harmonist Society. The Harmonists began the brickworks in 1888 and were forerunners in the brick making business for many years and produced roughly 20,000 common red bricks per day. They later sold the Brickworks and surrounding land to James Oliver in 1902. This was the second brick making factory in Leetsdale at the time, the other factory being Penn Brick Company. Five years later the Harmony Brick Works was devastated by a flood and the Brick Works never operated again. Recent discoveries in the vicinity of the old brickworks site led to an extensive archaeological excavation.

Present Day Leetsdale

Leetsdale lies on the northwestern edge of Allegheny County in Pennsylvania. Not far from the City of Pittsburgh, Leetsdale was first an Indian trade post, then a brick manufacturing plant, and later a steel mill town. It has moved into the modern era and is home to both the Leetsdale and Buncher Company's Industrial Parks. Like many other industrial communities along the Ohio River, Leetsdale's riverfronts are utilized for the transportation of goods necessary to keep its industrial heart alive.

The Borough of Leetsdale may have the image of all work and no play, since within its 653-acre corporate limits lies 565 acres of non-residential use, of which 320 acres are used as an industrial park. Fortunately, unlike other industrial towns throughout western Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and eastern Ohio, Leetsdale has adapted and evolved to save its industries. From steel mills to industrial complexes Leetsdale provides 3,000 jobs for local people. Although this blue-collar town is a commute for many, it is home to 1,232 residents.

Today Leetsdale's residents live within 88 acres of the 635-acre borough. The town is severely divided lengthwise by both Route 65 (Ohio River Blvd.) and by three lanes of the Norfolk Southern Railroad.

Additionally, the town is dwarfed by the Buncher Company Industrial Park, the Leetsdale Industrial Park and Hussey Copper. Residential use is primarily grouped to the east along Beaver and Broad Streets, Victory Lane, Breck Hill Drive and Oak Drive and to the west, across Route 65, on Washington Street. Leetsdale housing is a combination of medium to low density residential with one main commercial area. Though the industrial parts dominate Leetsdale landscape, residents do not want this to solely define their community. The goal of Leetsdale's council is to improve the quality of life for residents and draw attention from its industrial toward its residential.

Archeological Site

In 1999 work began on the 12-acre Leetsdale Archaeological Site, under the direction of the Pittsburgh District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and was completed in 2003. The 12-acre site at Leetsdale is important for a number of reasons.



During the span of the archaeological excavation many interesting finds were made at the Leetsdale Archaeological site. Evidence of human occupation dating back 8,000 years was found at the site, along with remains of a 19th Century brick factory associated with the Harmonist Society. Findings indicate that people have been sporadically camping within the same 12-acre area over the last 7,000-8,000 years. Additionally, remains found at the site will provide information about the Middle Archaic Period (6,000-1,100 BC) and the Early Woodland Period (1,100 BC- 200AD). No other site of this type has been excavated under controlled conditions along the upper Ohio River in Pennsylvania.

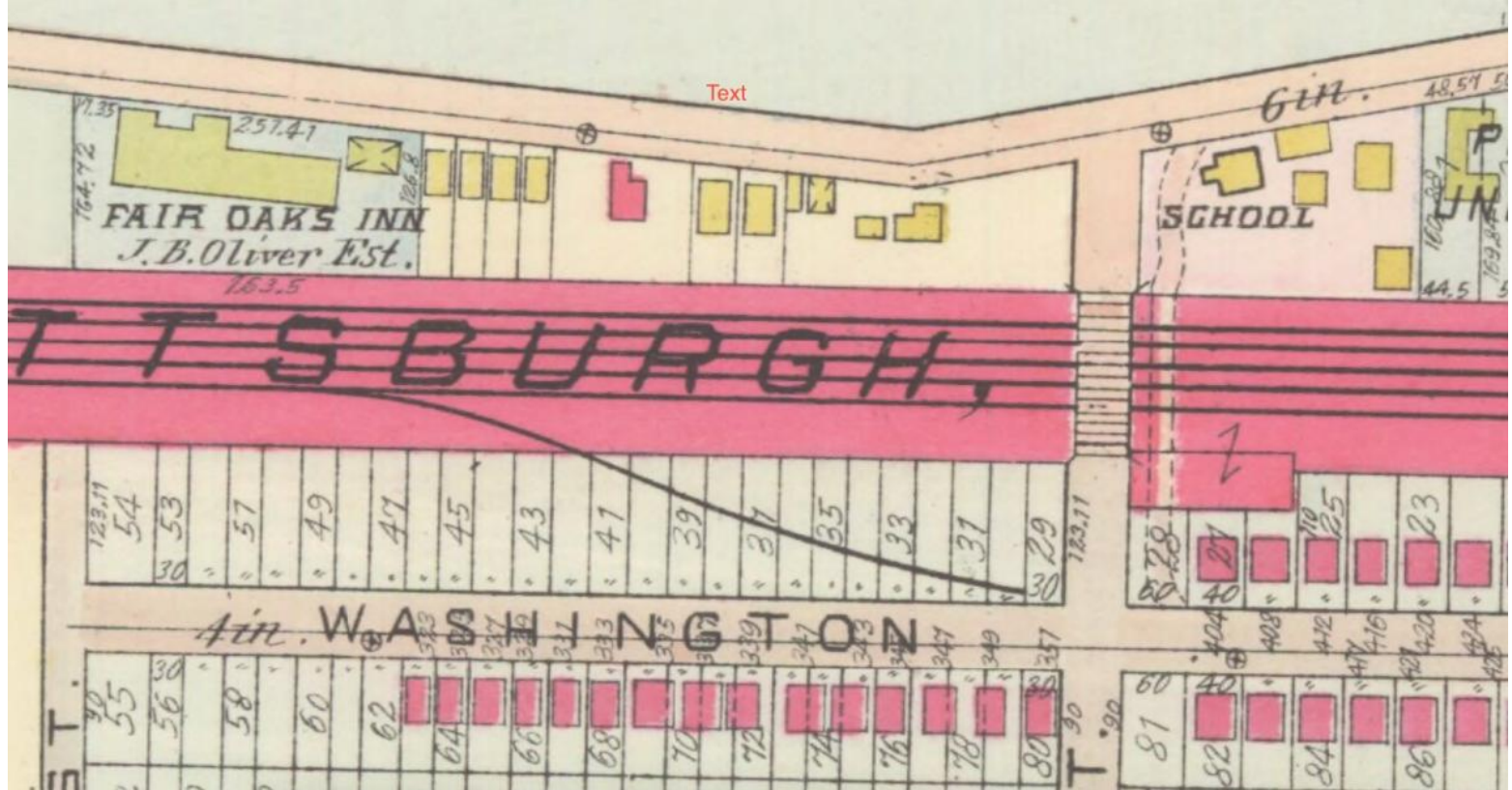
The prehistoric components of the site will provide new information on life in this region from 8,000 to 1,000 years ago. Special interest was found in the intact strata that dated back between 6,000 BC to 4,000 BC, known as the Middle Archaic Period. In Eastern North American prehistory this is the time period that we know the least about. The remains found from the Early Woodland period (1,100 BC- 200 AD) are significant because most of the previous findings from other sites were focused on ceremonial sites (mounds) rather than the daily activities of people as found at the Leetsdale Site. Once the site area was completely reviewed, the site was refilled and returned to the Leetsdale Industrial Park, which owns the property where the site was located.

This archaeological site is an important part of Leetsdale Borough and Pennsylvania history as it gives insight into the lifestyle of the early settlers in western Pennsylvania.

Photo: Archeologist works at the dig along the Ohio River in Leetsdale (Bob Donaldson, Post-Gazette)

Resources:

1. US Army Corps of Engineers, Pittsburgh District. "[Archaeology at the Harmony Brickworks](#)". Hardlines Design Company, Columbus, OH; 2004
2. Carpico, Maria. "[Dug Out: Archeologists complete excavation of former Leetsdale island](#)". Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, June 4, 2003.
3. Berton, Mark. "[Dig site brings to light artifacts as old as 7,000 years](#)". Pittsburgh Tribune-Review, August 10, 2003.



1906 map of Leedsdale showing locations of the Fair Oaks Inn, Oliver Bridge, and a one-room schoolhouse