

Carroll History Journal

Historical Society of Carroll County, Maryland

TIDEWATER CEMENT COMPANY AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF UNION BRIDGE

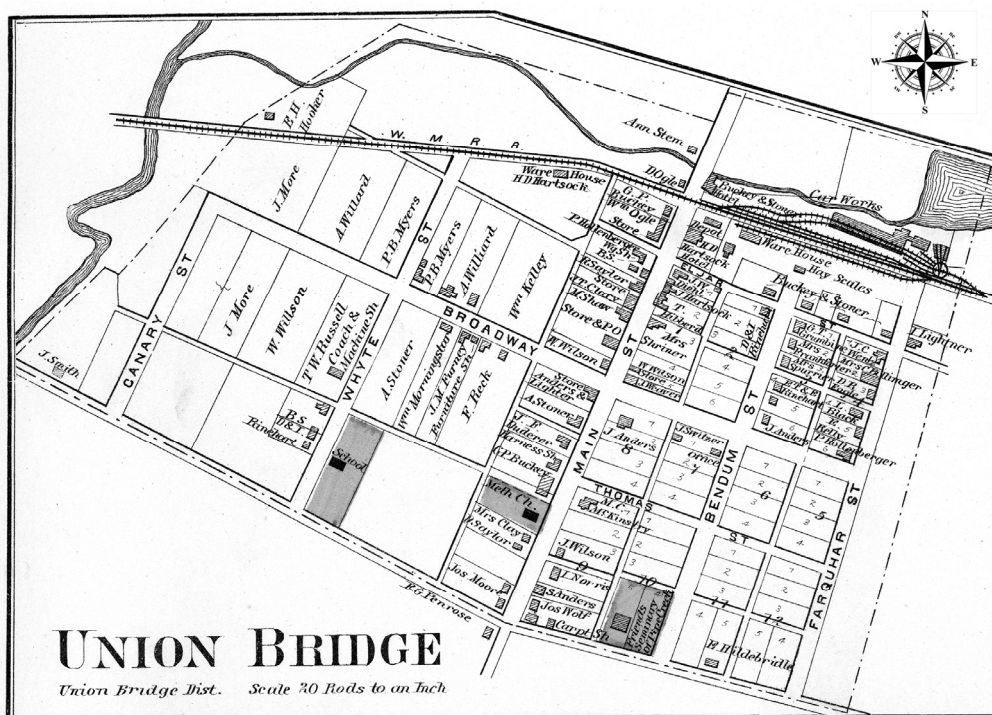
BY MARY ANN ASHCRAFT

The arrival of the Tidewater Portland Cement Company in 1909-1910 changed the community of Union Bridge faster than anything else in its 175-year history. Suddenly Carroll County had a truly industrial town in its midst—a miniature Pittsburgh or Baltimore—with many of the same social and environmental challenges those cities faced. The first ten years of Tidewater's existence in Union Bridge were a fascinating time as the town plunged headlong into the industrial age.

Established by Quakers around 1735 as the "Pipe Creek Settlement," Union Bridge remained a small, essentially agricultural community boasting only a couple of streets until the Western Maryland

Railroad reached it in the spring of 1862. At that point, as one newspaper reporter expressed it, the town "yawned, stretched and grew." The railroad established machine shops to build and repair its locomotives and other kinds of cars. New streets lined with churches and attractive homes emerged from farm fields which backed up to the edges of town. The late nineteenth century was good for the railroad industry, and Union Bridge shared in that prosperity but didn't lose touch with its farming heritage.

Daniel Wolfe, writing a brief history of his hometown in 1895, enumerated the stores, hotels, saloons, and services it boasted. By 1900, there were roughly 650 people living within the town limits. Men not running a business usually worked in the railroad shops or in other jobs associated with the railroad. Well over ten percent of the election district's males of working age were somehow involved with the railroad. Another 750 people lived outside of town, mainly on farms. The census taker listed "farmer" or "farm laborer" as the most common



Map of Union Bridge from the *Illustrated Atlas of Carroll County*, 1877. Tidewater Cement's plant would be in the vacant area at the lower right, between Main and Farquhar Streets.

occupations for country dwellers. African Americans, who made up slightly more than ten percent of the total population of the district, usually worked on farms or for families in town but were excluded from railroad employment.

The 1910 census, taken during late April, revealed moderate growth in the population over the preceding decade. Roughly 40 men listed their employer as the newly-arrived Tidewater Portland Cement Company whose plant was under construction. Blue Ridge College, founded in 1898 as Maryland Collegiate Institute, flourished on the edge of the cement company's property, its faculty and students adding to the diversity of the population, and its buildings contributing to the prosperous appearance of the community.

When the results of the 1920 census were released ten years after the cement plant arrived, Union Bridge was dramatically different. It had not only overtaken Taneytown as the second largest town in the county (behind Westminster), but its character had changed. Tidewater employee records have disappeared, so issues of the *Union Bridge Pilot*, a weekly newspaper, and the censuses of 1910 and 1920 are the best sources for piecing together the evolution of the town and its new industry—one that belched cement dust and mixed Russian, Italian, Eastern European, and African American workers with a local workforce that previously had been white and native born.

In the Beginning

The Western Maryland Railroad was the largest Union Bridge employer between 1900 and 1910. The *Pilot* of December 11, 1908, reported, "The force of workmen at the R.R. shops here is gradually



Employees of the Western Maryland Railroad in Union Bridge, 1910.
Photograph by Frank S. Thomas.

increasing and numbers about 80 men at present. They turn out, on average, 8 to 9 repaired cars per day. We trust this condition may be permanent." Unfortunately, it was not. Early in February 1909, the railroad suspended operations in all the shops for a month. Employees were growing accustomed to periodic layoffs, reductions in days and hours of work, and competition for work with the Western Maryland shops in Hagerstown, so it was little wonder that residents were excited by rumors of construction of a cement plant in town.

Geologists set the stage for situating a plant in Union Bridge when they recognized the local limestone was perfect for producing Portland cement. Cement appeared to be the construction medium of the future, and the industry was expanding rapidly. On September 24, 1909, the *Pilot* reported, "The Cement project is beginning to take definite shape. Last Saturday, the company paid in full for all its property holdings in and around town. Thursday morning a force of possibly 50 men began grading for the new [railroad] switch through town after which it is expected to begin on the plant." Even after an October rumor circulated that the railroad shops might be moved to Hagerstown, residents of Union Bridge could be optimistic.

By the beginning of 1910, the local workforce proved insufficient to meet the plant's labor needs. Baltimore labor contractors advertised positions in the *Sun* and began sending work crews to town by train. Men who lived nearby walked or arrived on horseback. On January 14, the *Pilot* reported, "Operations at the Cement plant continue without cessation, not even stopping for Sunday. A large force of men are at work. . . . As many as 125 men have been employed, some coming from Baltimore and Howard counties." On February 11, the count was 156. Much of the hard, dirty, dangerous construction was done by unskilled workers whose pay was \$1.40 for a 10-hour day. With labor easy to get, Tidewater could ignore a strike on February 18 by workers asking \$1.60 for a 9-hour day.

Before long, the town began experiencing some of the downsides of this employment boom. Housing was in short supply. Many workers were forced to live under temporary, often unpleasant, conditions, although the company arranged for morning and evening commuter trains from Westminster and soon built a boarding house designed to house 100 men who slept on berths arranged in tiers of three, with a "cooking house" nearby. Those who didn't commute or rent company housing could board with local families or rent accommodations which the newspaper sometimes referred to as "shacks." In 1911, families were paying \$10 per month to rent one side of a double house owned by Tidewater and there was speculation the price might rise to \$12. The cost of

room and board with local families ranged from \$5-\$7 per week in 1912—a hefty sum if the pay for unskilled labor was still \$1.40 per day!

At the end of April 1910, the *Pilot* reported, "The fact that both the R.R. shops and the Cement Co. advertised for workmen last week is evidence that labor is in demand in this section. Our merchants and business people also report excellent trade conditions. We are in need of more houses at this time which would induce more to locate here."

Tidewater began using immigrant workers as early as May 1910. "There are at present nearly 75 foreign laborers employed at the Cement plant. They room in the building provided for them and otherwise cook and live in true 'honkey' style," said the paper. Some local residents still remember hearing a group of houses that Tidewater built for its workers being called "Honkey Row." The term may have been derived from "Bohunk," a reference to immigrants from Bohemia and Hungary. A large number of Tidewater's foreign workers originally hailed from countries in Eastern Europe.

Another problem facing the town was how these men spent their spare time. The *Pilot* entertained its readers with workers' after-hours exploits. "Pay-day at the Cement Works last Saturday was probably responsible for a reduced amount of workmen at the beginning of the week, some quitting the works, while others not being able to stand prosperity, spent a few days investing their earnings." On another occasion, the paper reported, "Following pay-day last Wednesday, a number of the foreign laborers at the Cement works got badly mixed with 'booze' and for several nights made things quite uncomfortable for the more peaceable element which roomed in the same building. By Saturday evening about 50 of them had left, not to the discomfort



Railroad and cement plant workers lived in this row of houses on Farquhar Street, just outside the entrance to the Tidewater plant. The houses still stand. Photograph by Frank S. Thomas. Courtesy of Angelo Monteleone.

of those who remained.” It wasn’t long before the paper mentioned the town was operating two police courts—one in the Town Hall and the other in a livery stable.

Trying to keep personnel records for a large, transient labor force, especially one with foreign names and men who were often illiterate, must have created headaches for Tidewater. Those records, now missing, would have shed light on the hundreds (perhaps thousands) of workers who came and went between 1910 and 1920, but whose presence was only captured by a census taker one day every ten years.

The *Pilot* constantly expressed the need for more housing as workers poured into the area and lamented that no group of local citizens were stepping forward to tackle it. “After the plant is in operation, it is said that probably 200 skilled workmen, drawing from \$3.00 to \$5.00 per day, will be employed. . . . They would settle in the community if suitable housing were available.”

Tidewater

Hydrated Lime

for

FERTILIZING.

Has no Equal—Because it’s all pure Lime.

No loss of time for slaking, can be drilled in the soil, saving labor cost of at least \$2.00 per ton over lump lime.

No core and no clinker in Tidewater Hydrated, one ton will produce better results than three tons of many lump limes, because in every ton you get 2,000 pounds of pure lime.

We have 500 tons which we will sell on a close margin in order to introduce it for Spring crops.

Buy Hydrated Lime for fertilizer, drill or sow it today—plant tomorrow.

Call at our factory or phone your order in.

TIDEWATER PORTLAND CEMENT CO.,

Union Bridge, Md.

By late spring 1910, Tidewater’s hydrated lime portion of the plant was complete and selling lime for farmers’ fields. A picture of the building from this period of operation shows a dense black cloud over it, a precursor of the cement dust which would shower the town once cement production was underway.

Throughout the summer and fall of 1910, work on the remaining buildings continued non-stop, but when the year ended, the plant was still eight months from completion.

Cement Production Begins

The year 1911 marked a new era for Union Bridge’s African American population. Unwanted by the railroad, many local black men had never known employment except for families or on farms. Tidewater changed that. On January 6, the *Pilot* announced, “About thirty colored laborers received their ‘diplomas’ at the Cement Works on Wednesday.” These men joined an established workforce of local white men, commuters from outside the area, and a large contingent of foreigners. The mix sometimes proved to be volatile, especially in the beginning. The paper reported on January 27, “There appears to be considerable friction between the whites and blacks in this place lately and a ‘war of conquest’ is imminent.” No such “war” took place, but reports of fights among workers from different racial and ethnic groups appeared in the newspaper from time to time. Someone was stabbed; someone was beaten; someone was sent to a hospital in Baltimore and his assailant put in jail. In 1914, a foreigner with a fractured skull was taken to a hospital. Nobody was sure if his injury occurred while working at the plant or if it happened in a fight in which “clubs were trumps.”

On June 26, the paper reported:

An attempt to harmonize and amalgamate bad whiskey and several different strains of foreign blood from both males and females on the streets Tuesday evening, resulted in the arrest of the participants and fining one of them \$6.00 and costs. It appears that when the warring factions met on Elgar street the offender insisted on “fighting it out.” Honors were about even at the end of the fracas, the wife of one [of] the men coming to her husband’s rescue and

with an outburst of true devotion, proceeded to reduce a board to kindling wood over the back of the transgressor.

The Western Maryland Railroad benefitted from Tidewater's presence, even if workers in its shops still experienced sporadic layoffs and shutdowns. Between January 1 and May 12, 1911, about 900 railroad cars brought machinery and supplies to Union Bridge, including coal needed to burn the limestone. All of this was new business, and the freight charges Tidewater paid probably helped stabilize the railroad's finances. There are occasional references to men who left the railroad shops and cast their lot with the cement company, but there wasn't a mass exodus.

If the railroad employees were uncertain about their future, the town felt very confident. In March 1911, a reporter for the *Pilot* wrote, "The question is frequently asked, 'Will the Cement Company benefit our town.' To which we doubt if any merchant or businessman would reply in the negative, as the business has been increased quite noticeably during the past year. As the Cement industry is yet considered in its infancy, this should be a healthy enterprise. The *Scientific American* says that in 1880



Laying track in a Tidewater quarry in 1918. Limestone was loaded into small cars called "dinkeys" and hauled by locomotive to the crusher building. Photograph by Frank S. Thomas. Courtesy of Lehigh Heidelberg Cement.

there were 42,000 barrels of cement produced, while last year 74,000,000 were made."

At the end of August, Tidewater finally began turning out cement, and by mid-September the plant was running day and night, even as construction workers put the finishing touches on some of the buildings.

Yet, within two weeks of the start of production, the first reference to cement dust appeared in the newspaper. On October 6, the Linwood correspondent for the *Pilot* said the dust was not yet affecting residents there and, "We are willing to forego the experience." Over the next three years, people living in Union Bridge endured huge daily doses of dust and fought legal battles with Tidewater to resolve the problem. Employment opportunities were good



Tidewater's hydrated lime plant, completed in the spring of 1910, showered Union Bridge with lime dust for a year before the rest of the buildings were finished. Photograph by Frank S. Thomas.

Courtesy of Angelo Monteleone.

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE—F

FOURTEENTH CENSUS OF THE UNITED STATES

NAME OF INCORPORATED COMPANY

X _____

ENUM[illegible]

ED STATES: 1920—POPULATION

ENUMERATION DISTRICT No. 9

12 A

ED PLACE

WARD OF CITY...X

ERATED BY ME ON THE 2

DAY OF February 1920

ENLIMERATOR

443.

NATIVITY AND BIRTHPLACE.

and parents of each person enumerated. If born in the United States, give the state or territory. If of foreign birth, give the place of birth and, in addition, the mother's name. (See instructions.)

OCCUPATION

2024

FATHER.			MOTHER.			Place of birth of father.		Place of birth of mother.		Place of birth of child.	
Father's name.	Father's age.	Mother's name.	Mother's age.	Father's name.	Mother's name.	Father's age.	Mother's age.	Father's name.	Mother's name.	Father's age.	Mother's age.
(Italian) Crad		Austria Hungary (Croatia) Croatia		Austria Hungary (Croatia) Croatia				Miller	Cement Plant	W.	432
(Austrian) Crad		Austria Hungary (Croatia) Croatia		Austria Hungary (Croatia) Croatia				none			2
(Austrian) Crad		Austria Hungary (Croatia) Croatia		Austria Hungary (Croatia) Croatia				none			3
(Czechian) Crad		Austria Hungary (Croatia) Croatia		Austria Hungary (Croatia) Croatia				Miller	Cement Plant	W.	432
(Polish) Crad		Italy (Abruzzo) Italian		Italy (Abruzzo) Italian				Lobauer	Cement Plant	W.	62143
(Russian) Crad		Russia (Moscow) Russian		Russia (Moscow) Russian				Lobauer	Cement Plant	W.	6214
(Russian) Crad		Russia (Moscow) Russian		Russia (Moscow) Russian				Lobauer	Cement Plant	W.	7214
(Russian) Crad		Russia (Moscow) Russian		Russia (Moscow) Russian				Lobauer	Cement Plant	W.	8214
(Russian) Crad		Russia (Moscow) Russian		Russia (Moscow) Russian				Lobauer	Cement Plant	W.	9214
(Russian) Crad		Russia (Moscow) Russian		Russia (Moscow) Russian				Lobauer	Cement Plant	W.	10214
(German) Crad		Austria (Bohemia) German		Austria (Bohemia) German				Lobauer	Cement Plant	W.	11214
(Russian) Crad		Russia (Moscow) Russian		Russia (Moscow) Russian				Lobauer	Cement Plant	W.	12214
(Russian) Crad		Russia (Moscow) Russian		Russia (Moscow) Russian				Lobauer	Cement Plant	W.	13214
(Russian) Crad		Russia (Moscow) Russian		Russia (Moscow) Russian				Lobauer	Cement Plant	W.	14214
(Russian) Crad		Russia (Moscow) Russian		Russia (Moscow) Russian				Merchant	General Store	W.	15766
(Maryland)		Maryland		Maryland				Lobauer	Cement Plant	W.	16214
(Maryland)		Maryland		Maryland				none			17
(Maryland)		Maryland		Maryland				none			18
(Maryland)		Maryland		Maryland				none			19
(Maryland)		Maryland		Maryland				Freeman	Cement Plant	W.	2076
(Maryland)		Maryland		Maryland				Walsh			21
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(Maryland)		Maryland		Maryland				none			23
(Maryland)		Maryland		Maryland				none			24
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(Maryland)		Maryland		Maryland				none			26
(Italian) Crad		Italy (Calabria) Italian		Italy (Calabria) Italian				Repaermon	Cement Plant	W.	27432
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(Italian) Crad		Italy (Calabria) Italian		Italy (Calabria) Italian				none			29
(Italian) Crad		Italy (Calabria) Italian		Italy (Calabria) Italian				none			30
(Italian) Crad		Italy (Naples) Italian		Italy (Naples) Italian				Lobauer	Cement Plant	W.	31214
(Italian) Crad		Italy (Naples) Italian		Italy (Naples) Italian				none			32
(Italian) Crad		Italy (Naples) Italian		Italy (Naples) Italian				none			33
(Italian) Crad		Italy (Naples) Italian		Italy (Naples) Italian				Lobauer	Cement Plant	W.	34214
(Italian) Crad		Italy (Naples) Italian		Italy (Naples) Italian				none			35
(Italian) Crad		Italy (Naples) Italian		Italy (Naples) Italian				none			36
(Italian) Crad		Italy (Naples) Italian		Italy (Naples) Italian				none			37
(Italian) Crad		Italy (Naples) Italian		Italy (Naples) Italian				none			38
(Italian) Crad		Italy (Naples) Italian		Italy (Naples) Italian				none			39
(Italian) Crad		Italy (Naples) Italian		Italy (Naples) Italian				none			40
(Italian) Crad		Italy (Naples) Italian		Italy (Naples) Italian				Lobauer	Cement Plant	W.	41214
(Italian) Crad		Italy (Naples) Italian		Italy (Naples) Italian				Lobauer	Cement Plant	W.	42214
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(Maryland)		Maryland		Maryland				none			45
(Maryland)		Maryland		Maryland				Lobauer	General Store	W.	46012
(Maryland)		Maryland		Maryland				none			47
(Maryland)		Maryland		Maryland				none			48
(Maryland)		Maryland		Maryland				none			49
(Maryland)		Maryland		Maryland				none			50

and local merchants saw hefty profits, but cement dust filled the air everyone breathed, settled on sidewalks and roofs, clogged gutters, and cast a gray pall over the entire town. Only the farmers couldn't complain because the dust settling on their fields eliminated the need to apply lime. Was this what the town had anticipated?

Disillusioned

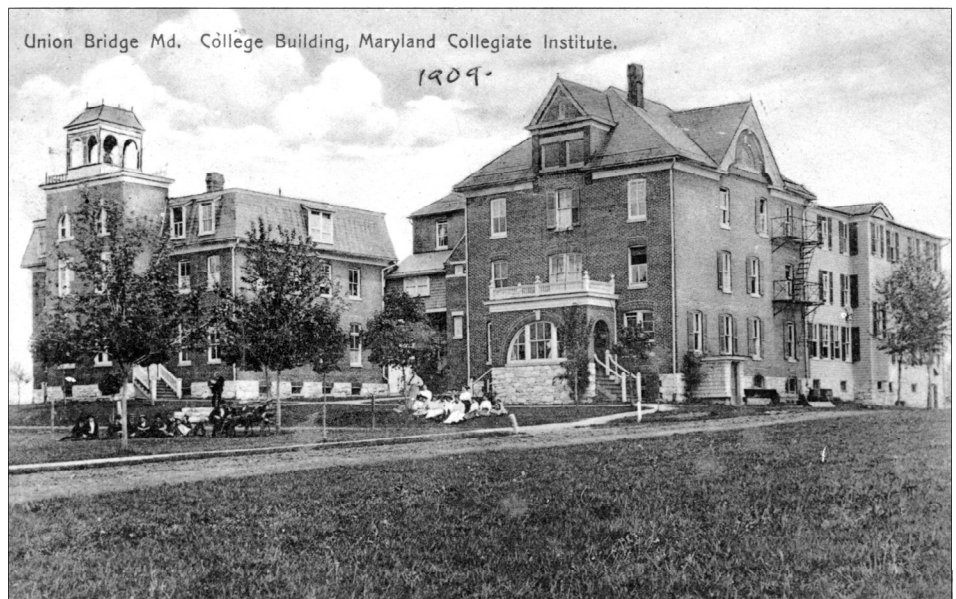
The buildings of Blue Ridge College were as close to the cement plant as any structures in town. By April 1912, college officials knew conditions were becoming intolerable due to the noise, air pollution, and blasting. They were willing to keep the college in Union Bridge, but only if things improved. Just eight months had passed since cement production had begun, but already Tidewater had become an unwelcome neighbor and the college its first significant victim. When conditions didn't improve, Blue Ridge first considered relocating to Hagerstown, then Myersville, but finally it settled upon New Windsor and opened there in the fall of 1912. The cement company immediately purchased the college buildings for company offices, a doctor's office, apartments, a restaurant, and a Catholic chapel. The chapel was almost a necessity because many of the foreign workers came from predominantly Catholic countries.

Townpeople frequently shared their cement dust stories with the newspaper. When Dr. Stauffer had the gutters and roof valleys on his drugstore cleaned in 1913, workers removed 14 buckets of dust, each bucket holding two gallons. High winds in January 1914 blew large scales of solid cement from the painted roofs of porches and other buildings in town. Some of the scales were as large as a hand and up to one-sixteenth inch thick. A little rain was all it took to turn the dust into solid cement. People soon discovered their slate roofs were

being ruined, and the Lutheran church found that its expensive tin roof, supposed to last 25 years if kept painted, was full of small holes just two years after it was installed.

Cement dust wasn't the only environmental problem the town experienced as the plant operated at full capacity and constantly added more equipment to increase its output. Quarrying limestone meant using large amounts of dynamite, and the Tidewater quarries lay very close to town. Blasting took place day and night, even on Sundays, until the latter was prohibited. With more powerful explosions came broken window panes and cracked walls all over town. Some blasts could be felt as far away as Westminster. The *Pilot* often mentioned particularly large or damaging ones such as one in September 1913 where 6,000 pounds of dynamite were used.

Work around heavy machinery, railroad cars, drills, dynamite, kilns, and conveyor belts was highly dangerous. The first fatal accident at the cement plant occurred in May 1911, but there had already been many serious ones, and there would be plenty more as the years passed. A premature explosion in the quarry killed two men in late July 1915. One of them, a local man named Samuel Sprague, left a wife and ten children. The other victim was a 20-year-old Italian who had come to America at age 16 with his father and brother-in-law and had been working at Tidewater four years. Giovanni Angelo Giofani was buried at St. Peter's Catholic Church cemetery in



These college buildings were bought by Tidewater in 1912 and converted for company use.

Libertytown where there are marked graves for seven other foreigners associated with the cement plant. Early in 1917, Edward Trite, a local man living in company housing with his family, suffered a crushed hip when caught between two railroad cars. He lingered for four months in hospitals. Upon his death, his wife and children were evicted from their home by Tidewater.

The *Pilot* of August 18, 1911, mentioned the visit of an accident insurance agent representing a company Tidewater used to insure its workers. He was in town to adjust the claims of several men recently injured in a bad fall. Although Tidewater carried insurance, victims' compensation during that era was minimal. Mrs. Sprague and her ten children waited five months before receiving financial help from the State Industrial Accident Commission.

To be fair, Tidewater probably treated its workers no differently from those in other industries, but by today's standards, the compensation was grossly inadequate. A 1908 study conducted elsewhere in the U.S. disclosed that nearly all insurance programs, either through an employer or a union, didn't cover much more than immediate necessities. With so many possibilities for injuries to the workers, it should come as no surprise that Tidewater established a hospital in one of the college buildings and employed a doctor and nurse, but seriously injured men like Edward Trite were immediately sent by train to Baltimore hospitals.

Like Chicago, Union Bridge could complain about its criminal element. In 1916, a local Italian family received a "Black Hand" note—an effort to extort money from them. G. Bonanio, a worker at the plant, was arrested on suspicion he was behind that Italian form of racketeering. He appeared in court in Baltimore but eventually was cleared. Fortunately, most of the problems around town were of a less serious nature—thefts and disagreements which ended in fights.

The "Dust Case"

Cement dust was a problem in Union Bridge from the start and references to devices which would capture or control it appeared in the paper within six months. While Blue Ridge College could pull up stakes and move to New Windsor, the rest of the town couldn't. People began looking far and wide for other communities that shared their pollution problem and how they were dealing with it. In March 1912, a lengthy article in the *Pilot* described a court case brought by California orange growers who claimed the dust from a nearby cement plant was damaging their orchards. The growers were granted an injunction, but the company refused to shut down or remedy the problem. Why should it if almost all the cement plants in the country were equally guilty and solving the problem would only lower profits?

The first serious response to the town's concerns occurred in April 1912 when Maryland sent two doctors from the State Board of Health to inspect the plant's emissions. Unfortunately, "the dust was not so conspicuous" that day, and the *Pilot* speculated someone had tipped off the company that the inspectors would be in town. Later that year, the paper reported continued concern over the pollution with the headline, "New State Board Tackles Dust Cloud." Still nothing happened.



This early 1911 photo shows the partially completed Tidewater cement plant. More buildings were added before cement production began. One quarry appears on the right. Photograph by Frank S. Thomas. Courtesy of Angelo Monteleone.

Early in 1913, the paper continued its campaign on behalf of the long-suffering citizens by accusing the Board of Health of "straddling" the pollution issue. Homeowners began asking for reductions in their property taxes due to cement dust damage and the fact that nobody would buy their houses, yet the Board of Health seemed reluctant to act.

At last the State brought suit against Tidewater, scheduling argument of the Dust Case for the October 1913 session of the Court of Appeals. For one reason or another the case was postponed and Tidewater tried to delay it further by circulating a petition among its workers, hoping to show support for its practices. Only a few of the workers signed it, the *Pilot* reported, concerned that a "refusal to sign would mean a loss of their positions." It wouldn't have mattered if they had signed, the newspaper felt, because the "foreign element have practically no property here and doubtless sends much of its savings away on the first train after pay day." As the wheels of justice slowly turned, "a most liberal coating of dust" continued to settle on the town.

When the May 1914 court term rolled around, everyone hoped the town would "get justice (nothing more) and steps will be taken for the elimination of the Cement dust which is ruining our town, our homes and certainly our health," but the case was postponed once more. This time, however, there was a difference. Tidewater had signed a contract to install a dusting-arresting device. The *Pilot* thought this appeared to be a "sincere promise" and not just another delaying tactic. In October, the company gave interested townspeople a demonstration of a dust arrestor which could remove eight to ten tons per 24-hour period on average. While only one unit had been installed, management acknowledged that each of the dust-producing departments should be similarly equipped.

The Dust Case was finally argued during the last court term of 1914, more than three years after cement production began. Although many in Union

SAFETY SLOGANS:--"Care-free" is "care"-full, not "care"-less.

TIDEWATER PORTLAND CEMENT COMPANY

B. T. SCOTT, President.

The largest Cement Company in the South

1914—1920:

Shipped: 26 Million Bags---95 lbs. each---of Tidewater Cement.

Uniform quality, quick deliveries, and satisfied customers in Maryland, Pennsylvania, Delaware, New York, New Jersey, Virginia, West Virginia, North and South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida made possible this large distribution of cement.

For your 1919 building operations you will require Portland Cement. Before buying, send for our catalogue "Placed in the Hands of Tidewater," containing a list of United States Government, State, County, Municipal and private building operations—exclusively of TIDEWATER Cement.

General Office:
Calvert Building,
Baltimore, Md.

E. R. STAPLETON, Assistant to President. In charge of Sales
G. S. LaForge, General Supt.

Works:
Union Bridge,
Maryland.

Union Bridge Pilot, October 15, 1920

Bridge felt Tidewater won because it received a fine of only \$50, the company was forced to acknowledge its responsibility for the pollution. The judge admitted he was unwilling to impose any penalty which would cause Tidewater to shut down and called this the company's "first offense," but he pointed out that civil lawsuits could now be entered, and that the company's admission of guilt could "bear heavily as evidence in the proceedings of individual damage suits." Furthermore, he warned if measures to solve the problem weren't satisfactory by the May 1915 court term, Tidewater officials could expect another indictment.

A More Peaceful Co-existence

The State of Maryland did not take Tidewater to court again between 1915 and 1920. Only occasional references to individual law suits appeared in the newspaper, but plenty of cement dust still settled on the town and blasting continued to cause damage. However, by 1915 Tidewater had become the area's largest employer with 350 people on its payroll, so the people and the plant gradually learned to live together.

Over the next five years the paper reported a number of instances in which the company reached out to

improve its image. In 1916, the Tidewater directors voted a 5% increase in wages. At Christmas that year, every worker received a cash bonus ranging from a few dollars to ten dollars depending upon years of service, and heads of departments received substantial bonuses periodically when production results were good. The company continued its efforts to provide housing for workers, particularly foreign workers. When the plant shut down temporarily in January 1918, it assured workers they would be expected to return to their jobs when it reopened. Local residents who were not Tidewater employees were treated at the company hospital now and then. The plant also made concerted efforts to improve worker safety, and on one occasion, a blast at the quarry using 5,500 pounds of dynamite “was scarcely noticeable in town.”

Tidewater’s advertisements in the *Pilot* began boasting it was the largest cement company in the South and had produced over 15 million bags of Portland cement between 1914 and 1916. When the United States entered World War I and labor became scarce, the company hired 50 women from Baltimore (referred to as “Khaki” girls) to work at the plant. They wore men’s clothing and performed “light labor”—whatever that meant! A government contract for 15,000 concrete “bombs” to be used during practice by pilots kept 12 to 15 extra people employed.

Although the labor shortage reduced cement production during the war, Tidewater bounced back afterward. Soon, however, it faced a new set of problems. Strikes across the country by railroad workers and coal miners seriously affected the industry. Even if Western Maryland Railroad workers weren’t striking, others might be, and if the trains were running, the mines might be shut down. Coal was vital to fuel the kilns, and most of the cement left Union Bridge by rail. During one railroad strike, 30 to 50 trucks a day were needed to haul away the cement.

Issues of the *Pilot* during 1920 noted Tidewater’s continuing efforts to establish better community relations. The company set aside land for its employees to maintain garden plots and held a contest with cash prizes for the best gardens. The

prizes for 1920 went to Giacomo Fabro, John Six, and Joe Duakji. A July notice in the paper read, “Don’t forget our colored employees will have a dance on College Campus Monday, 26th. Public is invited.” Community events were held in a new bandstand Tidewater helped build on the campus in front of its headquarters. There was a much-anticipated baseball game between the company “Operators” and “Foremen.” Luckily, the Operators won and the Foremen wisely sent a letter of congratulations. Nevertheless, there had been a police presence at the game just in case! These efforts cost the company next to nothing, but they signaled it had come a long way from its attitude ten years earlier.

Epilogue

Although Union Bridge would never return to its pre-1910 state, everyone recognized that Tidewater Portland Cement Company had brought abundant employment to the area even as it had committed some serious mistakes. In many ways, the social and environmental changes which occurred in town between 1910 and 1920 mirrored those that had occurred from Lowell, Massachusetts, to Butte, Montana, to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, over the previous 80 years and would continue as the 20th century progressed.

Lehigh Portland Cement, the largest cement company in the U.S., purchased Tidewater in 1925. The following year, well before the Great Depression, sales of cement began to decline nationwide. By the time the census taker arrived in Union Bridge in 1930, few foreign workers were left, and Lehigh’s workforce became primarily local residents, both black and white. Since those tumultuous early years, Lehigh has made continuous improvements to the plant, especially ones involving its environmental impact, but conflicts with residents of the surrounding area continue to arise from time to time. Today, Lehigh is a wholly-owned subsidiary of the German firm Heidelberger Zement A.G.

The 1920 Census: A Quick Look at the Diversity of Union Bridge

The 1920 census asked important questions, ones which revealed the increasingly diverse U.S. population. They included: whether a citizen, date of naturalization if not native-born, date of entering the U.S., and ability to speak English. Workers were asked not only their occupation but also their employer. Eighty-one people living in the Union Bridge Election District were foreign-born in 1920 and many others were born elsewhere in the U.S.

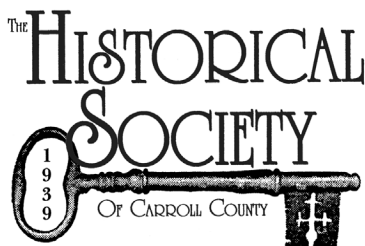
The centerfold, a page from that census, offers insights into the way Union Bridge looked ten years after Tidewater Portland Cement Company arrived. It lists 50 inhabitants living on two different roads on the outskirts of town. The first family was from Croatia and the two men of working age were millers at the cement plant. Next came a boarding house headed by an Italian and occupied by ten single Russians; all were laborers at the cement plant except one. Then there were two African-American families numbering eleven people with both heads of household working for Tidewater. Next appeared three Italian families whose heads of household were cement company employees. Almost all the foreign adults were aliens, and the wage earners in the foreign families were generally unskilled with the exception of the Croatians. The final eight inhabitants on the page were white and born in Maryland. One head of household worked for the railroad and one was a farm laborer.

The Ceskas were a typical Italian immigrant family. Loui, head of the household, had a wife and five children, three born since the family entered the U.S. in 1915. With no education and unable to speak English, he was unlikely to rise above “laborer.” He was lucky to have two members of his family as boarders to supplement his income. The older Ceska children attended school and spoke English. The family of Edwin Fabero who lived nearby was a bit different. Edwin brought his wife and two children from Italy five years after he arrived. He could read, write, and speak English and likely had a higher-paying job as a “repairman” at Tidewater. Understanding the living conditions of some of these families is difficult, but a story in the *Pilot* revealed the poverty of Domenico Frabrizzi, another Italian immigrant. He, his wife, five children (four under the age of five), and a boarder lived in a “shack” along the Western Maryland tracks between Union Bridge and Linwood. On winter mornings before dawn, the couple combed the tracks to pick up coal which had fallen from the trains. Very likely other Tidewater families lived under similar circumstances.

Each page of the census is a snapshot, and some of the others are equally intriguing, but many Tidewater employees lived in other districts of Carroll and Frederick counties and these census records have not been studied.

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