

“SAFETY-FIRST” DEPT. HELPING FOREIGNERS TO STUDY ENGLISH

And, With That Knowledge Comes the Desire to Become
Citizens of United States Almost 200 Studying

EDITOR’S INTRODUCTION: The American Car and Foundry Company was one of the country’s major manufacturers of railroad cars of all types. Its plant in Berwick was the dominant industry in the area as well as in all of Columbia County. In the first part of 1916, it employed 5,639 workers. The company was rapidly growing; its facilities expanded at Berwick, and it had also substantially increased its work force by 116% since 1902. Berwick had become a magnet for those looking for jobs, and a large number who came were the immigrants from eastern and southern Europe.

One of the challenges facing the immigrants was learning to communicate in English. In turn, the language barrier was a safety issue and created problems in the workplace.

The following article that appeared in *The Morning Press*, a Bloomsburg newspaper, on December 16, 1916, described the A. C. & F. program of providing English language classes for immigrants and the perceived benefits. The Safety First Department had a comprehensive and aggressive approach to improve the plant’s safety records which included a strong anti-alcohol drinking policy. It is at this time that the temperance movement was quite strong, and a third political party called the Prohibitionists was active.

Many of these immigrants would go through the court procedures to become naturalized citizens in Columbia County. The microfilm and paper records are available at the Society.

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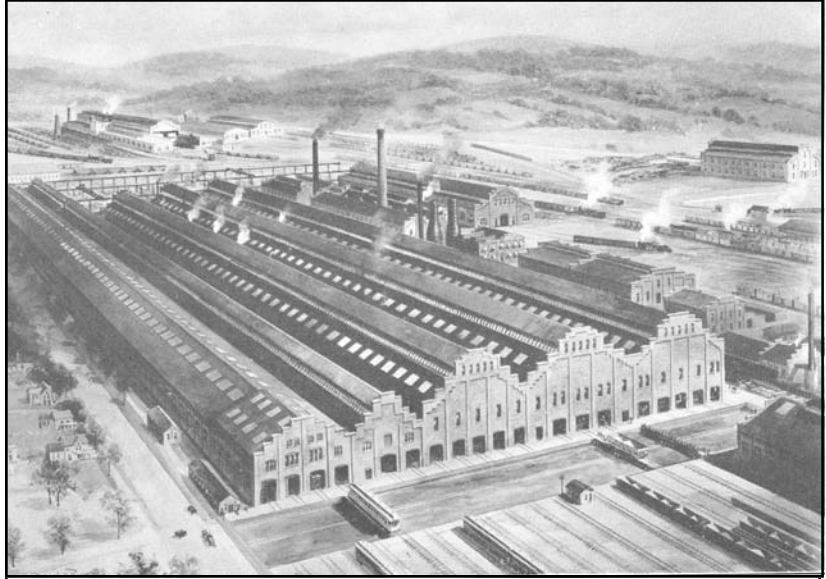
When thirty declarations of intention to become American citizens are soon filed with Prothonotary John F. Watson, as there soon will be, there will be afforded concrete evidence of “Safety First” work in the Berwick plant of the American Car & Foundry Company, under the direction of W. E. Jarrard. That, however, is merely incidental to the unique “Safety First” campaign which this important department of Berwick’s giant industry has lunched.

With the “Safety First” work, in the direct sense, the public is more or less familiar but there are few who realize that to make the campaign for a greater regard to safety while at work secure the maximum results with the foreign-speaking workmen there must be even more done than to supply safety appliances to the plant machinery, to teach the men to take care of themselves and to supply them with goggles to protect the eyes.

Knowledge Begets Patriotism

The instruction of the
American workman is
comparatively simple, and it is

to overcome this handicap under which the foreign speaking workman labors that the night school for foreigners has been started. The fact is realized that if the foreigner had an understanding of English he is in a position to the better take care of himself, but the work already done has proven that an understanding of English always brings a keener appreciation of American citizenship. So that, while there is being accomplished the particular aim of the Safety First Department those back of it have the satisfaction of knowing that they are helping in the betterment of conditions and in the improvement of the people with whom they labor.



AMERICAN CAR AND FOUNDRY COMPANY, BERWICK, PA. Steel Car Department, Freight and Passenger, Iron Machine Shop, Nut Factory, and Soft Foundry in the Background. (Photo 1913) Source: *Historical and Biographical Annals of Columbia and Montour Counties Pennsylvania*. Chicago: J. H. Beers & Co., 1915), Vol. I, preceding page 165.

A large Enrollment

The night class work was started by Mr. Jarred in the Schlanger's Hall, West Berwick, October 10, 11, and 12, 1916, with a membership of 205 foreigners in the various classes and with fifteen or twenty other foreigners attending the classes and expecting to become members at a later date. The removal of a few from the town has brought a slight decrease in the membership until at the present time there are 182 members enrolled as follows: Italian classes, grade C, Frank A. Ross teacher, enrollment 42; Italian class, grade B, Harry Mitt teacher, enrolment 49; Italian class, grade A, W. C. Delong teacher, enrollment 35; Russian, Hungarian, Polish, Slavish, etc., class grade B, Joseph Snelberger teacher, enrollment 7.

So rapidly did the work grow that Schlanger's Hall soon proved too small to accommodate the classes and the Y.M.C.A. of Berwick, which has stood my the campaign in directing the classes in English, rented two rooms of the West Berwick High School, with all facilities, including janitor. There the classes are conducted five nights each week, with the results already far beyond the expectation of Mr. Jarrard, safety inspector for the American Car & Foundry Company.

Speaking yesterday of the work that is being done Mr. Jarrard said: "The campaign has for its purposes industrial education, to increase safety, sanitation and to improve the method of living. And what is especially gratifying is the fact that we find the foreign

workmen join as enthusiastically in making this work a success as they have joined in following the work of this department in the past.”

Educational Moving Pictures

“It is our plan to show educational moving pictures one week out of each month, beginning January 1 and continuing until warm weather. The films we will introduce are such as these: ‘An American in the Making,’ ‘The Man He Might Have Been,’ ‘The Workman’s Lesson,’ ‘The Crime of Carelessness,’ ‘Safe and Unsafe Practices,’ ‘Steve Hill’s Awakening,’ ‘The House That Jack Built,’ ‘The Right and Wrong Practices in Railroads,’ and ‘The Danger of the Streets.’

“It was when we were planning this campaign,” continued Mr. Jarrard, “that we found there was a strong sentiment developed among the foreign workmen to learn to speak, understand, read and write the English language, and events have proved that we judged that sentiment correctly.

“The progress the men make in their work is amazing,” he went on to say, explaining it is so rapid because of their earnest work that he anticipates that a foreigner, without any knowledge of English, when he begins the terms, “can make himself well understood by the close of the term. The ‘pupils’ are graded, and those further advanced know a little English, can speak brokenly and can read and write a little in English. For these there is more advanced work.”

Earnest Pupils These

There is possibly no school in the county in where there is as much earnestness, for every last one of those attending is eager to grasp an understanding of the English language. With the beginners well known words that are frequently used by the workmen are the first to be taught. These are pronounced by the teachers, and if it is possible to have objects close at hand it is indicated by the teacher as the name of the object. Some of the more advanced pupils are reading out of readers, and the work is showing results that have encouraged those back of it to look to its becoming a permanent part of the “Safety First” work. At the present it requires all of Mr. Jarrard’s night but he has found pleasure in the real joy known to house whose ambition is to help their fellow men.

Amazing Accident Decreased

While this is the new feature of the year of the “Safety First” work in the Berwick plant, the same thoroughness which has characterized the work in the various departments since it was inaugurated July 1, 1913, still obtains. Statistics are dry, but these show just what the promulgation of the “Safety First” idea has done.

July 1 to December 31, 1913

Monthly average employed in Berwick District — 5,632

Monthly average accidents per 1,000 — 52

Monthly average as listed as serious per 1,000 — 17

January 1 to July 1, 1916

Monthly average employed in Berwick District — 5,639
Monthly average accidents per 1,000 — 35
Monthly average as listed as serious per 1,000 — 3

The figures here given are very conservative as at least 25 percent of the minor injuries were not reported during the first six months of the safety campaign. Yet notwithstanding, that fact the statistics show these as astonishing figures:

Percentage of decrease in total accidents per 1,000 employees 33
Percentage of decrease in total accidents listed as serious, per 1,000 employees 82

Equally as astonishing is the fact that during the three years since the department was instituted the company has had but two fatalities in the Berwick plant. Permanent injuries are almost a thing of the past and injuries involving a loss of twenty days or more are rare.

Elimination of Booze

There is another side to this "Safety First" work that has possibly been the biggest single factor in the elimination of accidents, and that has been the elimination of boozing employees.

Asked what his opinion was as to the part drink has among the employees and the effect its elimination has figured in the reduction of the percentage of accidents, Mr. Jarrard replied:

"One of the most dangerous influences at work against the efficiency and safety of workmen is the use of alcoholic liquors. As in the case of fatigue, I believe alcohol even when used moderately distorts the nerve cells and weakens them to such an extent that the very muscles which are most vital in the performance of the daily duties are gradually rendered incapable of ready response and the individual, bereft of self-control, is placed in a position of constant danger to himself and to others. Therefore, one of the progressive steps that this district of the company has taken to safeguard the lives of its workmen and to maintain a high standard of efficiency has been its campaign against booze." Under date of January 17th, 1914, the following notice was issued from the office of the General Superintendent:

"To All Concerned: —

'Workmen frequenting drinking places coming to or going from their work will be replaced by non-drinking men as rapidly as possible.'

"This order has been rigidly enforced and the men have all come to realize that the A. C. & F. Co. of this district will not tolerate a drinking man. A very appreciable reduction in the percentage of accidents developed when that restriction was placed upon drink.

"In one department where over 85 per cent are foreign workmen and where the prevention of accidents largely depends upon the human element as there is practically no machinery to safeguard, we find by considering all injuries and comparing the six

months previous to the elimination of drink with the six months following an increase of 100 per cent in cars built per injury.

“Since the establishment of this department in the Berwick district of the company, which includes the Berwick and Bloomsburg plants, the men have come to realize that “Safety First” is for their own benefit in that it lessens suffering and loss to themselves and their families. Mechanical safe-guarding and habits of care have wrought a phenomenal change in plant efficiency and economy.

“We aimed from the start to create a feeling among employees that we desired their hearty co-operation in making the Safety Department as highly efficient as possible. As a means toward this end, a campaign of education was launched. We furnished the workmen with a rule book of helpful safety suggestions and with caps, on which the words ‘Safety First’ are printed; placards are posted in conspicuous places; monthly bulletins issued by National Safety Council of Chicago, Ill., are both distributed among the workmen. Photographs illustrating the wrong way and the right way of performing hazardous operations are placed in especially provided bulletin boards. In this way the workmen are being constantly confronted with suggestions of “Safety First.”

Prizes for Suggestions

“Every workman is invited to offer suggestions through the Safety Department. Prizes are awarded for suggestions. A weekly canvas of all committeemen is made for suggestions which might prevent a possible accident. Once a month the committee, composed of workmen, makes a thorough tour of inspection, reporting unfinished and new suggestions on blanks provided by the Safety Department. At a joint meeting of the foreman’s committee and the workman’s committee, those finds are discussed and recommendations are submitted to the Safety Department. If an accident occurs, involving a loss in time of three days or more, the workman’s committee makes a thorough investigation of the same and submits its findings, including recommendations for eliminating that particular type of accident, to the Safety Department. All chain purchased for operating equipment is inspected at the factory before shipment. Daily inspection is made of mechanical operating equipment by the department repairmen. This sentiment of co-operation has been steadily increasing and the results of these efforts are apparent today in the statistics furnished.

The Medical Attendance

“Prior to the establishment of this department, a large number of accidents occurred among the foreign employees. Instead of reporting to the first aid hospital with their injuries, they often had fellow-workman treat them in their ignorant and unsanitary manner. This procedure in many cases led to infection. In July 1913, 13 cases of infection resulted among the foreign employees through these unsanitary methods of treating injuries. Today, employees injured while at work are sent immediately to one of the three first aid hospitals, where the injuries are treated by an experienced attendant. Practically all injuries, no matter how slight, are now reported at one of the first aid

stations. The attendants work in conjunction with a competent physician and his assistant who are employed by the company to treat all cases. An auto ambulance is also provided by the Department so that an injured person can be rushed to the Berwick Hospital or to the physician's office with all possible speed."

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