



**NOW
&
AND THEN**



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Sharon's grand entrance of yesteryears is busy again

By John Zavinski

A YEARS-LONG BRIDGE replacement project on the Shenango Valley Freeway has detoured inbound traffic through Sharon's original western gateway along South Irvine Avenue, the same way visitors arrived a century ago.

In its heyday, some blocks of that street were somewhat of a Millionaire's Row of stylish mansions. Much of the neighboring West Hill was *the* place to live before the city expanded eastward in the early 20th century.

A 1919 city directory shows a mixed class of residents along Irvine Avenue. They ranged from machinists and mill foremen to the families of

merchants whose downtown stores bore their names.

It wasn't just horse-drawn and motorized vehicles entering Sharon up Irvine Avenue. The streetcar line ran from interurban destinations in Ohio past the car barn Masury, up South Irvine to West State Street and beyond. The Sharon terminus and waiting room was just around the corner on West State, a now-gone building to the east of St. John's Episcopal Church.

Today, Irvine Avenue only gives a glimmer of its previous grandeur. Many mansions have been converted into apartments

and, sadly, for every few well-kept homes in each block there's a missing tooth or two from demolition after arson or neglect.

Nonetheless, some seem happy to live along the gateway, as evidenced by one front porch near Davis Street with multiple flags a-flyin'. In warm weather it seems to be occupied day and night by people entertained just by watching the traffic pass by. ♦



A row of fine brick mansions sits two flights of steps up from the street in the 100 block of South Irvine Avenue, north of Columbia Street in Sharon. Note the double streetcar tracks in this postcard published in 1924. Today, two of the houses in mid-block are gone after fires.



John Zavinski/Life & Times



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The 700 and 600 blocks South Irvine Avenue at Filer Way, a little east of the Ohio line, were filled with large, wood-frame homes, several of identical design, when pictured on this postcard that probably dates from the early 1920s. Today, as on much of the street, grassy lots have replaced four of the first seven houses.