

## Written Statement for the Record

Submitted to the U.S. Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship for the Hearing: "Industrialization, Rise of Small Manufacturers, and Reindustrializing America"

Submitted by:

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My name is Danielle Petrak, and I am the curator of the Watts Museum, an industrial history museum in the Statler College of Engineering and Mineral Resources at West Virginia University. Our museum is named after Royce Watts, who retired from WVU in 2017 after more than 60 years at the university.

Like many West Virginians, Royce was born into a mining family. He did not pursue a career in mining, but as a child, Royce made money by cutting up logs and selling them to miners for a few cents each to use as roof supports in the mines. Sadly, in 1942, when Royce was 13, his father, a coal miner, was killed in a mine roof fall in southern West Virginia.

At this time, the early 1940s, the West Virginia mining industry was booming, as coal production revved up to meet the nation's needs during World War II. The industrialization of West Virginia is nearly always associated with coal, in particular the start of largescale, commercial coal mining in the late nineteenth century.

But as we commemorate America 250, it is important to note that West Virginia had a strong, diverse industrial economy well before the birth of its commercial coal industry. In popular culture, the media, and other narratives, West Virginia—both past and present—is often portrayed as a remote place, a place of isolation. The vitality of its antebellum industries, however, shows that the state—although rugged and rural—was, in fact, well connected to much of the United States via trade networks and regional economies long before King Coal “boomed” onto the scene.

Nicknamed the Mountain State, West Virginia is known for the abundant natural resources in its hills and valleys—coal, as well as natural gas, salt, silica sand, clay, limestone, oil, timber, and more. Before the arrival of railroads, West Virginia was also home to important transportation networks. The National Road, for example, completed a main travel route to the west in 1818 by linking the Potomac River in Cumberland, Maryland, to the Ohio River in Wheeling.

In 1840, as covered wagons journeyed along the National Road, a twenty-two-year-old Mifflin M. Marsh carried baskets full of hand-rolled, tobacco-filled “conestogas,” or “stogies,” that he sold to wagon drivers as they approached the banks of the Ohio River. Later owning a company that made up to three million cigars per week, Marsh launched a cigar industry in Wheeling that grew to nearly 100 cigar manufacturers in the city by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Wheeling's location and access to fuel sources also helped sustain multiple nail making factories in the mid-1800s; today this industrial legacy is reflected in the name of the city's minor league hockey team, the Nailers.

Thanks to extensive, high-quality clay deposits in West Virginia, commercial pottery manufacturers popped up throughout the state in the late 1700s. Thompsons Pottery in Morgantown spearheaded the area's transition from earthenware pottery to more durable, non-porous stoneware in the 1850s. Their techniques and designs trickled over the state line, influencing the work of Pennsylvania potters. In 1901, Smithsonian curator Walter Hough, a

West Virginia native, recognized the significance of the Thompsons' work and collected most of the surviving examples of their pottery and tools, which are now in the National Museum of American History.

Abundant deposits of other natural resources—namely silica sand and natural gas—fueled the state's glass industry, with its first glass manufacturer opening in 1813, followed by roughly 400 more glass factories over the next 150 years. Based in Moundsville, Fostoria Glass made the longest-produced glass pattern in U.S. history, the "American" line, for 71 years.

Marsh Wheeling Cigars, LaBelle Cut Nails, Fostoria Glass ... These businesses were not small per se, but they also were not comparable in scale to the energy corporations often associated with heavy industry in West Virginia. Importantly, these companies were founded by West Virginia natives and residents; they employed skilled, union workers; and they created products using their state's natural resources to inject wealth and add value into the local economy.

As we think about "Reindustrializing" America—and Appalachia—from a small business perspective, we should look back to West Virginia's early industrial history, taking inspiration from this past era and investing in today's smaller-scale, diverse, and local industries and businesses.

Senator Justice, as Governor, you made manufacturing a cornerstone of West Virginia's economic growth, and your work in the Senate continues that focus through your strong advocacy for domestic manufacturing, workforce pipeline development, and targeted federal investments that help West Virginia employers hire, train, and grow. I am proud to note that both West Virginia University and Marshall University play an important role in this effort—supporting small and medium-sized manufacturers through the WV Manufacturing Extension Partnership, based at WVU, and Marshall University's Advanced Manufacturing Center, strengthening competitiveness across the state.

Thank you. I greatly appreciate this opportunity to share with you some history of West Virginia, a place whose people and natural resources I care about very deeply.