

The Delaware River:

Home of the Hoagie?



The origin of the hoagie may never be known. There are many who take credit for creating this over-stuffed sandwich.



The Quistconck, the first ship launched at Hog Island. (Photos Courtesy of the National Archives.)

Here's one story:

During World War I, Italian-American workers from the Bath Iron Works in Maine relocated to South Philadelphia to work on Hog Island, a spit of land in the Delaware River which housed the world's largest shipyard.

The workers put in 12-hour shifts, seven days a week. To get them through the long hours wives sent their men off to their jobs with large Italian rolls loaded with meats, cheeses, lettuce and peppers, all doused with olive oil and sprinkled with oregano.

The sandwiches were first called "hoggers" or "hogies" after the island, then someone threw in an "a" and Philly had its "hoagies."

Here's another version:

During the Depression, out-of-work Philadelphian Al DePalma went to Hog Island to find a job. When he saw the workers on lunch break eating their mammoth sandwiches his first thought was: "These fellas look like a bunch of hogs." Instead of applying for work he opened a luncheonette and began serving the sandwiches. He listed them on the menu as "hoggies," after the "hogs" he saw devouring them that day at lunch.

And then there's this tale:

One day an Irish worker named Hogan, who always lunched on American cheese sandwiches, became envious of his co-workers' meals. "If your wife will make me one of those things I'll buy it from you," he said to a fellow shipbuilder. The shipbuilder went home and said to his Italian wife, "Tomorrow make two sandwiches, one for me and one for Hogan." Before long the workers were calling the bulging sandwiches "hogans."

The shipyard employed 34,000 workers who could, at one time, build 50 war ships on "ways" and complete 28 more at fitting-out docks. Three hundred freight cars a day ferried ship-building materials to huge storage yards behind the ways.

The shipyard is gone. So is Hog Island, now linked to land and paved over by the runways of Philadelphia International Airport.

But the hoagies—the sandwiches which fed the men who fed the war machine are still around, as popular in Philadelphia as cheese steaks, soft pretzels, and the Mummers Parade.



Riveter at Hog Island Shipyard helping to build the "bridge of ships."

—A Bit of History Brought to You by the Delaware River Basin Commission (www.drbc.net).