

## Somerset Street - Brickyard / Rockwell / Valley Oil (1890)

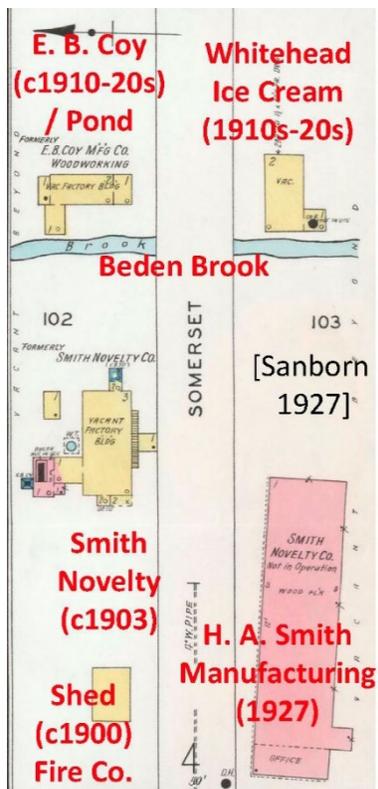
Rev. 1/4/2022 - D. Dixon

Somerset Street is the extension of Railroad Place in Hopewell Borough, east from Hamilton Avenue to the Hopewell Township line. After the removal of the Mercer & Somerset railroad tracks c1880, the area was used as a brickyard in the 1890s, and then developed as an industrial district on the north side, with residential lots on the south side. But starting in the 1990s, the analysis of significant contamination of the area lead to major remediation efforts, including removing tons of topsoil and demolishing and removing the residences, so now the street is almost empty from Rockwell to Valley Oil. As a result, there are no longer any traces of buildings or even soil from the earlier occupants of the street.

### Somerset Street Area

- Mercer & Somerset railroad tracks (1870s)
- Hopewell Brickyards (1890s) - Fay, Prince, and Cahill
- Hopewell Factory & Inducement Company (1900 - 1940s) - "Somerset Street"
- H. A. Smith / Rockwell / Kooltronic (1900 - 1999)
- Hopewell Borough Dump (1940s)
- Valley Oil (1970s) - Purchased north side from Rockwell, east of stream
- Site Contamination (1990s) - Sampling, soil removal, residences demolished

#### [1927 Sanborn Fire Map]



#### East Side of Beden Brook (to Hopewell Township line)

##### North side / Manufacturing

- E. B. Coy - Wood Working (1910s - 1920s) - by stream
- Rockwell Skating Pond (<1950 - 1970s) - by stream
- Smith Novelty Co. machine shop (c1900) - to east
- Hopewell Bobbin and Spool Company (1903-04)
  - Mercer Factory Assoc.
- Valley Oil (1970s) - east end

##### South Side / Residential

- Whitehead Ice Cream Factory (1914 - 1920s) - by stream
- 10+ building lots (now razed)

#### West Side of Beden Brook (Hamilton / Railroad Place)

##### North side (now parking lot)

- Smith Novelty Co. factory (c1903)
- Shed (c1900) - Rockwell Engine Co. Fire house (1954 - 1968)

##### South Side (Rockwell complex)

- H. A. Smith Manufacturing (1927), Rockwell (1945)
- Kooltronic (1975 - 1999)

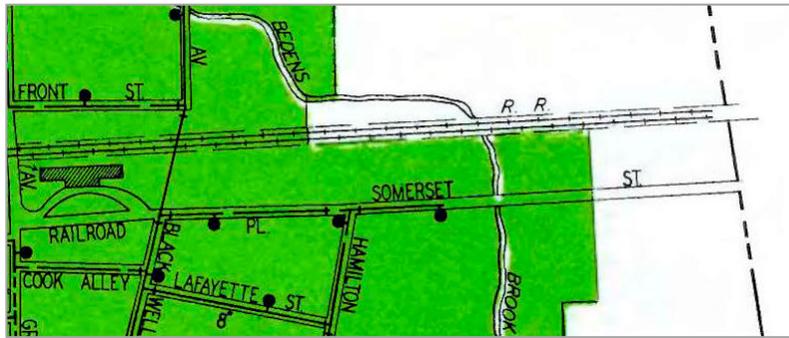
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## Somerset Street

Somerset Street is the eastern extension of Railroad Place, from Hamilton Avenue to the Hopewell Township line, with the King's Path development beyond.

The entrance to Somerset Street is bracketed by the Tomato Factory building on the north side at the end of Hamilton Ave. (next to the railroad tracks), and the Smith / Rockwell / Kooltronic facility on the south side, filling the block to Lafayette Street. The whole area on both sides is over 9 acres (the north side of Somerset, east of the stream, is just over 5 acres).



Somerset Street and Beden[s] Brook - Hopewell Borough Fire Insurance Rating Map (1949)

- Green is protected fire zone, dots are fire hydrants
- Dashed line on right is Hopewell Township border

The development of Somerset Street then can be thought of in quadrants, divided north/south by the road and east/west by the tributary of the Beden Brook just past the Rockwell complex.

- The west end, next to the Tomato Factory - extends just one block east to the stream
  - The south side has the Rockwell complex
  - The north side has a small building that is now twine and the Rockwell parking lot, that was previously the location of other Smith / Rockwell buildings.
- The east end - extending down to the Township line
  - The south side had residential buildings, which are now gone
  - The north side (by the tracks) had a variety of short-lived industrial buildings, and now has Valley Oil at the end

The Somerset Street area was first known as a brickyard in the 1890s, until it was bought in 1900 by the Hopewell Factory & Inducement Company, a local stock company formed to develop the area by offering free factory sites on the north side (next to the railroad tracks), and building lots for the company investors on the south side. There are brief newspaper records of a number of companies that then planned or built facilities along Somerset Street, but only H. A. Smith Co. lasted for an extended period, operating out of three buildings, the last of which evolved into the large Rockwell complex.

The Somerset Street itself was opened up c. 1900, and was named for the former Mercer and Somerset Railroad that had run along the path of the street.

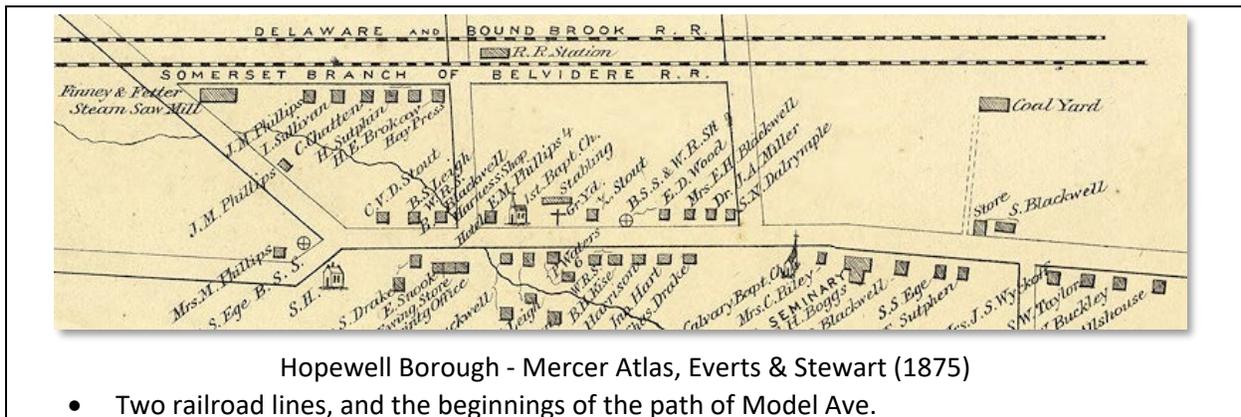
With the support of Rockwell, Somerset Street also was the home of a public skating pond and a town dump, but eventually evolved into primarily a residential street along the south side beyond Rockwell, with little activity on the north side.

In 1970, Valley Oil was formed and then built its office at the northeast end of the street. Then starting in the 1990s, the analysis of significant contamination of the area led to major remediation efforts, including removing tons of topsoil and demolishing and removing the residences, so now the street is almost empty from Rockwell to Valley Oil.

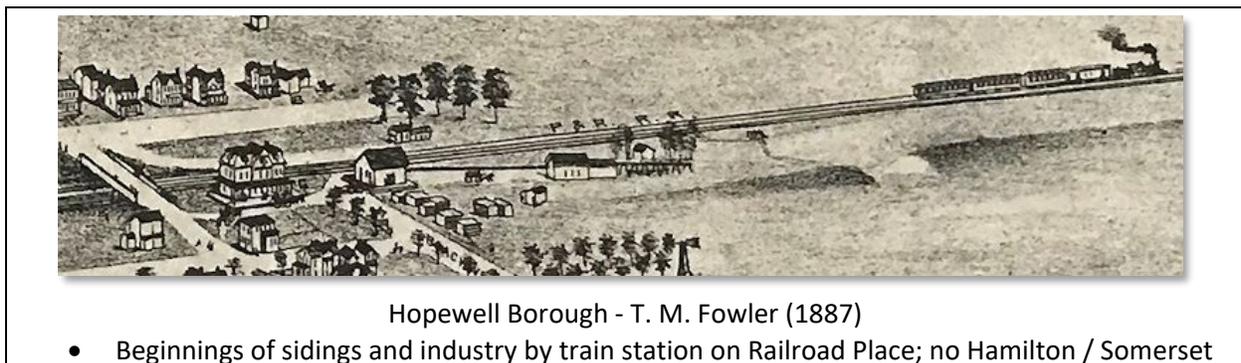
## Railroads (1870s)

During the 1870s Hopewell Borough saw the arrival of two competing railroad lines, running parallel tracks through the town in the undeveloped area north of Broad Street. The first line was the Mercer and Somerset Railroad (M&S), which was formally opened in February 1874. The M&S tracks in Hopewell ran south of the current tracks, essentially following the current Model Avenue to Railroad Place to Somerset Street.

The second line was the Delaware and Bound Brook Railroad (D&BB), which opened for service in May 1876, after prevailing against the M&S in the "Frog War" that January. The M&S was not successful, and service was discontinued in 1880, and the tracks were soon removed.



With the construction of the Hopewell train station in 1876, and the removal of the M&S tracks, the area along what is now Railroad Place near the station was opened up for industrial development, with multiple sidings to deliver and ship products, and the construction of a Hay Press (c1899), J. B. Hill lumber / supplies (c1890), the Chocolate Factory (1892), and the Tomato Factory (1892). The 1890s and 1900s then saw the beginnings of additional development along Somerset Street. (See the History Briefs on the Hopewell Valley Railroad Lines and Industrial Hopewell - Railroad Place for more information.)



## Hopewell Brickyards (1890s)

### Hopewell Valley Brickyards

New Jersey has rich deposits of clay that run diagonally northeast across the middle of the state, starting across from Wilmington, along the Delaware River, through Trenton, and then continuing to Perth Amboy. (Image of N. J. clay formations from [Clays of NJ 1904])

As reported in *Clays of NJ*, a number of brickyards were started around Trenton as early as 1856, and served as the nucleus of a thriving brick industry into the 1900s. (Image of Whippany, N. J. brickyard site from *Clays of N. J.*)

There also were brickyards in Flemington and Rocky Hill, and at least one in the Lambertville / Titusville area – The *Clays* book reports that T. O. Daniel had a small yard by 1816, "on the Sourland mountain, southeast of Lambertville." Hunter & Porter's *Hopewell: A Historic Geography* also identifies a brickyard on Baldpate Mountain, shown as "Br Yd" on the 1860 Lake & Beers map, and near the suggestively named current Brickyard Road.

However, we only know about the Hopewell Borough brickyard through brief mentions in the newspapers – It's a messy story of three entrepreneurs, two of whom died unexpectedly while in the business.

### Hopewell Borough Brickyards - Fay, Prince, and Cahill (1890 - 1899)

In the 1870s, the area in Hopewell Borough along the current Railroad Place and Somerset Street was occupied by the tracks of the two competing railroads, with the Mercer and Somerset running roughly along Railroad Place and then along Somerset. After M&S went out of business in 1880, the tracks then were removed, leaving open space for possible industrial development.

In 1882, the Hopewell Herald was promoting the development of a brickyard: "Can better brick be made elsewhere, than here? Not much. Recently we showed the excellent quality of our clay; and we believe that no other section of New Jersey can produce a better quality of clay." [HH 11/15/1882]

Hopewell did have a brickyard from 1890 to 1899, apparently located along what is now Somerset Street. Gantz [1987] reports that the brick yard reached to the east end of Somerset near the Valley Oil Co., on the north side of the street.

The brickyard property then was bought in 1901 by the Hopewell Factory Inducement Company, which reserved the north side of Somerset for manufacturing and opened the south side for building lots.



Fig. 2.  
General view of the brick works at Whippany, with the clay deposit underlying the field in the foreground.

### Hopewell Brickyard - Fay and Prince (1890 - 1891)

The brickyard was founded in 1890 by Charles Fay and Joseph Prince, who bought the land which was known to contain clay, and started a brickyard to manufacture fire brick and tile. [TET 8/19/1890]

Fay was a Trenton resident, and was previously a stockholder in the Delaware Pottery, but withdrew to form the new company in Hopewell. He then became sick, and died in April 1892 of rheumatism contracted while working at the brickyard. [TET 4/9/1892]

In December 1891, the papers reported that "the brick at Fay's brick-yard in this place were sold a constable's sale." [HH 12/30/1891] In October 1892, the Herald ran an ad for a public sale of the "Brickyard Property at Hopewell N. J., that describes the scope of the property: "9 2/100 acres, including the following chattels: 65,000 Brick, 12 tons of Coal, Brick Press, Wheelbarrows, Tools, Moulds and all the appurtenances of the Brickyard." [HH 10/5/1892]

And the tract needed to be large – besides the clay pits, it must have included other buildings and machinery, for excavating and preparing clay, and for pressing, firing, drying, and storing the bricks. It also had a water supply from the tributary of Beden Brook that crosses near the Railroad Place end.

Fay & Prince - 1890	Sale - 1892	Prince & Cahill - 1893
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Brick Works for Hopewell.</b></p> <p>Charles Fay and Joseph C. Prince have purchased a tract of land just outside of Hopewell, fronting on the railroad, which contains clay, and propose to manufacture red and ornamental brick, terra cotta, etc., there. They propose to get the machinery and buildings in place this Fall in order to be ready for the Spring trade. They also look forward to starting a pottery on the tract in the future. Mr. Fay will continue to reside in Trenton.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">[TET 8/19/1890]</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>PUBLIC SALE OF</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Brickyard Property</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">The subscriber will sell at public sale</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Monday, October 10, 1892,</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">at 11 o'clock a. m.,</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>BRICKYARD PROPERTY,</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">at Hopewell, N. J., containing 9 2-100 acres including the following chattels: 65,000 Brick, 12 tons of Coal, Brick Press, Wheelbarrows, Tools, Moulds and all the appurtenances of the Brickyard.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">[HH 10/5/1892]</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">—The brick yard will start as soon as the weather will permit, and will furnish employment for quite a force of workmen. The Messrs. Prince and Cahill are enterprising, practical men, and will not let grass grow under their feet.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">[HH 3/30/1893]</p>

### Hopewell Brickyard - Prince and Cahill (1893 - 1899)

In 1893, the brickyard was revived by Prince and Patrick J. Cahill. Cahill was for many years "the popular foreman" of Fell & Baker's brick yard in Trenton, and Prince was an usher at his wedding in 1889. [HH 3/30/1893]

In 1893, the papers report a "Hopewell Brickyard Base Ball team." There are brief mentions of the brickyard in 1894 and 1897 associated only with Cahill's name. The *Healthful, Historic Hopewell* booklet [Gray 1897] promoted the brickyard: "Surrounding Hopewell are the richest deposits of clay to be found in the State. It is from these deposits that Patrick Cahill manufactures his superior brick."

However, in December 1897, Patrick Cahill mysteriously disappeared when visiting Trenton, and his body was later found in the river. He was 30 years old, and left a wife, Mollie Murry, and four children. [TET 3/25/1898]

In 1900, the Hopewell brick yard was acquired by the People's Building Loan and Savings Association for \$500 at a Sheriff's sale as the result of the bank's complaint against "Mary Cahill." [TET 9/13/1900]

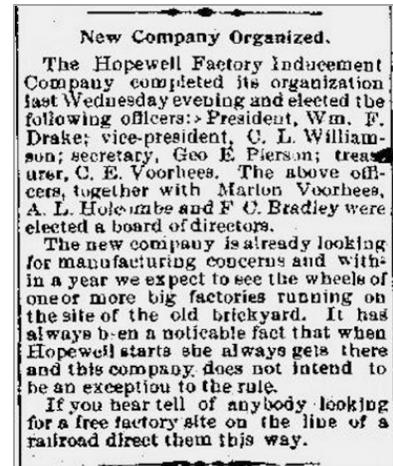
## Industrial Development (1900)

After the brickyard, Somerset Street was developed as an industrial area by the Hopewell Factory and Inducement Company, which offered free property on the north side for industrial use (by the tracks), and planned building lots on the south side for residential housing. The major result was the H. A. Smith Company, which later grew into Rockwell and then Kooltronic. The newspapers also report a variety of typically short-lived efforts to start other businesses.

### Hopewell Factory & Inducement Company (1900)

The Hopewell Factory [and] Inducement Company was formed in December 1900 as a stock company to purchase the "Hopewell brick-yard." It offered free factory sites to "any reliable manufacturing concern that would locate here." [Clip HH 1/9/1901] The property was described as the "Hopewell brick-yard" or the "Cahill brick-yard property," in the eastern part of Hopewell, near the railroad. [TET 1/21/1901]

The company's plan was to begin the development of Somerset Street by offering the free property on the north side for industrial use (by the tracks), and building lots on the south side for residential housing. The promotion included the display of a map at the George E. Pierson drug store showing free factory sites owned by the Factory Inducement Company. [TET 4/6/1901]



In 1902, the Factory Inducement Company divided the property along the south side of Somerset Street into building lots and apportioned them among the members, "each to receive a separate deed for their lot." The north side of the street still was reserved for manufacturing. [TET 1/24/1902]

While there is information on the H. A. Smith company and a couple other smaller concerns along Somerset Street, very little additional information on the development of the Factory Inducement Company and its eventual termination is available, and only in glimpses from newspaper clippings:

- In 1917, Hopewell Borough reported that it could not accept [unidentified] land donated by the Factory Inducement Company. [HH 6/13/1917]
- In 1921, the Factory Inducement Company advertised that Somerset street still was a private drive, and not for public use. [HH 11/27/1946]
- The Factory Inducement Company grounds was used through at least 1921 for events including the circus and gun club shooting matches.
- In 1946, Hopewell Borough advertised the sale of a [unknown] Factory Inducement Company lot for taxes (\$12.13). [HH 11/27/1946]
- In 1953, Hopewell Borough advertised the public sale of the last five lots on the south east end of Somerset street for a minimum of \$350. [HH 1/7/1953]

### H. A. Smith / Rockwell (1900)

The first recorded development from the Factory Inducement Company was the construction of the Smith Novelty Company machine shop, approximately 400 feet east of the shed by the Tomato Factory. The two-story shop building also had a two-story dwelling next to it. [Sanborn 1902]

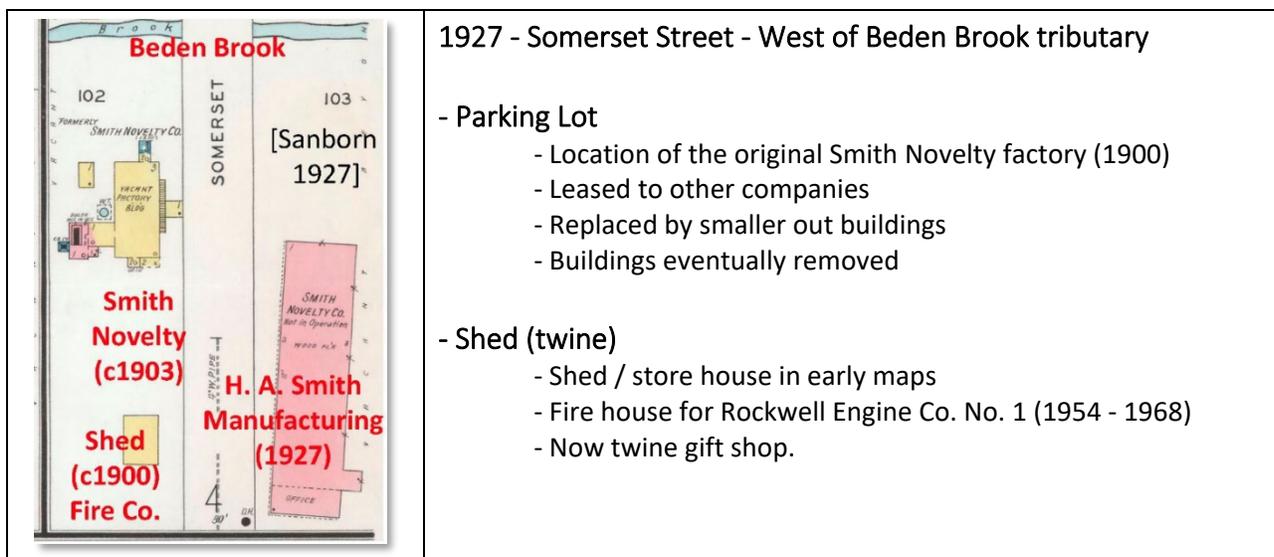
Hugh A. Smith came to Hopewell in 1900, and founded the Smith company that was later merged into Rockwell. Smith went on to serve on the borough council, and was twice elected mayor. He later donated his residence at 28 East Broad Street for the use of the Hopewell Public Library and Museum, which continues to be the home of The Hopewell Museum. (For more, see the History Brief on 57 Hamilton Ave, - Smith / Rockwell / Kooltronic.)

In April 1901, the Smith Novelty Company (predecessor to Rockwell) awarded the contract to build a factory at "the old brick yard." [HH 4/22/1901] The Smith building was completed in May, and was reported to have been "erected by the Hopewell Factory Inducement Company for the use of the Smith Novelty Company." [TET 5/24/1901]

Around 1903, the company built a factory building across Somerset Street from the current manufacturing facility (in the area of the current parking lot). This was originally two stories, and then added a third floor in 1910.

In 1927, the renamed Smith Manufacturing Company moved across the street from the original factory and built the first part of the current facility, along the south side of Somerset Street at the corner of Hamilton Avenue. This was a long one-story manufacturing building made of brick and steel that faced the current parking lot. After numerous expansions through Rockwell (1945) and Kooltronic (1975 - 1999), the original building still is part of the much larger facility that still stands at the site.

The original factory buildings on the north side of Somerset were leased to other manufacturers in the 1920s, and were later replaced by a parking lot with smaller buildings, which have since been removed.



### Rockwell Site / Fire Department (1960s)

In 1929, at the start of the Great Depression, Smith Manufacturing was purchased by the Pittsburgh Equitable Meter Company and reorganized under the new name of the H. A. Smith Machine Company. In 1945 the plant became the Hopewell Division of the Rockwell Manufacturing Company.

This c. 1962 aerial shows the Rockwell plant and the parking lot across the street next to the railroad tracks, with several outbuildings (now gone). The Rockwell pond is across the stream in the top right, and a small shed is on the left next to the parking lot.

**c. 1962 - Rockwell Aerial** [THM, n/d] (dated by autos in photo)



The shed, now 8 Somerset Street, appears in the 1902 to 1927 Sanborn maps, also identified as a stock shed. It later was used as the fire house for Rockwell Engine Co. No. 1 (1954 - 1968), and was used by the Princeton Doll and Toy Museum in the 2000s, and currently is the twine store.

**Rockwell Engine Company c. 1954** [HFD]

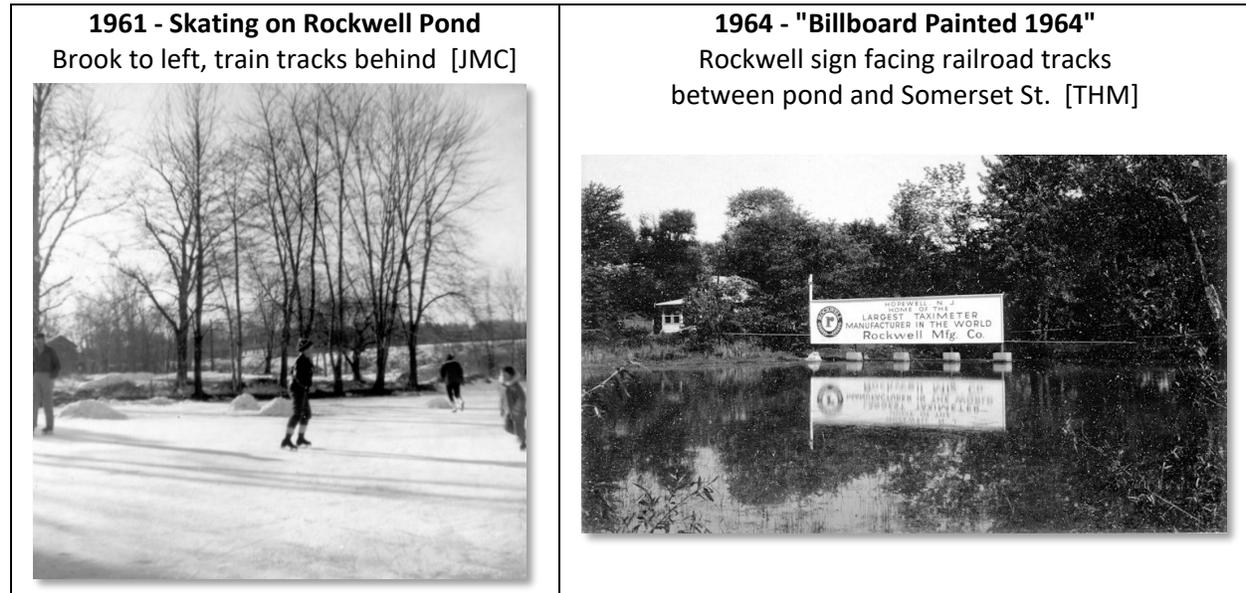


**twine Gift Shop 2020** [DD]



### Rockwell Skating Pond (<1950s - 1970s)

The Rockwell ice skating pond was just east of the parking lot and stream on the north side of Somerset Street, below the railroad tracks. During multiple periods from around 1910 the community organized the use of this area as a skating pond for children. Herbert Rockwell installed a dam to flood the area and installed lighting, and the Fire Department built up the surface of the ice. The pond was revived in 1950, and apparently lasted into the 1970s. [HH 12/27/1950]



### Hopewell Bobbin and Spool Company (1903 - 1904)

One early result of the Factory Inducement Company was the construction of a factory for the Hopewell Bobbin and Spool Company, which went into operation and then soon burned down and went out of business.

The story began with the creation of the Mercer Factory Association Limited in June 1903, a stock/subscriber company with local investors that financed the construction of a large frame factory building "to be used by F. S. Sernberger & Company as a bobbin and spool works." [TET 12/29/1903]

The Hopewell Bobbin and Spool Company began operations in August 1904. Later that month local barber Harry Cox injured his hand in a circular saw. [HH 8/28/1904]

The building was destroyed by a fire "of supposed incendiary origin" only a month later in September 1904. The loss was reported as "about \$10,000, covered by insurance." [Clip TET 19/28/1904]

However, there were no further reports of this business in the newspapers.

In the newspapers, the Mercer Factory Association was described as "Hopewell's improvement company," which also had two other adjunct buildings. But there are no further references to it.

**FIREBUGS BURN BIG  
HOPEWELL FACTORY  
AND ENDANGER HOME**

New Bobbin and Spool Plant Laid in Ruins With Ten Thousand Dollars Loss.

**RAILROADERS GIVE AN ALARM**

Shrieks of Locomotive Whistle Aroused People of Town and Desperate Fight Follows to Prevent Spread of Flames—Building Belonged to Improvement Asso.—Good Insurance.

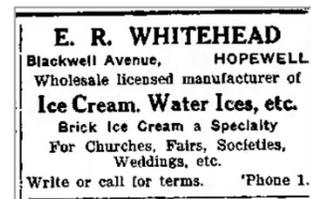
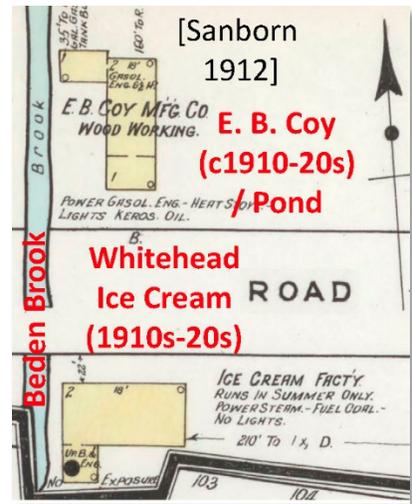
Special to the Times.  
Hopewell, Sept. 28.—Fire of supposed incendiary origin destroyed the Hopewell Spool and Bobbin Company's big factory, together with much stock and valuable machinery, at an early hour this morning.

### Whitehead Ice Cream / E. B. Coy Wood Working (1910s - 1920s)

In the 1910s and 1920s there were two businesses across the street from each other just on the east side of the Beden Brook stream - the Whitehead Ice Cream Factory on the south side and E. B. Coy Manufacturing Co. Wood Working on the north side. These are mainly known from the Sanborn maps - the two buildings appear in the 1912 map, but are shown as vacant in the 1927 and 1935 maps.

Edward R. Whitehead had a general store and restaurant at 19 Blackwell Avenue, and also manufactured ice cream. His father, John L. Whitehead, opened the general store in 1894, added a restaurant, and continued to operate it until his retirement in 1904, when his son continued the business. [HH 3/7/1934]. The store then continued into the 1950s.

In 1914, the Factory Inducement Company sold land for "for a nominal consideration" to E. R. Whitehead, "who planned an addition to his ice cream making plant." [TET 5/10/1914] Whitehead continued to advertise his ice cream business into the 1920s. [Clip HH 2/24/1926]



### Other Companies (1920s - 1930s)

Other companies were briefly mentioned in the newspapers as planning or building sites along Somerset Street, but no further record of these has been found:

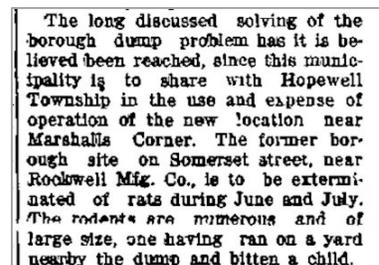
- A "gas meter factory from Philadelphia" (1901) - Planned to "erect brick building costing \$8,000" and employ "nearly 100 hands" on land donated by the Factory Inducement Company. [HH 9/12/1901]
- **Trenton Patent Manufacturing Co.** (1920) - Moving from Trenton, and rented the former H. A. Smith Manufacturing Co. building on Somerset street, before moving into their larger factory building. [HH 9/1/1920]
- **Inter-State Safety Manufacturing** (1925) - Moving from Norristown, Pa. to occupy the building next to the H. A. Smith Manufacturing Co. on Somerset; was in negotiations with the local Business League. [HH 7/1/1925]
- **Clear Clean Cloth Co.** (1929) - New firm incorporated, on Somerset Street. A. H. Smith one of the shareholders. [TET 8/14/1929] The product was advertised at the Flemington Fair that summer. [Clip TET 8/28/1929]



### Hopewell Borough Dump (1940s)

In 1950, the newspaper reported that the former Hopewell Borough dump site [somewhere] on Somerset Street near Rockwell was being closed, in favor of a new dump shared with Hopewell Township near Marshalls Corner.

Herbert S. Rockwell had permitted Borough use of the site as a dump "for a number of years." [Clip HH 6/14/1950]



## Valley Oil (1970s)

In 1970, J. B. Hill sold its oil business to Valley Oil, founded by David Bregenzer Sr. and Donald Terhune, previously with Nassau Oil. After initially running its business from the J. B. Hill location for a couple years, Valley Oil moved to its present location at the end of Somerset Street (#54), starting in a mobile home before constructing the present building and moving the tanks by the mid 1970s. (For more, see the History Brief on 43 Railroad Place, J. B. Hill & Sons.)

Valley Oil actually purchased the entire north side of Somerset from Rockwell, east of the stream. When they were clearing the land for construction in the early 1970s, they filled in the then-overgrown pond and levelled the land. By that time, the property had no buildings and no foundations, but did have evidence of use for dumping. Later when Hopewell installed sewers, Valley Oil allowed the contractor to dump the excavated dirt along its property on the north side of Somerset Street, which continues to be raised today. [Information from Dave Bregenzer, Jr.]

## Contamination and Remediation (1990s)

Beginning around 1991, site sampling found that the soil around the Rockwell site was impacted with volatile organic compounds, metals, and radium. Starting in 1999, Rockwell International removed approximately 12,300 tons of contaminated soil. Later, the remaining houses on the south side of Somerset St., then vacant, also were demolished. Monitoring and reporting on the site, and adjacent properties, continues to the present day.

Around 2006, a "pump-and-treat" system was installed in a building on the south side of Somerset Street to extract, treat, and discharge groundwater. This process is expected to continue for many years. [Photo 2020 - Treatment building]



As a result, there is no remaining physical evidence of the historical use of Somerset Street on the east side beyond the Beden Brook stream - not buildings or even in the earth. The south side was demolished and the earth removed, and the north side was leveled and covered with dirt from around the town. [Photo 2020]



View east down current empty Somerset Street [DD 2020]

## References

Information extracted and summarized from sources including books, reports, maps, deeds, newspapers, and photos.

Many of the original materials (i.e., documents, maps, aerials, and photos) come from the many contributors to the Hopewell Valley History Project and are shared on the site (HopewellHistoryProject.org) - see the Acknowledgements page.

Comments, additions, and corrections are welcome.

### History Briefs

See the associated Hopewell History Briefs for more information:

- Hopewell Valley Railroad Lines
- Industrial Hopewell - Railroad Place
- 43 Railroad Place - J. B. Hill & Sons
- 57 Hamilton Ave - Smith / Rockwell / Kooltronic

### Books

[HHH 1897] - *Healthful Historic Hopewell* (1897), Normer Gray

[Gantz 1987] - *Hopewell's Past* (1987), Elizabeth (Betty) Gantz

[Clays of NJ 1904] *The Clays and Clay Industry of New Jersey* (1904), Heinrich Ries and Henry B. Kümmel

[HAHG 1992] - *Hopewell: A Historical Geography* (1992), Richard W. Hunter and Richard L. Porter

### Maps

- 1875 Hopewell map from Combination Atlas Map of Mercer County by Everts & Stewart

- 1887 Hopewell panoramic aerial map by T. M. Fowler

- 1902, 1912, 1927, 1937 Sanborn fire maps of Hopewell Borough

### Newspapers

[HH] - Hopewell Herald newspaper (through 1955)

[TET] - Trenton Evening Times newspaper