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18th and EARLY 19th CENTURY INDUSTRY
IN MIDDLESEX COUNTY

Industry in Middlesex County was non-existent in the county during the 1700's. It was a sparsely settled community and those who lived in the county were mainly farmers with a few ship captains who sailed from New Brunswick to New York with items to be sold or traded. People of the county lived mostly off the land. What they could not grow themselves they traded or bartered. However, there were craftsmen such as wheel-rights, one carriage maker, a saddle maker and a tin-smith. Their businesses were carried on mostly in their homes or barns, but one or two were fortunate to own a small shop in town at that time. These, I guess you could say, were the forerunners of industry in Middlesex County.

From Donald Sinclair of the Rutgers University Library I was lucky to have him locate a pamphlet entitled "New Brunswick and its Industries", published by A. E. Gordon, New Brunswick, by the Times Printing House in 1873. The author is unknown. Having read through John P. Wall's volumes and not finding specific dates, I turned to this small book which was a real boon, particularly for the city of New Brunswick which I shall dwell on since I believe most of you nice ladies would be more interested in the "old home town" rather than Perth Amboy, Woodbridge, etc. etc.

Since very little if any industry existed in the 1700's I will start with the 19th century.

In 1811, on Albany Street, the south side, at the corner of Neilson St., was ^{The} a printing office of the Gazette. This was on the second floor of the home of Justice Henry, and above that the carriage manufacturing establishment of John VanNuis. Most, or should I say all city houses and businesses of this period were clustered on or near the Raritan River. There were

nothing but open fields and farm lands above Albany Street. The land by the river was extremely marshy. I would judge that there must have been a great deal of filling brought in in order to build the homes and business establishments located there, although I found nothing on that subject in my reading.

By 1828 the population had grown to 5,000. There were 750 dwellings; over 100 stores including 12 grain stores and 20 taverns which doubled as hotels or inns. Messrs. Elias Runyon, James Bishop, Sr., John Bergen, John Brush and Holcomb Cox seemed to be the big grain dealers in those days with warehouses on Burnet St. Grain came to New Brunswick from as far away as Warren, Hunderdon, and Sussex Counties and even Pennsylvania. The grain was shipped to New York by boat from New Brunswick. The grain dealers in turn supplied the grain farmers from those places with fish, salt, and dry goods.

In 1833 the Delaware and Raritan Canal was opened, this having been in the talking, planning and actual working stages since 1804. This was a tremendous boon to the town, for it provided a deep waterway to New Brunswick and could accommodate larger ships. Also the health of the town was greatly improved by the substitution of deep water and docks for the bare river-bed, covered with filth which formerly lay exposed. The canal was 42 miles long. It started in Bordentown and had 23 miles of feeders along the Delaware north of Trenton and 14 locks in all.

By 1830 agitation for a railroad commenced. It was incorporated in 1832 and had horse cars running from Newark to New York, and later that same year the road was extended to New Brunswick. This, of course, was another boon to business in the town.

The first real industry to be recorded was a "hand-sewed" shoe factory run by Hutchinson & Day. This small industry was located on lower Church St. Mr. Day had experimented with rubber and finally came up with a more or less water-proofed outer shoe. Suspenders was another item Mr. Day manufactured. In time he was aided in business by Messrs. William Waldron and George Eldridge and then began a larger business of making regular shoes.

An early rubber industry in New Brunswick was run by Peter C. Onderdonk and Johnson Letson. These gentlemen in 1846-1847 began in a small way the making of unvulcanized gum shoes, dried in the sun and tipped with fur. After two years of manufacturing in a small frame building on Washington St. they sold out in 1849 to the N. B. Rubber Company then owned and operated by Mr. Christopher Meyer who was a young man from Germany. His experience and experiments had led to the establishment of this firm and the building of the work in Milltown.

Besides these pioneers of manufacturing may be mentioned the saw mills of James Neilson and Rolfe & Metlar. Also the wallpaper factories of M. A. Howell & Co. and the Janeways; the cotton factory of Neilson & Stockton; the flour mill of T.V.D. Hoagland; the foundries of the Fisk Brothers whose father had in 1832 put up the first stationary steam engine ever erected here; the machine shop of Mr. Waldron (the forerunner of the Waldron plant in Highland Park); the planing mill of Brokaw & Buttler, all of which were in operation in 1855. There was also a pottery, a brewery and several ship yards.

The following paragraph is from the booklet I mentioned earlier on why it was of advantage to locate in New Brunswick for most any type of manufacturing.

1. Plenty of land, cheap.
2. Abundance of water supplied by city works.
3. The best quality of water to be found in the country. No boiler with it will have scale, and old scale will be cleaned out. It saves coal, and iron and time.
4. The best possible market communication, being on canal and river communication from New York to the South, on the trunk railroad from the East to the West and South, within four miles of a coal road to be completed next year, and a main station on projected roads, one connecting the Delaware with the Hudson by a competing road; the third connecting the city with New York by a local road.
5. Liberal railroad management, by which facilities and prices of freight to all points South and West are the same as those enjoyed by shipyards in New York City.
6. Very low valuation and consequently low taxes.
7. Unsurpassed health.
8. Building loan associations which give cheap homes to operatives.
9. The market of an agricultural region ensuring cheapness of living by 25 per cent compared with other towns between here and New York, and also abundance, freshness and variety of fruits, vegetables and produce.
10. The very best educational, religious and social advantages.
11. Beautiful suburbs without, street improvement within.
12. General good order, very few fires and splendid fire department.

It is difficult to pin-point the dates of old industries since very few are mentioned in either Mr. Wall's books and also the booklet I borrowed from the Library. However, I will list some of the older industries which are known to be of an early vintage, and their locations.

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| 1. Norfolk and New Brunswick Hosiery Co. | Upper lock on the canal. |
| 2. The New Brunswick Carpet Company. | Water St. near Somerset St. |
| 3. Janeway & Company (later to become Janeway & Carpenter. | Water St. on Canal, later H.P. |
| 4. The New Brunswick Rubber Company | Washington St. |
| 5. The New Jersey Rubber Company | Dennis St. |
| 6. The Meyer Rubber Company | |
| 7. The Novelty Rubber Company | Upper lock on river. |
| 8. The National Iron Works. | New, Neilson, Morris & John Sts. |
| 9. The Empire Machine Works | Water St. Near Albany |
| 10. Felter & Company (shoe mfgs) | Delavan Street |
| 11. John Boundy Company (shoe mfgs) | Dennis St. |
| 12. Vosper & Kramer (shoes) | Burnet St. near New St. |
| 13. Motisher & Shyers (shoes) | 43 Church St. |
| 14. The Star Linseed Oil, White Lead & Color Works. | On the River |
| 15. The Brookford Snuff Mills | on the banks of Lawrence Brook |
| 16. Buttler & Johnson (sashes & blinds) | John St. |
| 17. William S. Van Doren " " | midway between Morris & Somerset Sts on Nielson St. |
| 18. Lyle Van Nuis (mfg. carriages) | Corner Richmond and Dennis Sts. |
| 19. McCrellis Brothers " " | Somerset St. |
| 20. The New Brunswick Gaslight Co. | Corner Washington & Water Sts. |

~~Box The Box~~

21. The Gold Spring Berry Farm (strawberries, raspberries and blackberries)
Where the Court House now stands
22. Cornelius Powelson (fine furniture) for New and George Sts.
23. Henry S. Voorhees (furniture - made all furniture for Herzog Hall)
Burnet St.
24. Rolfe & Sons Saw-Mill
Foot of New St.
25. William Frank's Confectionery Establishment. (Made over 200 kinds of French
& American candies)
Peace St.

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