# 8 Somerset St., Hopewell - Rockwell Fire Brigade (c1927)

Rev. 2/11/2022 - D. Dixon

There is a small undistinguished one-story building at 8 Somerset Street in Hopewell Borough - at the intersection with Hamilton Avenue, on the railroad side of the street, just past the Tomato Factory and before the parking lot. The other side of the street is filled with a large industrial facility - which started as H. A. Smith, then was Rockwell, and later Kooltronic, and now is used for office and storage space.

This small building seems to appear on maps back to 1927 as a "Stock Shed," but the first known specific use was for the Rockwell Fire Brigade from 1954 to 1968. Then in 1975 the current property was consolidated from two parcels, previously owned by Rockwell and J. B. Hill (across Somerset).

The building then was used for a variety of purposes - J. B. Hill hardware, the Mower Ranch, the Hopewell Antique Cottage, the Princeton Doll and Toy Museum, and now the twine gift shop. This small building has continued to provide useful service to a variety of organizations in Hopewell, during all the changes from the growth of the Rockwell facility, and with the dramatic clearing of Somerset Avenue as the result of cleanup from soil contamination.

**1900, 1912 - H. A. Smith / Rockwell** (old rectangular shed)

**1927, 1935 - Stock Shed**

**1954 - 1968 - Rockwell Fire Brigade**

**1970s - J. B. Hill Hardware** - Outdoor furniture, etc.
- Joseph Hill II & Arthur Wright

**1980 - 1988 - Mower Ranch**
- Merrill & Beverly Mellott

**1988 - 2003 - Hopewell Antique Cottage**
- David & Karen Dutch, Winona & David Frye

**2003 - 2016 - Princeton Doll and Toy Museum**
- Virginia Aris / Nancy O'Connor

**2016 - present - twine.**
- Melissa Cookman

Rockwell Fire Brigade 1957

Mower Ranch 1980s

Museum 2016

twine 2020

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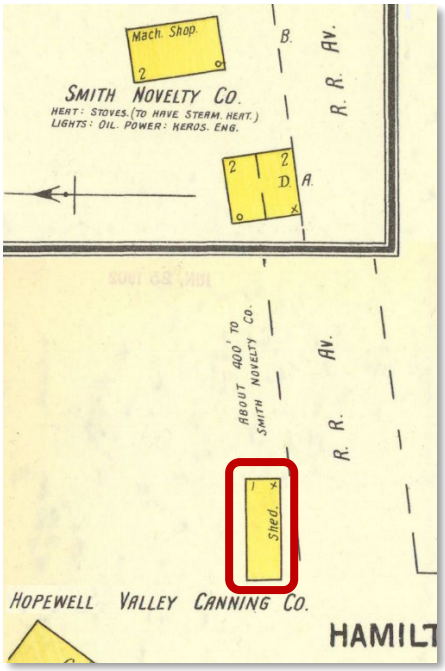
# Early Somerset Street - H. A. Smith / Rockwell

## H. A. Smith / Rockwell (1900, 1912) - Earlier Building

The development of Somerset Street began with the Smith Novelty Company (later H. A. Smith), which later became the Hopewell Division of Rockwell. In the early 1900's the maps show a "Shed" near the current location of 8 Somerset Street - but this was probably not the current building.




**1902 - "Shed" - Smith Novelty Co.** [Sanborn 1902]
Somerset at Hamilton - North (train tracks) to left

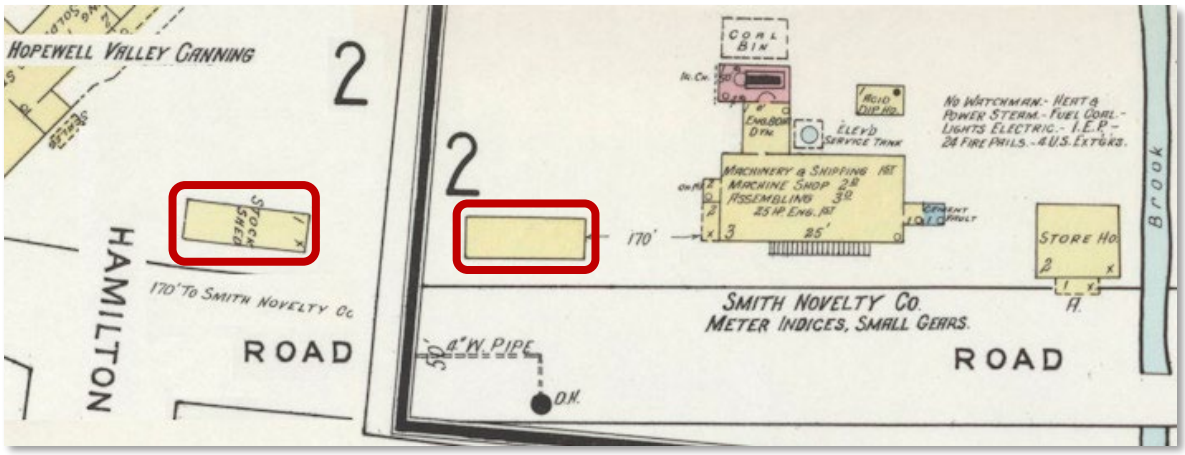
The first Smith Novelty Co. "Machine Shop" building was constructed by 1902 on the north (railroad) side of Somerset Street, further east of the later Rockwell facility and parking lot, past the Beden Brook tributary.

The 1902 Sanborn map marks its location as 400' east of a "Shed" building.

The Shed is located on the map just north of the Hamilton intersection, apparently more rectangular in shape and closer to Hamilton than the current building.

The 1912 Sanborn map then shows a new Smith Novelty Co. factory building, located on the west side of the stream, in the location of the current parking lot across from the Rockwell complex. The shed is now identified as a "Stock Shed," and still located just north of the Hamilton intersection.

**1912 - "Shed" - Smith Novelty Co.** [Sanborn 1912]
Somerset at Hamilton - North (train tracks) to top

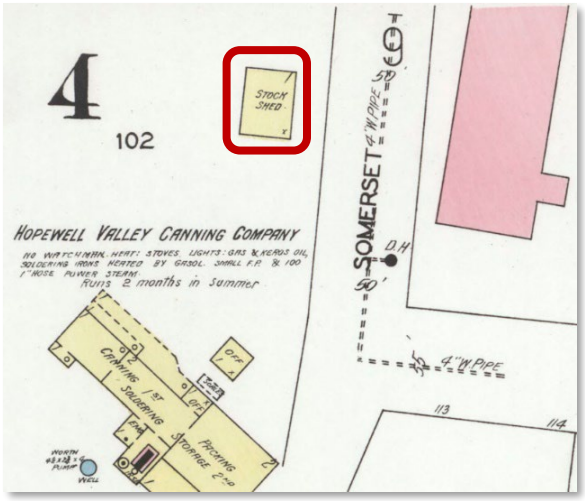


## Stock Shed (1927 & 1935)

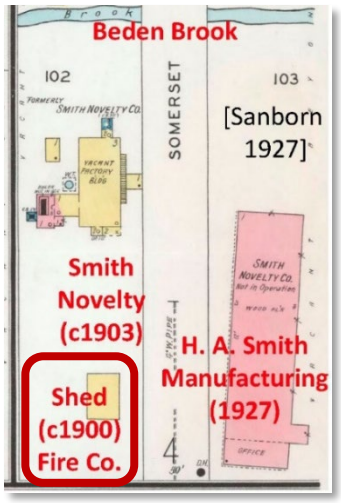
In 1927, the renamed Smith Manufacturing Company moved across the street from the original factory and built the first part of what became the large Rockwell complex, along the south side of Somerset Street at the corner of Hamilton Avenue. The original factory buildings on the north side of Somerset were leased to other manufacturers in the 1920s, and were later replaced by a parking lot.

The 1927 and 1935 Sanborn maps then show an apparently different "Stock Shed" - positioned at the location of the current 8 Somerset building. The building also is more square than shown on the previous maps, so this is presumably a new and different building that matches the current building, rather than an artifact from a different mapmaker.

**1927 - Shed - Hamilton & Somerset [Sanborn 1927]**
North (train tracks) to left

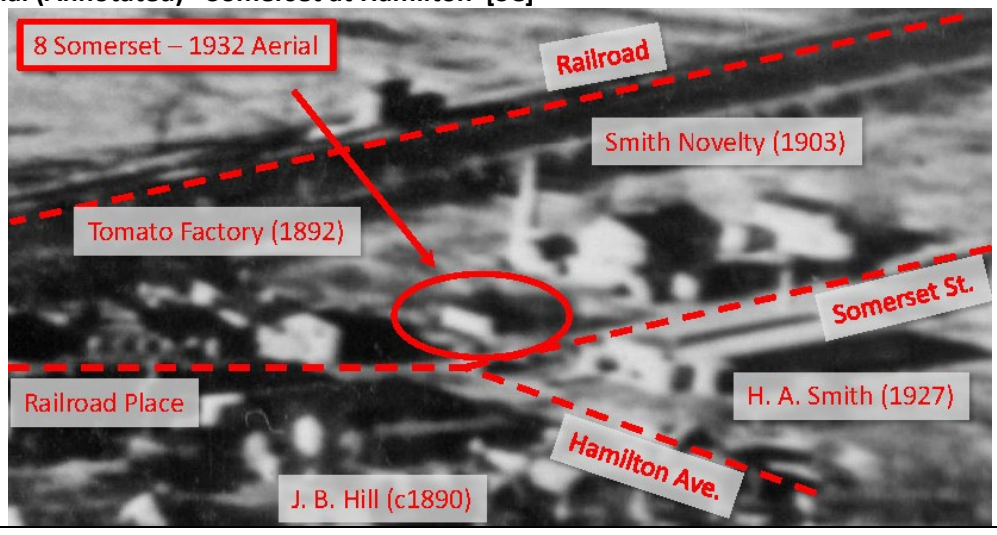



**1927 - Somerset - West of Beden Brook**
North (train tracks) to left




This 1932 aerial (from the Lindbergh kidnapping period) shows the Smith Manufacturing building (bottom right) starting to be enlarged, and the old Smith Novelty complex (across the street) still being developed. The small Shed building is visible in the center, down from the Tomato Factory complex.

**1932 Aerial (Annotated) - Somerset at Hamilton [SC]**



# Rockwell Fire Brigade (1954 - 1968)

In 1945 the Smith plant became the Hopewell Division of the Rockwell Manufacturing Company, and was a major benefactor to Hopewell. In 1948, the Hopewell [Borough] Fire Department needed new fire equipment, and Rockwell donated a $15,000 American LaFrance Pumper to the borough.

> An arrangement of alarm in response has been in effect for years whereby designated employees will respond to daytime fire and ambulance calls when other volunteers are at a low supply. This is done without loss of pay to the responding plant worker. [TET 1/7/1964]

In January 1954, Rockwell organized its own Fire Brigade, Rockwell Engine Company No. 1, at 8 Somerset Street. Its engine was donated by the borough "to use as industrial fire protection" - an old American La France truck that was purchased by the Fire Department in 1923, and had been in continuous use since then. [Rockwell News, 4/1957]

> [Rockwell] took over the old American La France 750-gallon pumper, is repairing it and keeping it in readiness in case it should be needed for the protection of Hopewell. [HH 4/8/1954]

In 1968, "after many years of good service," the Rockwell equipment ("Old Number 1") was returned to the Fire Department, and the Rockwell Fire Brigade was presumably disbanded.

> Due to the fine cooperation between this industrial fire fighting group and the Borough forces. the community has benefitted from this additional protection on several occasions. The Rockwell Fire Brigade has assured the Fire Department they are ready to assist in any emergency.
> [HFD 75th Anniv. 1986]

**Rockwell Engine Company No. 1 at 8 Somerset - 1957 [RMA]**

Front row, left to right : Julius Anderson, Jr.; Howard Shanks; Charles Childs; Reynold Dansberry, Chief; Arvin Warren; Joseph Williamson, Jr.; and Herbert S. Rockwell.
In the engine, left to right: Kenneth Hullfish; A. Scott Dansberry, Jr.; David Crum; Mark Palmatier; "Jim" Lake; Bruce Vansant; Mahlon Riley; Kenneth L. Williamson; and Joseph Kamrad. [Rockwell News, 4/1957]

# J. B. Hill Hardware (1970s)

In the 1970s, the 8 Somerset Street building apparently was used as an outgrowth of the J. B. Hill hardware store (diagonally across the intersection at 43 Railroad Place), as a kind of garden shop with outdoor furniture and the like.

Meanwhile, Kooltronic acquired the former Rockwell Hopewell plant in 1975, after Rockwell closed down its business in Hopewell.

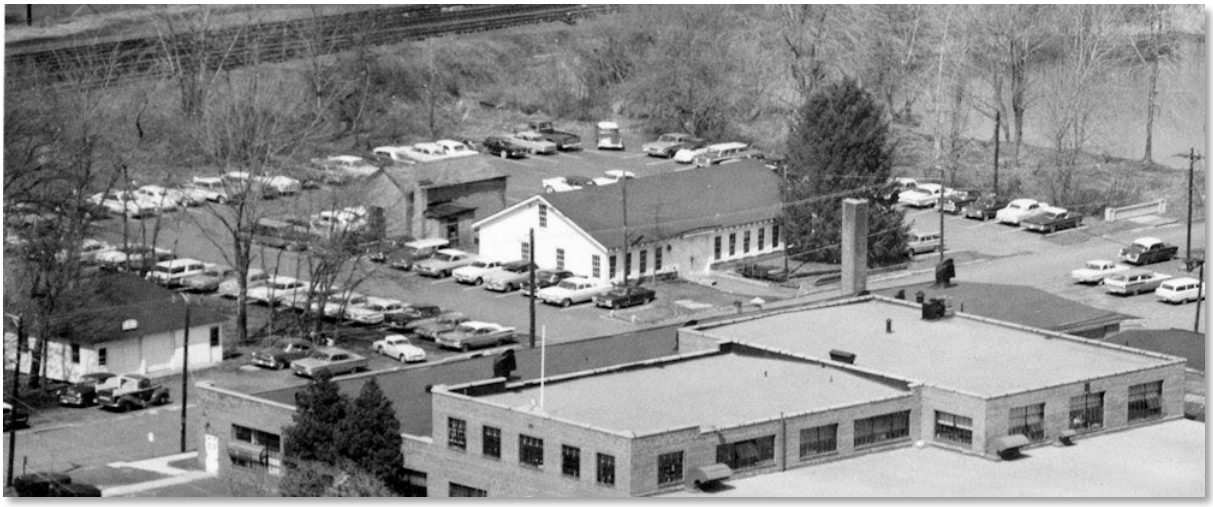
The adjacent parking lot had two buildings - a larger white one-and-a-half story frame building with a center garage door on the street side, and a smaller possibly brick building behind.

Kooltronic used the larger white building for miscellaneous purposes, and also rented space there, and used the smaller building for lawnmowers and similar equipment. Kooltronic later demolished the buildings and paved over the parking lot during one of its expansions (past 1972 (aerial), probably 1984 expansion).

These buildings and parking lot replaced the earlier two-to-three story H. A. Smith factory building, and, along with the 8 Somerset building, go back to at least a c1962 aerial, and maybe to 1931 / 1932 aerials.

The c1962 aerial shows the 8 Somerset building on the left, with the curved "Rockwell Engine Co. No. 1" sign on the roof, and the two buildings to the right in the adjacent parking lot. As in the 1957 photo, the Engine Co. building has one garage bay in the center and another bay on the left.

**c1962 Aerial - Somerset past Hamilton [THM]**



# Mower Ranch (1980 - 1988) - Merrill & Beverly Mellott

In 1980, the Mower Ranch purchased 8 Somerset Street from J. B. Hill owners Hill and Wright (see below). The property then was soon transferred from corporate ownership to the Mower Ranch's individual owners, Merrill H. and Beverly Borenga Mellott.

The Mower Ranch provided mower sales and service from 8 Somerset Street. The building front had a bay window on the left, a center door and a garage on the right. After selling the Somerset Street property in 1988, the Mower Ranch relocated to 303 North Greenwood Avenue (aka Hopewell-Wertsville Road). In 1993-94, the business went mobile, using a mobile workshop to provide lawn mower repair service on the spot.

Deeds:
- 12/31/1980 [rec 12/7/1988] - DB 2469-531 - Merrill & Beverly Mellott from Mower Ranch
- 5/12/1980 - DB 2132-810 - Mower Ranch from Joseph B. Hill II & Bertina Hill and Arthur M. & Janet Hill Wright

**Mower Ranch, 8 Somerset - 1979 [RMA]**
(Note "white" building in parking lot beyond)

Mower Ranch
North Greenwood

[Hw Harv Fair 1990]

# Hopewell Antique Cottage (1988 - 2003) - David Dutch & Winona Frye

In 1988 Cottage Partners, a N. J. partnership, purchased 8 Somerset Street from the Mellotts (the Mower Ranch). The general partners were David Dutch and Wiona Frye.

Wiona Frye had previously been one of the dealers at the Brookside Antique Center at 43 West Broad Street in Hopewell. Her husband, David Frye, also was involved in the business.
David Dutch and his wife Karen Dutch also operated an antique store in Lambertville for many years.

The front of the building now had a window on the right side, replacing the garage door.

David Frye also was responsible for acquiring the big green moving truck that still sits behind the building to provide extra storage on the site. After it was in place, the engine was removed for use on the Borough fleet.

Deed - 12/28/1988 - DB 2472-272 - Cottage Partners from Merrill & Beverly Borenga Mellott

Hopewell Antique Cottage - 2003 by Audrey Jones

Hopewell Antique Cottage
8 Somerset

[Hw Harv Fair 1999]

# Princeton Doll Museum (2003 - 2016) - Nancy O'Connor / Virginia Aris

In 2003, Nancy O'Connor purchased 8 Somerset Street from Cottage Partners (David Dutch and Winona Frye).

Nancy O'Connor was an antique doll collector in Princeton, and joined with her friend, Virginia Aris, to open the Princeton Doll and Toy Museum at 8 Somerset in March 2003. Aris was an antique dealer and collector, and became Executive Director of the Museum.

The Museum's collection included rare dolls from O'Connor's private collection, as well as those of Aris and many other donations and acquisitions.

After O'Connor fell ill, the 8 Somerset property was put up for sale, and was sold in 2016. In October 2015, the Museum relocated across Somerset Street into a larger space in the Hopewell Center (the former Rockwell complex) at 57 Hamilton Avenue.

After the death of Virginia Aris, the museum was closed in July 2017 and the collection was disbanded. Some of the collection was donated to other nonprofit organizations, and the remainder was sold at the Museum and at auction. The profits from the sales were donated to the Hopewell Museum and the National Federation of Doll Collectors.

The Facebook page for the Princeton Doll and Toy Museum continues to be active:
https://facebook.com/Princeton-Doll-and-Toy-Museum-468228553344952/

Video tour (2017) - https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=503430624144552

Deed - 3/7/2003 - DB 4497-229 - Nancy "O'Conner" from Cottage Partners / David Dutch & Winona Frye

**Museum - 2017 [Facebook]**

Virginia Aris outside the Hopewell Center

# twine (2016 - present) - Melissa Cookman

In 2016 Melissa Cookman purchased 8 Somerset Street from Nancy O'Connor and moved in her "twine" gift shop, opening in October 2016. Twine had previously been at 10 East Broad Street (behind Nomad Pizza), where it had opened in October 2011.

The building was renovated to add the side room on the right, and painted the distinctive red.

> The building's exterior was transformed from a drab gray to the same shade of red as the old Twine exterior for consistency... We gutted the building, adding new floors and windows, and then added on a [side room] for a maker's space. [Community News 10/3/2016]
>
> Twine has a spacious backyard used for outdoor movies in spring and summer. Films are shown on the side of an old, abandoned moving truck. [NJ Monthly 4/11/2017]

twine gift shop - https://www.twinehopewell.com/

Deed - 02/04/2016 - DB 6240-1399 - Melissa Cookman from Nancy O'Connor

**twine Gift Shop 2020 [DD]**

**View east down Somerset Street from Hamilton Avenue - 2020 [DD]**

# 8 Somerset Lot (1975) - J. B. Hill II & Arthur Wright

The lot that is now 8 Somerset Street was consolidated in 1975 from two separate tracts that were already owned by Joseph B. Hill II and Arthur M. Wright (then the owners of J. B. Hill & Sons at 43 Railroad Place at the corner of Hamilton Avenue).

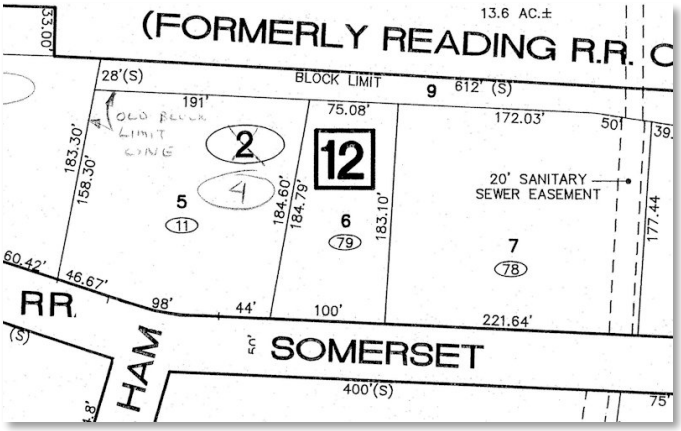
One tract was acquired in 1975 from Rockwell International, as a parcel split off from a property that had been transferred in 1949 from the predecessor Rockwell company.

The other tract was acquired in 1972 from J. B. Hill & Sons, as a parcel split off from a property acquired in 1949 by the previous generation of Hills.

Deeds:
- 11/12/1975 - DB 2003-561 - Hills & Wrights to same - consolidate two tracts into current property
- 8/13/1975 - DB 1997-163 - Hill and Wright from Rockwell International
  Parcel of 11/30/1946 - DB 955/510 - Rockwell Manufacturing from Rockwell Machine
- 8/16/1972 - DB 1917-893 - Hill and Wright from J. B. Hill & Sons
  Parcel of 4/6/1949 - DB 1059-214 - Hervey S. Hill from J. B. Hill

The 8 Somerset Street property is currently designated as Block 12, Lot 6 on the Hopewell Borough previous tax map, and was previously Block 4, Lot 79 before the renumbering in 1994.

**8 Somerset Property (large "12"/6) [1993 Hw Boro Block/Lot Conversion Tax Map]**



# 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 - see the Acknowledgements page (HopewellHistoryProject.org).

Comments, additions, and corrections are welcome.

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- Art Wright - J. B. Hill
- David Frye - Hopewell Antique Cottage
- Frank Mahood - Princeton Doll and Toy Museum

## History Briefs

See related Hopewell History Briefs for more information:

- 57 Hamilton Ave - Smith / Rockwell / Kooltronic
- Somerset Street - Brickyard / Rockwell / Valley Oil

## Books / Documents

[HFD 75th Anniv., 1986] - Hopewell Fire Department 75th Anniversary booklet, 1986
[Hw Harv Fair] - Hopewell Harvest Fair pamphlets (1981 - 2019)

## Maps

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

## Newspapers

[HH] - Hopewell Herald newspaper (through 1955)
[TET] - Trenton Evening Times newspaper