

How Hopewell Became a Town (1850s-1920s) with the Arrival of the Railroad in the 1870s

Rev. 3/2/2023 - D. Dixon

This brief is extended from a talk presented for the Sourland Conservancy in October 2022. The video of the talk is available on the History Project site, along with the talk slides.

The theme of this work is to celebrate the community of Hopewell Borough in the late 1800s into the early 1900s. These people took advantage of the arrival of the railroads in the 1870s, and worked diligently to develop the institutions and utilities and businesses needed to grow Hopewell into a full-fledged town where people wanted to make a home. Their legacy is still visible in the streetscapes that we think of as the historical look of Hopewell, in the local institutions that are still with us today, and in the strong community spirit of contributing back to the town.

This brief provides a broad overview of these themes. For more information on the individual organizations and businesses, see the related History Brief reports on the History Project website.

<p>Hopewell 1850s -1870s – Farmsteads to Railroads</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Community</u>: Hw Academy Public School, Female Seminary, Calvary Baptist, St. Alphonsus, and Presbyterian Church, Hw Herald Newspaper, Hook & Ladder Fire Co. • <u>Services</u>: Western Union Telegraph, M&S & D&BB Railroads • <u>Industrial</u>: Model Ave. – Saw & Feed Mill 	 <p>Hopewell Train Station (1876)</p>
<p>Hopewell 1880s - 1890s – Developing Town</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Community</u>: Second Calvary & Methodist Churches, St. Michaels, Model Ave. Public School, Union Fire Co., Hw National Bank • <u>Services</u>: Hw Water Co., Hw Telephone Co. • <u>Industrial</u>: Model Ave. – Hw Creamery, Golden Coal/Lumber, Railroad Place – J. B. Hill Coal/Lumber, Hw Improve Assoc., Shirt / Hw Chocolate Factory, Hw Canning Co. 	 <p>Hopewell Natl. Bank (1890)</p>
<p>Hopewell 1900s - 1920s – Community</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Community</u>: High School, Elem. School, Hw Public Library, Hw Museum, Hw Fire Dept. • <u>Services</u>: Gas Lighting, Electricity, Public Water, Trolley • <u>Industrial</u>: Railroad Place & Somerset St. - Factory & Inducement Co, Smith / Rockwell 	 <p>Hopewell High School (1910)</p>

Introduction

Looking back to the 1850s, Hopewell Township was an area of farmsteads, with small communities including the area we now call Hopewell Borough, then with only some ten significant buildings centered around the Baptist Meeting House (now the Old School Baptist Church). The Baptist congregation was organized around 1715 in a local home, the first meeting house was built in 1747, and then rebuilt in 1822 as the present building.

So how did this small community - then barely a village - grow into a full-fledged town, the incorporated Borough of Hopewell that we know today?

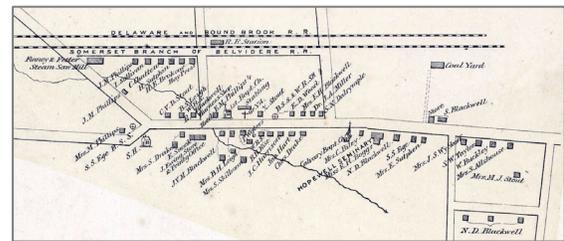
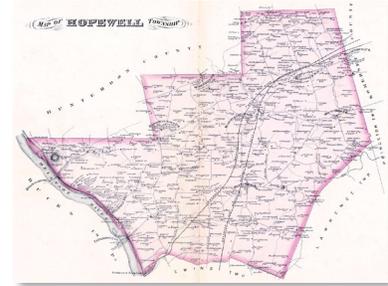
A major contributor to the growth of Hopewell was the arrival of railroad service in the 1870s, opening up the town with much greater access to supplies and markets and opportunities. In particular, the boost from the railroads led to the development of more than seven major industrial sites along the railroad tracks that provided important services for farmers and locals, and hundreds of jobs for local residents.

This growth also was driven by decades of ongoing efforts and funding by the Hopewell community and local boosters to create and attract a broad range of community organizations (churches, schools, library, fire departments, etc.), public services (telegraph, telephone, electricity, water, etc.), and local industry to help support commerce and provide jobs. They created a town where people wanted to live, where businesses wanted to operate, and where the community continued to give back to the town.

This brief explores the growth of the town of Hopewell during the key period of change, from the 1850s through the early 1900s. It begins with historical maps that show the growth of the town within the Township, starting out as a handful of markers on the map, growing to a village, and then into a full-fledged town. It then explores the changes through the eyes of the people who lived in Hopewell – in their words as they wrote about the town to promote the area to others, and in their actions as they invested their energy and their efforts and their money to improve the town.

This brief provides an overview of this story. See the History Project website to explore these maps in higher resolution, and for much more detail on the individual institutions and businesses as documented in other history briefs, along with extensive references. The video of the original talk also is available on the History Project site, along with the talk slides.

- History Briefs and associated videos - <https://hopewellhistoryproject.org/hopewell-boro-history-briefs/>



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Hopewell Township Maps 1850s - 1870s – Farmsteads

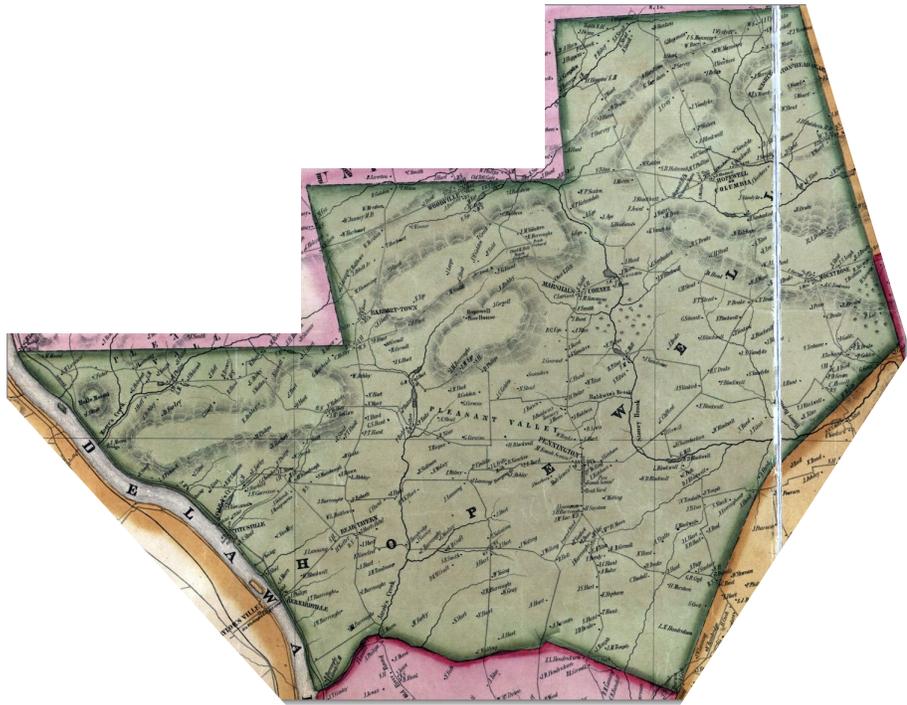
We first can trace the physical development of the Hopewell Valley by using a variety of historical maps, which provide snapshots of the outlying farms and the buildings in the town of Hopewell at approximately ten-year intervals.

Hopewell Township 1850 Map – Farmsteads

This c. 1850 map of Hopewell Township is from "Map of Mercer County, New Jersey," by Otley and Keily, 1849.

Where current-day maps focus on population centers, this map shows names scattered all across the area, identifying the many farmsteads in the Township.

There are familiar names of specific places - including Hopewell, Pennington, Marshalls Corner, "Harbort-town," and "Woodville" - but these each only have a handful of rectangles representing buildings at these cross-roads.



For more on farms in the Hopewell Valley, see the associated chapter in *Hopewell: A Historical Geography* by Richard Hunter and Richard Porter (1990). Basically, Hopewell Township had some 500 such farm properties from 1849 to 1875. These were holdings of large multi-generational families, often going back to Colonial times. These properties, typically 100 to 300 acres, were used for cropland, livestock pastures and forage, wood lots, and gardens.

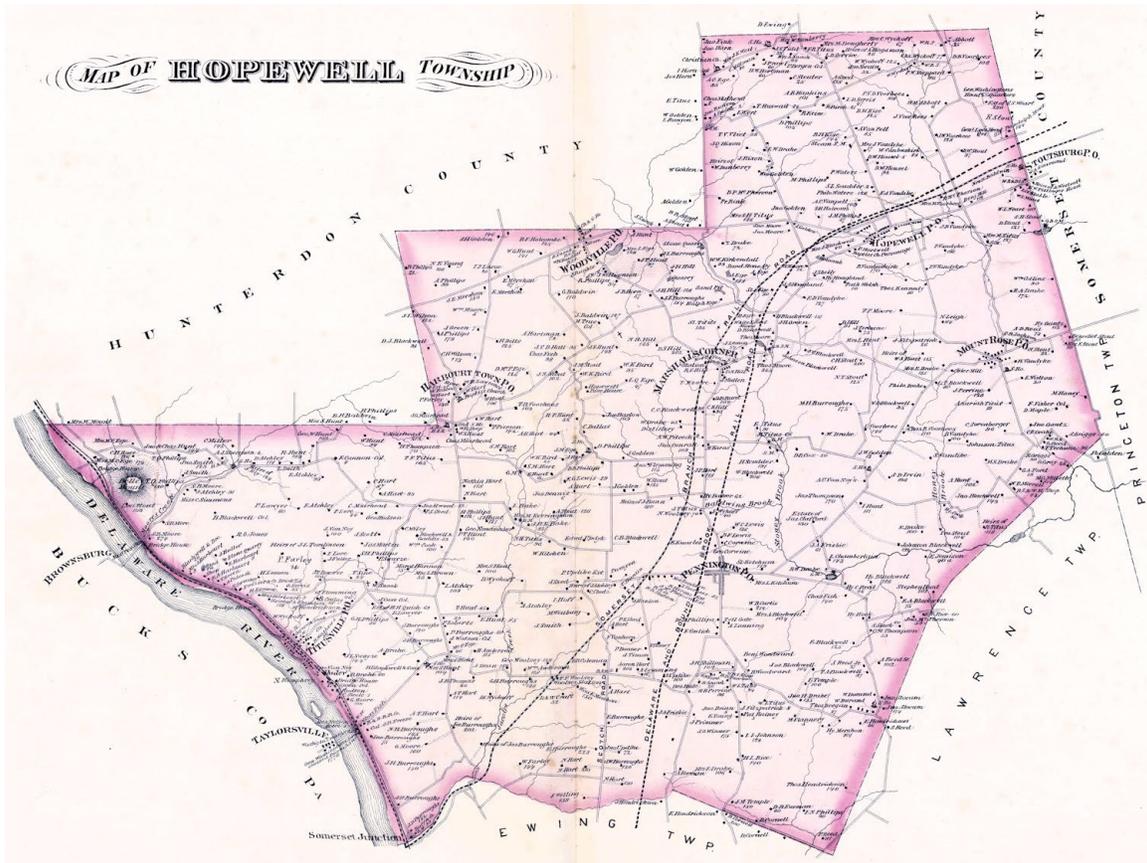
These families were not running the farms as a business; they were farming for self-sufficiency, growing crops and keeping animals for their families. If they had a surplus, they might trade it with the neighbors, but in this era farmers were in the business of selling farm products.

The first step to business was mainly through the grist mills, which could take raw farm products and turn them into cash by processing and grinding grain and getting it to markets.

A decade later, in the 1860s, the story was very much the same. These people on the farms were living much as their parents lived, and as they expected their children to live. The children were growing up, and starting to think about how they and their next generation of families were going to fit into the farm.

Hopewell Township 1875 Map – Railroads

This 1875 map then shows a big development - two new railroad lines cutting diagonally across the Township. This is from "Combination Atlas Map of Mercer County, New Jersey," by Everts & Stewart, 1875.



Yes, Hopewell had not one, but two competing railroads coming up from Philadelphia and the Delaware River, through Pennington and Hopewell, and then continuing up towards New York. The first line - the Mercer & Somerset (M&S) - started operation in 1874, and the second line - the Delaware & Bound Brook (D&BB) - started operation in 1876.

The tracks of the two competing lines crossed to the west of Hopewell, at the site of the infamous Frog War in 1876. The Mercer & Somerset lost the "war" and went out of business by the end of the decade, and its tracks were removed by the early 1880s.

But except for the railroad tracks, not a lot more has changed on the map since the 1850s. It was still dominated by the farmsteads, with a few more buildings in the named villages.

The Impact of the Railroad 1870s – Change

So the question with the arrival of the railroad in the 1870s is how fast this change impacted the lives of the people in the Hopewell Valley. How quickly did people understand that something significant has happened? How quickly did people then change their behavior? Thanks to the promotional efforts of the railroad, and the coincidence of the timing, the answer is that changes did happen very fast.

1876 – U. S. Centennial Celebration

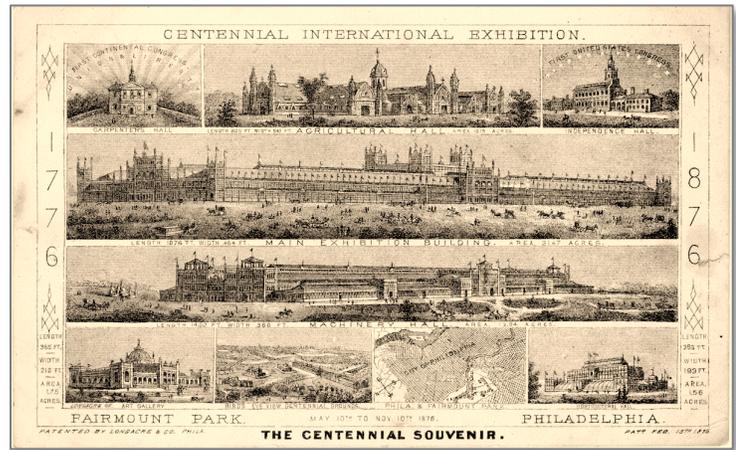
The first example of the speed of change was in 1876, when the D&BB train line opened in the Hopewell Valley, and the Hopewell and Pennington train stations were built. More importantly, 1876 was the centennial of the United States, which was celebrated in the local towns and across the country. It also was the year of the Philadelphia Centennial International Exhibition, the first World's Fair ever held in the United States.

For local farmers, if you had heard about the earlier 1855 World's Fair in Paris, it might as well have been on the other side of the moon. But as the competing railroads made very clear to all in 1876, the Philadelphia World's Fair was only a day trip away. You could get on the train in your hometown, and be dropped off at a train station right there in Fairmount Park, where you could join 100,000 people a day going to the event.

The world really had changed, and you could not miss the implications. The newspaper clipping talks about tens of thousands of people leaving New York City to go to the World's Fair each morning, and several thousands of people a morning travelling on just one of the two train lines through Hopewell.

The awareness of this new world is shown in a newspaper quote from the Danbury News: "To get home from the grandeur and majesty of the Centennial Exhibition on a Friday night, and go to beating a carpet the next day, is a contrast which the strongest mind wavers before."

The impact of the railroads was very clear, as was the awareness of changes coming for both your personal and business life.



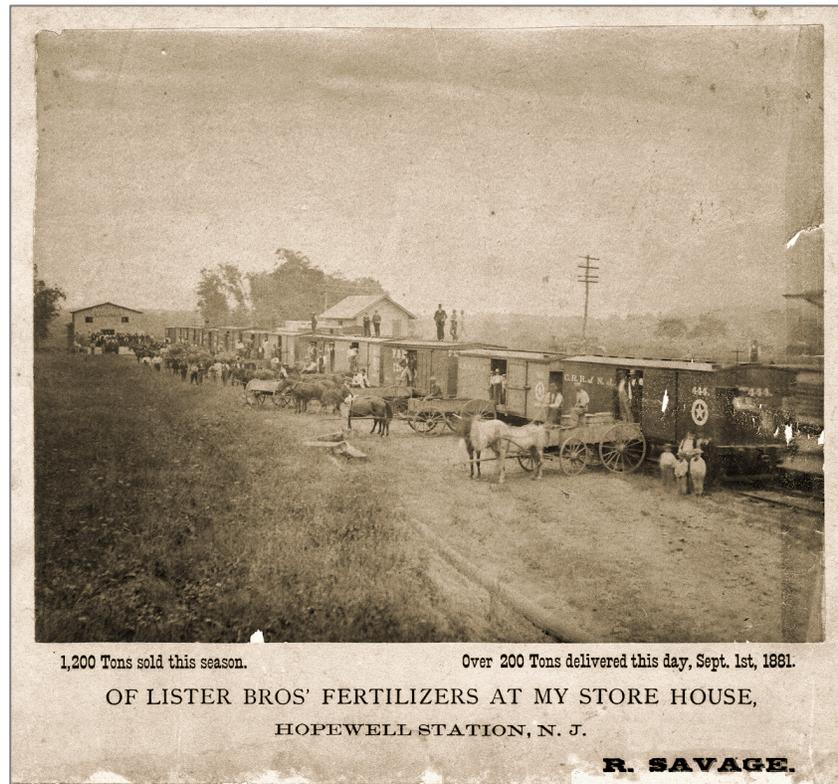
1876 Postcard [DD]

Immense Number of Centennial Visitors.
By Associated Press.
New York, Sept. 21.—The Pennsylvania Railroad Company, yesterday and to-day, transferred an immense number of passengers from New York to the Centennial grounds. The number of cars despatched from New York, yesterday, was two hundred and ninety-one, with a capacity for about twenty thousand passengers, and by half-past eight o'clock, this morning, one hundred and thirty-five cars were sent out, carrying about nine thousand people. The indications are that before noon to-day far more people will have left here for Philadelphia than departed during the whole of yesterday.
 The first three trains which left here by the Delaware and Bound Brook route for Philadelphia this morning consisted of thirty-eight cars, with about twenty-five hundred passengers.

[NY Morning Herald 9/22/1876]

1881 – Fertilizers - Ruben Savidge

The second example of the speed of change from the railroads is shown in this spectacular image from a promotional flyer, advertizing that on this one day in September 1881, Ruben Savidge took delivery of 200 tons of fertilizer. The photo shows the railroad siding across from the Hopewell train station, where at least eight boxcars had been dropped off. Next to the boxcars are the horse-drawn wagons that then were needed to move the materials throughout the local area.



[R. Savidge – 9/1/1881 - S. Cohen]

So imagine a farmer looking at this photo, or seeing this kind of scene at the train station. Your farm was perhaps 200 acres, but only around half of that would be good land that can be readily cultivated or grazed. But the train could bring fertilizers, more grains, more animals, and more farm equipment, which could allow you to grow significantly more on your property, and expand your business for you and your extended family. And if you were still not convinced, you could see that in this season Ruben Savidge had already sold 1200 tons of fertilizer, so your neighbors certainly were on board.

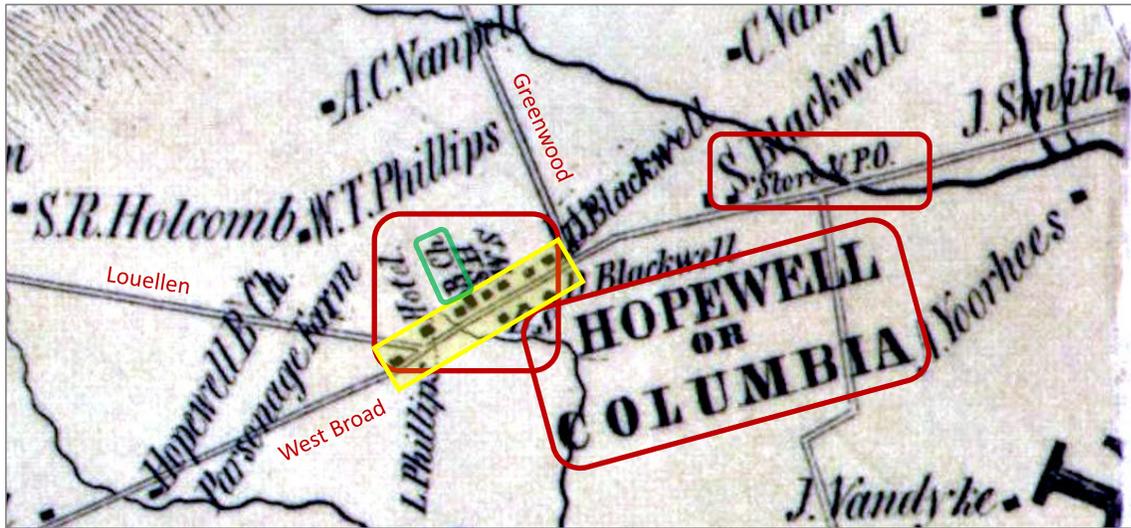
The world was changing fast. This is only five years after the train station was built. So imagine looking at this as an entrepreneur. You knew Ruben Savidge as the operator of the general store up on Mount Rose. In five years he has his own storage building on the siding by the station (in the back left of the photo), and he is now at the point that can contact his supplier and order up these huge quantities of product to be delivered to Hopewell. This suggests enormous potential for other new businesses to grow in the area.

Hopewell Borough Maps 1860s - 1900s – Growth

Hopewell c1850 Map – "Columbia"

Moving on with maps, the next step is to look in detail at Hopewell Borough to see the growth of roads and buildings and businesses in the town. The maps below are annotated in red to highlight important new sites, and in yellow to highlight the major areas of change.

This is a close-up around Hopewell from the same 1849 Otle and Keily Hopewell Township map.

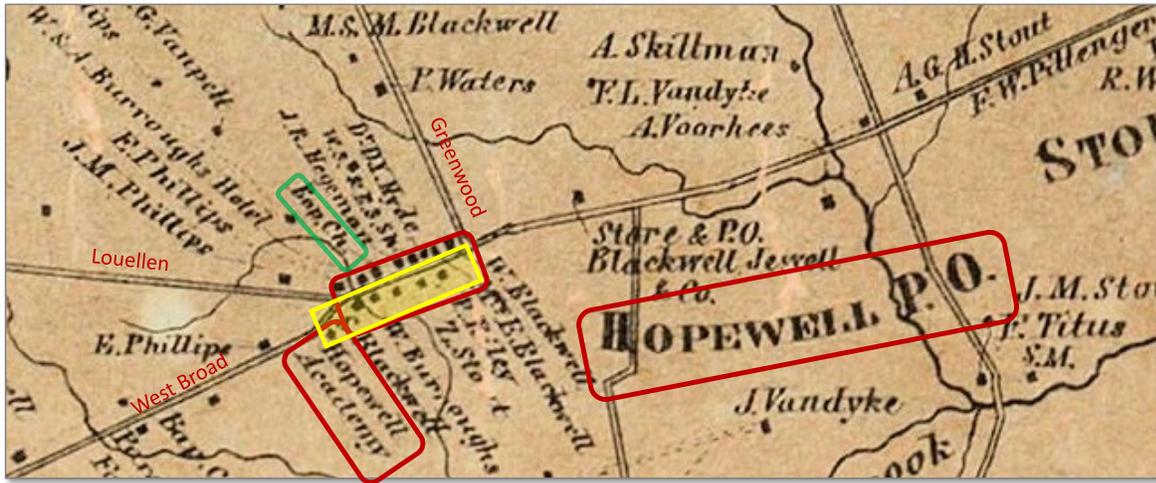


The first odd detail is that the mapmaker is not even sure of the name of the town, which is indicated as "Hopewell or Columbia." The area was originally referred to by the major structure, the Baptist Meeting House (our Old School Baptist Church, built in 1747 and rebuilt as the current building in 1822). The area then was known more as Columbia after the Revolutionary War, and that name was used for some streets, buildings, and organizations. But the opening of the post office in 1825 eventually helped settle the name as Hopewell, but clearly the confusion lingered.

The town itself in this map is only some ten buildings, clustered around the Old School Baptist Church (highlighted in green), on what we now call West Broad Street between Louellen and Greenwood (in yellow). Around the church are a few businesses - the hotel, blacksmith and wheelwright - and some homes. And immediately surrounding are still farmsteads.

Hopewell 1860 Map – West Broad

Moving another decade to 1860, this is a close-up from "Map of the Vicinity of Phila. and Trenton," by Lake & Beers.

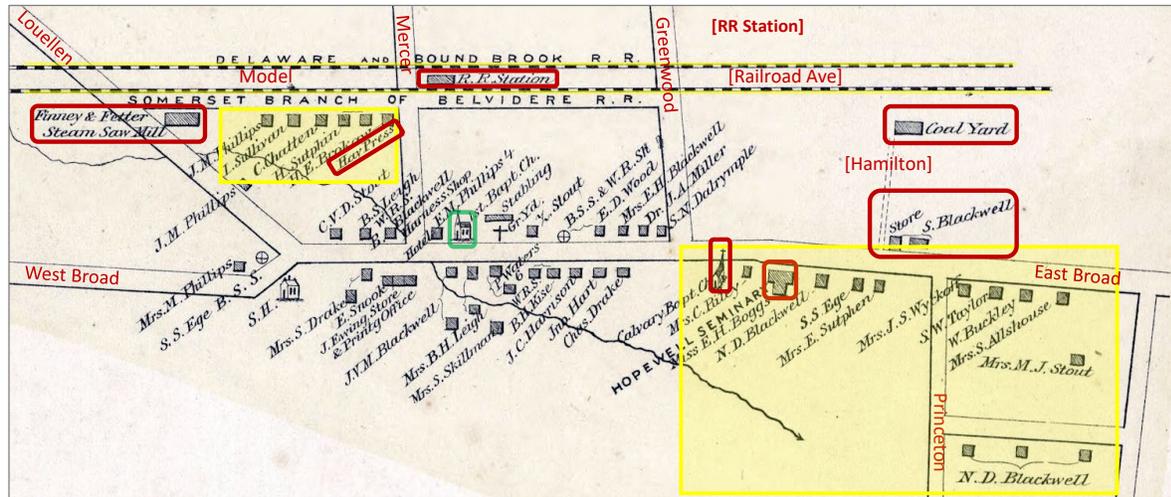


There is very little change from 1850, with some more residential buildings, including on the south side of the West Broad, plus the new Hopewell Academy public school.

The development still is clustered on West Broad around the Baptist Church, and still does not cross Greenwood to East Broad.

Hopewell 1876 Map – Railroads / East Broad

The next jump is 15 years, to around 1876, when the second railroad line opened in Hopewell (the D&BB), and the first line (the M&S) had been in operation for a couple years. This map of Hopewell is from the "Combination Atlas Map of Mercer County, New Jersey," by Everts & Stewart, 1875.



The upper dashed railroad line is the Delaware & Bound Brook (our still existing line), which was opened in 1876, although its railroad station had not yet been built in this map (to the top right, on Railroad Place off Greenwood).

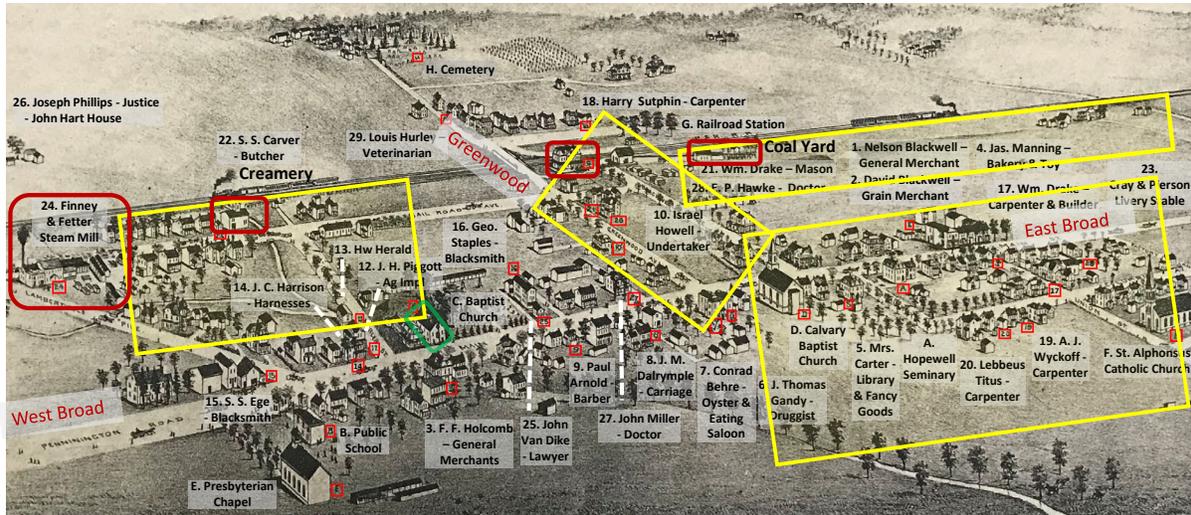
The lower dashed railroad line is the Mercer & Somerset, which had been opened in 1874, with its railroad station shown on our Model Avenue, a block above the Old School Baptist Church.

The map shows the growth that was clustered around the Baptist Church continuing to spread along West Broad, and a block of new buildings along Model closer to the M&S railroad station (in yellow). Also along Model at the triangle corner with Louellen is the first industrial site in Hopewell, the Finney & Fetter.

The map also shows the center of Hopewell shifting to the east past Greenwood (to the right, in yellow), with growth on the south side of East Broad, led by the Calvary Baptist Church and Miss Boggs' Hopewell Seminary.

Hopewell 1887 Map – Fowler / Railroad Place

This amazing map is "1887 - Hopewell, New Jersey," by T. M. Fowler. Fowler was an itinerant mapmaker who travelled around Pennsylvania and into New Jersey, visiting towns to create these panoramic birds-eye views, which include our first sketches of many of the buildings in town.



Highlighted on the left is that original area along West Broad and up to Model, with some more growth. Also on Model is the second industrial site in Hopewell, the Creamery.

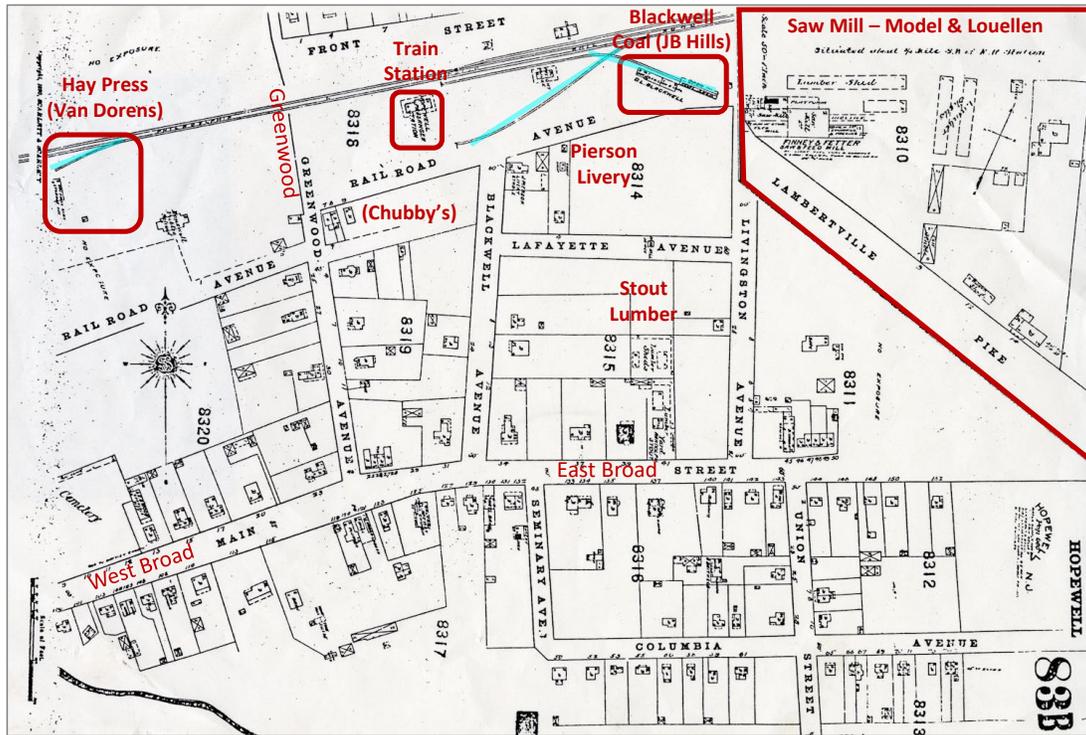
There also is new growth along East Broad, and south on Seminary and Columbia to Princeton Ave. Plus there is growth up Blackwell Avenue to the railroad station.

But the key area is highlighted in the upper right. By 1887, the Mercer & Somerset Railroad was bankrupt, and the railroad tracks had been removed. But in Hopewell, unlike in Pennington, for example, the two railroad tracks ran right next to each other through town. When the M&S tracks were torn up, it left a large area of empty space, conveniently located right next to the remaining tracks.

So for Hopewell boosters who were trying to bring business and industry to town, that was prime real estate to think about developing, which is exactly what happened. On the west side, Model Avenue was the first industrial row along the railroad, and was filling up, but there were still large blocks of open space over on east side, along Railroad Place.

Hopewell 1890 Map – Fire Map / Sidings

This is another kind of map - a fire map. In this period, independent companies would come to each town and draw these detailed maps of the streets and buildings, which fire insurance companies could then use to write policies. These maps are obviously tremendously valuable to us, showing the streets, property lines, and even building shapes and materials. This 1890 map of Hopewell is from "Fire Maps of Mercer County, New Jersey" by Scarlett & Scarlett.



The interesting change here from the earlier map is that the center of town has shifted so far east that this single-page map no longer includes the area around the Old School Baptist Church.

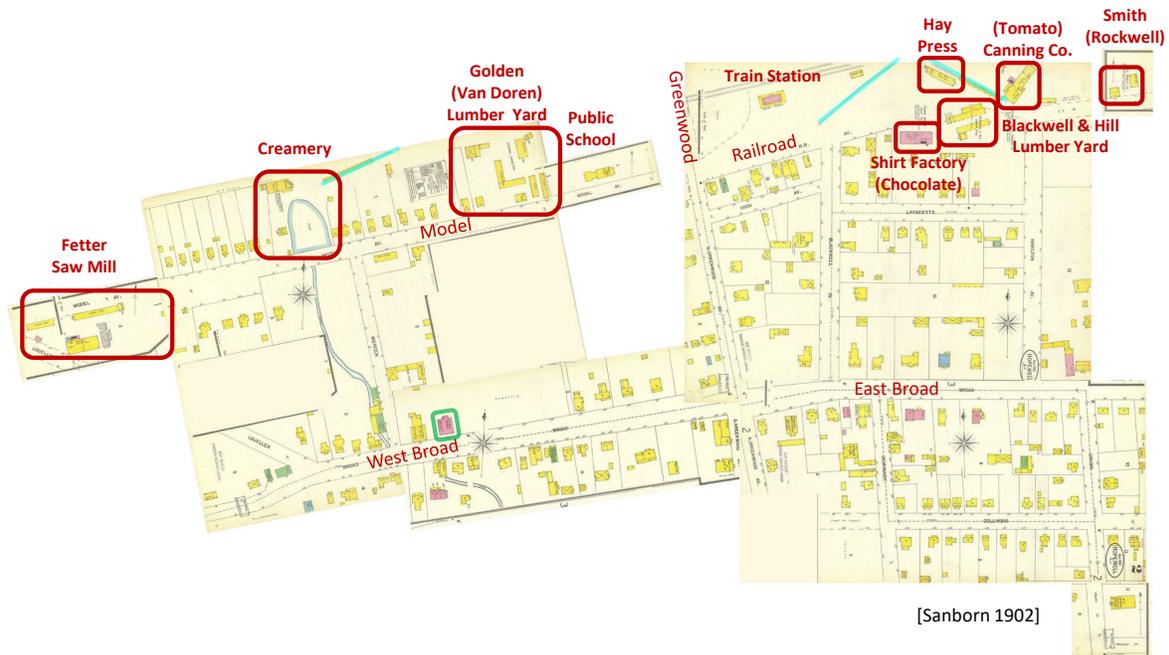
Instead, it shows continued growth north to the railroad tracks along Greenwood, Blackwell, and Hamilton (Livingston on the map), and east along East Broad, Columbia, Seminary, and Princeton (Union on the map).

There also were sidings along both sides of the main tracks in the area of the train station, but three different railroad sidings also branched off diagonally to serve local businesses (highlighted in blue). On the left is a siding for a Hay Press, which will soon become the Golden / Van Doren lumber yard. On the right is a siding for the Blackwell Hay, Feed, and Coal business, which soon evolved into the J. B. Hill lumber yard. And in the middle is a siding that ran down by the side of the train station, which was used for general deliveries of products and even animals.

These sidings, and particularly the dedicated sidings for specific businesses, are an indication of the amount of economic activity going on in Hopewell.

Hopewell c1900 Map – Fire Map / Industrial Hopewell

This final map, from 1902, is also a fire map, the "Fire Insurance Map of Hopewell, New Jersey," by the Sanborn Map Company. The mapmaker fit Hopewell onto three pages by cutting and pasting different slices of the populated area of town, so this version spreads out and reassembles the pieces into the full width of the town.



As shown by the red highlights along the top, this map shows the full extent of the industrialization of Hopewell, with almost all the major structures that we still have today (plus a couple that have been lost) along Model Avenue (on the left) and Railroad Place down to Somerset Street (on the right, past the train station).

These include the Saw Mill, Creamery, and Lumber Yard along Model Avenue, and the Chocolate Factory, Lumber Yard, Tomato Factory, and Smith (Rockwell) along Railroad Place.

This is the realization of the efforts of the people of Hopewell, which is discussed next.

The Growth of Hopewell – 1850-70s / 1880-90s / 1900-1920s

As the maps have shown, Hopewell saw significant growth in the late 1800s, driven by the arrival of the railroads in the 1870s, and expanded by the industrialization along the railroad tracks.

It was the efforts of the people of Hopewell that helped the town evolve into the place that we know today. And we know a great deal about what they were thinking and what they were doing - through their words, especially in several promotional publications, and through their actions, especially as recorded in the newspapers.

This section reviews the growth of Hopewell across three time periods from 1850 into the 1900s, listing the major developments during each period, and then categorizing them in terms of Community, Services, and Industrialization:

- **Community** focuses on fund-raising and volunteer efforts to improve the local community, including churches, schools, and libraries.
- **Services** focuses on both local and external construction of key town utilities, including telephone, electricity, water, and the railroad and trolley.
- **Industrialization** focuses on the major industrial sites established along Model Avenue and Railroad Place - their contribution to Hopewell (e.g., farm export, lumber supplies, and/or jobs) and the principals, whether local families or external investors.

“Progressive” Hopewell – c. 1900

There were two major promotional booklets for Hopewell published around 1900, *Healthful, Historic Hopewell* in 1897, and then *Hopewell 1909*. Each has 50 plus pages promoting Hopewell to new residents and also to new businesses, also with 40 plus photos. These are wonderful resources for historical research, along with other special issues of the *Hopewell Herald* newspaper.

The organization of the booklets shows how these people were thinking about presenting their town.

They emphasized the historical basis of the town, and discussed the schools, because these were important for young families coming into town.

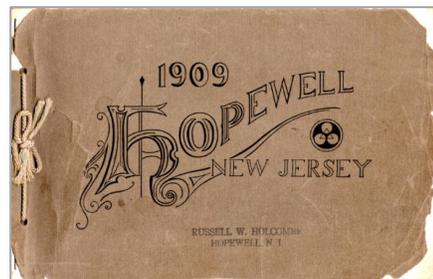
They talked about banking and railroads and other kinds of local services, for residents and also for business.

They talked about businesses and manufacturing in town to show that Hopewell was a place where you could come and find a job, and where you could start your own businesses.

And they talked about building and real estate, because you want a place to stay when you come to town, and you want to be able to build a new residence in town.



[HHH 1897]



[Hopewell 1909]

This quote from *Healthful, Historic Hopewell* describes the benefits of the town in their words: The town is well located for trade and travel, midway between New York and Philadelphia, the two major cities in the U.S., and on the main line of the Reading Railroad between those cities. Plus, it is attractive, picturesque, healthy, and its citizens are wonderful; a great place to live.

“Located as it is, midway between New York and Philadelphia, the two metropolitan centres of the United States, on the main line of the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad, [Hopewell] possesses superb advantages for trade and travel. The attractiveness of the town, the picturesqueness of its environs, the healthfulness of its climate, the social worth and well-regulated character of its citizens are qualities par excellence, combining to make the borough a most desirable place for residence.” [HHH 1897]

The second quote, from *Hopewell 1909*, sounds discordant to us today. The good news is that Hopewell is "modern in every respect," since only nine of the houses from before 1872 were still standing. So the town reportedly was wiped clean, but somehow is still historic?

“Although Hopewell possesses much of historic interest it does not have any of those disadvantages usually associated with ancient towns. In fact it is modern in every respect. Only nine of the houses erected prior to 1872 are standing today.” [Hopewell 1909]

However, this is not quite so terrible as it seems. For one, looking back to the 1850 map, there were only around nine buildings in town to begin with. In addition, not all of the older buildings were particularly historic. For example, the Harry Cox barber shop on Seminary Avenue was basically a one-room single-story shack with no foundation, and was gone in less than 50 years. We know of at least several other similar small buildings from around 1900.

So the choice of 1872 as the pivot date in this quote makes sense, since that was the time that the people in town knew that the train was coming, knew the town was growing, and started building larger, more permanent structures, which are the ones we still know today.

Hopewell 1850s - 1870s – Farmsteads to Railroads

The first period in the growth of Hopewell is from the 1850s to the 1870s, or from the farmsteads to the arrival of the railroads.

Developments

- Community: Churches, Public School, Newspaper, Fire Co.
- Services: Telegraph, Telephone, Railroads
- Industrial: Model Ave. – Saw & Feed Mill

Timeline

- 1856 – Hopewell Academy – First public school (75 W Broad)
- c1865 – Hopewell Female Seminary (Boggs) (23 E Broad)
- 1870s – Hopewell House (Phillips) (48 W Broad & Mercer)
- 1872 – Calvary Baptist Church (3 E Broad)
- 1874 – Mercer & Somerset Railroad (M&S) (Model at Mercer)
- 1874 – Hopewell Herald Newspaper (47 W Broad)
- 1874 – Finney and Fetter Saw & Feed Mill (Model & Louellen)
- 1875 – Western Union Telegraph Co
- 1876 – Delaware & Bound Brook RR (D&BB) (2 Railroad Place)
- 1877 – Hopewell Hook & Ladder fire co (S Greenwood)
- 1877 – St. Alphonsus Church (54 E Prospect & Princeton)
- 1877 – Presbyterian Church / Chapel (79 W Broad)



Hopewell Academy
Public School (1856)
75 W Broad
[Hw Grammar Sch 1926]



Calvary Baptist Church (1872)
3 E Broad [Hw 75th 1966]

In terms of community institutions, this period saw the expansion of churches, as additional denominations beyond the Old School Baptist Church funded the construction of church buildings, first adding the Calvary Baptist Church (1872), and then St. Alphonsus Church (1877) and the Presbyterian Church (1877).

This period saw arguably the first of what we would call a public school as the local government took on funding education - the Hopewell Academy on West Broad at Louellen (1856). This building later became the Grand Army of the Republic (G.A.R.) Hall, from c. 1900 to c. 1920.

The people of Hopewell also saw the need for a local fire company, but this was not yet a function that local government could take on. So the community raised money for equipment and volunteered to staff the Hopewell Hook & Ladder Company in 1877, the first of three such local fire companies.

And the Hopewell Herald newspaper was established in 1874, which not only helped bring the community together, but still provides tremendous help to us in understanding the past.

The new services in this period helped to open up the town to the larger world, through telegraph and railroad service in the 1870s and then telephone communication in 1899.



Original Saw Mill (1874)
[Fowler 1887]

Saw & Feed Mill (1874 - 1927)

The first step in the industrialization of Hopewell was the construction of Finney & Fetter Saw & Feed Mill in 1874. This was an export business, processing hardwood lumber from the Sourland ridge. And it was externally funded, by John Finney and A. J. Fetter. Finney had a thriving saw mill business in Lambertville, and Fetter was the partner who lived in town and ran the Hopewell operation.



Original Mill Buildings [Fowler 1887]

The saw mill was built in 1874, the same year that the Mercer & Somerset Railroad started service, and located along the M&S tracks at the west end of Model Avenue at the triangular corner with Louellen Street, a block down from the M&S railroad station. The buildings are long gone, and the corner is now the site of the Hopewell Borough Pump House.

The saw mill had some 20 employees. It produced car, wagon, and ship timber, and also manufactured products including wagon wheel components and ax handles. It had an international business selling Hopewell products; the story is the Czar of Russia had a carriage made with Hopewell lumber. Plus, the building also was a grain mill, so they were grinding grain as well.

We have a drawing of the first mill thanks to the 1887 Fowler map, but this burned down and replaced in 1895. The photo shows the second mill building, starting work on a huge tree trunk that was moved up the ramp to the second floor entrance, ready to run a gauntlet of saws to become finished lumber and parts by the other end.



Second Mill [Elaine Zeltner, 1895+]

The saw mill operated under Finny & Fetter until 1919, when it was bought out by R. Scott Kise, who ran it until c. 1927. The building was then basically unused until it was demolished in 1945. The Kise family had previously operated its own saw mill up the hill north of Hopewell on the family farm.

The obvious question is how to get trees down to the mill from the Sourland Mountain in 1870. The answer is that they were dragged by horses or mules. So the mill had its own team of 16 mules for that purpose. Of course this further damaged the roads, which were dirt roads that were also chewed up from the weather and wagon wheels. So Fetter also used the mules to drag a scraper to flatten down the roads to make them more passable.

The mill operated about 50 years, and then eventually was closed and demolished, and there is no evidence of it left in the landscape. But it was the first industrial site in Hopewell, and it demonstrated the potential of industrial sites in Hopewell by the railroad tracks.

Hopewell 1880s - 1890s – Developing Town

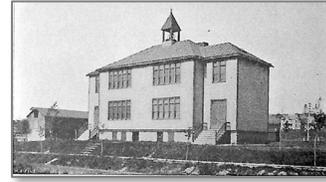
The next period, the 1880s to the 1890s, was major period in the development of the town, particularly industrial development along the railroad, on Model Avenue and extending down Railroad Place.

Developments

- **Community:** Churches, Public Schools, Fire Co., National Bank
- **Services:** Private Water [Finney & Fetter]
- **Industrial:** Model Ave. – Creamery, Coal/Lumber
Railroad Place – Coal/Lumber, Improve Assoc.,
Chocolate Factory, Canning Co.

Timeline

- 1885 – Union Fire Co. (Mercer)
- 1887 – Hopewell Creamery opens (56 Model)
- 1888 – Model Ave. (Lincoln) School (12-18 Model)
- 1889/1892 – A. S. Golden Lumber (Van Doren) (24 Model)
- 1890 – Hopewell National Bank (13 E Broad)
- 1890 – Blackwell & Hill (JB Hill) Coal / Lumber (43 Railroad)
- 1891 – Hopewell Borough incorporated, 178 male voters
- 1891 – Hernig & Northrup Creamery (56 Model)
- 1892 – Private Hopewell Water Co
- 1892 – Hopewell Improvement Association (Railroad Pl)
- 1892 – Shirt / Chocolate Factory (37-41 Railroad)
- 1892 – Hopewell Canning Co / Tomato Fact (2 Somerset)
- 1897 – Second Calvary Baptist Church (First & Maple)
- 1897 – Hopewell Methodist Church (20 Blackwell)
- 1898 – St. Michaels Orphanage (130 Hopewell-Princeton)
- 1899 – Hopewell Telephone Company starts service



Model Ave. School (1889)
12-14 Model [HHH 1897]



Hopewell Natl. Bank (1890)
13 E. Broad [HHH 1897]



St. Michaels (1898) [pc 1907]

From a community point of view, this period brought more churches and more investments in the public schools, with the Model Avenue (Lincoln) School, which was later expanded with multiple wings. And there was a second fire company - the original one was not working out well, so the people of Hopewell raised funds again to buy more equipment, and volunteered again.

A town also needs local banks to loan money for housing and for businesses. So Hopewell privately started Savings and Loans, and also started the Hopewell National Bank, a federally chartered national bank that issued its own United States currency.

From a services view, the big news in this period was the private water company. The need was obvious - residents need reliable water for cleanliness and health, businesses need water for manufacturing, and the fire companies need water to put out fires. But local borough government was not prepared to start a water company. So again, the people of Hopewell, and the boosters of Hopewell, invested their time, energy, effort, and money and create a private water company and build the town water system, because it just had to be done. Similarly, a private Hopewell Telephone Company started service in 1899.

Fetter from the sawmill was one of those people who made the water company happen. He understood the need, since the first sawmill had burnt down. Think about what you do in 1880 when there's a fire. You run somewhere to ring a bell, and the volunteers run to the firehouse, and then somehow somebody has to tell them where the fire is. But by the time they get to the fire, the building is already consumed in flames. Now they need some water, but where do you find large quantities of water? If you are lucky, there is a pond or well nearby, and can you start manually pumping water.

So the goal of a fire company in that period was not to put out the fire and save the building; the goal was to keep the town of Hopewell from burning down. There were two major fires at Broad and Greenwood in this period that that wiped out the entire corners of the intersection. When a building catches on fire it is going to be lost, and all you can do is to try to save the rest of the street.

But when Fetter's second saw mill caught on fire there was a water company, and a reliable water supply with water pressure, and so the fire company was able to put out the fire. The newspaper articles about this event were overwhelmed with how incredible this was to finally be able to put out a fire and save a building, thanks to the private investment in the water company.

Creamery (1887/1893 - 1923)

The next industrial site along Model Avenue was the creamery, which also is gone. This building was halfway down Model, near Mercer Street, where the auto repair shop is now.

In the map, the building is on the left, by the train tracks, with a large pond by the road which was used to cut ice to keep the milk cool.

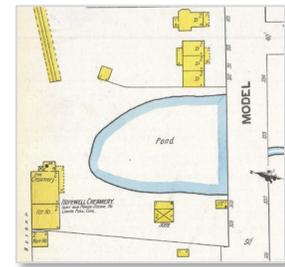
Throughout this region, creameries were established in towns to process the milk from dairy farmers and get it to market. The farmers milked their cows twice a day, collecting a highly perishable product that needed to be for sale on the street within a couple days. So they needed a central resource to aggregate the milk, process it, and then move it in bulk to the end market to sell.

A creamery performs several operations. It separates milk and cream, and it might also churn butter, but the key need was to preserve the milk by keeping it cold. In the map, the top of the building is labelled as the creamery, and the bottom as the ice house.

The people of Hopewell needed a creamery, and tried to create one in 1881, but failed when they could not raise the necessary funding. Around 1887, the creamery was started with external funding by Naughtright and Northrup, but we have little information about them. In 1893, the creamery was taken over by Hernig and Northrup. Like the sawmill, there were two partners: Hernig was a major dairy distributor in Philadelphia who had multiple creameries, and Northrup stayed in Hopewell and ran the business here.

The creamery ran about 30 years here in Hopewell. During this period the creamery processed around 5000 pounds of milk a day, supplied by around 100 farms. The building also was continually updated with new equipment, adding pasteurization equipment and more modern refrigeration.

In 1920, the creamery was taken over by the Castanea Dairy Company of Trenton, and the business was then shut down by 1925. The pond was used intermittently for public recreation over the next decades, including swimming, fishing, and ice skating, but was filled in by the end of 1949. The creamery building later was demolished.



Creamery & pond
[Sanborn 1902]

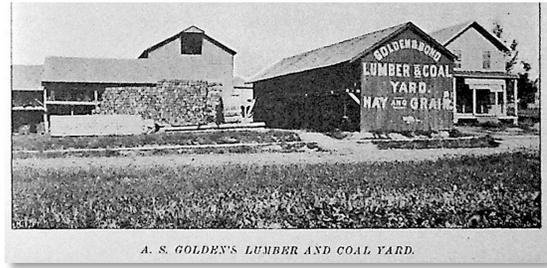


The Creamery [HHH 1897]

Golden / Van Doren Lumber Yard (1889/1892 - 2005)

Hopewell also had two major and long-lived lumber yards develop during the late 1800s. Lumber yards are a totally different kind of business, an import business, bringing large quantities of products into Hopewell and storing them and selling them.

In recent memory, Hopewell had both the Van Doren Lumber Yard on Model Avenue, and the J. B. Hill Lumber Yard on Railroad Place, but both had their roots back to the late 1800. Both lumber yards sold similar products, including coal for heating, agricultural supplies for farmers, and building supplies in general. Both were run by local families in Hopewell, with multiple generations, for over a century.



Golden & Bond Lumber Yard [HHH 1897]

Both lumber yards started small and then expanded. The Golden / Van Doren Lumber Yard on Model Avenue started with a hay press in 1889. In 1892, A. S. Golden bought the property and expanded into a full service business. The photo shows multiple lumber sheds on the left towards the street, and there was a railroad siding at the back right with storage buildings for fertilizer, hay & grain storage, and coal.

After Golden died, the business was bought by J. C. Van Doren, and then passed to his sons Bob and George Van Doren, who are still remembered today. The site is now JMAT Supply, and the owners have received permission for redevelopment of the property with residential townhouses.

J. B. Hill Lumber Yard (1875/1890 - 2005)

The other lumber yard was the J. B. Hill Lumber Yard on Railroad Place at Hamilton Avenue, with a similar story with multiple generations of local owners. The area started as a coal yard along the railroad siding by 1875. By 1890, David Blackwell had established a coal and hay and feed business, which also included a hay press.

Blackwell then partnered with Joseph B. Hill, and by 1897 they had established a lumber yard at the familiar location across the street. By 1904, Blackwell had retired from the business, and it then continued as J. B. Hill, eventually becoming J. B. Hill and Sons by 1938, with the second and then third generation of Hills.



Blackwell & Hill, & Lumber Yard [HHH 1897]

J. B. Hill also added a fuel oil business in 1934, which was sold off to Valley Oil in 1970. Around 1970, the company converted into a retail hardware store, as Sentry Hardware. J. B. Hill closed on 2005, after operating for some 115 years. Hill sold the property to the current owner, Morehouse Engineering, which has renovated the offices and the property.

Like other local entrepreneurs, Joseph B. Hill was involved in numerous other activities to support the town and the local economy. In addition to running his own business, he served as the third president of the Hopewell Canning Company from 1914 to c. 1938. He also was president of the Hopewell Building & Loan Association from 1919 to 1935, where he was a director for 21 years, serving without compensation.

Tomato Canning Factory (1892 - 1938/1951)

What we now call the Tomato Factory also was started in the early 1890s, at the end of Railroad Place on Somerset Street. This is a story like the creamery, with a business in town serving as an intermediary to process farm products and get them to market. Tomatoes are a perishable product, and piling them in a horse-drawn wagon and bumping over dirt roads all the way to Trenton or Philadelphia just was not feasible. So what was needed in Hopewell, as was done all over region, was a cannery to turn highly perishable tomatoes into a non-perishable canned product.

In Hopewell, this was a locally funded effort, a combination of local investors and farmers. As a result, the Hopewell Valley Canning Company was a public shareholder company, and, helpfully for us, the newspapers recorded extensive details on the finances and how they ran this business. The tomato cannery then had a 60 year run in Hopewell.

The cannery business was founded, launched, and operational in an amazingly short time. In March 1892, they had an organizational meeting and decided to create a canning company. They did site visits to different canning companies and figured out how they were going to operate the business. By April, they had raised the needed funding, with 60 shareholders, including both farmers and investors.

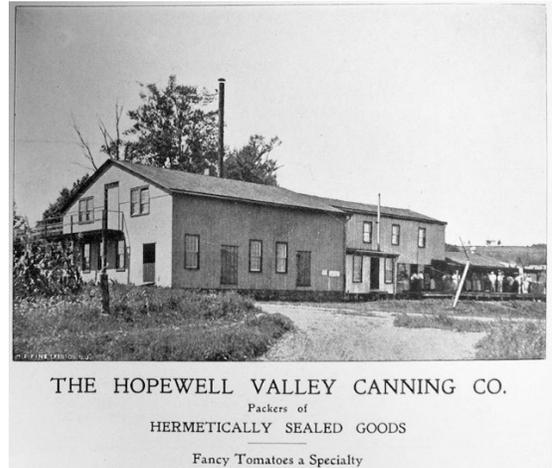
They incorporated the company, selected the site, and hired an architect. In May, they hired the builder and started construction. In June and July, they installed all the heavy equipment and got the plant running. So then in August and September of the same year they packed 215,000 quart cans of tomatoes, some 570 tons of product.

Even more, the canning business is only operational when the tomato crop is ripe, which means the business only runs for about two months, August and September. There's not much margin for error, or for unexpected shutdowns, and the whole operation is dependent on a single crop, which can be decimated by a bad spring or an early frost.

So early each year, the cannery signed contracts with local farmers for some 100 acres of tomato crops to be delivered that summer. On a good day they could pack 10,000 cans a day. So on that one day they needed 10,000 empty cans in storage, some 50,000 tomatoes coming in to pack in those cans, and then 10,000 full cans of tomatoes stored for shipment.

The cannery was a great boost to Hopewell. It was obviously critical for local farmers. And it offered good summertime jobs. In the 1900s, it employed approximately sixty-five women, forty peelers and twenty-five packers.

The canning business was sold to a succession of external companies in 1938, and continued to operate through 1951. In 1962, the building became the current Tomato Factory Antiques Center.

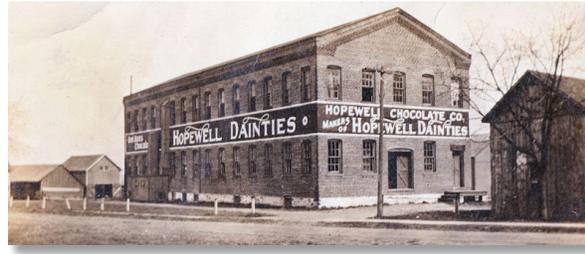


Hopewell Canning Co. [HHH 1897]

Shirt / Chocolate Factory (1892 - 1930)

Hopewell had import business with the lumber yards, and businesses supporting farmers with the sawmill, the creamery, and the tomato factory. But another type of business that could bring investment and jobs was manufacturing.

The boosters of Hopewell wanted to attract businesses that would provide jobs, and so they formed the Hopewell Improvement Association in 1892 to provide incentives to attract external businesses.



Hopewell Chocolate Co., 1910 [S. Cohen]

In order to create what we know as the Chocolate Factory on Railroad Place, the Improvement Association bought the land and built the building in order to lease it to the Hopewell Shirt Factory 1892. This did provide jobs; on the top floor of the building alone the shirt factory had 100 sewing machines with 100 operators.

The shirt factory left after 10 years, and was replaced by the Belle Mead Sweets Company in 1903. After it left in 1905, the building was used briefly by the Fraley Vibrator Company, which we do not know much about.

Then in 1909 the people of Hopewell banded together again to form their own local business to use the building, and incorporated the Hopewell Chocolate Company, which manufactured the Hopewell Dainties brand of chocolates. That business ran for 20 some years until 1930, through World War I, but then running into the Great Depression. The building was then used intermittently for businesses, and then was converged to fully residential use.

So consider the level of investment these people were making in the town. They invested in the Chocolate Company, and served on its board. But the Chocolate Company was leasing from the Improvement Association, which was funded and run by people from the same pool of Hopewell investors. And the Improvement Association had a mortgage from the Hopewell National Bank, which again was funded and run by people from the same local pool of investors. So with just this one business, the people of Hopewell were three levels deep in investing and working to help their town develop and grow.

Hopewell 1900s - 1920s – Community

The last period is the early 1900s, which saw the completion and consolidation of trends that were developing earlier, as highlighted by the attention to Hopewell from the Lindbergh kidnapping in 1932.

Developments

- Community: Schools, Public Library, Museum, Hw Fire Dept.
- Services: Gas Lighting, Electric, Public Water, Trolley
- Industrial: Railroad Place / Somerset St. – Smith/Rockwell

Timeline

- 1900 – Hopewell Factory & Inducement Co. (Somerset)
- 1902 – Smith Novelty (Rockwell) (Somerset)
- 1902 – Mrs. Gould's Store – Ewing, Jimmy, Chubby (1 Railroad)
- 1903 – Hopewell Gas Co – Acetylene lights vs kerosene
- 1904 – Electric lights in Hopewell
- 1904 – Trolley service to Pennington and Trenton
- 1907 – Borough takes over Water Company
- 1910 – Hopewell High School (4–6 Columbia)
- 1911 – Hopewell Fire Department (15 Seminary)
- 1914 – Hopewell Free Public Library (64 W Broad)
- 1915 – New Hopewell Presbyterian Church (79 W Broad)
- 1924 – Hopewell Museum (28 E Broad)
- 1926 – Hopewell Elementary School (35 Princeton)
- 1932 – Lindbergh kidnapping



Hopewell High School (1910)
4-6 Columbia [pc]



Hopewell Fire Dept (1911)
Fire House / 15 Seminary Ave.
[HVHS 1986]



Hopewell Public Library (1914)
Hopewell Museum (1924)
28 E Broad [Hw 1909]

From a community view, there was more investment in schools, including a separate Hopewell High School, which became Borough Hall and now is the Fire Department building. This period also saw the creation of the Hopewell Public Library and the Hopewell Museum, thanks to local fundraising and volunteers. Similarly, the two existing fire departments were competing with each other, and the town still needed something better, but the borough still was not ready to get into that business. So the people of Hopewell came together and started a third fire company, the Hopewell Fire Department. There were actually three competing fire companies for a period, but they eventually consolidated and the borough did eventually take it over.

From a services point of view, the town was filling the amenities that we expect today, with gas lighting, so the streets are lit at night, and then wiring for electricity. The private water company also was bought by the borough to start our public water system. And the trolley arrived as well, all in the early 1900s.

Smith / Rockwell / Kooltronic (1900 - 1974/1999)

The last major step in the industrialization of Hopewell is what we know as the Rockwell / Kooltronic building. After Model Avenue had filled in by the early 1890s, and Railroad Place had filled in in the later 1890s, the next section of open space was along what we call Somerset Street.



Smith Factory 1920s/30s [THM]

Somerset was empty because the Mercer & Somerset Railroad line had run through there, and after the tracks were removed the area had been used as a brickyard in the 1890s. Again, local investors stepped up and formed the Factory & Inducement Company to buy the Somerset Street property, and offer lots for free and other inducements for businesses to come to Hopewell.

This effort did not seem to be a tremendous success. We know of a couple small businesses that were there for a decade or two, including an ice cream factory. There also was a spool and bobbins factory that started there, and then burnt down the same year.

But they also attracted an individual entrepreneur, Hugh A. Smith, who arrived in town in 1890 and started a small machine shop up Somerset. That inauspicious start eventually grew into the Rockwell plant, and expanded into a facility that provided 400 jobs and operated in Hopewell until 1974.

Within three years after his arrival, Smith built a factory building for his Smith Novelty Company, located in what is now the parking lot across the street from the Rockwell complex, and by 1915 he was employing 40 people as the H.A. Smith Manufacturing Company.

In 1927, Smith built his first factory building on Somerset, which was the beginning of what we know as the Rockwell facility, and is still part of that complex after all the expansions. Smith sold the business, and the parent company eventually became Rockwell International, which kept expanding the plant. After Rockwell left in 1974, Kooltronic then operated at the site until 1999.



Rockwell Complex 1962 [THM]

This property had 100 year run, providing up to 400 jobs in Hopewell, thanks to the Inducement Company attracting this one person.

The people of Hopewell worked diligently to attract people to the town, and they gave back as well. For example, Hugh A. Smith was twice elected mayor of Hopewell, and he donated the building that is now the Museum to the town. Later, Herbert Rockwell came to town to run the Rockwell business, and he gave back over and over to Hopewell, sponsoring events, and giving fire engines to the fire company. He also started a Rockwell fire company so that his employees were ready help to fight fires, at the plant and also around the town.

Legacy

Train Station as Community Center (1970s)

The Hopewell train station is one obvious legacy of the railroad coming to town. One key difference between the Hopewell train station and, for example, Pennington and other places, is that the train station is part of the core of the town. As a result, there was development of small businesses and housing along Railroad Place because the train station was here, in addition to the industrial development. So this was a busy area, and was not separate from the town.

In Pennington, the train station is blocks from the center of town and so did not have that same kind of development around it. In addition, the two railroad lines did not run next to each other thorough Pennington - the M&S train station was across Route 31 by the Library, so the two train stations did not jointly encourage development as with Model Avenue and Railroad Place in Hopewell.

We know about the end of the train service in our area because of information shared by the family of the last station master in Hopewell, Mike Denshaw. His daughter came to the station as a child, roller skated around in the waiting room, and saw how her dad interacted with the people of the town. The Denshaw family also lived in the Pennington train station, so they had a unique perspective on the stations and service.

She reports that the train station was a community center in Hopewell because it was part of this town:

"Hopewell was a busier station, not necessarily just by passenger count, but because of the number of neighbors and visitors who stopped by every day. Some regulars just came to talk with dad and exchange news. ... Other frequent guests included staff from the Hopewell Valley News [then across the street], and the neighboring deli, the mail carrier, and quite a few railroad buffs and tradespeople of all kinds." The businesses along Railroad Place included food stores, a shoe store, a taxi business, a livery which later turned into auto repair, and even the post office for a while."



Hopewell Stationmaster
Mike Denshaw
[Ranulph Bye 1973]

Corner Store / Chubby's (1890 -)

Finally, the building that encapsulates this story is what was known as the Corner Store, on Railroad Place at North Greenwood Avenue. Now Chubby's, the store was located on the corner because of the train station, and all the commuters passing through. It started as a sundries kind of store for commuters, but also serving the neighborhood, because there was residential housing here as well on both sides of the tracks.



M. L. Von Steeg's Store
(1913 - 1925) [J. Klett]

We have records going back to 1890 of the building as a store. In the early 1900s it was Mrs. John Gould's store, and then Mrs. M. L. Von Steig's store,

selling confectionary and sundries. The photo shows Mrs. Von Steig's store in the first part of the 1900s, where the building was a duplex, and the store was only the front of one side of the building.

Starting in 1925 the building was Ewing's Corner Store, as the corner store name became established for a long period of time. Walter Ewing started a luncheonette there too, so the store was starting to move from a commuter focused business to a town focused business, becoming a town center.

Then in the 1950s and 60s it was Jimmy's Corner Store, for Jim and Marie ("Red") Hall, with a full fountain service. One way to measure the traffic was from the sale of newspapers. Early in the morning the train would pass through and throw off bundles of newspapers. People today remember working there for Jimmy as kids, stacking newspapers, assembling them from sections, and laying out huge rows of newspapers for the commuters every day. And Sunday brought the Sunday paper, not for commuters, for all the local people.

In the 1970s, as the railroad service was declining, the building was Kip's [Slobiski] Corner Store and Cliff's [Skubas] Corner Store. The Skubas expanded the back of the building to add a second-floor addition as a separate apartment.

Then in 1979 the building became Rose & Chubby's, for Rose Sponholtz and Carol ("Chubby") Montello. As passenger railroad service ended on 1982, the business became a luncheonette, and was no longer a commuter sundries store. Finally, in 2019 the building was reopened as Aunt Chubby's Luncheonette, combining the entire frontage along Railroad Place as dining space.

With a history of some 130 years, the building continues as local fixture, where people meet and chat, early morning tradespeople pick up coffee, kids hang out, and families and friends enjoy a meal.

Coming full circle, this building also continues in the tradition of giving back to Hopewell. Jim Hall served in World War II, receiving multiple distinguished service awards including two Purple Hearts. He also served Hopewell for three terms on the Borough Council, and through 70 years of activity and leadership with the American Legion.

And now Chubby's is organized as a non-profit, and started the Chubby's Project, which manages a food pantry and runs a free lunch program delivering hot meals and groceries to neighbors in need.

Hopewell Heritage

We know quite a lot about how the people of Hopewell worked to improve their town in the late 1800s and early 1900s, encouraged by the arrival of railroad service. We see their actions in the newspapers, and even have their words in the materials that they prepared to promote their town.

And we see and have their legacy with us today, in multiple ways. The historic streetscape of Hopewell is based on buildings from this time, built by people who came to town and constructed houses and businesses to last. For example, the Tomato Factory looks like a rather non-descript building that now houses an antique mall, but if you go inside and look around you will see the pillars and all the structure that make the building so strong to process tens of thousands of cans.

We also see their legacy in our local institutions, including the churches, the Library, the Museum, the Fire Department, and the Water Department. Again and again it was the people of the town raising money, building structures, investing their time - and volunteering to make these things happen. This commitment is still happening here today, and this legacy of community service continues to make Hopewell a better place.

History Briefs

See the Hopewell Valley History Project for these and other History Brief reports on specific organizations, properties, and businesses discussed in this report. These include additional detail and references on the chronologies.

See <https://hopewellhistoryproject.org/hopewell-boro-history-briefs/>

Hopewell Railroads Briefs

- The Hopewell and Pennington Train Stations (1876)
- Hopewell Valley Railroad Lines (1870s)

Local Organizations Briefs

- The Hopewell Public Library (1914)
- Hopewell Boro Fire Companies (1877)
- Hopewell Boro Veterans Organizations: American Legion and G.A.R (1887)
- Hopewell Presbyterian Church - West Broad & Louellen (1877)
- Second Calvary Baptist Church - 69 Columbia (1959)

Model Avenue Briefs

- Golden / Van Doren Lumberyard -24 Model (1892)
- Hopewell Creamery - 56-58 Model (c1887)
- Fetter Saw Mill - 93 Model (1874)

Railroad Place Briefs

- Rose & Chubby's - 1-3 Railroad (c1890s)
- Grain & Feed / FCA - 52/56 Railroad (c1875)
- Chocolate Factory - 37-41 Railroad (1892)
- J. B. Hill & Sons - 43 Railroad (c1875)
- Tomato Factory - 2 Somerset (1892)
- Smith / Rockwell / Kooltronic - 57 Hamilton (1900)
- Rockwell Fire Brigade - 8 Somerset (c1927)
- Brickyard / Rockwell - Somerset Street (1890)

General 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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- [TET] - Trenton Evening Times newspaper - genealogybank.com (\$)
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 - <https://records.mercercounty.org>
- [DB] - Mercer County Deed Books (digitized images, index 1838-1919, deeds to 1887)
 - <https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/219073>

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- FamilySearch - Family historical records - <https://www.familysearch.org/search/>
- Ancestry.com - Family history records (\$) - <https://www.ancestry.com/>