

The Cork Factory

By Tom Riley



The history of the site at 9 Main Street in Butler, which became the Bloomingdale Manufacturing Company in 1939, can be traced back to before the Civil War. Located next to Stonehouse (Kikeout) Brook where it joins the Pequannock River, the mill could clearly be seen from the bridge crossing from Main Street, Bloomingdale to Main Street, Butler. Originally, a stone building intended as a woolen mill was erected on the site. It is said that sick and wounded Union Army soldiers were cared for there. When the woolen mill failed to materialize, the building was equipped as a grist mill.

After the war, the mill was converted to make dental rubber and rubber hoses by Mr. J. W. Robinson. Without much success making those products, Mr. Robinson turned his attention to the rubber reclaiming business. Robinson's Soft Rubber Works was a small operation performing almost all of the scrap rubber cracking, grinding, and pulverizing by hand. The grist mill machinery that was used to clean grain was converted to clean the pulverized rubber.

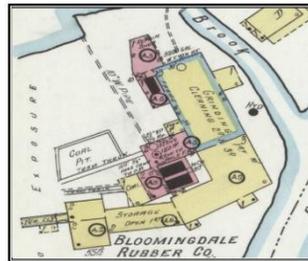
About 1880, the mill was enlarged, a raceway constructed, and water wheels and rubber processing machinery installed. The operation remained small and the process was slow and tedious. The mill's output remained limited because most of the work was still done by hand.

Upon the death of Mr. Robinson in 1885, the plant was sold to Mr. M. J. Dewey, who operated it until late 1889. It was then purchased by G. A. Hobart, who created the Bloomingdale Soft Rubber Company. Butler at the time was referred to as West Bloomingdale. About this time, the City of Newark constructed its reservoirs in West Milford and greatly restricted the flow of water to the mills downstream. The installation of a steam engine at the plant greatly improved the methods of manufacture and business increased.



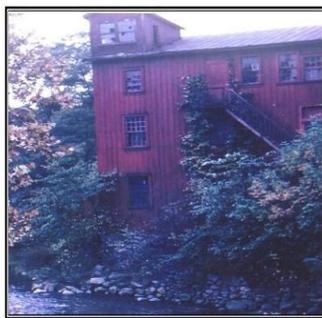
The mill ran twenty-four hours a day producing carriage cloth, rubber for waterproofing raincoats, and insulation. Twenty tons of finely ground blended scrap rubber was shipped monthly to Edinburgh, Scotland. Business declined in February 1907 when a serious panic hit American industry. Production ground to a standstill and, within two months, the plant was closed.

While the factory was closed, the mechanical rubber reclaiming process gave way to an acid process. Using the new technology, the company re-opened in 1910 as the Bloomingdale Rubber Company with George S. Mahana as president and treasurer. The company developed an automobile tube reclaiming process and later, they added a truck tire reclaiming operation. By 1915, the demand for the company's products superseded the capacity of the Butler plant. A new mill was established in Chester, Pennsylvania and, for a period of time, the company operated both factories. The older Butler plant was eventually closed and the building remained vacant from shortly after 1915 until 1939.



Joseph S. Piluso bought the old factory and, on June 15, 1939, organized the Bloomingdale Manufacturing Company (aka Cork Factory). Mr. Piluso learned the cork business from his father, Sebastian, who operated a cork plant in Jersey City, New Jersey. Starting out with six employees, the number quickly grew to thirty as the business expanded. The company's main products were granulated cork for insulation, bottle cap liners, gasket material, floats for fishing nets, and ring life preservers. Later, life jackets were also produced. The scarcity of material often limited production because bales of raw cork had to be imported from Spain and Portugal.

In the mid 1950's, Al Kochka purchased the property and, in 1959, had the old factory torn down. His plan for a trucking terminal and garage on the site never materialized.



Sources: *Butler in Story and Pictures 1901-2001*, *Sanborn Insurance Maps 1920*, *Paterson Morning Call July 15, 1939*, *Herald News Oct. 1, 1959*, *Bits of History, Morris County, July 14, 2015*, *North Jersey.com Aug. 28 2018*

