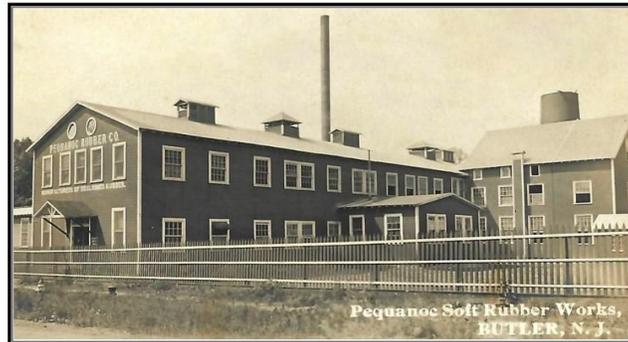


# Pequanoc Rubber Company

By Tom Riley



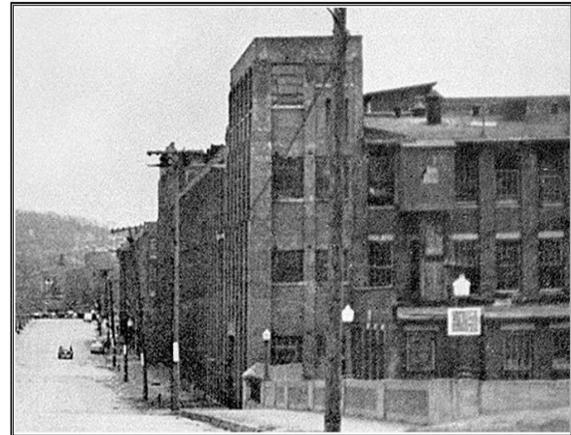
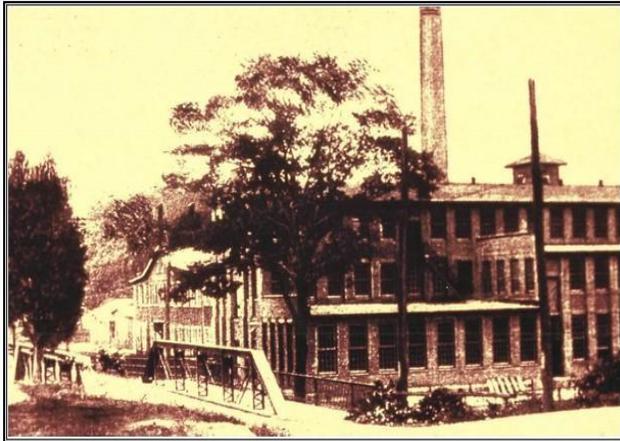
The story of the Pequanoc Rubber Company began when Joseph F. McLean resigned his position as Assistant Plant Supervisor at the American Hard Rubber Company and set out on his own to create a new business. His plan was to build a factory that reclaimed used rubber and recycled it into new products. The Chapman-McLean Company became the Pequanoc Rubber Company when it was incorporated on June 8, 1901. Starting out in a small factory with 35 workers producing two tons of reclaimed rubber daily, the business grew into a large 360,000 sq. ft. plant with 400 employees processing 112 tons daily.

Located on upper Main Street next to the American Hard Rubber plant between the Railroad Station and the river, its 225-foot brick smokestack was a local landmark. Over a fifty year period, the Pequanoc Rubber Company grew into one of the world's largest rubber reclaiming factories.

In 1939, the company was producing two-and-a-half to three million pounds of reclaimed rubber per month from approximately six million pounds of scrap rubber like discarded automobile tires. They were supplying the raw material to other companies manufacturing insulated wire, rubber footwear, hard rubber, rubber auto parts, rubber toys, mud flaps, bicycle grips and pedals, and many other products in which reclaimed rubber was a compounding ingredient. Over 50 grades of reclaimed rubber were produced including well-known grades like Ajax, Aurora, Red Star, and Imperial. The output of the plant was shipped to all parts of the United States, Central and South America, and before World War II, to many European countries.

The original factory used the Pequannock River for power but, by 1941, the plant was using 3,000,000 kilowatt-hours of electricity monthly to drive over 100 heavy-duty rubber milling machines. Pequanoc Rubber also had one of the largest shredding machines in the industry. It could shred 7,000,000 pounds of scrap rubber per month. For cooling the milling machines and washing the rubber, 1,800 gallons of water per minute was necessary. The four boilers of its power plant produced 1,457,000 lbs. of steam for more than two dozen 6 x 25 ft. devulcanizers and drying machines. Pequanoc Rubber's power plant not only provided steam to heat its own factory, but also for the American Hard Rubber Company next door and the Butler Bank.

During World War II, when practically all the crude rubber producing areas were in enemy hands, skilled rubber compounders found that reclaimed rubber could be successfully substituted for crude rubber without adversely affecting the quality of the finished product. More than once, Mr. McLean and other rubber reclaiming executives were summoned to Washington D.C. and reminded how crucial their industry was to the war effort. It was the abundance of reclaimed rubber, available at a competitively low price, that minimized the effect any foreign stranglehold might have had on American industry.



At midnight on February 25, 1957, disaster struck the Butler plant. A fire broke out in one of the dryers used to dry the rubber after it had gone through a washing process. The fire spread quickly, finding fuel in the rubber dust that coated the walls of the building and in the piles of material waiting to be processed. By the end of the next day, the three story high, three block long factory was nothing but rubble. It was a \$13 million dollar loss; 400 jobs went up in smoke, and it took years for the town to recover. The factory was never rebuilt. (For more information about the Pequanon Soft Rubber Company Fire, see the article in *Stories About Butler*.)



Sources: *Butler in Story and Pictures 1901-2001*, *India Rubber World* Oct. 1, 1941, *Paterson Morning Call* May 27, 1939, *Paterson Morning Call* Dec. 23, 1941, *Paterson Morning Call* July 10, 1944, *Paterson Evening News* Mar. 5, 1957, *Suburban Trends* Feb. 7, 2001

