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Lancaster County, PA

George Brown's Sons business started as one of six cotton mills in Lancaster County, and the only known cotton mill in Mount Joy. George Brown's Sons manufactured cottonades, flannels, and cotton worsteds, with the worsteds being identified as a superior type, much used in men's slacks and trousers. The product commended itself to wholesale dealers and clothing manufacturers. George Brown, I was born in 1831 in Yorkshire, England, which was then the center of the world's woolen industry. He was the son of Benjamin Brown, who was purported to have "operated the first power carding machine ever constructed", and grew up in a family of innovators. Coming to America in 1859 with his family, who included the eldest two of his six sons, the senior Brown was employed in the cotton industry in both Trenton and Philadelphia until he made the decision to enter business on his own account. It is of interest that he should have located in Mount Joy. He expanded his business to Mount Joy from Philadelphia in 1883, beginning operations with twelve looms in a rented building, and rapidly expanded.

By 1889, Brown owned one building, presumably Building #1, now known as Mill #2, and in 1890 bought Buildings A, B, C, and also possibly G, now known as Mill #1. Brown was succeeded in ownership in 1891 by his six sons, for whom the company was named (and which name was used when the concern was incorporated in 1919). Buildings E, D, and F were added after 1916. The first floor of Buildings A, D, and E contained the looms, while the necessary carding and spinning machinery were located on the second floor. Building B contained a weave room, machine shop, and dynamo on the first floor, and a picker department and carding room for the preparation of stock on the second floor. Building C was used as the dye house. Building G housed the executive offices and administrative areas. Building H's first floor contained napping machines, rotary hot presses, shears, and measuring and rolling machines, all for finishing, as well as the shipping department. The second floor was used for beaming and twisting.

Unlike the mills of Lancaster city, which were promoted by established entrepreneurs to take advantage of an existing pool of labor, or the Yorkshire mills of Brown's childhood that were located adjacent to the sources of water power, it is significant that the sole resource justifying the location of George Brown's initial venture seems to have been the closely situated branch of the Pennsylvania Railroad. Even the water needed in the textile processes was in short supply in the borough, so the factory had it's own 50,000 gallon suction tank next to the boiler-house, presumably supplied from the creek one-quarter mile away by pump. George Brown's Sons had made apparent the fact that an enterprise of this nature, though situated at some distance from large trade centers, and far from the field of

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supply, could thrive and blossom in Lancaster County when properly managed by skilled and experienced minds.

During the period 1890 through 1917, the company continually updated equipment and increased the number of operating looms from a few dozen to over 250, while installing electric light and power and a full sprinkler system. By 1894, George Brown's Sons had 104 employees operating 126 looms on a daily basis, with every department in the plant presided over personally by one of the brothers. Yearly output had increased more than tenfold since the company's inception in 1883, when 300,000 yards of material were manufactured. Production figures from 1894 list 1,250,000 yards of finished goods, requiring 20,000 pounds of yarn which was purchased elsewhere, in addition to the annual requirement of 500,000 pounds of cotton and wool. Selling agent for the firm was Joshua I. Bailey and Company, headquartered in Philadelphia, with houses in New York and Chicago. The growth of the company proved greater than could be accommodated in the Mount Joy location, so that in 1902 a whole additional complex was purchased at Lenni Mills, located in Delaware County, Pennsylvania. It is thus likely that improvements would have been concentrated at that location for the next few years.

With the increase in demand for cotton fabrics during World War I, the portion of Chestnut Street to the east of Building C was closed in 1916, and from 1916 onward Buildings D, E, and F were constructed, more than doubling the floor area. In the matter of equipment the very latest inventions of looms, cards, mules, nappers, shears, rotary hot presses, measuring and rolling machines, twistors, etc., were being utilized throughout this time frame. George Brown's Sons provided important and continuous employment within Mount Joy in the first decades of the twentieth century, with employment rising to 140 hands working in multiple shifts by 1903, which must have at least doubled by 1919. The proprietors were also conspicuous benefactors of local schools and other charities, and prominent in leadership of the Lancaster County Manufacturers Association (of which Thomas J. Brown served as President), and the borough council and school board. A 1937 edition of the Mount Joy Progress lists 290 looms in operation, including twelve mules, sixteen cards, and the dyeing and finishing machinery, indicative of more than double the industrial capacity listed for 1894. While George Brown's Sons continued operation and survived most of the depression years, unlike many of their local competitors who did not, the firm ceased operations in 1940.

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From the beginning of settlement in Lancaster County, the textile industry played an integral part in the developing economic vitality of the area. The cotton industry in the county seems to have started in the 1840's in Lancaster city, where most of the subsequent mills were opened. Home industries such as weaving and spinning which were important to the producer oriented economy of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century were rapidly being displaced by the preeminence and availability of cheaply made and mass produced textiles. From 1850 to 1880, the number of cotton manufacturing firms in Lancaster County increased from 222 to 313, with the number of looms in operation more than doubling from 503 to 1,066. Operating spindles increased to 40,508 from 14,208 in 1850, and employment in the field almost quadrupled in this time frame, going from 390 to 1,461 workers. The largest mill enterprise in the city of Lancaster launched at this time were the Conestoga Mills, operated by John Farnum and Company of Philadelphia. These three mills on South Prince Street dominated the local cotton making industry in the county for the next 100 years. At the time George Brown founded his enterprise in Mount Joy in 1883, the Conestoga Mills were already operating 940 looms and 40,000 spindles. During World War I, the company produced 30,000 yards of heavy cotton textiles every day, dwarfing the scale of any comparable local enterprise. This was used for tenting and other purposes in the war effort, and occupied between thirty-five to forty percent of the company's production capacity. By 1922, John Farnum and Company employed 805 male and 483 female employees. This was at least four times the number employed at George Brown's Sons, which still almost certainly maintained second or third place in the county in textile manufacturing capabilities.

The trajectory of the textile making experience in Pennsylvania parallels as well as diverges from the fortunes of George Brown's Sons. By 1860, textiles had assumed a position as the second largest industry in Pennsylvania in number of workers, total establishments (693), and was third largest in capital invested and value of product. Before 1861, production in Pennsylvania had consisted of mostly woolen and cotton goods, but by 1919 the industry had diversified in the Commonwealth to embrace production of carpets, hosiery, and knot and silk goods. Between 1919 and 1939, however, the number of firms dropped to 790 from 1,342. Although the industry still maintained its position among state industries at third in value of production and number of employees, textiles were only producing forty-four percent of the goods in 1939 as had been manufactured in 1919. Cotton and woolen mills had been eclipsed by 1939 in Pennsylvania and Lancaster County by silk and knit production. Silk production was still expanding as late as 1929, after having become the largest sector of the statewide textile industry with 373 establishments in 1919.

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An example of a large silk mill in operation concurrently with Gorge Brown's Sons was the Stehli Silk Mill, founded in 1898 in Rossmere, a suburb of Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Located on the southwest corner of Martha and Marshall streets on the north side of the city of Lancaster, the structure, when completed in May of 1898, measured 45 by 307 feet. The mill was enlarged several times, and by 1925 was purported to be either the first or second largest site in the United States devoted to manufacturing broad silks. Emil J. Stehli, the company's Swiss born founder and absentee owner, resided in New York City. Stehli also operated a plant in High Point, North Carolina, which was completed by 1918, had built two throwing mills in Virginia (Waynesboro, completed in 1925 and Harrisonburg, 1920), and had also erected a weaving mill in Manheim, Pennsylvania in 1925. Between 1907 and 1924, the work force at the Stehli Mills more than tripled, rising from between 600 to 700 male and female employees to about 2,000 mill hands. Silk mills were also in prominent operation in other parts of Lancaster County at this juncture, being located in New Holland, Christiana, Ephrata, Columbia, Marietta, and Denver. While not operating to the scale of the Stehli Mill, the Columbia Silk Mill, operated by Schwarzenbach, Huber, and Company, was characterized as "large", and a mill in New Holland, operated by Storb, Snader, and Company was equally as productive, each of these mills producing one million dollars worth of silk annually in 1922. The Westerhoff Brothers Mills at Ephrata and Denver were also giving employment to several hundred mill hands in the mid-1920's.

A glimpse into the day to day operations at the Stehli Silk Mills was provided by Richard Cullen Rath, who in 1991 detailed a strike instigated by the Industrial Workers of the World ("Wobblies") at the site in 1907. Although the strike was of limited duration and ultimately proved ineffectual, the proceedings do provide a nice contrast between managerial techniques found at the Stehli site in comparison to the "family-style" operation at George Brown's Sons. On November 4, 1907, between 300 and 400 male and female weavers struck at the Stehli Mills, demanding higher wages, better working conditions, and the reinstatement of thirty-five workers who had been fired by Emil Stehli as union agitators. Along with the plant's superintendent, Jacob Schneebeli, Stehli was able to break the strike by December 2, 1907. According to Rath, several factors conspired against the IWW-backed union at Stehli, who was seeking "a straight ten hour day", instead of ten and three-quarter hours, and who was also looking to increase wages from ten cents an hour to the national average of twelve cents an hour. Rath concludes that "The union was not able to force Stehli to negotiate for two reasons: first, management kept the mill in operation to a large degree by hiring new workers from a massive labor pool made available by the closing of the York mills." The nationwide panic of 1907 had just contributed to the closing of three

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silk mills in York, throwing 1,000 weavers onto the job market. "Secondly," Rath continues, "through his financial superiority in a time of generalized economic hardship, he (Stehli) was able to garner the power necessary to keep his mill operating on a reduced level which allowed him in turn to ignore his workers with impunity. In short, he was financially equipped to outlast them." While hardly immune to this type of radical labor activity, George Brown's Sons, modeled on the "Philadelphia" style of ownership, was less likely to experience this action as were the absentee owners of the Stehli Silk Corporation.

A comprehensive, systematic decade by decade look at the overall textile industries health in Lancaster County has been hard to establish. It is chronicled that by 1922, Lancaster County had several large textile plants, producing \$17,610,300.00 worth of goods. The 1929 Census on Manufacturers was the most helpful in delineating the extent and trends of textile operations in Lancaster County. Fourteen firms are listed as producing knit goods, employing 778 and generating \$2,673,754.00 worth of products. The preponderance of the silk making industry in the county in 1929 is irrefutably evinced. Eighteen establishments are listed, providing employment for 4,016 workers, with a stated product value of \$39,542,078.00. Eclipsing the cotton and worsted industries (which do not as much as garner separate listing), the silk industry now far surpassed the other leading industries listed in the census. Foundry and machine shop work in 1929 was a distant second, with the silk industry in Lancaster County almost doubling the number of workers, and more than tripling the total product value. George Brown's Sons' operations seem to fit nicely into the pattern of textile manufacturing identified by Dr. Philip Scranton of Rutgers University as the, "proprietary alternative at Philadelphia." With an emphasis on flexibility and specialization, skill intensive and capital saving firms such as Brown's Mount Joy enterprise were more readily able to respond to both seasonal and financial fluctuations of the market. Because proprietors such as the Brown brothers directed their operations in such close proximity to their workers, problems that arose at more monolithic, capital intensive plants which tended to grind down and demoralize workers were more easily avoided. According to Scranton, "Artisanal and paternalistic cultural elements merged profitably with market rationalizing," in these types of firms, and also drew on the sociocultural experience of the immigrants situation in America. It seems evident that the Brown brothers were able to successfully export Scranton's summary of the success of the Philadelphia textile industry in the 1880's to their niche in Mount Joy from 1883 to 1940. Scranton writes that, "The millmen of the Quaker City in the mid-eighties were independent proprietors of family or partnership enterprises...they largely operated through personal supervision of the works, buying carefully, manufacturing to match the vagaries of the market...selling direct to a considerable

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degree, and expanding their operations by plowing back their profits." By employing many of these techniques, George Brown's Sons were able to outlast most of their local competition in the cotton industry, who succumbed to the exodus of textile plants to the South, the depression, or foreign competition. Because of the duration of manufacturing and historical integrity of the Brown brothers' contributions to industrializing Lancaster, this site warrants consideration for historic designation.

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Verbal Boundary Description Lancaster County Deed Book Ref. T-56-699 Starting at the northeast corner: on the east, the line of a vacant lot, no. 362 E. Main. On the south, PA RR tracks. On the far west, rear lines of residential property on Jacobus Street. On the near north, Sassafra Alley and the rear of 314-322 E. Main. On the near west, the side of no. 322 E. Main. On the north, East Main Street.

Boundary Justification The boundary includes the entire borough lot occupied by George Brown's Sons plant at its greatest extent, and also the Pennsylvania Railroad Freight Depot.

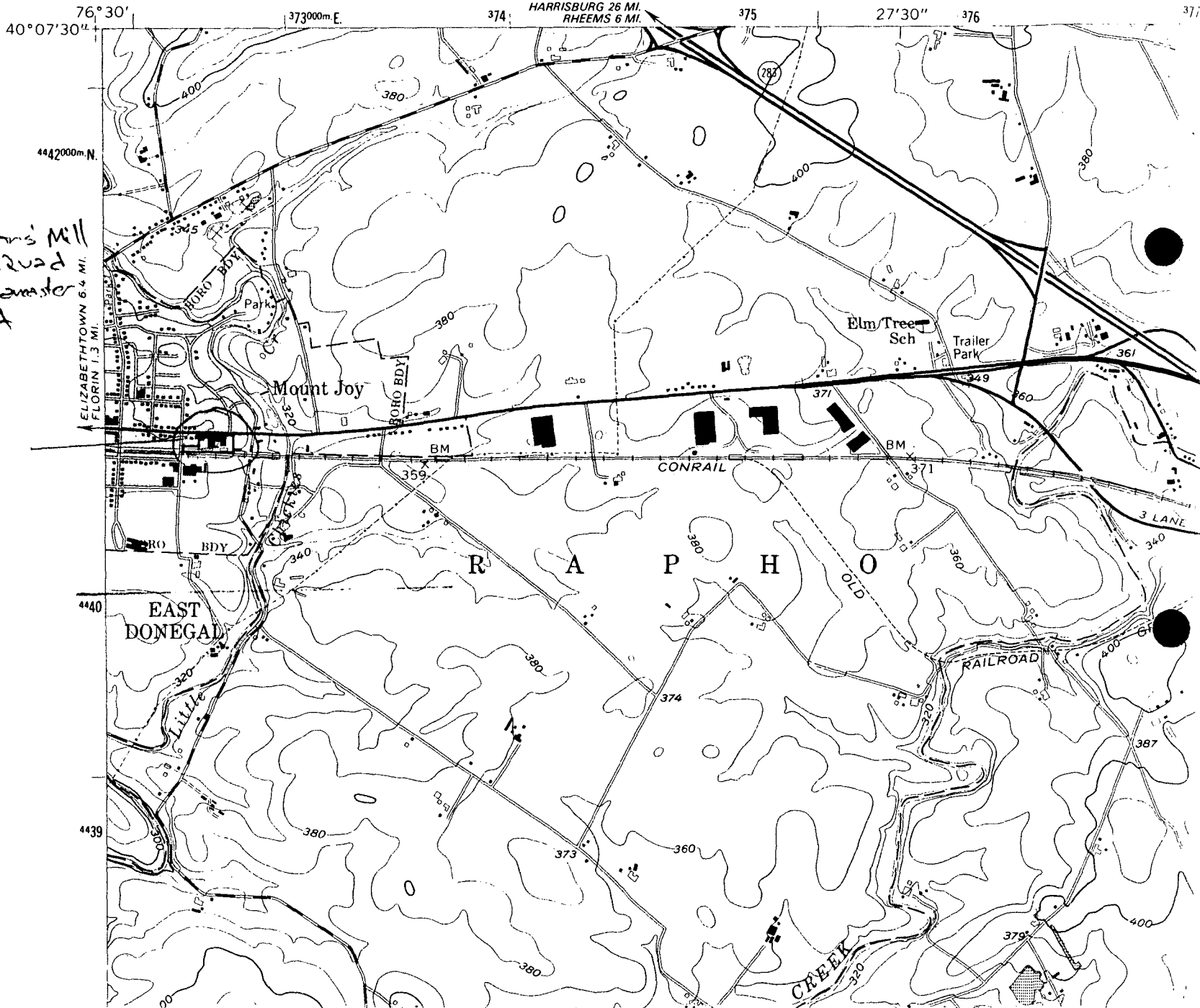
GEORGE BROWN'S SONS CO

QUAD: Columbia East

ZONE:18

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
GEOLOGICAL SURVEY

5664 U.N.E.
(ELIZABETHTOWN)



George Brown Sons Mill
Columbia East Quad
Mount Joy 300, Lancaster
County, PA
-UTM-
Zone 18

E

372460

N

4440700