

FERRACUTE MACHINE WORKS
New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail
East Commerce Street
Bridgeton
Cumberland County
New Jersey

HABS NO. NJ-1192

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

FERRACUTE MACHINE-WORKS

HABS No. NJ-1192

Location: East Commerce Street, Bridgeton, Cumberland County, New Jersey

Significance: Ferracute Machine-Works, founded in 1863 and erected here in 1904 on the east side of East Lake, was one of several profitable makers of iron products, of which much evidence throughout South Jersey remains in the form of intricate cast porches and fences. The headquarters and factory buildings are abandoned and in poor condition, but they represent a once significant local industry.

Description: This is the largest industrial building of the Ferracute complex; it is a long, rectangular, one-and-one-half-story block. The minimal gable-end signage--which reads "1863 Ferracute 1904"--is reminiscent of Art Nouveau styling. The structural iron skeleton is clad with brick, which is stuccoed in the gable-end pediment. One full slope of the gable roof is fully glazed, as is a portion of the other slope; the other areas are covered with metal and shingles; this permitted generous illumination of the interior. There are fifteen metal ventilation stacks and a railing along the roof ridge.

The gable end features single segmental-arched openings in four first-floor bays, each of which contain four-over-four-light double-hung wood sash. Above the first floor there is segmental-arched fenestration of six-over-six- and eight-over-eight-light sash; the bottom row open like awning windows. On the side facades, the window openings are also tall and narrow with segmental-arched tops; there are two contained in each of the eight bays, which are articulated by brick pilasters

History:

The first Europeans to settle along the Cohansey River included Richard Hancock, a surveyor who bought 500 acres on the eastern shore and moved there in 1675. Within a decade he erected a dam and sawmill. More settlers arrived, and the town that sprang up on the western shore was called Cohansey; the town across from it was called "The Bridge." Bridgeton was combined and incorporated in 1865, and industrial complexes soon clustered along the river.

During the colonial period, settlers in South Jersey utilized the resources of the area not only to create a self-sufficient economy for themselves, but also to facilitate the break away from the British government. With the products made from iron foundries, mills, and glass factories, the colonists no longer relied upon agriculture as a single source of income. The early industries in South Jersey include: glassmaking, ironworks, grist mills, sawmills, cedar mining, charcoal burning, and brickmaking. Many of these enterprises were sustained well into the nineteenth century, though others did not survive the industrial revolution.

Inventor Oberlin Smith founded the Ferracute Machine-Works in 1863. There he produced foot and power presses, dies, tools for cutting, embossing and drawing, as well as tinware, lanterns, lamps, fruit cans, and similar sheet-metal goods. At first Smith made predominantly fruit-can presses, since the area was home to many canneries that manufactured their own containers. An estimated sixty employees worked there at the time.¹ By the twentieth century, Ferracute had turned to making presses and molds to meet new heavy-industry needs such as automobile and airplane parts; in 1909 the company employed

¹ Arthur D. Cox and Thomas Malim, Ferracute: History of an American Enterprise (Bridgeton: Cowan Printing, 1985), 1-7; Thomas Cushing and Charles E. Sheppard, History of the Counties of Gloucester, Salem and Cumberland in New Jersey (Philadelphia: Everts & Peck, 1883), 598.

125 persons.²

The buildings that sit abandoned today adjacent to the railroad tracks and East Lake, represent the company's second location. Smith moved there in 1904 following a fire that destroyed his first complex. Besides the primary building described above, the site includes the one-and-one-half-story turreted brick Victorian headquarters that combines Stick, Queen Anne, and Tudor Revival styling, and a vacant industrial structure that is approximately one-quarter the size of the main building, with the same proportions and features. All machinery has been removed.

Sources:

"Bridgeton Historic District" National Register nomination. September 1982.

Cox, Arthur D., and Thomas Malim. Ferracute: History of an American Enterprise Bridgeton: Cowan Printing, 1985.

Cushing, Thomas, and Sheppard, Charles E. History of the Counties of Gloucester, Salem and Cumberland in New Jersey. Philadelphia: Everts & Peck, 1883.

Industrial Directory of New Jersey. Camden: S. Chew and Sons, 1909.

Sebold, Kimberly, and Sara Amy Leach. Historic Themes and Resources within the New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail: Southern New Jersey and the Delaware Bay. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Interior, 1991.

Project Information: The project was sponsored by the New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail (NJCHT) of the National Park Service, Janet Wolf, director. The documentation was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS), Robert Kapsch, chief, under the direction of Sara Amy Leach, HABS historian. The project was completed during summer 1992. The project historian was Kimberly R. Sebold (University of Delaware). The photography was produced by David Ames, University of Delaware, Center for Historic Architecture and Engineering.

² Industrial Directory of New Jersey (Camden: S. Chew and Sons, 1909), 57.