

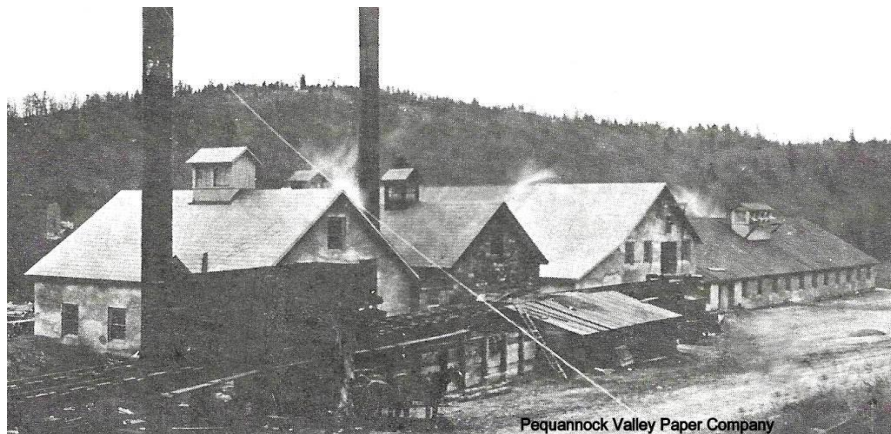
Pequannock Valley Paper Company

By Tom Riley

The area west of the Hamburg Turnpike/Macopin Road bridge across the Pequannock River in Butler is one of the earliest paper-making sites in northern New Jersey. According to *The History of Morris County*, published in 1914, paper was being made there by hand as early as 1810. John Logan expanded the mill and added machinery in 1845. The operation changed hands a number of times until 1857, when it was purchased by James White.

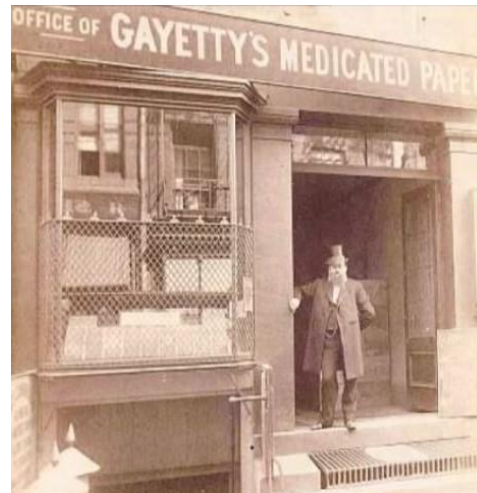
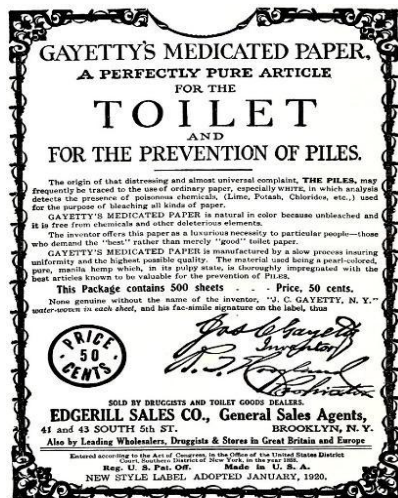
The White family's legacy in paper making goes back to John White, who learned the trade in his native country of Scotland. Soon after John arrived in the U.S. from Edinburgh in 1814, he built a small plant for the manufacture of paper in Millburn, NJ. When fire destroyed the building in 1837, he built another paper mill in Ho-Ho-Kus. Fifteen workers manufactured manila paper, wrapping tissue, and paper twine. When John White died in 1848, his wife Mabella and son James carried on the business. When fire also destroyed the Ho-Ho-Kus mill in 1857, James moved the plant to West Bloomingdale (Butler, after 1901).

After acquiring the Logan property, James built a new mill out of native fieldstone and equipped the plant with the latest equipment the paper making industry had to offer. His business prospered and, in 1885, another plant, called the "upper mill," was built adjacent to the original structure which was then referred to as the "lower mill." The swift flowing Pequannock River provided ample water to feed the raceway that provided the power to turn the twelve-foot waterwheels located at each mill.



White's factories were manufacturing fruit wrapping paper and tissue paper when he was approached by J.C. Gayetty with an idea to produce a new product, "medicated paper for the water closet." Almost identical to dress pattern material, the paper was impregnated with a secret formula. Quassia wood chips imported from the island of Jamaica were added to the paper slurry during the manufacturing process. Gayetty arranged for J.M.R. Richards, Ltd. of London to act as the firm's agent and before long, the luxury paper became the rage of European royalty.

Shipments from Butler regularly made their way to the continent. One thousand sheets of “The Queen’s Own” as the locals called it, cost \$1, a tidy sum in 1890.



By the time of James White’s death in 1900, his sons, Walter, Joseph, and Fred, were running the business. Later, Walter’s sons, Clayton and DeGray, also joined the management. The lower mill was dedicated to the production of the Queen’s Own, while the upper mill continued to make dress patterns, wrapping and tissue paper. King Edward VIII put the kibosh on the lucrative Queen’s Own market when he instituted a “Buy British” campaign. There was no domestic market for a product that cost \$1 per 1,000 sheets when regular toilet paper was priced at 10 cents per 1,000 sheets.

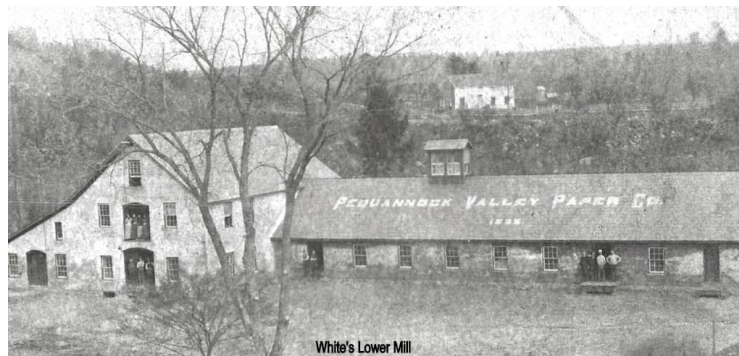
When the original mill was built, 150,000,000 gallons of water flowed down the Pequannock River every day. After the construction of the Oak Ridge Reservoir, 100,000,000 gallons of water were siphoned off to supply the city of Newark. With the usefulness of the river as a source of power eliminated, the Whites installed a stationary marine steam engine to keep their mills in operation.

With the demise of the Queen’s Own, the lower mill was closed. In 1906, an addition was added to the upper mill and, in 1911, the old steam engine was replaced by a larger more efficient 1,000 horse-power cross-compound Corliss stationary steam engine. New items like paper for automobile covers and lightweight luggage were added to their product line. Another new product was deterioration resistant ½ inch wide rolls of ticker tape paper used by the American Telegraph Company.

The Whites were well known for taking a parental attitude toward their workers. They were welcomed to work as long as they felt they could and were often helped in time of need. Most jobs were handed down from father to son. The Card, Mabey and Poole families once had three generations working at the mill at the same time.

When Walter Clayton White III came to work for the company in 1938, a fifth generation of the family was added to the management. Times were changing, however, and workers were demanding higher wages and additional benefits. The C.I.O. unionized the plant and, claiming they were being paid 15% less than other workers with similar jobs, organized a two-week strike

in February 1941. A settlement was negotiated, but the management-employee relationship was never the same.



In 1949, the company retired their steam engine and switched to central station electric power. The giant 188 ft. long, 56-inch-wide leather belt made from 600 steer hides, that had been driven by the steam engine's large flywheel for 38 years, was scrapped. In the 1960s, it could still be seen in the back of the mill.

After the workers unionized, production dropped off and costs skyrocketed. The Whites failed to reinvest in new machinery and were producing paper at a rate of 50 ft. per minute on 40-inch-wide rolls. By 1956, competitors could outproduce them 50 times over with the same labor force and modern machinery. In 1958, the plant closed and the unique way of life that surrounded it ended.

In 1963, DeGray Marion, partner in the firm of Corbal Industries, formed De Land Corporation and negotiated the purchase of the paper mills and adjoining properties from DeGray White. While renovations were being made on the lower mill, welding sparks ignited paper pulp and fire destroyed the entire building. Corbal Industries renovated the upper mill in 1964 and began screen printing on vinyl for tablecloths and other vinyl products.

Panta-Products, a subsidiary of Pantasote Corporation of Paterson, headed by John Foley, a former Kinnelon mayor, acquired the property in 1968 and constructed a new 65,000 square foot plant adjacent to the upper mill.

James Berenzy bought Panta-Products in 1987 and changed its name to Butler Printing and Laminating. With a workforce of about 125, it continues the business of printing, laminating and embossing wall coverings, window shades, pool liners, shower curtains, and other products.

In 1990 Butler Printing and Laminating supplied several hundred thousand all-weather blankets for the troops of Desert Storm. In 2001 it was Butler's largest employer.



Sources: *Butler Argus* Aug 20, 1964, *Suburban Trends* June 1, 1980, *North Jersey Highlander Article* by Emil Salvini, *Butler in Story and Pictures* 2001, *White Family Article* by Richard Townsend April 26, 2009.