Form No. 10-300 (Rev. 10-74)

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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

# NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

**INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM** 

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NAME

HISTORIC

Smithville Historic District

AND/OR COMMON'

LOCATION

HA NJ38

STREET & NUMBER

NOT FOR PUBLICATION CITY, TOWN CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT (Easthampton Twp.) Smithville Fourth VICINITY OF CODE COUNTY STATE CODE 34 Burlington 005 New Jersey

### CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

X.DISTRICT \_BUILDING(S)

\_STRUCTURE

\_\_SITE \_OBJECT OWNERSHIP.

\_PUBLIC **X\_PRIVATE** 

\_\_ВОТН

**PUBLIC ACQUISITION** X\_IN PROCESS

. \_\_BEING CONSIDERED

STATUS **X**OCCUPIED

**XUNOCCUPIED** -WORK IN PROGRESS

**ACCESSIBLE** 

XYES: RESTRICTED \_YES: UNRESTRICTED\_\_

....NO

PRESENT USE

\_AGRICULTURE \_\_MUSEUM

\_\_COMMERCIAL \_\_PARK \_\_EDUCATIONAL

....PRIVATE RESIDENCE \_\_ENTERTAINMENT \_\_RELIGIOUS

**X**GOVERNMENT \_\_SCIENTIFIC XINDUSTRIAL ... \_\_TRANSPORTATION \_MILITARY \_OTHER:

## OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME Smith Estate Co.; Grace Thomas; varied

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

STATE New Jersev

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE.

REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Burlington County Courty House

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Mount Holly

STATE

New Jersey

REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

New Jersey Historic Sites Inventory 2834.1; 3

DATE

1960

\_\_FEDERAL \_XSTATE \_\_COUNTY \_\_LOCAL

SURVEY RECORDS Historic Sites Section, Dept. of Environmental Protection

CITY, TOWN

Trenton

STATE New Jersey



#### CONDITION

CHECK ONE

**CHECK ONE** 

\_\_EXCELLENT

X<sub>FAIR</sub>

\_\_DETERIORATED
\_\_RUINS
\_\_UNEXPOSED

\_UNALTERED
X\_ALTERED

XORIGINAL SITE

\_MOVED DATE\_\_\_\_

#### DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Smithville Historical District is formed on 3 sides of Smithville Lake, with a narrow stretch along the east side and major portions to the north and south. The northern section contains the mansion and service building complex. This complex is surrounded by a massive stone and brick wall, which forms an "L" shaped enclosure, the long side of which parallels the Smithville-Jacksonville Road. This is the main road which runs north-south through the district. To the west of the manor complex are 2 streets of workers houses. The houses still stand on the southern street but only 2 remain on the northern street, along with a few foundations. To the east of the manor complex, across the Smithville-Jacksonville Road, are the remains of a sizable farm complex; consisting of a large frame barn and several brick buildings some of which are in ruins. There is also a brick house which probably dates from the early 19th century.

All of the aforementioned structures occur on upward sloping ground north of Rancocas Creek, which meanders in a generally east-westerly direction, slightly north of Smithville Lake.

South of the manor complex, and slightly north of Rancocas Creek, is a frame gothic cottage of the mid 19th century. There are also 2 brick shed roof factory buildings on the north-west shore of the lake. It is possible that at one time there were 4 buildings in that location.

The narrow stretch of the district, east of the lake, forms a thin strip of high ground between the lake and the low lying swamp land to the east.

The large southern portion of the district contains another cluster of buildings. On the west side of the main road is the old brick school house which is on the southeast shore of the lake. The building is currently the Easthampton Municipal Building. Next to it is a small fram house and the intersection of Forest Avenue, which runs east-west. Along this street are several large houses which date c. 1870. Further south on the Smithville-Jacksonville Road, is a railroad crossing with another cluster of buildings including a church and 4 mid 19th century frame houses.

The architectural focal point of the district is the manor house, which is an unusually fine example of a Greek Revival residence. It is central hall plan, 5 bay, brick building with a hip roof terminating in a balustrade. The third floor has windows which have Chinese screens, are formed

# RERIOD AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW \_PREHISTORIC \_\_ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC \_\_COMMUNITY PLANNING \_\_LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

\_\_RELIGION \_\_1400-1499 \_\_ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC \_\_CONSERVATION \_\_LAW \_\_SCIENCE \_\_1500-1599 \_\_AGRICULTURE \_\_ECONOMICS \_\_LITERATURE \_\_SCULPTURE X\_ARCHITECTURE \_\_1600-1699 \_\_EDUCATION \_\_MILITARY \_SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN

\_\_INVENTION

SPECIFIC DATES

#### **BUILDER/ARCHITECT**

#### STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

#### Industry:

The Smithville Historic District constitutes an intact, surviving company town, of the mid 19th century. As such it demonstrates, by its placement of the manor house in the midst of the factory and workers housing cluster, a relationship between management and labor which was no longer possible with the advent of big business. In addition, it was a fertile ground of engineering innovation which produced one of the world's only bicycle railroad, and developed a prototype of the modern bicycle.

#### Architecture:

The mansion is a large, imposing, and unusually is a fine example of Greek Revival architecture in New Jersey. In addition, there are a number of Italianate workers houses which constitute a period dormitory complex.

#### History:

The first settlers in the vicinity were mainly Dutch and English Quakers seeking refuge from persecution in Europe. The first knwon settler on the Rancocas Creek at Smithville was Jacob Parker, who built a dam in the vicinity in 1789 for a mill. During the American War of Independence, entrenchments were dug in the Smithville Woods by the men of General Philemon Dickenson's Birgade to forestall General Clinton's retreat from Philadelphia. Traces of these works were still visible on the landscape in 1936. In 1828, Jonathan and Samuel Shreve, who kept a store in Columbus, moved to the Parker location and established a calico factory. They built a town here and called it Shreveville. Mr. Samuel Sample was brought over from Scotland to be in charge of the factory, and shortly thereafter, another factory was built to manufacture spool cotton thread. It is said that the first spool cotton in the United States was made at Shreveville.

The Shreve family built the present mansion in 1842. Disaster struck in 1856, however, when the factory burned, the Shreves went bankrupt, and Samuel Semple moved to Mount

## 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

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into a deep entablature, which is articulated by a brick string course. The main facades, which face north and south, have central, 3 bay, doric porticos of one story each. The mansion also has a 4 bay 2 story extention, on the west side, whose parapet roof is surmounted by a small square Adjacent to the mansion is a continuous series of service buildings, which form an L shaped complex. ning at a point just west of the mansion, it meanders northward, with many additions, to the rear wall of the property. also starts westward from that point, bridges a service road and meanders westward to the west property wall. to stables and other services, this complex also contains recreation facilities including a bowling alley. In the northeast corner of the mansion property is a 2 story brick building.

The massive stoned brick wall, which surrounds the manor property, is capped by a heavy sloped iron plate, and crowned with iron spikes. Near the center of the east wall is the main carriage entrance which is flanked by a pair of large iron urns. The other entrance occurs on the south wall, directly on axis with the south portico of the mansion. is flanked by a pair of cast iron eagles, on octagonal piers. These eagles do not frame the gate symmetricly. This is due to the arrangement of their wings. Because they were cast from the same mold, the eagle on the left gate post has its outer wing lowered and inner wing raised, while the eagle on the right gate post has its inner wing lowered and its outer wing raised.

This is the main approach to the mansion. The grounds are well landscaped in the fashion of a formal garden with statuary and a pair of iron fountains.

The workers houses to the west of the manor complex, are simple, flatroofed, 2 story, frame houses, with denticular cornices and sash windows. A typical example is the double house on Park Avenue, which has a double porch with one central column, and Italianate "gingerbread" bracketting.

Most of the houses south of the lake are similar to this except that many have the added feature of a garret story third floor.

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Description

Smithville Historic District

The district consists of two major areas of historic buildings which occur on opposite sides of Smithville Lake. The lake was included because it was built and enlarged by successive owners of the town (including Hezekiah Smith), and is intimately associated with the town's history.

Although the surviving buildings are somewhat scattered, evidence indicates that at one time the concentration of buildings was much greater. Many of the frame workers houses have been demolished. This is particularly true of the southern panhandle area.

Evidence indicates that there was an additional row of houses north of Park Avenue and that there were two additional factory buildings in the present factory complex.

The northern end of the district is a relatively contiguous group of buildings. The buildings at the southern end are fewer and more widely spaced, but they still read as a distinct group, and are distinguishable from the surrounding country side. As on approaches along the Smithville-Jacksonville Road, they appear to be a small hamlet.

Although the two halves of the town and the lake are contiguous, their visual connection is weak. However, the district boundaries were drawn to include all three for the following reasons.

- 1. This recognizes the fact that they are contiguous;
- 2. this recognizes their common historical association;
- 3. The one time size and extent of the company town is indicated by the disposition of the remaining buildings.

### Comprehensive Inventory

- 1. Manor Complex: 3 story Greek Revival brick mansion with side wing, rear wing, and stable. Surrounded by a formal garden and a brick wall.
- 2. Nos. 10 & 11 Park Avenue: double house (worker's housing), frame with 4 major bays, plus a central entrance double porch (one side serving each half of the House) vaguely Italianate styling. Asbestos siding.

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- 3. Nos. 8&9 Park Avenue: double house (workers housing), frame, similar to #2 except that the 2 bay entrance porch has only one column (located in the center) with elaborate scroll brackets in the corners. (asbestos sided)
- 4. No. 7 Park Avenue: 2 story, 5 bay single house (workers housing), frame, vaguely Italianate. (asbestos sided)
- 5. No. 6 Park Avenue: similar to #4.
- 6. Nos. 4 & 5 Park Avenue: 2 story double house (workers housing) of 4 major bays with central double entrance and a wide 3 bay Italianate porch. (asbestos sided)
- 7. No.1 Park Avenue: similar to #4
- 8. No. 2117 Mead Lane: mid-19th century 2 bay, 2 story clapboard frame house of simple character.
- 9. Park Avenue and Smithville-Jacksonville Road: 2 1/2 story frame Gothic Revival house with rear porch and out buildings which has tie beam motif.
- 10. Farmhouse (farm complex): 2 story, 3 bay, pitch roof, scored stucco with clapboard, shed roof side wing, one bay front porch.
- 11. A large brick stable (farm complex) with iron lintels. Building has domestic form with pitch roof 2 1/2 stories and 6 bays (mid-19th century).
- 12. Warehouse (farm complex) 3 story brick with iron lintels, 3 bays on a side and a shallow pitch roof.
- 13. Large barn (farm complex) recently constructed using the remains of an old brick wall as an end wall.
- 14. River Street factory buildings, 2 story, 14 bays, brick with a slightly pitched shed roof.
- 15. River Street factory complex: at one time 2 stories, now one, brick, much altered.
- 16. River Street iron truss bridge whose ends are decorated with cast iron pineapples.
- 17. Easthampton Twp. Municipal Hall: a "T" plan building with the entrance at the bottom of the "T", brick with entrance tower and spire and a 6 bay hall to the rear, 1 story with raised basement. (late 19th century)

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- 18. No. 28 Smithville-Jacksonville Rd.: 2 story frame clapboard house with a side wing and gable end returns. (mid-19th century)
- 19. Nos. 33 & 35 Forrest Avenue: double house (workers housing), frame, 4 major bays with double entrance in the center, no porch, steep pitch roof. (asbestos siding)
- 20. Forrest Avenue and Smithville-Jacksonville Road: similar to #19.
- 21. Nos. 32 & 34 Forrest Avenue: double house, similar to #19.
- 22. No. 45 Smithville-Jacksonville Road: similar to #19 but with fine medalion cornice, small rear shed extention and a 2 bay front porch.
- 23 & 24. United Methodist Church and Parsonage: Greek Revival basilican clapboard church with frontal tower and belvidere. Parsonage has gable end returns and clapboard surface, 3 bays, 2 1/2 stories.
- 25. No. 51 Smithville-Jacksonville Road: similar to #19 but with 3 bay porch with columns which are square cut in Eastlake shape turnings

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Holly. In 1865, Hezekiah Smith came upon the scene and purchased the manor and factory for \$23,000. Shortly thereafter, the name of the town changed to Smithville.

Hezekiah B. Smith was born in Bridgewater, Vermont, where his family had been neighbors of the Coolidges of nearby Plymouth. At 14 he found a job with a cabinetmaker in Woodstock and was soon given charge of all the shop machinery.

Within five years Hezekiah had his own furniture factory in an abandoned balcksmith's shack and was soon shipping furniture to Boston, Lowell and Springfield. He saved his money and by early manhood had become prosperous and respected.

Smith eventually became a leading manufacturer of window blinds. By the end of the Civil War he had outgrown his plant. Determined to move, he visited the village of Shreveport (also called Shreveville), New Jersey. He wished to buy a plant with unlimited opportunity for expansion in a rural area where he would not compete for labor. Nestling along Rancocas Creek, the village consisted of several serviceable large buildings, a tavern, about 35 homes for employees and a dilapidated manor house. A millpond provided water power, a single-track railroad connected with the main line at Mount Holly, three miles away.

Smith bought the whole community, including 2,000 acres of land, and had the name changed to Smithville. His machinery was installed, the millpond enlarged and extensive additions made to the factory buildings.

Smith extensively altered the mansion, adding a billiard room and bowling alley, a stable, coach house, conservatory and greenhouse. Formal gardens were planted, and around the whole a tall brick fence was constructed with large eagles above the main gate. A barn with a tower that could be seen for miles was constructed. Smith claimed that he spent altogether over a half-million dollars on his town.

Then Agnes Gilkinson arrived. Introduced as Mrs. Smith, she was a charming hostess and beautiful. As a girl she had been one of Smith's employees. He sent her to finishing school and later to the Woman's Medical College of

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Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, the only one in the country at that time. In Smithville, Agnes acted as company physician and edited the Smithville Mechanic, a weekly magazine.

The H. B. Smith Machine Company became the largest woodworking machinery plant in the country. It filed about 65 patents, some quite startling. Experiments were made "with a mechanism applied to the center of a long-line shafting which would under sudden stress allow either section of the revolve independently of the other." Perfected, this later became the automobile differential.

In 1879, one of the nation's first horseless carriages was constructed at Smithville. Using a kerosene-burning steam engine with a fire-tube boiler and three-speed gear, the vehicle operated successfully on a number of trial runs but, since it frightened both horses and people, Smith concluded it was too dangerous. "Put it away, Fritz", he said to his helper. "We're 20 years ahead of time".

Smith had high hopes for an experimental tricycle, but it never caught on. He also built a steam-driven bicycle, one of the first motorcycles. The engine was on the steering column, and power was applied to the rear wheel by a leather belt. Later he used steam to drive a tricycle.

Bicycles were growing in popularity in the 1870's. It was in 1879 that George W. Pressey came to see Smith. The inventor impressed Smith and, after successful tests, Smith agreed to make the safety bicycle, paying Pressey a royalty on each one sold. Thus the Star bicycle was born, hitting the market in 1881. Although some objections were raised that, with its small wheel in front, it didn't look much like a bike, the Star's speed and safety made it an almost immediate success.

Early Stars were driven by straps that wound around the rear wheel hub. Chain drives were introduced in the Eighties, and by the middle of that decade the newest bicycles looked much like today's. Smith pushed his models hard in the face of competition. He employed Tom Finley, a noted athlete, to tour the country on a Star. In Washington, D.C., Finley announced that he would ride down the Capitol steps. The

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police arrested him, but then relented and let him accomplish the feat. He also rode down Mount Washington and, it is said, did bike tricks in the Philadelphia Academy of Music.

Finley won the world bicycle record for the mile: two minutes, 34.4 seconds. Star records ranged from the half mile to the 100 mile and included the "hands-off" half-mile and mile.

Smith correctly concluded that the bicycle craze would slowly die down and, although gross Star sales became several times larger than those of woodworking machinery, he refused to allow his original product to be neglected. He did, however, inspire the use of the bicycle to solve a major problem. Smithville did not have enough houses for all of Smith's employees, so almost half of them lived in Mount Holly. The connecting railroad was principally used for freight, and the railroad compnay refused to add passenger runs. So Smith put an employee, Arthur E. Hotchkiss, to work planning the world's first bicycle railroad.

Although it wasn't finished until after Smith's death, the Hotchkiss Bicycle Railroad remains a testament to his foresight. It was essentially a grooved metal monorail, held up by a trestle, from which the cycles hung. They held one to four passengers, who did the work, pedaling from the outskirts of Mount Holly to the center of Smithville, crossing the Rancocas Creek seven times, all in from eight to ten minutes. It lasted form 1892 to 1898, and a ride on it became a popular Sunday diversion for young couples. They would line up outside the Pine Street terminal in Mount Holly and wait for hours to take turns. Gradually, most of the employees got their own bikes and the novelty of the railroad wore off.

Smith also used his considerable talent as a promoter to persue a brief political career.

On a bright day in 1878 a processing marched toward the courthouse square of Toms River, New Jersey. The band, resplendent in gold-braided uniforms, struck up "Hail the Conquering Hero Comes".

Several carriages followed the band. In the first, an open landau, sat two men. One was large and middle-aged,

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thickly bearded, continuously waving to the crowd. The other was old and wizened, a silent figure huddling under a paisley shawl. Behind them came a one-man sulky pulled by a harnessed moose!

Thus did Hezekiah Bradley Smith run for Congress on the Democratic and Greenback ticket. He had decided that the only way he could lure his rural backers to his meetings was by arousing curiosity. Hence the moose and the presence of Alexander Hamilton Stephens, former vice president of the Confederacy. South Jersey had been pro-South during the Civil War: "a nest of Copperheads".

The farmers flocked to the rallies, drawn either by the moose or the former rebel, and Smith was elected. Two years later, the farmers failed to attend either the rallies or the polls. Stephens was running for governor of Georgia and was no longer available. Smith lost and later served a term as a state senator.

Smith died in 1887, leaving the bulk of his estate to establish a mechanic school for boys. But his son, Captain Elton A. Smith, succeeded in breaking the will, and eventually became president of the H. B. Smith Machine Co.

The Star bicycles were produced until 1910. By then bikes looked much as they do today, with wheels of equal size. But the bicycle boom, which had begun in the 1880's was petering out because all popular attention as fixed on automobiles.

As in many towns of that era, the company ran all aspects of life in the town. Smith was progressive in his dealings with the workers. He built a school, opera house, zoo, church, ballroom and other facilities for the town. He paid top wages, held to a nine hour day and closed his plants Saturday afternoons. He footed the bill for the Smithville Silver Coronet Band and paid its members for their services when he ran successfully for the U.S. House of Representatives.

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Significance:
Smithville Historic District

In 19th century New Jersey there were a number of industrial towns which were owned or dominated by one concern.

But few survive as well as Smithville. Other period examples, notably Allaire, Batsto and Atsion, lost considerably more of their original fabric. Batsto, for example, has no surviving industrial buildings, few surviving worker's houses. Oxford, in Warren County, is probably the only period New Jersey company town which is clearly more intact than Smithville.

#### VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Beginning at the intersection of Maple Avenue and the Smithville-Jacksonville Road proceed due east for 375 ft., thence due south for 625 ft. Thence, due west to the Smithville-Jacksonville Road. Thence, south along Smithville-Jacksonville Road to a point 375 ft. north of the intersection with Forrest Avenue, thence due east 250 ft. Thence due south 1500 ft., thence due west to the Smithville-Jacksonville Rd. Thence due west 75 ft. Thence due north to the shore of Smithville Lake, thence around the west end of the lake proceeding to the north side round to a certain point then due north. (This north-south line is located 400 ft. west of the place where River Street crosses the feeder into Smithville Lake.) Proceed due north to a point due west of the intersection of Park Avenue and Maple Avenue. Thence due west to the aforesaid intersection, thence west along Maple Avenue to Smithville-Jacksonville Road.

Form No. 10-300a (Rev. 10-74)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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MAY 1 2 1977

# NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

**CONTINUATION SHEET** 

ITEM NUMBER 9

PAGE

New History Atlas of Burlington County New Jersey, J. D. Scott, 1876, pages 81, xx1

The Historic Rancocas, George DeCou, pages 69, 84, 133, 148. History of Burlington County and Mercer County, Woodward

and Hageman, 1883, pages 313-315.

Courier Post, Camden, New Jersey, Nov. 18, 1970, page 62.
"Hezekiah Smith, Builder of Safety Bicycle", George Walton
Smithsoinian Magazine, pages 70-74, 1971.

Smithville, NJ

### Property Ownership in the Smithville Historic District

08201

(source - Burlington County tax records) 1976

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### Property

1. Smithville Mansion and annexes, within Mansion wall

2. 6 worker's dwellings along Park Avenue

- 3. 2 worker's dwellings along Maple Ave.
- 4. Gardener's House Park Ave.
- 5. Gothic Cottage Park Ave. and Jacksonville
- 6. Farm complex, across Jacksonville Rd. from Mansion
- 7. Factory Complex River Street
- 8. Eastampton Township Vol. Fire Co., Jacksonville Rd.
- 9. Eastampton Municipal Bldg. Jacksonville Rd.
- 10. 18th century frame house (adj. to #9) Jacksonville Rd.
- 11. 3 worker's dwellings Forrest Ave.
- 12. Methodist Church Jacksonville Rd.
- 13. Early 19th century frame house adjacent to #12, Jacksonville Rd.
- 14. Double frame house (19th Cent.) W. side Jacksonville Rd.
- 15. 3 19th century frame houses east side of Jacksonville Rd.

### Owner

- 1. Board of Chosen Freeholders County of Burlington Business County office Buse to Holey, N.J. 08660 2. Board of Chosen Freeholders
- County of Burlington refer

Board of Chosen Freeholders County of Burlington refert

Mr. & Mrs. Hugh Keiffer RD #2, Mt. Holly, 08060

- 5. Board of Chosen Freeholders County of Burlington which
- 6. Harry Pike, Jr. R.D. 2, Mt. Holly, 08060
- 7. Board of Chosen Freeholders County of Burlington A Great
- 8. Eastampton Twp. Vol. Fire Co. RD #2, Mt. Holly, 08060 >
- 29. Eastampton Township SLETTIVILE RD P. D. # =-

<:i>

- 10. Board of Chosen Freeholders County of Burlington re for and
  - 11. Board of Chosen Freeholders County of Burlington
  - 12. Smithville Methodist Church
  - 13. Smithville Methodist Church repeat
- 14. H.B. Smith Machine Co. R.D. #2, Mt. Holly, 08060
- 15. H.B. Smith Machine Co. R.D. #2, Mt. Holly, 08060