

Delanco History Board

Heritage Site Nomination Form – DRAFT

(v. 8/24/2021 pf)

Name of Property: Historic: A. Ridgway & Son Mfr. of Children's and Infant's Shoes
Atlantic Paper Tube; Riverside Outboard & Marine Center

Common: Harold F. Fisher & Sons Canvas Co./Delanco Tarp

Name of Nominator: Peter Fritz, DHB Member **Date of Nomination:** 8/3/2021

Contact Info: 303 Union Avenue, Delanco NJ; PFritz5976@aol.com; 609-760-7746

Current Property Owner: Delanco Township

Contact Info: 770 Coopertown Road, Delanco

Is property owner aware of nomination? Yes In favor of nomination? Yes

Location of Property:

Common Street address: 200 Ash Street at Rancocas Block: 1405 Lot: 6

Build Years (or approximation): Residence (?), Frame factory (1885), Brick factory (1912)

Source of information: The Delanco Story

Architect and builder, if known: _____

Name of original owner/occupant, if known: Andress J. and Meriam Ridgway

Original purpose of the site: (Residence, Commercial, Industrial, Farmland, etc.)

Private Residence

Changes in purpose over the years, with dates if known:

Shoe factory; Paper tube Company; Marine products dealer/boat storage; Canvas company;
Future municipal creek-front public park

Site status regarding federal, state or county historic recognition. (Attach details.)

Not currently recognized as historic at any level

Is the site endangered? Would Delanco Heritage Site designation help preserve it?

Highly endangered, likely to be demolished before the end of 2021

Signage Notes: Once demolished, recommend interpretive signage on site; Updated booklet

Please attach

- Physical description of the structure including architectural classification.
- An explanation of any major additions or exterior modifications over the years. Also note on timeline.
- Current photos of the exterior of the site, historic photos, or maps, if available. History Board may be able to assist.
- Timeline showing the Chain of ownership since the structure was built and approximate dates of transfer, if known.
- Description of any associated notable residents or events. Also note on timeline.
- Any additional information that describes how this site contributes to an understanding of Delanco history and culture.
- Details on federal, state or county historic designations, if any.

Return completed nomination form and attachments to:

Delanco History Board, 770 Coopertown Road, Delanco NJ 08075

Questions? Contact Peter Fritz, PFritz5976@aol.com, 609-760-7746

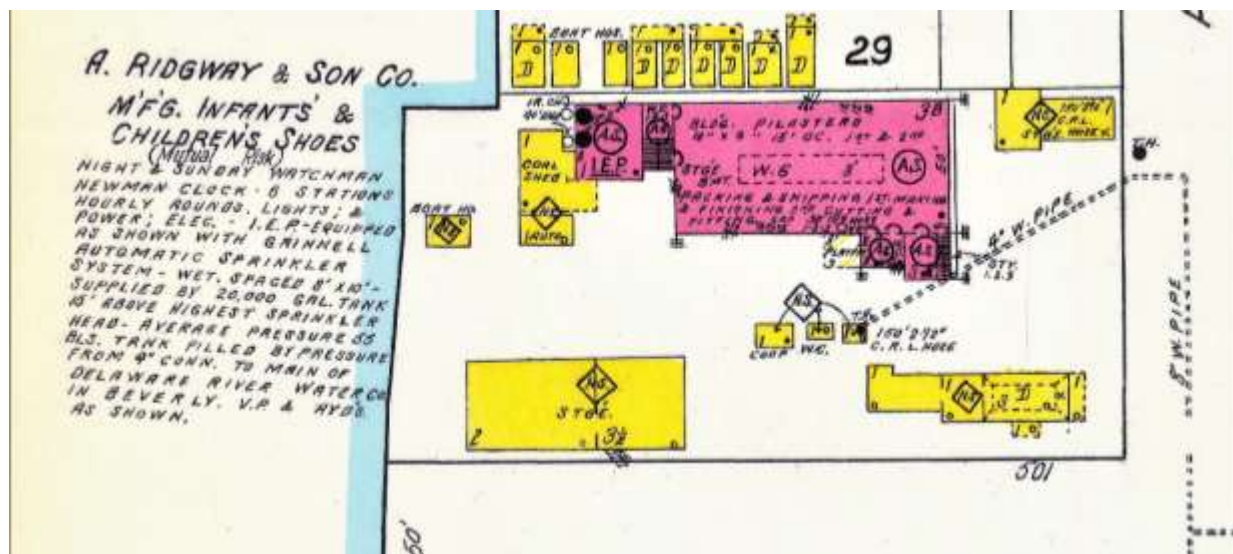
- **Physical description of the structure including architectural classification.**
- **An explanation of any major additions or exterior modifications over the years. Also note on timeline.**

The shoe manufacturing business began in 1881 in the 1-story frame garage/workshop of Andress J. Ridgway at his home at this location. In 1885 he expanded by building a slope-roofed 2-story frame factory building adjacent to the garage. As business grew, he built a 3-story frame slope-roofed addition. The buildings had large 2/2 windows throughout.

In 1912, the company built a new 3-story slope-roofed brick factory building with its own coal-fired power plant either to augment or replace the original frame building. The building had a freight elevator and large 9/9 windows throughout. The brick factory was in full operation for many years and was the primary employer located in Delanco until 1928. The 1921 Sanborn Fire Map (below) shows the position of the original Ridgway residence, frame factory and Brick factory. The original frame building suffered a fire in 1922, but the structure was saved, repaired and used for storage for a time before being demolished.

After the shoe factory closed, R.H. Gerhardt purchased the building and opened Atlantic Cardboard Tubing, then Riverside Marine opened for Outboard services and supply/indoor and outdoor boat storage, taking advantage of its location just yards from the Rancocas Creek. The business was run by Charles Kalmes then Albert Gaunt. Harold F. Fisher & Son Canvas moved their operation there from Berlin, NJ and operated there until 2018.

- **Current photos of the exterior of the site, historic photos, or maps.**



This detail from the 1921 Sanborn Fire Map shows Andress J. Ridgway's 3-story Victorian home on the lower right corner of the lot, the original frame factory (minus the garage) on the lower left corner of the lot, and the 3 1/2-story brick factory building in the center, plus several 1-story outbuildings including a coal shed, chicken coop and a privy. The Rancocas Creek is to the left (south), Ash Street is at the bottom (east), and Rancocas Avenue is on the right (north). The nine small 1-story sheds just above (north of) the factory were part of a Delanco rod & gun club that operated on the site of Borel's Boatyard. Note the interesting description of the sprinkler system and details of the watchman's rounds (at left). The Delanco Archive contains Sanborn Fire Maps from 1909, 1915, and 1921.



This quarter view photo of the original frame shoe factory was taken about 1912. It shows the south and east facades. It shows the progression of the facility from a residential garage/workshop (left), followed by a 2 1/2-story addition (center), then a 3-story addition to the right. The frame facility was replaced by a 3-story brick factory just west of it on the property in 1912, at which time the frame building was used for storage. It suffered a fire in 1922 and was eventually razed. This photo from the Delanco archive, must have been taken from the bank of the creek.



This postcard of the Delanco creekfront and the frame shoe factory is dated 1914, which must be in error, since the 1912 brick factory is not yet shown. Note Borel's Boatyard with its 2 1/2-story boatshed to the left of the factory, and the tiny bridgetenders' house to the extreme left of the photo. Also, the gable end of the boatshed of Louis D. Steel Shipyard just to the right of the photo across Ash Street. There also appears to be a houseboat pulled up to the bank in the center-right of the photo. The uses of the other miscellaneous sheds have not yet been identified. Photo from the Delanco archive.



This photo, taken some time after 1912, shows the orientation of the original frame factory building and its addition in relation to the newer frame factory. Borel's boatshed is to the left of the factory. In the foreground is the steam tug *Rancocas* with a barge in tow, heading downstream toward the swing bridge. This was a busy time for commerce along the Rancocas Creek, when the waterway was a major asset to the growth and prosperity of Delanco. Photo from the Delanco archive.



In this photo, the employees appear to be taking a moment from their hard work manufacturing shoes for children and infants. The photo appears to have been taken in the original frame factory building, which would date it between 1885 and 1912. Photo from the Delanco Archive.



Employees of Andrees Ridgeway Shoe Factory Circa 1912

Ridgeway & Son Shoes was the major employer in Delanco for many years. This annual photo of Ridgeway's employees was taken about 1912 in front of the original frame factory building.



Firemen play streams of water on building of R.H. Gerhardt Co. in Delanco, bringing the blaze under control at 8:40 a.m.

Fire destroys Delanco paper firm

By Gennaro Scaramazza
Times staff writer

DELANCO — Fire this morning destroyed a 75-foot-long building that housed a family paper-tube business on Cooper Street near Hickory Street.

Fire Chief Gary Stahl, who commanded firefighters from Delanco, Beverly, Riverside and Delran, said the fire, which began in the rear of the L-shaped building of R.H. Gerhardt Co. where the heater is located, was declared under control at 8:40 a.m. The alarm was sounded at 7:32 a.m.

A major portion of the 75-foot-long section's roof, and the roof of the 40-foot L-shape section in the rear collapsed as firemen from the Riverside ladder truck pumped water into the building.

The fire also destroyed machinery, paper-tube products and a truck inside the one-story cinderblock building, Cooper Street between Laurel Street and Burlington Avenue was closed to traffic.

"We're looking at either juveniles or a heating" malfunction as the cause, Stahl said. Richard Craft, an assistant county fire marshal, was called in to aid in the investigation.

The company, which has five employees, has been a family business since 1934.

J. Bernard Gerhardt, who inherited the business from his father, said this morning he doesn't know if he will reopen the company. "The problem is the kind of machinery we use; it takes a long time to make it," he said.

He said it could take a year or more to get

back into business, and by then his customers will have found another manufacturer.

"I'm old enough to collect social security, but my nephew is vice president," Gerhardt said. "It's tough on him."

Stahl said the fire was "fully involved" when the first firefighters arrived. The dense smoke blew toward the Burlington Avenue School but did not affect classes.

However, Styles Inc., which is next the Gerhardt building, evacuated its 100 employees at 7:30 a.m. because of the dense smoke and returned about two hours later, a spokeswoman said. She said employees at the company, which manufactures metal office furniture, begin work at 7 a.m.

Reporter Larry Tashbaum contributed to this report.

Burlington County Times article: Major fire closed the F.H. Gerhardt Paper Tube Co. (March 2, 1987)



Riverside Outboard & Marine Center, run by Charles Kalmes and Albert Gaunt followed Atlantic Paper Tube in the brick building. This sign remains on the side of the building facing the Rancocas Creek.



Street view from the corner of Rancocas and Ash when Fisher Canvas was in operation. At the time, the windows were in better shape and the siding did not look so decrepit.

Note the 4-story stair tower on the corner of the building adjacent to the freight elevator, the double leaf access doors on each floor, and the window detail.

Fisher & Son Canvas moved to Cinnaminson in 2018.



This photo from Bright MLS shows the recent condition of Fisher & Son Canvas when it was still in operation. The original powerplant building and coal shed has long since been demolished and many of the windows have been boarded up. The main entrance is indicated under the awning next to the freight elevator. A bay door can be seen to the rear (south side) of the factory.



This Bright MLS photo shows the street view of the factory from the Ash Street gate. The Rancocas Creek is just beyond the tree-line to the left of the photo. A paved ramp leads from ground level to the creek and was once used for boat launch and recovery. The freight elevator's external door is indicated with white paint. The elevator is still in place, but no longer operable.

- **Timeline showing the Chain of ownership since the structure was built and approximate dates of transfer, if known.**

1855 Andress J. Ridgway married Meriam Wilmerton and settled in Beverly.

Spring 1857 Andress and Meriam Ridgway moved from Beverly to Delanco, likely to 200 Ash Street at the corner of Rancocas. The residence build date is unknown. Andress learned the shoemaking business in Bridgeboro and worked for the Stokley Company in Burlington from 1879 to 1880. Details in his letter, below.

1880 Andress Ridgway left the Stokley Company in Burlington, when the company went on strike and began to make custom shoes on his own at his home at 200 Ash Street in Delanco.

1881 Andress Ridgway began manufacturing children's shoes in the garage of his home at 200 Ash Street. He began with three employees. Andress originally partnered with Martin Beekler, but bought him out after three months. He continued the business with daughters, Laura and Anna.

1883 Andress brought his son, Andress Crittenden Ridgway into the business, changing its name.

1885 Andress J. Ridgway constructed a 2 1/2-story frame factory building adjacent to his garage and workshop. He added a 3 1/2-story addition to the structure after 1921.

1894 Mr. and Mrs. Harry Cook, Sr. entered the business.

1902 The two-story, eight-room Hickory Street School was built behind the Town Hall and Town Square on land acquired from Andress Ridgway. Bonds were issued by Burlington City Loan & Trust. [Note: This property was on Walnut Street, between Chestnut and Hickory, and

extended to the alley. This was approximately half of the current open area that extends fully from Walnut to Union.]

- 1907** By 1907 the company had about 90 skilled employees and was producing 360,000 pairs of shoes per year.
- 1912** Ridgway constructed a brick factory to either augment or replace the 1885 frame structure. Both buildings existed side-by-side on the Ash Street property for a time until the original structure is demolished.
- 1915** See the 1915 Sanborn Fire Map attached for the positions of the buildings at that time.
- 1921** The Sanborn Fire Map of 1921 shows the original 2 1/2 story section of the frame shoe factory and the then-new, 3 1/2 story brick shoe factory in situ on the lot. It also shows Andress Ridgway's Victorian home located on the corner of the lot facing Ash Street at the intersection of Rancocas Ave.
- 1921** Historian Rev F. Elwood Perkins reports business at Ridgway & Son Shoes began to decline, though it continued to operate until 1928. At its peak, it employed as many as 145 people.
- 5/12/1922** Ridgway Shoe Factory's original frame building burned in a fire. Delanco's chief, Joseph Kimble, called for help in fighting this roaring fire. Fire company records indicate the building was not destroyed, although virtually every window was broken by the force of the fire hoses. Ridgway's newer brick building survived the fire. The shoe Company was one of the largest employers in the area at the time.
- 12/18/1928** Ridgway & Sons Shoes ceased operations. The building sold to Atlantic Paper Tube Co.
- 1929** The Delanco Story, P28 says Atlantic Paper Tube moved in and began production in 1929. President R. H. Gerhardt.
- 1934** A Burlington County Times article says R.H. Gerhardt Co. Paper Tube, a family business was established. It also refers to the business as Atlantic Paper Tube. Currently researching the history of this company.
- 1954** According to their published history, Harold F. Fisher & Sons was established originally as a surplus business, repairing and selling surplus tents at his Barracks Trading Post.
- 1960s** Property was acquired by Charles Kalmes for back taxes. He repaired the building and established Kalmes Outboard Service – Boat storage indoors and out. Charles and his wife Pearl lived at 315 Walter Ave in 1940. They later lived on Third Street.
- _____ Albert Gault of Delanco took over the business and continued similar operations under the name Riverside Outboard & Marine Center.
- C 1970** Harold F. Fisher & Sons acquired the former shoe factory and moved their canvas business from Berlin, NJ, per The Delanco Story, p 45.
- _____ Harold Fisher died and his sons took over the business.
- 1976** Atlantic Paper tube, also known as R.H. Gerhardt (or Gerhart) Co. moved to 420 Cooper Street, per The Delanco Story.
- 1977** The property was not mentioned in the Burlington County Historic Survey of 1977.
- 3/2/1987** R.H. Gerhardt (Atlantic Paper Tube)'s new plant on Cooper Street burned to the ground. Article attached.
- 1993** Harold Fisher's son, Frank took over operation of the canvas business.
- 2018** Harold F. Fisher & Sons moved operations to 875 Industrial Highway in Cinnaminson.
- 5/20/2020** Property sold to Delanco Township. The tentative plan is to establish a creek-side public park with access to the creek for launch and recovery of non-motorized watercraft.

2021 The brick factory building is being considered for demolition. A new, purpose-built community building is being considered for the site.

- **Any additional information that describes how this site contributes to an understanding of Delanco history and culture.**

In its 140-year history, the site has served as a significant employer of Delanco residents. The original A. Ridgway & Son shoe factory operated from 1881 to 1928, first housed in the 1885 frame factory building now demolished, then in the 1912 brick factory building that has served a series of Delanco businesses until 2018.

The building was sold to another significant employer in Delanco, Atlantic Paper Tube which began operation in 1929. About 1976, Atlantic Paper Tube left the premises, relocating to Cooper Street. The building was vacant for a time. Charles Kalmes of Delanco purchased the property for past taxes and established Riverside Marine, providing outside and inside boat storage and mechanical services for outboard motors. Albert Gault succeeded Charles Kalmes and continued to provide similar services. Another business entity. See sign photo and advertisement attached.

Harold F. Fisher and Son established their business in 1954 outside of Delanco as the Barracks Trading Post, repairing and selling surplus tents and other canvas goods. They expanded their business into fabricating canvas covers, which required significant loft space. The former shoe factory fit the bill perfectly. The Delanco Story reports they moved to Delanco from Berlin, NJ about 1970, though the exact date is in question. They operated under the name Delanco Tarp at some point. Though they never had a large staff, they operated at 200 Ash until 2018 when they moved to Cinnaminson.

Delanco Township acquired the property in 2020 and has announced plans to open the property to the public as part of its growing municipal park system. Part of its function will be to provide access to the Rancocas Creek for non-motorized personal watercraft.

The township is currently studying the possibility of razing the existing factory and constructing a smaller building on the property to serve various community and recreational purposes.

- **Description of any associated notable residents or events.**

The History of My Life - Andress J. Ridgway

"I was born in Chester, Pa., May 10th, 1832. My father, Andress Ridgway was a seafaring man, born in Gloucester Co., NJ. My mother was of Irish parentage. My grandfather's name was also Andress Ridgway and a member of the Society of Friends at Mickleton, NJ. When about three years of age, my father, who traded south in the winter, was lost outside of the Capes of the Delaware. My mother having died six months before, I was adopted by a family living in Chester by the name of McLarne with whom I followed the water on the Delaware. I left Chester, September 1st, 1852, moved to Bridgeboro, where I learned the shoe making trade with my brother Thomas. I was married Nov. 5th, 1855, to Meriam Wilmerton, daughter of Abraham and Mary Wilmerton of Willingboro Township. Our first year of married life was spent at Beverly, NJ, moving to Delanco in the spring of 1857, have resided here ever since, and have been a daily reader of the Public Ledger. I have three living children: Miss Laura V. Ridgway, Andress C. and Mrs. Harry Cook. Was a charter member of the Methodist Episcopal Church organized in 1857, was Superintendent of this Sunday school for 37 years and still active in the Church work at present writing (1917). In politics was a Republican for some years, for the last thirty years I have been a Prohibitionist. Thirty-six years ago, I started to manufacture children's - turn shoes with my son A. C. Ridgway as a partner, still taking an active interest in the business."

-- Signed my eighty-fifth birthday, Thursday, May 10, 1917 Delanco, NJ

Provided by Church Historian Alice M. Smith, Dobbins Memorial United Methodist Church

Andress J. Ridgway was a significant contributor to the prosperity of Delanco in his lifetime. Providing property on Walnut Street to double the size of Delanco's town green.

Atlantic Paper Tube Co/R.H. Gerhardt Co

According to the BCT article below, R.H. Gerhardt Co. was a family business established in 1934 as Atlantic Paper Tube. R.H Gerhardt was founder and president. It occupied 200 Ash Street until it moved to a cement block building at 420 Cooper Street near Hickory Street. Nephew, J. Bernard Gerhardt took over the business.

Other sources refer to the business as Atlantic Paper Tube Co. and give the date of 1976 when the business moved from 200 Ash to 420 Cooper. On the early morning of March 2, 1987, the business burned to the ground and never reopened. See article attached.

Riverside Outboard & Marine Center

With immediate access to the Rancocas Creek, the empty building was attractive to a business providing indoor and outdoor storage for pleasure craft. It was operated by Charles Kalmes, followed by Albert Gaunt. The property is equipped with a paved launch ramp and a swing davit on the seawall. The sign for the business(es) is faded, but still attached to the south side of the building (see above).



Harold F. Fisher & Son originally started out in the government surplus business in 1954, Harold Fisher started repairing the surplus tents that he would sell at his Barracks Trading Post. Before long he was being approached to make boat covers, custom tarps and any other items that required a sewing machine. It wasn't too long before Harold was traveling as far north to Rhode Island and south to the Chesapeake Bay to measure boats for winter covers. Photo from the Delanco Archive.

As his winter boat cover and truck tarp business grew, Mr. Fisher moved several times to larger facilities, final locating in a 14,000 square foot facility along the Rancocas Creek. The 100-year-old former Shoe Factory provided plenty of space for the various products that Harold F. Fisher and Sons manufactured. But, in 2018 with much sorrow, Fisher and Sons had to move on, relocating to Cinnaminson, NJ.

Operated by Harold's youngest son Frank for the last 28 years, Fisher and Sons has gone through its share of expansions and contractions. From winter storage covers to truck tarps, from subcontracting to booms. [Note: This may be a reference to floating booms used for environmental protection, a large part of their business.] Frank and his wife Barbara have led the charge in tackling large jobs like fabric structure panels for the military and large quantities of container covers for the railroads. Equipped with RF and thermal fabric welders along with heavy duty Singer, Consew and Union Special sewing machines there are not too many jobs that Fisher and Sons can't handle. Just the way Pop liked it."
-- *From the Harold F. Fisher & Son published company history.*

Notes:

The Delanco Story (p 5) says that Harold F. Fisher moved to Delanco from Berlin (NJ) about 1970, making it difficult to find the exact date of the move.

There is a Barracks Trading Post currently located in Maple Shade. It sells electronics and their published business history says they were founded in 1964. Any connection is not known.

From the 2007 photo below, the company also did business as Delanco Tarp.



An early advertisement for Ridgway Shoes dated prior to 1883 when Andress' son, Andress Crittendon Ridgway joined the firm.



Photo of a shoe actually manufactured by Ridgway & Son Shoes. The shoe is from the collection of Vincent Colonna. The shoemaking equipment was borrowed for the display.



Vinyl sign from the company truck showing both operating names. Peter Fritz photo from 2007.