

Benhams & Stoutenborough's Tinware Factory

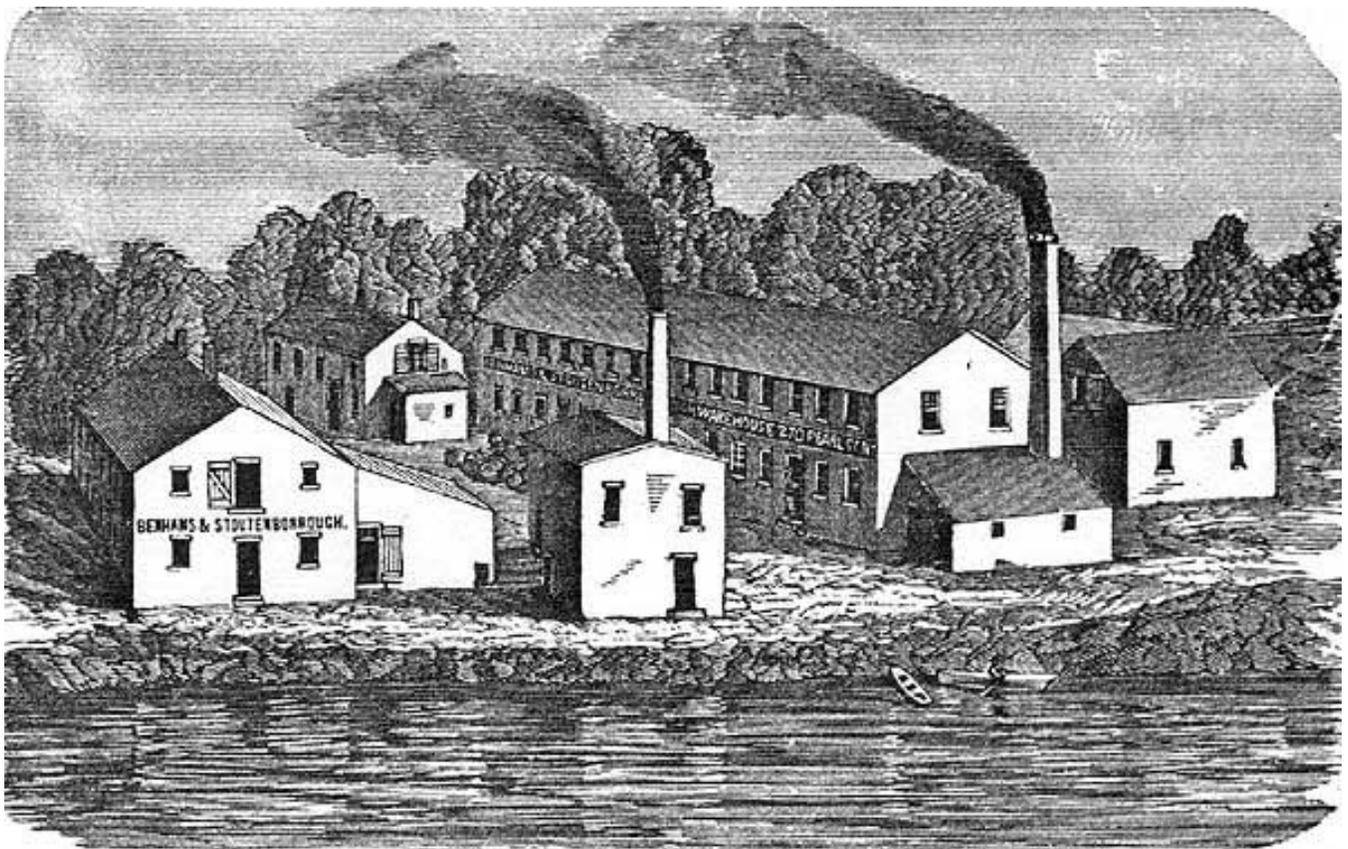
(also known as
Atwater & Benham's Tinware Factory)

by Daniel E Russell
City Historian
City of Glen Cove, New York

One of the most ubiquitous of 19th century household furnishings was "tinware"... utilitarian domestic items made of sheet iron which had been galvanized with a thin tin skin to protect against rusting exactly like a "tin can". The raw metal objects could be painted, varnished or glazed in a wide variety of styles to appeal to housewives of the era.

A leading manufacturer of tinware in New York was

Benhams & Stoutenborough, also known through part of its history as "Atwater & Benham". With sales rooms located on Pearl Street in Manhattan (presided over by Darius Benham and partner Xenophon Stoutenborough) the company operated a sprawling factory in Glen Cove (which was directed by Darius' brother J. C. Benham). Covering more than one acre, it employed 60 workman. The facility was located on Glen Street,



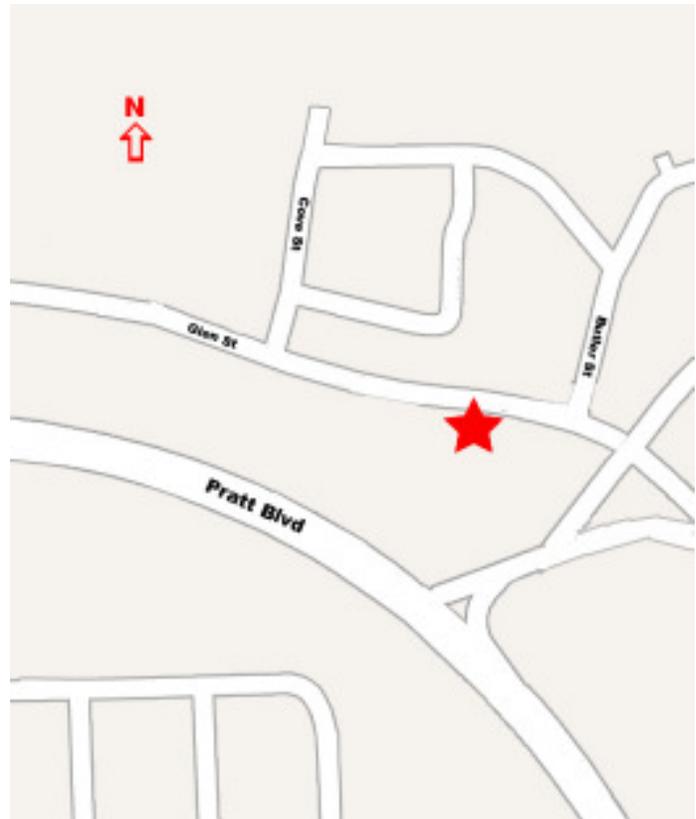
on the border of Upper Mill Pond, approximately where the Senior Citizen Center and Pierce Apartment complex are located today.

The heart of the factory was a two story building in which the tinware was formed. Giant drop presses powered by a 30 horse power steam engine stamped out a variety of products including wash basins, ornamental boxes, dust pans, buckets and watering cans. Coal hods — used in the 19th century to carry coal from the coal bin to the cast iron stove — were produced in a separate building. A third large building was dedicated exclusively to decorating the raw tinware and packing it for shipment to the company's New York City warehouse and sales office. According to one source, the company decorated the tinware using

“lithography; ornamentation by flexible blocks; crystalizing, by which the semblance of ice is given to water coolers, etc.; hand painting; Japanning; and other processes by which a degree of beauty is imparted to utensils of common use which entitles them to rank among art productions”.

Benham & Stoutenborough also won valuable government contracts to provide the US Army and Navy with tinware. Perhaps their most unusual product, however, were specially designed tin tubes to contain nitroglycerin for blasting. This product was used to eliminate a number of rocky obstructions in New York City's infamous Hell's Gate.

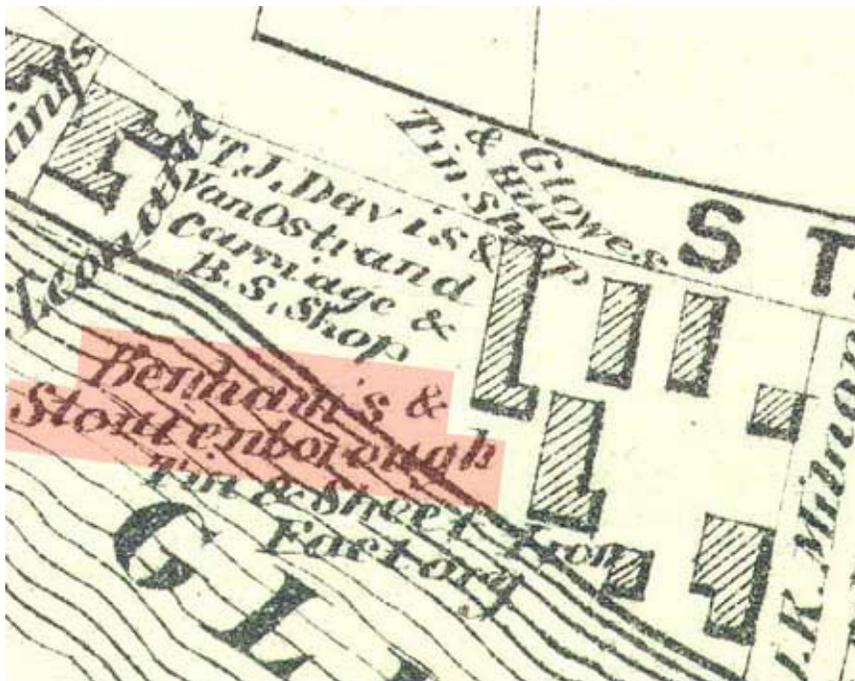
On Tuesday, 20 November 1883, at about 11:30 in the evening, a fire broke out in the main factory building, the result of a defective flue on the heating furnace. The blaze



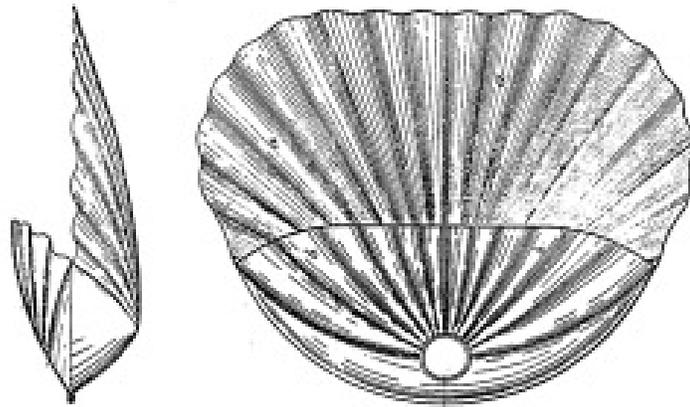
Approximate location of Benham & Stoutenborough's Tinware Factory

engulfed the building, and rapidly spread to the factory's store house, a barn, and other outbuildings on the premises. Local legend claims that the members of the Glen Cove Fire Department were having their annual holiday ball that evening, and rushed to the scene wearing formal attire. The damage to the plant was \$10,000.

The factory was not the only tinware manufacturer in Glen Cove. Coles, Clowes & Co., later known as Clowes & Hall, also manufactured tinware, as did Gruman's Tinware factory (owned and operated by C.B. and H. L. Gruman), although both facilities were considerably smaller than Benhams & Stoutenborough's.



Detail from the 1873 Beers Atlas plate for Glen Cove showing the Benham & Stoutenborough Tinware Factory



An assortment of tinware produced by Benham & Stoutenborough

