

## FLASHBACK

### **125 years ago** Somerville Water Power Canal

If you walk the greenway in Raritan today, you will be strolling a landscape that did not exist in 1840. Raritan's greenway is what remains of Somerset County's early industrial enterprise, the Water Power Canal. The ambitious plan to bring manufacturing to rural Somerset County began its life in 1836 when a group of local capitalists—including Wall, Gaston, and Loomis, surveyed the Raritan River in the vicinity of an existing grist mill and developed plans for "The Somerville Water Power Canal." They began to acquire land and gave their names to the first streets laid out in what would eventually become a village. When they formally incorporated in 1842, their plans were extensive (See the waterway shown in blue), and several factories already in operation can be seen. However, according to extensive original research by Mr. D. J. Coon, portions were never completed due to continuing financial problems, a bankruptcy, and re-incorporation as the Raritan Water Power Company in 1845.



Map Source: NJ Room at Somerville Public Library. Read more about it: *Somerset County, Three Centuries of Progress* (1990) Jesse Havens. *Evolving Industries Along Raritan's Waterfront*. D. J. Coon.

**100 years ago:** In 1920, the Middle Brook again was the site of an important change for Somerset County. In the hills above Bridgewater, its western branch was dammed to form a 21-acre reservoir, named at the time for the communities it served, the *Bound Brook/Elizabeth Reservoir*. Today, we know it as *Washington Valley Reservoir*, the centerpiece of the western end of *Washington Valley Park*, a great place to appreciate fall foliage. The eastern end of this park, between Chimney Rock Road and Vosseler Ave, and its smaller reservoir, preserves some of the area of the 1777-78 Middlebrook encampment.

**250 years ago... Rolling toward Revolution:** Fall brought Fredrick Frelinghuysen, James Madison, Philip Freneau, and other members of the Class of 1771, back to campus at the College of New Jersey in Princeton. In Boston, John Adams won acquittal for Captain Preston after a 6-day trial. Thanks to Adams skillful questioning of contradictory witnesses, the jury found there was reasonable doubt that Preston had given the order for the British regulars to fire on civilians. Unpopular with the Sons of Liberty because he took the case, Adams is respected for upholding "the rule of law" following *The Boston Massacre*. No doubt it was discussed at Nassau Hall in Princeton.