

# Somers Brothers Tinware Factory

(later American Can Company)



## DESIGNATION REPORT

# Somers Brothers Tinware Factory (later American Can Company)

## LOCATION

Borough of Brooklyn  
238-246 3rd Street, 365-379 3rd Avenue,  
and 232-236 3rd Street (aka 361-363 3rd Avenue)

## LANDMARK TYPE

Individual

## SIGNIFICANCE

Once one of the largest decorated tinware manufacturing complexes in the United States, the Somers Brothers Tinware Factory (later American Can Company) remains one of Gowanus' most distinctive industrial buildings.



**View Southeast to 3rd Street and 3rd Avenue**

Brooklyn Public Library, c.1909

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## **Somers Brothers Tinware Factory (later American Can Company)**

238-246 3rd Street, 365-379 3rd Avenue, and 232-236  
3rd Street (aka 361-363 3rd Avenue), Brooklyn

### **Designation List 515 LP-2640**

**Built:** 1884

**Architect:** Daniel McLean Somers

**Landmark Site:** Borough of Brooklyn,  
Tax Map Block 980, Lot 8 in part consisting of the  
land beneath the Somers Brothers Tinware Factory  
located on the portion of the lot beginning at the corner  
formed by the intersection of the southwesterly side of  
Third Street with the southeasterly side of Third  
Avenue; running thence southeasterly along the  
southwesterly side of Third Street, 149 feet 6 inches;  
thence southwesterly parallel with Third Avenue, 54  
feet 5 inches; thence northwesterly parallel with Third  
Street, 83 feet 6 inches; thence southwesterly parallel  
with Third Avenue, 143 feet; thence northwesterly  
parallel with Third Street, 66 feet; thence northerly  
along the southeasterly side of Third Avenue, 205 feet  
6 inches to the point of the beginning.

**Calendared:** June 25, 2019

**Public Hearing:** September 24, 2019

**Designated:** October 29, 2019

On September 24, 2019, the Landmarks Preservation  
Commission held a public hearing on the proposed  
designation of the Somers Brothers Tinware Factory  
(later American Can Company) as a New York City  
Landmark and the proposed designation of the related

Landmark Site (Item No.1). The hearing was duly  
advertised in accordance with the provisions of the  
law. The Commission received support for the proposed  
designation from 14 people, including the representatives  
of the property owner, New York City Councilmember  
Brad Lander, Gowanus Landmarking Coalition, Historic  
Districts Council, Society for the Architecture of the City,  
New York Landmarks Conservancy, The Municipal Art  
Society of New York, Park Slope Civic Council, Friends  
and Residents of Greater Gowanus, and four individuals.  
In addition, the Commission received 33 written  
submissions in support of designation.

## Summary

### Somers Brothers Tinware Factory

The Somers Brothers Tinware Factory (later American Can Company) was built in 1884 for Somers Brothers, a pioneer of tinware production in the United States and one of the most significant and best-known manufacturers in Brooklyn from 1869-1901. Before the development of plastic containers and extensive use of aluminum cans, tinplate vessels were essential to the storage, preservation, mass production, and dissemination of a diverse range of products. In 1878, the Somers brothers—Daniel, Guy, and Joseph—began to use a lithographic process of Daniel Somers’ invention to print images on tinplate sheets, and custom equipment to cut and shape the sheets into containers. These processes set the firm apart as one of the earliest American companies to market tinware with integrated decorative surfaces rather than separate paper labels.

To better meet the intense demand for its products, Somers Brothers began to construct this polychromatic brick plant on the southeast corner of 3rd Avenue and 3rd Street in 1884, on a site with convenient access to the now-infilled 5th Street basin of the Gowanus Canal. The imaginative Daniel Somers was responsible for the design, and was the inventor of numerous devices and processes that were used to manufacture Somers Brothers’ tin boxes. Some features, like the L-shaped plan, flat roof, regular fenestration pattern, and narrow width to allow for daylight penetration, are hallmarks of late nineteenth-century industrial architecture. The mixture of segmental and semicircular arches and the regular grid of vertical piers and horizontal bands are characteristic of the American Round Arch style. The

building’s distinctive polychromatic brick, patterns, projections, and prominent corner pavilion communicated a solid public image for the Somers brothers, longtime residents of Brooklyn, and lend to the building’s prominence in the Gowanus neighborhood’s urban landscape.

In the 1890s, the Somers Brothers Tinware Factory complex was written about as one of the largest tinplate factories in the world; Daniel Somers wrote that “the works are pronounced by English experts to be the finest tinplate works in existence.”<sup>1</sup> In 1898, a portion of Somers Brothers’ operations became part of the American Tin Plate Company, a tinplate trust then in possession of 90% of tin mills in the United States. In 1901, Somers Brothers was absorbed by the American Can Company, which was responsible for a number of innovations in tin can fabrication, and bought out 98% of American tin can manufacturers to eliminate competition and dominate domestic tin can production. Almost a century later, the factory’s reuse as a creative node in Gowanus infused new utility into the building. Growing since the 1970s, a curated collection of more than 300 artists, performers, designers, publishers, non-profit organizations, and others currently use the complex. It’s also well-known as the location of the iconic music studio, BC Studio, and it serves as a venue for the annual Rooftop Films series. Known as the Old American Can Factory, the complex led the Gowanus neighborhood’s transition from industry to a lively mix of arts and manufacturing, and remains a vital contributor to the historic, architectural, and cultural character of the neighborhood.

## Building Description

Somers Brothers Tinware Factory

### Description

The Somers Brothers Tinware Factory is an L-shaped historic factory complex located at the corner of 3rd Street and 3rd Avenue in the Gowanus neighborhood of Brooklyn. The complex's original three-story-and-basement buildings included in this designation consist of a prominent corner pavilion and two wings. The polychromatic brick structures were built as a unit and feature red, red-orange, black, and white-glazed brick cladding and detailing, bluestone sills, and an assortment of brick arch configurations, recesses, corbels, and projections that enliven the facade.

The facades are animated by a variety of arched window openings and decorative and compositional elements. The primary (street-facing) facades feature segmental- and round-arched window openings with three courses of rowlock brick projecting progressively further from the first through third stories. Third-story windows feature the most elaborate detail, where arched window heads are incorporated into projecting string courses. Windows are grouped with bluestone sill courses. Brick piers between the window bays feature white-glazed brick string courses, each two courses in height. Centered above the piers on the 3rd Avenue facade of the corner pavilion are diamond-shaped window openings with historic window units and decorative dogtooth-brick enframements. The building is crowned by an elaborate red brick cornice that features stretcher and dogtooth courses, a red brick frieze with alternating horizontal and vertical framed panels. On the pavilion, vertical sections of the frieze are centered above each diamond-shaped window of the 3rd Avenue elevation;

on the wings, vertical sections of the frieze are centered above red brick corbels with dogtooth caps and are positioned between bays or form pilaster capitals.

At the time of designation, ongoing work to replace non-historic windows, repaint painted portions of the facade, and replace entrance and site features beyond the boundaries of the landmark site was in progress.

### Corner Pavilion (232-236 3rd Street, 361-363 3rd Avenue)

**Historic:** Both facades of the corner pavilion are organized in three bays, with a wider central bay and two flanking bays. The 3rd Street facade is slightly wider, with four windows in the center bay, compared to three on the 3rd Avenue facade. The flanking bays on both facades, which are two windows wide, project slightly more than the center sections, and are framed by further projecting brick pilasters with recessed panels. The base is brick with segmental-arched openings and header courses. The second bay on 3rd Street features a stoop, railings, and newel posts that project beyond the landmark site. The stoop leads to an entrance in a segmental-arched opening in the eastern bay of the 3rd Street facade. The first story features a combination of segmental-arched and round-arched openings. The second story features primarily segmental-arched windows, with round-arched windows in the center two bays of the 3rd Street facade. The double-height third story features segmental-arched windows on 3rd Street and round-arched windows on 3rd Avenue; above them, the third story features diamond-shaped windows with decorative brick surrounds on the 3rd Avenue facade and a blank frieze on 3rd Street. Painted signage is visible in this location in the c. 1914 historic photograph included in this report. A metal areaway fence extends beyond the landmark site.

**Alterations:** One-story, two-bay, pyramid hip-roofed tower and a decorative iron balustrade that bordered roof of the corner pavilion were removed sometime after c. 1940; facade painted below first-story window openings; historic windows replaced with square-headed one-over-one aluminum sash windows, with frames or panning that infills the arched opening (original four-over-four wood sash windows remained until c. 2018 at the third story).

*Basement:* On 3rd Street, window opening of first bay sealed; entrance opening at second bay sealed; light fixture installed on pilaster base south of entrance stairs; non-historic window grilles.

*First Story:* On 3rd Street, entrance door replaced and infilled to accommodate non-historic, rectangular door; security feature on window infill of first bay; signage above entrance door.

*Second Story:* On 3rd Street, projecting pipe through window infill of fourth bay.

*Third Story:* On 3rd Avenue, diamond-shaped, multi-pane window of the first bay replaced with a single diamond-shaped pane. On 3rd Street, frieze painted.

### **South Elevation (3rd Avenue Pavilion Return)**

**Historic:** The south elevation, which forms a return between the 3rd Avenue elevation of the corner pavilion and the 3rd Avenue wing, is one bay wide and is articulated by a red brick pilaster with recessed panels on its west side, where it abuts the 3rd Avenue elevation. The south elevation features segmental-arched openings at the first, second, and third stories. The upper portion of the double-height third-story features a bullseye opening articulated by two courses of projecting rowlock brick arranged in a circle.

**Alterations:** Facade painted below first-story window opening; basement level obscured by wood and metal platform; except for fourth-story bullseye windows historic windows replaced with square-headed one-over-one aluminum sash windows, with frames or

panning that infills the arched opening; bullseye window sealed with plywood; projecting pipes through window infill of first and second stories.

### **West Elevation (3rd Street Return)**

**Historic:** The west elevation, which forms a return between the 3rd Street elevation and the 3rd Street wing, is one bay wide and is articulated by a red brick pilaster with recessed panels on its north side, where it abuts the 3rd Street elevation of the corner pavilion. The basement, first, second, and third stories feature segmental-arched openings. The upper portion of the double-height third-story features a bullseye opening articulated by two courses of projecting rowlock brick arranged in a circle.

**Alterations:** Facade painted below first-story window opening; except for fourth-story bullseye, historic windows replaced with square-headed one-over-one aluminum sash windows, with frames or panning infilling the arched opening; basement- and first-story windows infilled and painted.

### **3rd Street Wing (238-246 3rd Street) Historic:**

The primary facade of the 3rd Street wing is twelve bays wide and faced in brick laid in a running bond. It features a projecting two-bay section at the east end and a recessed ten-bay section connecting to the corner pavilion. The facade is topped with a continuous red brick cornice that features stretcher and dogtooth courses, and a brick frieze with alternating horizontal and vertical framed panels. Except for the narrow bay adjacent to the eastern section, the window openings of the 3rd Street wing are wider than those of the corner pavilion. Similar to the corner pavilion, the edges of the eastern two-bay section are articulated by full-height pilasters with wider, projecting bases with ogival brick coping courses, resting on bluestone sills. The pilaster connecting to the recessed section features similar detail on the return.

The basement level features segmental-arched entrance and window openings in the recessed portion of the wing, and the ground level of the projecting eastern section includes a vehicular entrance. The fifth bay serves as a basement entrance, and an iron fence that extends beyond the landmark site encloses the eastern three bays of the recessed portion of the facade at this location. The first story features a projecting bluestone sill course above two courses of projecting black brick and segmental-arched window openings. The second story features segmental-arched window openings. On the third story, the projecting two-bay section features segmental-arched openings below basket-handle arches; the ten-bay recessed section features semicircular-arched openings with bluestone sills. Windows of the second and third stories feature projecting bluestone sills.

**Alterations:** Historic windows replaced with non-historic, paired, one-over-one aluminum sash windows with frames or panning infilling arched opening above; historic, segmental-arched, wood windows with five rows of four panes and a four-pane, operable horizontal pivot in each window at recessed section of third story replaced after August 2018.

*Basement:* Facade painted below first-story windows; facade of first and second bays painted to first story; roll-down metal security gate at fifth bay entrance; window openings of sixth through twelfth bays infilled and painted; standpipe at twelfth bay.

*First Story:* Vehicular entrance at eastern projecting section (visible in c.1914 image below) enlarged and fitted with roll-down metal gate; light fixtures and wiring above windows; security grilles installed in windows of fourth through twelfth bays; projecting pipes through window infill of third and twelfth bays.

*Third Story:* Windows of first and second bays partially infilled; infill painted; communications equipment visible at roofline.

**3rd Street Wing Rear Wall, Historic:** The 3rd Street wing rear wall is a rear facade that is not visible from public thoroughfares. It is twelve bays wide, with a concrete block elevator tower at the rear of the corner pavilion. The facade is laid in ashlar below the first-story windows and common bond brick on the first, second, and third stories. The first, second, and third stories feature projecting bluestone sills. The entire elevation features segmental-arched openings for windows and entrances. Window openings that serve as means of egress for a fire stair are narrower and longer than others; these include the tenth bay of the first story, the seventh bay of the second story; and the fourth bay of the third story. The facade terminates in a simple brick cornice with a stone cap.

**Alterations:** Historic windows replaced with square-headed one-over-one aluminum sash windows, with frames or panning that infills the arched opening; non-historic light and security features.

*Basement:* Window openings infilled except at the eighth bay; window openings of eleventh and twelfth bays replaced with single garage opening.

*First Story:* Window opening at second bay infilled; window opening at fourth bay partially infilled and possibly lengthened; window openings of eleventh and twelfth bays replaced with single vehicular opening.

*Second Story:* Window opening at second bay partially infilled; door replaced at seventh bay.

*Third Story:* Window openings in third and tenth bays infilled.

### **3rd Avenue Wing (365-379 3rd Avenue)**

**Historic:** The primary facade of the 3rd Avenue wing is nineteen bays wide extending south from the corner pavilion. Like the 3rd Street facade, it is laid in running bond, and features the same cornice as the 3rd Street wing, and its window openings are wider than those of the corner pavilion. The basement level features segmental-arched openings with rowlock

courses above, with an entrance in the twelfth bay. The first floor features a projecting bluestone sill course above two courses of projecting black brick (painted) and segmental-arched openings with rowlock courses above. The second story has segmental-arched openings with bluestone sills and rowlock courses above. The third story has segmental-arched openings below basket-handle arches, and bluestone sills. The eleventh bay features a multi-paned window that may be historic.

**Alterations:** Historic windows replaced with non-historic, paired, square-headed one-over-one aluminum sash windows with frames or panning infilling arch above.

*Basement:* Facade painted below first-story windows; first bay obscured by wood and metal platform that extends beyond the landmark site; second bay infilled; twelfth bay converted to basement entrance and partially infilled to accommodate rectangular double doors and roll-down security grille; entrance stairs and railings that extend beyond the landmark site installed at twelfth bay; fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth bays obscured by plywood sheets; eighteenth and nineteenth bays infilled.

*First Story:* Window opening at first bay converted to entrance, lengthened, and partially infilled to accommodate rectangular, roll-down security grille and enframing; windows at fifteenth and seventeenth bays converted to entrances, lengthened, and partially infilled to accommodate rectangular, roll-down security grilles; visible brick infill above and adjacent to fifteenth and seventeenth bay entrances; projecting pipes through window infill of third, sixth, ninth, twelfth, sixteenth, and eighteenth bays.

*Second Story:* Projecting pipes through window infill of second, third, seventh, tenth, twelfth, and fifteenth bays.

*Third Story:* First, tenth, and twelfth windows infilled with brick; communications equipment visible at roofline.

**3rd Avenue Wing Rear Wall, Historic:** The 3rd Street wing rear wall is a rear facade that is not visible from public thoroughfares. It is nineteen bays wide extending south from the corner pavilion. All windows are in segmental-arched openings, and windows at first, second, and third stories feature projecting bluestone sills. Window openings that serve as means of egress for a fire stair are narrower and longer than others; these include the tenth bay of the second story and thirteenth bay of the third story. The facade terminates in a simple brick cornice with a stone cap. The facade is laid in ashlar below the first-story windows and common bond brick on the first, second, and third stories.

**Alterations:** Windows replaced with non-historic aluminum square-headed sash windows with frames or panning infilling arched opening above; non-historic light and security features; eighteenth and nineteenth bays replaced with non-historic elevator tower, though an elevator and wooden platform were in that location from the time of construction; metal chute between first and second bays and from roof to first story; installation date and original material and configuration of metal fire stair with projecting supports not determined.

*Basement:* Basement obscured by wood and concrete block ramp and concrete block fence.

*First Story:* Ninth bay obscured by connector to former engine house, which is not included in the landmark site; window openings at tenth through fourteenth bays infilled and infill painted; window opening at fifteenth bay partially infilled; lengthened, and converted to entrance with non-historic metal and glass door; arch above window opening at thirteenth bay painted; metal fire stair with projecting supports.

*Second Story:* Window openings at fourth through eighth bays infilled; ninth bay obscured by connector to former engine house, which is not included in the landmark site; window opening at tenth bay partially

infilled; window openings at eleventh through fourteenth bays infilled; visible brick replacement below window opening at fourteenth bay; metal fire stair with projecting supports.

*Third Story:* Ninth bay obscured by connector to former engine house; tenth bay infilled; window opening at thirteenth bay partially infilled; metal fire stair with ladder connected to facade.

## History and Significance

Somers Brothers Tinware Factory

### Early History of the Area<sup>2</sup>

The Somers Brothers Tinware Factory is located within Brooklyn's Gowanus neighborhood, which extends from around Baltic Street southward to the Gowanus Expressway and from Bond Street eastward to Fourth Avenue. Before the arrival of European colonists, this area was occupied by the Canarsee, one of several Algonquin-speaking groups comprising the Lenape people, whose territory extended from the Upper Hudson Valley to Delaware Bay. The Canarsee lived in loosely organized, relatively autonomous groups in seasonal campsites and farming communities, moving with the seasons to obtain their food supply. They developed an extensive network of trails throughout Brooklyn, including one from the present Atlantic Terminal area to Gowanus Bay.

"Gowanus" is a Munsee word of uncertain meaning. The area's central geographic feature was Gowanus Creek, a tidal estuary originating near the present-day intersection of 3rd Avenue and Baltic Street and meandering southward through marshlands into Gowanus Bay. Estuaries like Gowanus Creek were vital to the Canarsee, providing access to the shoreline and its abundant shellfish. Native American sites have been identified in the area, including a campsite just east of the canal head where pottery, clay pipes, and arrowheads have been found; the Gowanus Houses just west of the canal occupy the former site of the village of Werpos, which contained a Native burial ground and cornfields.

In 1609, Englishman Henry Hudson, backed by the Dutch East India Company, explored the river that now bears his name and opened the region to

Dutch colonization. Although the Canarsee initially traded with Dutch and English settlers as they had with other Native groups, the colonists quickly overtook them and were displacing them by the 1640s. Never large in number, the Canarsee were devastated by armed conflict and the introduction of European diseases, as well as by land agreements based on European concepts of property ownership that were completely foreign to them.<sup>3</sup> The few remaining Canarsee left the region entirely by the 1700s.

At the time of the American Revolution, Gowanus was largely agricultural, with much of its labor performed by enslaved people of African descent. Along the shore of Gowanus Bay, colonists had erected several tide mills, which released water impounded during high tide to grind grains into flour and meal. The area played a key role in the Battle of Long Island (also known as the Battle of Brooklyn), the first major conflict of the Revolutionary War and the largest waged in North America up to that time. In August of 1776, thousands of British troops assembled at Gravesend Bay with the goal of capturing New York City and crushing the nascent rebellion. One of the few routes leading to New York was the Gowanus Road, located around present-day Fifth Avenue. At the Vechte-Cortelyou House (demolished) on the Gowanus Road near 3rd Street, a small contingent of Maryland troops suffered severe casualties in battling the British forces and allowing Washington and his army to escape northward and survive.

### Development of the Gowanus Canal<sup>4</sup>

The 1825 opening of the Erie Canal vaulted New York to preeminence among the nation's commercial ports and set off economic booms in both New York City and Brooklyn. Formerly a small settlement centered around the Fulton Ferry landing, Brooklyn grew from 7,000 residents in 1820 to nearly 100,000 by 1850. Much of its waterfront between Greenpoint and Red Hook was built up with docks and warehouses, and

row houses spread southward and eastward from Brooklyn Heights into new neighborhoods like Boerum Hill. Brooklyn was chartered as a city in 1834, and in 1839 the city extended the street grid to its outermost areas, providing a blueprint for its future growth. By this time, land speculation and the filling of marshlands were already occurring west of Gowanus Creek, in Red Hook, which would be transformed into a major grain-handling center with the opening of Atlantic Basin on Buttermilk Channel in 1846.

Although the Gowanus area remained rural into the 1840s, Red Hook's development, as well as the recent opening of Green-Wood Cemetery and completion of the first bridge across Gowanus Creek, focused attention on the creek and its 1,700 acres of surrounding wetlands. To real estate speculators and developers, the marshlands were worse than useless: unable to be built upon, they were also thought to generate unhealthy air that impeded development throughout the surrounding area. Draining the Gowanus marshes, the Brooklyn Eagle argued, would remove the "miasma which hangs about Prospect Hill and other portions of the city, making them liable to intermittent fevers and other diseases; and thus shutting them out from improvement."<sup>5</sup> In 1847, at the request of Brooklyn's Common Council, the prominent hydraulic engineer David B. Douglass formulated plans for a permanent drainage canal emptying into Gowanus Bay. This self-cleaning canal would either extend through Brooklyn to Wallabout Bay, or connect to a parallel canal with locks and gates that would permit its periodic flushing.

Douglass' proposal was rejected in favor of a much cheaper one from the developer of Atlantic Basin, Daniel Richards. Approved as the Gowanus Canal in 1849, Richards' waterway roughly followed the path of Gowanus Creek, extending northward from Gowanus Bay to around 6th Street, where it turned eastward before again turning northward around Second Avenue. Unlike Douglass, Richards saw no

need for a flushing mechanism, expecting tidal action to keep the canal clean. His waterway would be an industrial as well as drainage canal, navigable by barges and other small vessels and containing several large commercial basins. "The introduction of this class of shipping into this section of our city would cause to spring to life much new enterprise, and introduce a lively business along the line of the canal," predicted Richards, who envisioned the canal's banks lined with "cheap warehouses, sheds and yards, for deposit and storage of heavy coarse goods, as also lumber, coal, brick, stone and wood yards, as well as manufactories."<sup>6</sup>

Despite the adoption of Richards' plan, no formal mechanism was created for its implementation, and the canal's construction, left up to local landowners, proceeded haphazardly through the 1850s. Central to the canal's completion would be the railroad magnate, financier, and speculator Edwin C. Litchfield, who had acquired the old Dutch farms between 1st and 9th streets, stretching from the canal eastward to what is now Prospect Park, in the early 1850s. Litchfield directed much of the filling, grading, and paving work along the east side of the canal; politically savvy and powerful, he was instrumental in creating a state commission to improve 3rd Street through the heart of his property between the canal and his new villa, Grace Hill.<sup>7</sup> Although work on the canal stagnated during the Civil War, it accelerated starting in 1866 with the founding of Litchfield's Brooklyn Improvement Company to develop private docking facilities there. Soon afterward, the state chartered the Gowanus Canal Improvement Commission, which would dredge the canal, install permanent canal walls, and carry the project through to completion over the next four years. During this time, Litchfield's company began building private basins along the east side of the canal, including those remaining today at 4th, 6th, and 7th Streets.

## Industry Along the Gowanus Canal<sup>8</sup>

As the canal neared completion in the late 1860s, area streets continued to be paved and opened and Daniel Richards' long-delayed vision of an urban waterway lined with industrial businesses began to be realized. By 1869, about a dozen firms had established themselves along the canal; most dealt in bulk goods, as would be typical of the Gowanus throughout its history. Several lumber yards, a stone yard, a sawmill, and factories making doors, blinds, and drainpipe were already operating on the Gowanus, which would play a key role in Brooklyn's late-19th- and early-20th-century building boom as a major entry and distribution point for building supplies. In 1872, the New York and Long Island Cignet Stone Company, a pioneering manufacturer and marketer of concrete block in the United States, moved to a five-acre site adjoining the canal's 4th Street Basin and began building its office (a designated New York City Landmark), one of the country's first concrete buildings.<sup>9</sup> By the early 1870s, the canal had become the center of Brooklyn's coal trade. Most dealers of building supplies and other bulk goods operated out of wood-framed structures, few if any of which survive.

By 1880, more than 30 industrial firms had settled along the canal as Gowanus developed into one of Brooklyn's busiest industrial neighborhoods. Manufactured goods, including tinware, furniture, chemicals, paint, paper, and textiles, as well as food and tobacco items, were produced in robust brick structures generally located a block or more from the canal. Area factories and other industrial businesses employed large numbers of Irish, German, and Scandinavian immigrants, with Italian immigrants joining them around the turn of the 20th century. Many factory workers were teenage boys and girls who labored under harsh conditions for low pay.

Despite Daniel Richards' expectation that the tides would keep the canal clean, pollution bedeviled the Gowanus practically from its start. Sewers were

routed into Gowanus Creek starting in the late 1850s, and by 1877 the Eagle found the canal to be "very vile ... a nuisance that is seriously affecting the health of South Brooklyn people."<sup>10</sup> By 1886, the canal was so choked with filth that some boats were having trouble reaching the docks. Three years later, a commission investigating the matter proposed filling in the canal, stating that "while the canal is a source of great profit to less than 100 persons, firms, or corporations ... it is detrimental to health, obstructive to traffic, and an injury ... to real estate values throughout South Brooklyn."<sup>11</sup> Opened in 1911, the Gowanus Flushing Tunnel was expected to purify the canal by drawing its water through a mile-long tunnel into Buttermilk Channel, but it was only modestly successful and shut down after its impeller broke in 1960.

Following World War II, there was a decline in industrial activity along and around the Canal. Along the Canal, many industrial businesses closed or downsized, leaving large vacant lots and sometimes vacant buildings. In 1921, the New York Times called the Gowanus "one of the dirtiest, one of the shortest, and one of the most important waterways in the world," noting that it handled more freight annually than the entire Erie Canal, known at the time as the New York State Barge Canal.<sup>12</sup> The 1920s would be the canal's most productive decade, when more than 20,000 vessels used it per year. Its use steeply declined in the 1930s with the onset of the Depression, the decline in local building activity, the shift from coal to oil, and the replacement of local waterborne freight with trucking. Its larger manufacturers were replaced by smaller, more specialized companies, many devoted to food production.

Over the past thirty years, interest in both working and living in the canal area has returned. While heavy industry has largely left the Gowanus, parts of district have active light-industrial and commercial activity, and it has become a hub for creative industries and artists. The cultural landscape

includes a wide variety of artists and artisans, cultural and educational institutions and non-profit organizations, many of whom have reactivated former industrial and manufacturing buildings. In 2010, the canal was declared a Superfund site, initiating a multiyear cleanup project that continues today. Reduction in sewage overflows and reactivation of the flushing tunnel in 2014 have improved conditions in and along the canal. Apartment houses have been constructed on many former canalside industrial sites in recent years, and the area is undergoing a rezoning by the New York City Department of City Planning.

### **Daniel, Guy, and Joseph Somers**

Somers Brothers was a pioneering tinware production and decoration firm in the United States and one of the most significant and best-known manufacturers in Brooklyn from 1869-1901. The brothers—Daniel, Guy, and Joseph—were the children of Joseph Risley Somers and Mary Carlton Somers (née Atkinson) of Alexandria, Virginia and descendants and relations of notable historic figures in Great Britain and the United States.<sup>13</sup> Daniel McLean Somers (1841-1912) was an inventor, manufacturer, and civil engineer who came to Brooklyn in 1865 and was a prominent figure in Brooklyn business and politics thereafter.<sup>14</sup> Guy Atkinson Somers (1842-1909) was a machinist and production superintendent.<sup>15</sup> Joseph LeStrange Somers (1844-1914) was a manufacturer and salesman who left his studies at the University of Virginia in the midst of the Civil War and came to Brooklyn in 1862.<sup>16</sup> Between 1862 and 1869, “without capital or a local business acquaintance” in Brooklyn, Joseph and Guy Somers went into business at 38 Columbia Heights as Joseph L. Somers & Brother to produce brass notions and tin tags, colorful identifiers that bore the name of the manufacturer or processor of an item in order to discourage counterfeits.<sup>17</sup> Daniel Somers became a fixture of the firm sometime between c.1865 and 1869.<sup>18</sup>

In 1869, Daniel, Guy, and Joseph Somers, with their cousin, the inventor and former brass manufacturer William H. Atkinson, went into business as Somers Brothers and began to produce boxes cut from sheets of brass and tin by a method of Daniel Somers’ invention. As copartners, each of the three Somers brothers undertook a separate leadership role in the business: Daniel oversaw the mechanics and equipment operations, Joseph oversaw finances, production, and sales, and Guy oversaw tinware fabrication.<sup>19</sup> Another cousin, Elmer Everet Somers (1861-1924), later became a partner in the firm. Most of the containers that Somers Brothers made were meant to hold perishable products, household products, medicines, or small articles.

In 1878, Somers Brothers began to manufacture tinware with designs and images printed directly on the metal surfaces using a lithographic process of Daniel Somers’ invention. Daniel Somers “was the originator of this idea of using decorated tin boxes, and devised and constructed the necessary machinery both for shaping the boxes and decorating them.”<sup>20</sup> Somers Brothers was among the earliest American companies to market lithographed tinware; even a decade after the firm began to lithograph tin, it was one of only three known tin lithographers in the United States.<sup>21</sup>

Daniel Somers invented and patented numerous devices to facilitate and improve the manufacture of Somers Brothers’ tin boxes, among them Machines for Making Split-Metal and Other Tubes (1872), Sheet Metal Boxes (1878), Rolling Mechanism (1904), Apparatus for Forming Thin Metallic Plate (1904), Process of Making Thin Plate (1905), Process of Making Tin-Plate (1905), Furnace (1905), and Apparatus for Opening Packs of Plates (1907). Together, Daniel Somers and William H. Atkinson invented an Apparatus for Pickling Metal Plates (1892), a device to remove impurities from metal surfaces to allow for better adherence of tin plate

or pigment.<sup>22</sup> Despite his lack of education in architectural construction, Daniel Somers was further responsible for the design of the Somers Brothers Tinware Factory (later American Can Company) in 1884 and a subsequent addition on a separate lot. After his initial forays into architecture in his designs for Somers Brothers, Daniel Somers drew plans for renovations to his home at 105 Halsey Street (in the Bedford Historic District) and construction of his own mausoleum in Green-wood Cemetery, which was built by E. C. Tayntor Company with stained glass by Maitland Armstrong.<sup>23</sup>

The Somers brothers were active contributors to their communities. Over the course of his life in Brooklyn, Daniel Somers was a director of the Brooklyn Public Library, a Parks Department Commissioner, and member of numerous Brooklyn organizations.<sup>24</sup> Joseph Somers was a member of Protestant Episcopal Church of Brooklyn, the Brooklyn Club, and Merchants Association of New York.<sup>25</sup>

### **Somers Brothers**

The Somers brothers became active in tin production in Brooklyn in 1862. Although the earlier Brooklyn factories that the firm leased are no longer extant, their locations reflected the importance of water routes for Somers Brothers' acquisition of raw materials from mills abroad and prefigured its relocation to a site near the Gowanus Canal. Prior to 1872, the Somers Brothers tin works was at 38 Columbia Heights, near the Fulton Ferry and piers on the East River. From 1872 until about 1879, the brothers ran their business from 107 Water Street. From about 1879 until 1884, the Somers Brothers plant sat at the intersection of Front Street and Pearl Street, near the Fulton and Catharine ferries in the industrial waterfront neighborhood now known as DUMBO.<sup>26</sup>

In 1884, the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* wrote about Somers Brothers' Front Street plant as "the greatest

decorated tin box factory in this country" with its importation of tinplate from Great Britain, a staff of artists to design its lithographs, a proprietary lithographic process to transfer appropriate pigments to the tin sheet surfaces, steam pipe kilns to fix the pigments, and applications of enamel and gloss finishes to produce durable products. Once the decorations were complete, machine operators bent the sheets into the appropriate shapes to make containers. Dies and chucks for different container sizes were made on site "in a separate large machine room where every man employed is an artist in his way, and all the machines used are made there also, after the castings have been furnished from original designs." Complete boxes were sent by rail "to the men who called for them, maybe 1,000 miles off."<sup>27</sup>

In its decade of operation on Front Street, Somers Brothers' production grew thirtyfold. By 1884, the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* wrote that Somers Brothers was "the largest firm in the business in this country. It was also the first to take up decorating tin boxes by printing directly on the sheets."<sup>28</sup> Before there was a direct lithographic process for tin, paper labels were applied to tin containers to advertise the products within; with equipment of Daniel Somers' invention, Somers Brothers was able to customize and streamline the lithographic process to such an extent that the additional application of a print on the tin surface cost "very little more" than the production of plain tinware. A significant proportion of Somers Brothers' employees were female; by 1884, there were 200 female employees and 75 male employees at work in the Front Street plant, with an output of 15,000 to 20,000 tin boxes per day in addition to tin and iron novelties and other custom containers.<sup>29</sup> The customization capabilities at the Somers Brothers Tinware Factory were well known: In an 1886-1887 notebook, the author Mark Twain (Samuel Langhorne Clemens, 1835-1910) wrote, "Somers Bros, mfr's of fine metal boxes, Brooklyn. Tin—for historical game";

Twain was the holder of an 1885 patent for *Mark Twain's Memory Builder, A Game for Acquiring and Retaining All Sorts of Facts and Dates*, and thought of potential improvements to the game over the course of his life, among them a never-built iteration on Somers Brothers tinware.<sup>30</sup>

Somers Brothers was notable in domestic and international commerce and was an important employer in the area of South Brooklyn:

During the third of a century in which they have continued under this title, they have developed a large and extensive business in the manufacture and sale of decorated metal receptacles, tin signs, tin tobacco tags, and other novel advertising devices, for which they have established a reputation throughout our own and foreign countries. They are the originators of decorated tin boxes, such as are now in use, and among the first to make tin plate in the United States. Their factory at 3rd Street and 3rd Avenue in Brooklyn covers two acres of land, and gives employment to a large number of skilled laborers.<sup>31</sup>

### **Tinplate, Tinware, and the Development of the American Tinplate Industry<sup>32</sup>**

Somers Brothers' large-scale production of tinware containers in the 1870s-1901 is notable for its contribution to American mass production and dissemination of shelf-stable items in tins. Before the substitution of tin with aluminum in industrial products like cans, and centuries before the mass production of plastic containers for storage and preservation, tinplate vessels were essential to non-toxic and food-safe mass-production of a wide range of products.

Tinplate consists of a sheet of iron or steel plated in tin while flat; in a subsequent process, the sheet can be bent to shape, and the result is known as tinware. Between 1800 and 1890, tinplate production

in Great Britain grew one hundred fiftyfold as new functions and applications for tinware came about, among them inexpensive utensils, cans for the gasoline and the preservation of perishable products, and meters for new gas lamps, lights, heat sources, and appliances. Throughout this time, the United States was the single largest consumer of tinplate from Great Britain and the recipient of over 70% of its tinplate exports. Thomas Jefferson was among the earliest American adopters of tinplate shingles as a roof material and wrote about tinplate as "the lightest and most durable cover in the world" in 1821.<sup>33</sup>

In the 1800s, significant developments in the storage and preservation of perishable items were made in France and England, and tinware became the primary material used for this purpose.<sup>34</sup> Somers Brothers "were pioneers in the manufacture of tin boxes for tobacco, confectionery, medicines, fruit, meats, etc." at a time when such innovations were still under development in the United States.<sup>35</sup> Before the mass production of tin cans, the price of shelf-stable tinned goods was prohibitive for most American families. The rapid development of tinware and tin can production technologies made nutritive items more affordable and available for mass consumption. As provisions for settlers, workers, and soldiers, tin cans made American urbanization and expansion into areas far from points of production possible and broke the cycle of dependence on erratic seasonal harvests and local product.<sup>36</sup> Among consumers of more expensive tinware items, elaborate decorations were thought to make an item seem more precious and less like a product of mass production. Somers Brothers large-scale manufacture of decorative tinware containers in the 1870s-1901 is therefore notable for its contribution to the initial stages of American mass production and dissemination of shelf-stable products.

Abortive attempts to establish tinplate mills in the United States were made in the 1820s-1870s, but construction, production, and labor costs made long-

term competition with extant mills in Great Britain infeasible at the time. However, the rapid expansion of American steel production, an upsurge in the consumption of tinplate for cans and gasoline containers, and improvements to tinware fabrication equipment and processes—among them Daniel Somers’ numerous patents—soon brought the development of an American tinplate trade to the fore.

### **Somers Brothers Tinware Factory Design and Site Development<sup>37</sup>**

The Somers Brothers Tinware Factory (later American Can Company) was built in 1884; subsequent additions were built in 1891-1892 and 1902 and are outside the scope of this designation.

To better address the demand for Somers Brothers products, “in 1884 Mr. Somers personally designed and built a large factory and tin plate mill in Brooklyn” that became the Somers Brothers Tinware Factory (later American Can Company).<sup>38</sup> The title to the site was conveyed to Somers Brothers by the Brooklyn Improvement Company on March 29, 1884.<sup>39</sup> The presence of the 5th Street Basin, which has since been infilled, at the rear of the Somers Brothers site was crucial to the firm’s importation of raw materials and shipment of tinware products.<sup>40</sup> On May 24, 1884, Daniel Somers filed plans to construct the polychromatic brick tinware plant at the southeast corner of 3rd Avenue and 3rd Street. Plans were approved in May for occupation by Somers Brothers in December.<sup>41</sup>

Many features of the Somers Brothers Tinware Factory, including the L-shaped plan, flat roof, regular fenestration pattern, and narrow width to allow for daylight penetration, are characteristic of late nineteenth-century industrial architecture. The mixture of segmental and semicircular arches and the regular grid of vertical brick piers and horizontal bands place the Somers Brothers Tinware Factory in the tradition of the American Round Arch style. The American

Round Arch style was a variant of the German Rundbogenstil, which arose in the 1830s and 1840s and drew inspiration from Roman, Byzantine, and Romanesque architecture, with particular emphasis on the round-arched elements of those styles. Brought to the United States by German immigrant architects and builders and shown in pattern books and architectural periodicals, the style was particularly well-suited to industrial and commercial buildings because of its reliance on brick and locally available stones, simplicity of detail, and structural expressiveness. The style was widely employed in the United States for factories, breweries, warehouses, and other industrial structures, including the Estey Piano Company Factory (1885-86), the Havemeyers & Elder Filter, Pan & Finishing House (1881-84), and the Joseph Loth & Company Silk Ribbon Mill (1885-86), all designated New York City Landmarks. Despite its name, buildings constructed in the American Round Arch style, like the Somers Brothers Tinware Factory, often mixed economical segmental-arched window openings with round-arched ones.<sup>42</sup> They also utilized corbelling, patterning, and other forms of decorative brickwork to model and bring variety to their facades, had parapets that varied in height, and often featured towers or pediments to introduce additional visual interest. While the inspiration for Daniel Somers’ design remains unknown, it is possible that Somers, a civil engineer, sought a design scheme that made the most of his expertise, or that he drew from publications that made the American Round Arch style familiar to mass audiences.

Other aspects of the Somers Brothers Tinware Factory’s design, such as its distinctive use of polychromatic brick; dogtooth patterns, corbels, and string courses; projections and panels; diamond windows with Queen Anne-style, multi-pane sashes; prominent corner pavilion; and dramatic tower (demolished), made the structure stand out on the urban landscape. Somers Brothers included an

illustration of this factory on price lists that advertised the firm's products.<sup>43</sup>

The complex features an asymmetrical L-shaped plan and assortment of fine brick details, and had an efficient initial internal organization. To process tinplate and brass sheets brought over the Gowanus Canal to the 5th Street Basin then at the rear of the site, Somers designed the plant to house multiple functions across distinct sections of the structure. The 3rd Avenue wing was built to house storage in the basement; areas to sort, stamp, and lithograph metal sheets on the first and second floors; areas to varnish, gloss, and finish decorative designs on the third floor; and steam kilns to fix pigments onto the sheets on the third floor. The 3rd Street wing was built with areas to process and pack complete products on the first floor, a machine shop on the second floor, and a paint shop on the third floor. At the prominent intersection of 3rd Street and 3rd Avenue and built with bold projections and a conspicuous, pyramid hip-roofed, one-story tower (demolished), the corner pavilion was Somers Brothers' office and showroom, with a pattern shop in the basement. To move materials and products, elevators were built at the rear of the corner pavilion in the 3rd Avenue wing, and in the 3rd Street wing.<sup>44</sup>

By 1892, the Somers Brothers Tinware Factory was among the largest and most productive tinware manufactories across the globe:

For several years this firm has owned and operated successfully a big tin-box factory in Brooklyn, which is one of the largest establishments of its kind in the world. The members of this firm were pioneers in the manufacture of tin boxes for tobacco, confectionery, medicines, fruit, meats, etc. They now employ 850 hands in their Brooklyn factory. In the manufacture of tin boxes the firm uses about 60,000 boxes of tin every year.

They are numbered among the greatest American importers of tin.<sup>45</sup>

Somers Brothers built a tinplate mill adjacent to their factory on 3rd Street in 1891-92, to manufacture tinplate rather than rely on imported material. The structure, known as the Somerton Tin Plate Works at 252-258 3rd Street, is not included in this designation. A five-story and basement structure at 381-385 3rd Avenue, also outside the boundaries of this designation, was built to house kilns by the architect Rudolphe Lawrence ("R.L.") Daus for the American Can Company in 1902.<sup>46</sup>

Somers Brothers' stated aim was to manufacture enough tinplate to furnish the firm's tinware production and to market a surplus; "the firm was among the first to establish a plant for the manufacture of tin plates, when changes in the tariff made it possible to produce that article in this country."<sup>47</sup> The expansion of the Somers Brothers site along the 5th Street Basin was seen to ensure "excellent facilities for the receipt of raw materials." Steel was brought onto the site from vessels on the Gowanus Canal, and through an elevator to the upper levels of the mill.

The Somers Brothers Tinware Factory complex won international acclaim; visitors from three of the largest Welsh tinware companies "declared that in construction and equipment it was without an equal" and J. H. Rogers, chairman of the Welsh Tin Plate Association, noted that it was "the finest and best equipped plant he ever saw."<sup>48</sup> In a letter he sent to supplement an illustration of the complex in lectures about the 1890 McKinley Tariff, Daniel Somers wrote: "The works are pronounced by English experts to be the finest tinplate works in existence."<sup>49</sup>

### **Somers Brothers Later History**

Throughout the 1890s, debates over tinplate tariffs and wages dominated American politics and business. The

scale of Somers Brothers' operations and its reliance on raw materials brought from international sources through domestic ports made it liable to economic fluctuations in the 1880s-1890s, while the American tinplate trade was in the midst of critical development.

In 1887, a significant increase in the price of coal became a serious issue for the numerous workshops and factories in Brooklyn that were dependent on coal to power their equipment. Furthermore, the Tariff Act of 1890, known as the McKinley Tariff for then-Representative and future Republican President William McKinley, set a tariff of 2.2 cents per pound on tinplate imports—an increase of 70%.<sup>50</sup> Daniel Somers did not endorse the McKinley Tariff: “He believed that his success would be a triumph of American ingenuity over other countries and not a matter of tariff rates.”<sup>51</sup> Subsequent tariffs of varying rates caused fluctuations in wages and productivity.<sup>52</sup>

Between 1896 and 1897, operations at the Somerton Tin Plate Works, the mill not included in this designation, were brought to a standstill as a result of fluctuations in the nascent American tinplate trade.<sup>53</sup> In December 1898, Somers Brothers entered it into a tinplate trust, the American Tin Plate Company, which took in “practically all of the large tin plate producers” in the United States and absorbed 90% of domestic tin mills.<sup>54</sup> Daniel Somers saw the trust as beneficial in its assurance of cooperation rather than competition among domestic mills.<sup>55</sup> In 1901 the American Tin Plate Company merged with the United States Steel Corporation, which became the largest corporation in America at the time; after subsequent consolidations, the trust became the American Sheet and Tin Plate Company in 1904.<sup>56</sup>

The trust did not absorb the Somers Brothers Tinware Factory itself, which was seen as distinct in its function from the mill: “The Somers plant includes two separate establishments. One of them is the rolling mill, already mentioned, and the other is the tin box

factory, where all kinds of tin boxes are made. The tin box factory is not included in the trust and will continue to be run as a private business.”<sup>57</sup> At the time, the Somers Brothers Tinware Factory and mill were further distinct in terms of their productiveness: “The Somerton Works have been idle for the best part of a year ... Somers Brothers' decorated Tinware factory is running full with a good supply of orders.”<sup>58</sup>

### **American Can Company**

In 1901, Somers Brothers was absorbed by the American Can Company, a corporation that became known for its innovations in tin and aluminum can fabrication, seals, and liners; these developments became standards in the manufacture of cans to store produce and beverages, in particular of perishable, reactive, and volatile items.<sup>59</sup> The American Can Company was incorporated in 1901, after its eighteen-month acquisition of 103 factories or “more than 98 per cent of all the companies engaged in the manufacture of tin cans in the country.”<sup>60</sup> The conveyance from Somers Brothers to D. Wiley McCaughey, a lawyer, was made on April 6, 1901 and from McCaughey to the American Can Company on September 17, 1902.<sup>61</sup> Even after Somers Brothers' absorption by the American Can Company, Joseph Somers' “executive ability, keen foresight, and business acumen” were “so closely identified with the details of the business” that the American Can Company kept him on as a general manager until 1903.<sup>62</sup> The former Somers Brothers Tinware Factory was known as the “Somers Factory” or “Somers branch” throughout the American Can Company's tenure at this location.<sup>63</sup>

With aggressive competition from other manufacturers and initial complications due to its incorporation of dozens of disparate companies, the American Can Company shut down 80 of its 123 plants in 1903; the former Somers Brothers plant was one of its 43 assets to remain in operation. From 1904-

1912, the direction and reputation of the American Can Company began to shift toward modernization, innovation, and consumer assistance.

By 1917, the American Can Company was the 31st largest business in the United States; its nearest competitor, the Continental Can Company, was the 222nd largest.<sup>64</sup> At the same time, at the former Somers Brothers Tinware Factory, it became an asset to the American effort in World War I. The American Can Company's four plants in Brooklyn were "engaged partially or exclusively in turning out war supplies," often in the face of coal shortages.<sup>65</sup> 25,000 gas masks with metal canisters for absorptive chemicals were put together in the former Somers Brothers Tinware Factory to be sent to American soldiers abroad.<sup>66</sup> In 1917, "the military situation necessitated [an] immediate provision being made to accommodate the increased stocks of clothing and provisions for the men. ... the Somers plant of the American Can Company was likewise requisitioned for the clothing factory and clothing storage."<sup>67</sup> In 1918, a "fully equipped field ambulance" was presented to the United States Government at the plant. Over 600 employees were in attendance at the presentation; more than 50 employees who were then in active service were represented at the event by a service flag.<sup>68</sup> Throughout the American involvement in World War I, the American Can Company sought female power press operators and packers to work at this location.<sup>69</sup>

Decades after the Somers Brothers Tinware Factory became an asset of the American Can Company, the plant was described in 1922 as "today probably one of the most productive plants of that organization."<sup>70</sup> By 1935, American Company advertisements bore the claim that the corporation was the "World's Largest Maker of Tin Containers."<sup>71</sup> The Company's incorporation in defiance of the Sherman Antitrust Act of 1890, its size and dominance among American can makers, its purchase of rival businesses

to eliminate competition, and its engagement in exclusive contracts made it the focus of antitrust suits brought by the United States Department of Justice in 1913 and 1948; although the Company was not subject to dissolution after judgments were made in 1917 and 1950, it was subject to drastic checks on its practices and policies after 1950.

In 1948, American Can Company was released from its mortgage with the Brooklyn Improvement Company.<sup>72</sup> In January 1950, the American Can Company sold the former Somers Brothers Tinware Factory to Alexander J. Lipstock, Vincent Caraci, and Robert L. Levine; the latter parties conveyed their portion to Adler Properties in October 1950, who leased it to Corrugated Container Corporation as of November 1952.<sup>73</sup>

### **Somers Brothers Tinware Factory Later History**

The Somers Brothers Tinware Factory is one of Gowanus' most distinctive industrial buildings. Most of its characteristic architectural features remain intact despite changes in the ownership and use of the complex over time, and in part due to the committed stewardship of the complex in recent decades. From the 1950s until the 1970s, the former factory was underutilized; sometime between c.1940 and c.1980, the one-story tower above the corner pavilion was demolished.<sup>74</sup> In the 1970s, as industrial manufacturing declined in the area around the Gowanus Canal, local groups began to advocate for the cleanup of the canal and surrounding neighborhood. In 1973, the Gowanus Canal Redevelopment Committee was established by Mayor John Lindsay and City Councilman Thomas J. Cuite to help the City of New York lobby for Federal funding to clean the canal. In 1978, the Gowanus Canal Community Development Corporation formed; along with other organizations, it actively sought to revitalize the area of South Brooklyn, with particular focus on the area around the Gowanus Canal.<sup>75</sup>

A few tenants, including some artists, occupied the Somers Brothers Tinware Factory in the 1970s. In 1983, the current owner, LMS Realty Associates, acquired the former tinware plant and made efforts to stabilize and rehabilitate the structure. In 1990, the design firm XØ Projects made its office in the factory, and later became the manager and developer of the complex, completing sensitive rehabilitation work with an aim to serve the arts and culture industries in the area. Now known as the Old American Can Factory, the former Somers Brothers Tinware Factory has become a standout creative node in Gowanus area. XØ Projects organizes frequent performances, exhibitions, farmers' markets, and other events in the complex. Currently the industrial complex houses "a curated community" of over 300 visual artists, artisans, craftspeople, filmmakers, printmakers, publishers, design and fabrication firms, and other companies, and it serves as a venue for the annual Rooftop Films series.<sup>76</sup> With its many tenants in the arts, design, and fabrication fields, former Somers Brothers' Tinware Factory is a significant contributor to the Gowanus neighborhood's emergence as a center of creative arts and manufacturing, and an important connection to its industrial history.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> “Protection Illustrated,” *New-York Daily Tribune*, October 25, 1892, 3.

<sup>2</sup> Portions of this section are adapted from Landmarks Preservation Commission, *Sunset Park South Historic District Designation Report (LP-2622)* (New York: City of New York, 2019), 9-10. Other sources include Richard W. Hunter, *National Register of Historic Places Eligibility Evaluation and Cultural Resources Assessment for the Gowanus Canal* (Northern Ecological Associates, Inc., 2004), 2-1 to 2-57; and Joseph Alexiou, *Gowanus: Brooklyn’s Curious Canal* (New York: New York University Press, 2015).

<sup>3</sup> Although European settlers considered their “purchases” of property from Native Americans to be outright acquisitions, the European concept of holding title to land was foreign to the Lenape, who considered these transactions as customary exchanges of gifts smoothing the way for settlers’ temporary use of the land for camping, hunting, fishing, and the cultivation of crops.

<sup>4</sup> Sources for this section include Hunter and Alexiou.

<sup>5</sup> Cited in Alexiou, 114.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Litchfield’s villa, designed by Alexander J. Davis and built between 1853 and 1857, is now within Prospect Park. It predated the park’s construction and was designated as a New York City Landmark in 1966.

<sup>8</sup> Sources for this section include Hunter and Alexiou; and M. Dripps, *Map of the City of Brooklyn* (New York: M. Dripps, 1869).

<sup>9</sup> Landmarks Preservation Commission, *New York and Long Island Coignet Stone Company Building Designation Report (LP-2202)* (New York: City of New York, 2006), prepared by Matthew A. Postal.

<sup>10</sup> “Very Vile: The Disgusting Condition of Gowanus Canal,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, September 3, 1877, 4.

<sup>11</sup> Cited in Alexiou, 250.

<sup>12</sup> “Gowanus Tonnage \$100,000,000 a Year,” *New York Times*, October 29, 1922, 111.

<sup>13</sup> The Somers brothers were descendants of John Somers

(1651-1716), a prominent English statesman and onetime Lord High Chancellor of England, and John Somers (1648-1723), a Quaker emigrant from England in 1681 and the founder of the oldest settlement in Atlantic County, New Jersey in 1695, on a tract that later became known as Somers Point. Richard Somers (1778-1804), the latter’s great grandson, was an officer of the United States Navy known as an American hero for his assaults on Tripoli in the First Barbary War (1801-1805). Richard Somers died in the September 4, 1804 explosion of the *Intrepid* in Tripoli harbor; the oldest military monument in the United States commemorates Somers and others in Annapolis, Maryland, and echoes ancient Roman rostral column naval monuments.

The c.1720 Somers Mansion Historic Site in Somers Point is inscribed to the National Register of Historic Places and the New Jersey Register of Historic Places.

<sup>14</sup> Daniel Somers is known to have been a graduate of Episcopal High School, in Fairfax, Virginia; no mention of his college attendance has been found. *A Volume Commemorating the Creation of the Second City of the World: By the Consolidation of the Communities Adjacent to New York Harbor Under the New Charter of the City of New York* (New York: Republic Press, 1898), 94-97; *Brooklyn Life*, May 2, 1896, 18; “Daniel McL. Somers Dead,” *New York Times*, August 30, 1912, 9.

<sup>15</sup> “Two-Thirtieths of the Damages Asked,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, December 19, 1882, 4.

<sup>16</sup> “Only a few dozen students attended the university in any given year during the war, and the university was unsuccessful in preventing some of those from being drafted into Confederate service in 1863.” Ervin L. Jordan Jr., “The University of Virginia during the Civil War,” *Encyclopedia Virginia*, Virginia Foundation for the Humanities, March 24, 2016.

<sup>17</sup> Henry Reed Stiles, *The Civil, Political, Professional and Ecclesiastical History, and Commercial and Industrial Record of the County of Kings and the City of Brooklyn, N. Y., from 1683 to 1884* (New York: W. W. Munsell & Co., 1884), 702; Megan E. Springate, “Some Brief Notes on the Tobacco Tag,” *Arch Notes NS 2* (6) (1997): 10-12; *Brooklyn City and Business Directory for the Year Ending May 1st, 1871* (New York: Lain & Company, 1871), 722.

<sup>18</sup> In business directories from 1871, Daniel Somers’ trade was listed as “buttons”— a reference to circular tin tags— Guy’s as “mechanic” and Joseph’s as “brassware” at 38 Columbia Heights; the brothers’ business was listed as J. L. Somers & Brother, in the “brass trimmings” trade. From 1872-1876, after a move to 107 Water Street, Guy and Joseph Somers were listed as machinists and brass

manufacturers. After the creation of Somers Brothers, Daniel, Guy, and Joseph were listed in the metal goods, stamped metal goods, and metal boxes trades in various years.

<sup>19</sup> *The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography*, vol. 18, (New York: James T. White & Company, 1922), 85; “Two-Thirtieths of the Damages Asked,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*. The role of Elmer, who was a child at the time of Somers Brothers’ formation, is unknown. “Brooklyn’s Tin Plate Mill,” *Albany Morning Express*, August 10, 1892.

<sup>20</sup> Somers was granted a patent for his process in 1879. *The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography*, vol. 16 (New York: James T. White & Company, 1918), 428.

<sup>21</sup> Darryl Rehr, “The Somers Patent Model,” *ETCetera: Magazine of the Early Typewriter Collectors Association*, no. 35 (June 1996): 8-9.

<sup>22</sup> Machines for Making Split-Metal and other Tubes (No. 130,758, patented August 20, 1872); Sheet Metal Boxes (No. 214,851, patented April 29, 1879); Apparatus for Pickling Metal Plates (No. 473,106, patented April 19, 1892); Rolling Mechanism (No. 800,950, patented October 3, 1905); Apparatus for Forming Thin Metallic Plate (No. 800,951, patented October 3, 1905); Process of Making Thin Plate (No. 800,837, patented October 3, 1905); Process of Making Tin-Plate (No. 800,952, patented October 3, 1905); Furnace (No. 803,076, patented October 31, 1905); Apparatus for Opening Packs of Plates (No. 869,315, patented October 1, 1907).

Somers further held patents for a Pen-Holder (1872), Machine for Inserting and Clinching Metallic Staples (1877), Embroidering Attachment for Sewing Machines (1877, with John H. Rose), Hand-Mirror (1881), Automatic Pencil Case (1881), a Clock Case for the Ansonia Clock Company (1881, with William H. Atkinson), Insect-Powder Gun (1885), Combined Packing-Box and Exhibiting-Stand (1886), Hydrocarbon Burner (1894) and Steam Engine (1907), did studies on the motion dynamics of coaster brakes, and made improvements to the gas engine.

<sup>23</sup> “The Somers Mausoleum,” *Brooklyn Life*, February 14, 1914, 22. The Somers Mausoleum was completed “under the personal direction of his widow, Mrs. Hannah Somers, and her son, Donald McLean Somers.” *Brooklyn Life*, February 14, 1914, 22; “D. McL. Somers Dead After Long Illness,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, August 29, 1912, 2;

Directories give Daniel Somers’ address as 101 Halsey Street, though newspapers give the address as 105 Halsey Street. 101 and 105 Halsey Street are two of a row of ten near-identical neo-grec row houses. Unlike the others in the

row, 105 Halsey Street features an additional entrance portico, stoop, oriel window, cornice, and dormer, all designed in the Renaissance Revival style; whether these additions were made by Daniel Somers is unknown.

<sup>24</sup> Daniel Somers was a charter member and director of the Brooklyn Manufacturers’ Association, a director and sometime president of the Associated Manufacturers’ Mutual Fire Insurance Company, a charter member of the Brooklyn Club, a member of the State Board of World’s Fair Commissioners, a vocal advocate of Democratic Party politics, a supporter of Brooklyn’s consolidation and influential member of the Consolidation League’s Central Committee, and a member of Central Congregational Church of Brooklyn. *Brooklyn Life*, May 2, 1896, 18; *A Volume Commemorating the Creation of the Second City of the World: By the Consolidation of the Communities Adjacent to New York Harbor Under the New Charter of the City of New York* (New York: Republic Press, 1898), 94-97.

<sup>25</sup> Later, as a resident of Mendham, New Jersey, Joseph Somers was responsible for infrastructure projects for the town, the endowment of and donation of books to the Free Public Library of Mendham, and was a member of the Somerset County Golf Club of New Jersey. *The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography*, vol. 18, (New York: James T. White & Company, 1922), 85.

<sup>26</sup> Stiles. 703; this section is based on numerous Brooklyn business directories that were published by George T. Lain, among them George T. Lain, comp., *Brooklyn city and Business Directory for the Year Ending May 1st, 1870* (New York: Lain & Company, 1870), 619; George T. Lain, comp., *Brooklyn city and Business Directory for the Year Ending May 1st, 1883* (New York: Lain & Company, 1883), 1083; “Local Manufacturers,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, August 10, 1884, 2, which describes “a large, four story brick building at the corner of Jay and Front Streets.”

<sup>27</sup> “Local Manufacturers,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, August 10, 1884, 2.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> Frederick Anderson, Robert Pack Browning, Michael B. Frank, Lin Salamo, eds., *Mark Twain’s Notebooks and Journals, Volume III: 1883-1891*, Notebook 26 (March 1886-June 1887) (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1979), 296.

<sup>31</sup> *A Volume Commemorating the Creation of the Second City of the World: By the Consolidation of the Communities Adjacent to New York Harbor Under the New Charter of the City of New York* (New York: Republic Press, 1898), 94-97.

<sup>32</sup> The major source for this section is W. E. Minchiton, *The British Tinplate Industry: A History* (Oxford, United Kingdom: Clarendon Press, 1953), 1-71.

<sup>33</sup> Jefferson was responsible for the inclusion of tinplate roofs at Monticello, Poplar Forest, and the University of Virginia. Thomas Jefferson, Letter to Charles Yancey, July 23, 1821; Pamela Hemenway Simpson, *Cheap, Quick, & Easy: Imitative Architectural Materials, 1870-1930* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1999), 32.

<sup>34</sup> In 1795, Nicholas Appert, a French chef and confectioner, first developed means to enclose, seal, and sterilize glass containers which was further developed to serve the needs of French armies under Napoleon Bonaparte. In 1810, the British inventor and merchant Peter Durand was granted a patent for his preservation process in a tinplate can and gave rise to the modern process of tinning or canning foods. In 1865, after extensive research into the spoilage of wine due to the presence of microorganisms, French biologist and chemist Louis Pasteur patented the process that would become known as pasteurization. Gordon L. Robertson, *Food Packaging: Principles and Practice* (New York: Marcel Dekker, Inc., 1993), 174-175; Lance Day, Ian McNeil, eds. *Biographical Dictionary of the History of Technology* (New York: Routledge, 1996); Jane Busch, "An Introduction to the Tin Can" in *Historical Archaeology*, vol. 15, no. 1 (1981), 95-104; James T. Rock, "Cans in the Countryside" in *Historical Archaeology*, vol. 18, no. 2 (1984), 97-111.

<sup>35</sup> "Brooklyn's Tin Plate Mill," *Albany Morning Express*, August 10, 1892. Domestic patents were given to Thomas Kensett for a tinplate can in 1825; Allen Taylor for a tin can stamper machine in 1847; Henry Evans for a pendulum press, which sped can production tenfold to 50-60 cans per hour, in 1849; and Gail Borden for a condensed milk can in 1856.

<sup>36</sup> Gregg Steven Pearson, "The Democratization of Food: Tin Cans and the Growth of the American Food Processing Industry, 1810-1940" PhD diss., Lehigh University, 2016 (2756), 1-2, 26-27.

<sup>37</sup> Architectural analysis in this section is adapted from Gale Harris, *Standard Varnish Works Factory Office Building Designation Report (LP-2250)* (New York: City of New York, 2007), 4, and Michael D. Caratzas, *Estey Piano Company Factory Designation Report (LP-2195)* (New York: City of New York, 2006), 13, 32.

<sup>38</sup> *The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography*, vol. 16 (New York: James T. White & Company, 1918), 428.

<sup>39</sup> Kings County, Office of the Register, Conveyance Liber

1547, 539 (March 29, 1884).

<sup>40</sup> Information on the Brooklyn Improvement Corporation is adapted from Matthew A. Postal, *New York and Long Island Coignet Stone Company Building (LP-2202)* (New York: City of New York, 2006), 6-7. This section is based on Joseph K. Lane, *The Brooklyn Improvement Company: A Brief History In Honor of Its 100th Anniversary* (New York, 1966); "Edwin Clark Litchfield," and "Litchfield, Developer of Park Slope," in *Civic News* (Park Slope Civic Council, April 1966), 12-26; and "Final Report: National Register of Historic Places, Eligibility Evaluation and Cultural Resources Assessment for the Gowanus Canal," prepared for U. S. Army Corps of Engineers, New York District, May 2004.

<sup>41</sup> Application 631: "631-3d av, s e cor 3d st, two four-story colored brick engine house and factory, engine house 29.6 x 49, and factory 158 and 58x205, tin roofs, brick cornices; cost, total, about \$80,000; owners, Somers Bros., Front st, cor Pearl st; architect, D. M. Somers." *Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide*, May 24, 1884, 585.

"Plans have been approved by Buildings Commissioner Gaylor for the erection of a factory and engine house connected therewith on the southeast corner of 3rd Avenue and 3rd Street, by Somers Brothers, whose place of business is now at Front and Pearl streets. The lot on 3rd Avenue is more than large enough to accommodate the projected building, which is to be 150 feet front, 58 feet rear and 204 feet deep, and will have four stories, running up to a height of 53 feet. The foundation will be laid on piles, and the material will be brick, with bluestone coplugs. The cost will be \$60,000, and it will be occupied next December for the manufacture of tin boxes and kindred goods." "A New Factory," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, May 20, 1884, 4.

<sup>42</sup> Betsy Hunter Bradley, *The Works: The Industrial Architecture of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 237.

<sup>43</sup> *List No. 37, Somers Bros. Decorated Tin Boxes*, n.d., <https://www.worthpoint.com/worthopedia/pp-illustrated-price-list-somers-bros-1756452667>.

<sup>44</sup> *Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Brooklyn, Kings County, New York* (New York: Sanborn Map and Publishing Company, 1888) Volume 6, Plate 138.

<sup>45</sup> "Brooklyn's Tin Plate Mill," *Albany Morning Express*, August 10, 1892.

<sup>46</sup> New Building Application 952-02, *Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide*, v. 69 (June 21, 1902), (New York: C. W. Sweet & Company, 1902), 1178; *Insurance Maps, Borough of Brooklyn, City of New York 1906* (New York:

Sanborn Map Company, 1906), Volume 1, Plate 38.

“Business Affairs,” *Troy Daily Times*, April 13, 1891, 1.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

Application 548: “548-5th st Basin, 124-260 e 3d av, Two two-story brk and stone tin plate factories, 76x203, slate roofs, stone and brk cornices; cost, \$30,000; ow’rs and b’rs, Somers Bros; ar’t, D. M. Somers” *Real Estate Record and Builders’ Guide*, v. 47 (April 4, 1891), (New York: C. W. Sweet & Company, 1891), 542; Application 1382: “1382-3d st, s s, 150 s e 3d av. two six-story granite tin plate works, &c., 50 and 56x100. tin roofs, stone and tile cornices; cost, \$30,000; Somers Bros., 3d st: ar’t, D. M. Somers (Somers Bros.), M. Cooney and Mr. Johnson.” *Real Estate Record and Builders’ Guide*, v. 48 (July 25, 1891), (New York: C. W. Sweet & Company, 1891), 136.

Although Daniel Somers’ initial intent was to build the mill on a discrete site, his analysis of soil and other conditions on the tract adjacent to the Somers Brothers Tinware Factory instead led him to plan construction there. Numerous machines of Daniel Somers’ invention were in use in the mill: “We were departing very largely from the beaten path of the Welsh manufacturers in the direction of improved automatic machinery in the various operations of tin-plate making. This we had to invent, devise, and reduce to working drawing before we could begin with the active building. ... We have built and equipped our mill, from the foundations upwards, in the most substantial manner, and spared no expense, pains, or thought to make it the most complete and perfect of its kind in existence.” *Congressional Record—House* (Washington, D.C.: Government Publishing Office, 1892), 5355.

<sup>48</sup> “Brooklyn’s Tin Plate Mill,” *Albany Morning Express*, August 10, 1892; Rome Citizen (Rome, New York) August 10, 1892, 4.; “Converted by One Visit,” *The Press*, July 30, 1892, 4.

<sup>49</sup> “Protection Illustrated,” *New-York Daily Tribune*, October 25, 1892, 3.

“In the effort to make a model mill no pains have been spared, the aggregate investment approaching \$250,000. The guiding idea throughout has been to attain two ends, the highest quality of product and the introduction of labor-saving appliances. Those who have designed plant are looking beyond the time when their competitors will be the Welsh makers. They are preparing even at this early for the struggle which must come among American producers of tin plate, when American ingenuity and the spirit of American progress shall dominate the industry.” “The Somerton Tin-Plate Works,” *The Iron Age*, v. 49 (March 10, 1892): 454.

<sup>50</sup> The tariff was not to become effective until July 1, 1891, to allow time for American manufacturers to establish tinplate works; its sunset date of October 1, 1897, was conditional on the successful establishment of American tinplate industry—that for one fiscal year prior to June 30, 1897, domestic production would equal one-third of imports

<sup>52</sup> Among American consumers, the McKinley Tariff was unpopular due to the immediate increase in the cost of tinware imports after its enactment. The tariff became the dominant issue of the presidential election of 1892, in which former Democratic President and advocate for a lower tariff Grover Cleveland defeated the incumbent Republican President Benjamin Harrison. With Democratic support, the Revenue Act or Wilson-Gorman Tariff went into effect on October 1, 1894, and, among other outcomes, reduced the tinplate tariff to 1.2 cents per pound. In the immediate aftermath of the act’s passage, wage disputes brought American tinplate production to a halt until late January 1895; to lower production costs, Somers Brothers and other tinplate-dependent businesses made significant reductions to employees’ wages. “Tin Workers to Be Reduced,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, August 15, 1894, 1.

Somers Brothers’ employees were vocal in their objections to the Wilson-Gorman Tariff, “which they say is ruinous to their business,” and petitioned their local representative to use his influence to oppose it. “Don’t Like the New Bill,” *New York Herald*, December 24, 1893, 8.

The Dingley Act, which went into effect on July 24, 1897, raised the tariff to 1.5 cents per pound and subsequent advances were made to tinplate worker wages in 1897 and 1899.

<sup>53</sup> The company’s three-mill plant in Brooklyn has been idle for some time past, the high freight rates on coal and steel making it cheaper for the firm to purchase their supplies of tin plate in the open market than to make it themselves.” *The Metal Worker*, vol. 48 (September 25, 1897), 71.

<sup>54</sup> The incorporation of the American Tin Plate Company was overseen by William Henry Moore and James Hobart Moore, the organizers of several significant corporate mergers, among them that of the United States Steel Corporation (1901), which drew in multiple steel concerns that were then under William Henry Moore’s direction. Somers Brothers’ inclusion in the trust indicates that it was known as a major tinplate producer despite its cessation of operations at the time: “Under the operation of the trust this mill may be opened again, and made one of the principal centers of manufacturing for the country. It is in a good location for shipping, there is plenty of room near by for

expansion and the present plant is capable of enlargement. Further, there are only three plants in the whole Eastern country.” “Brooklyn Mill in Tin Plate Trust,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, December 16, 1898, 16.

<sup>55</sup> The former managers of the absorbed tinplate mills agreed not to start new mills or otherwise compete with the new corporation for five years from the date of its establishment.

<sup>56</sup> W. C. Cronmeyer, “The Development of the Tinplate Industry,” *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine*, vol. 13 (1930): 135.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> “Scrap,” *The Metal Worker: A Weekly Journal of the Stove, Roofing, Cornice, Tin, Plumbing and Heating Trades*, vol. 49 (April 9, 1898), 46.

<sup>59</sup> The American Can Company bought the Sanitary Can Company, which had sought the aid of its research department to develop a new fabrication and closure technique, in 1908; in 1913, after further refinement by the American Can Company’s researchers, the “sanitary can” became the can manufacturers’ standard for the storage of perishable items. Through experimentation, the American Can Company was further responsible for developments to can liners and enamel compositions to prevent discoloration and withstand heat without an effect on contents’ taste; tinplate specifications that were important to the development of novel techniques to roll and electroplate steel; and, in 1933, the debut of the first stable beer cans, which, unlike earlier prototypes, were neither prone to burst or buckle after pasteurization nor susceptible to unpleasant tastes due to the iron content of the cans. William C. Stolk, *American Can Company: Revolution in Containers* (New York: Newcomen Society in North America, 1960), 10-20.

<sup>60</sup> “Brooklyn Tin Factories Absorbed by Big Trust,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, March 24, 1901, 5.

<sup>61</sup> Kings County, Office of the Register, Conveyance Liber 30, 413 (April 6, 1901); Liber 37, 421 (September 17, 1906).

<sup>62</sup> *The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography*, vol. 18, (New York: James T. White & Company, 1922), 85.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*; *Brooklyn Life*, June 28, 1919, 45

<sup>64</sup> Ohio Central History, “American Can Company,” [https://ohiohistorycentral.org/w/American\\_Can\\_Company](https://ohiohistorycentral.org/w/American_Can_Company).

<sup>65</sup> “Munitions Plants Here in Dire Need; Appeals in Vain,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, January 10, 1918, 1.

<sup>66</sup> Benedict Crowell and Robert Forrest Wilson, *The Armies*

of Industry: Our Nation’s Manufacture of Munitions for a World in Arms, 1917-1918 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1921), 513, 521.

<sup>67</sup> Report of Paymaster General of the Navy, Chief of Bureau of Supplies and Accounts, Navy Department, Bureau of Supplies and Accounts, Washington, 30 September 1917 in United States Navy Department, Annual Report of the Secretary of the Navy, 245.

<sup>68</sup> “Ambulance is Presented,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, September 12, 1918, 4.

<sup>69</sup> *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, May 16, 1918, 14; November 13, 1919, 10.

<sup>70</sup> *The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography*, vol. 18, (New York: James T. White & Company, 1922), 85.

<sup>71</sup> *El Paso Herald Post*, November 12, 1935.

<sup>72</sup> Kings County, Office of the Register, Conveyance Liber 7319, 471 (June 21, 1948).

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, Liber 7565, 466 (January 27, 1950); Liber 7675, 133 (October 4, 1950); Liber 8022, 627 (November 21, 1952); “‘Tin Can Trust’ Sued,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, November 29, 1913, 1; Stolk, 15-16; “‘Tin Can Trust’ Sued,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, November 29, 1913, 1; Stolk, 15-16.

<sup>74</sup> See images below; New York City Department of Taxes Photographs (c.1938-43) and (c.1893-88), Municipal Archives.

<sup>75</sup> Gupte, Pranay, “Coalition Will Seek-\$300 Million For Sewer,” *The New York Times*, February 11, 1973, 115; this paragraph is adapted from Jessica Baldwin, *Montauk Paint Manufacturing Company Building Designation Report (LP-2641)* (New York: City of New York, 2019), 14.

<sup>76</sup> “The Old American Can Factory,” <https://thecanfactory.org/>.

The documentary “Sound and Chaos” highlights BC Studio, a music studio on two floors of the former plant; under the aegis of longtime producer Martin Bisi, music icons like Herbie Hancock, Sonic Youth, the Dresden Dolls, and other artists recorded albums at BC Studio. Brad Cohan, “Martin Bisi Probably Produced All Your Favorite Records,” *Vice*, July 10, 2015, [https://www.vice.com/en\\_us/article/rgp5y3/martin-bisi-probably-produced-all-your-favorite-records](https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/rgp5y3/martin-bisi-probably-produced-all-your-favorite-records).

## Findings and Designation

Somers Brothers Tinware Factory (later American Can Company)

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture, and the other features of this building and site, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the Somers Brothers Tinware Factory (later American Can Company) has a special character and a special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage, and cultural characteristics of New York City.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 74, Section 3020 of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 3 of Title 25 of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark the Somers Brothers Tinware Factory (later American Can Company) and designates Borough of Brooklyn Tax Map Block 980, Lot 8 in part consisting of the land beneath the Somers Brothers Tinware Factory located on the portion of the lot beginning at the corner formed by the intersection of the southwesterly side of Third Street with the southeasterly side of Third Avenue; running thence southeasterly along the southwesterly side of Third Street, 149 feet 6 inches; thence southwesterly parallel with Third Avenue, 54 feet 5 inches; thence northwesterly parallel with Third Street, 83 feet 6 inches; thence southwesterly parallel with Third Avenue, 143 feet; thence northwesterly parallel with Third Street, 66 feet; thence northerly along the southeasterly side of Third Avenue, 205 feet 6 inches to the point of the beginning, as its Landmark Site.



View Southeast to 3rd Street and 3rd Avenue  
Brooklyn Public Library, c. 1909



**View Southwest from Washington Park**  
Library of Congress, c.1914

D.M. Somers.

J.L. Somers.

G.A. Somers.

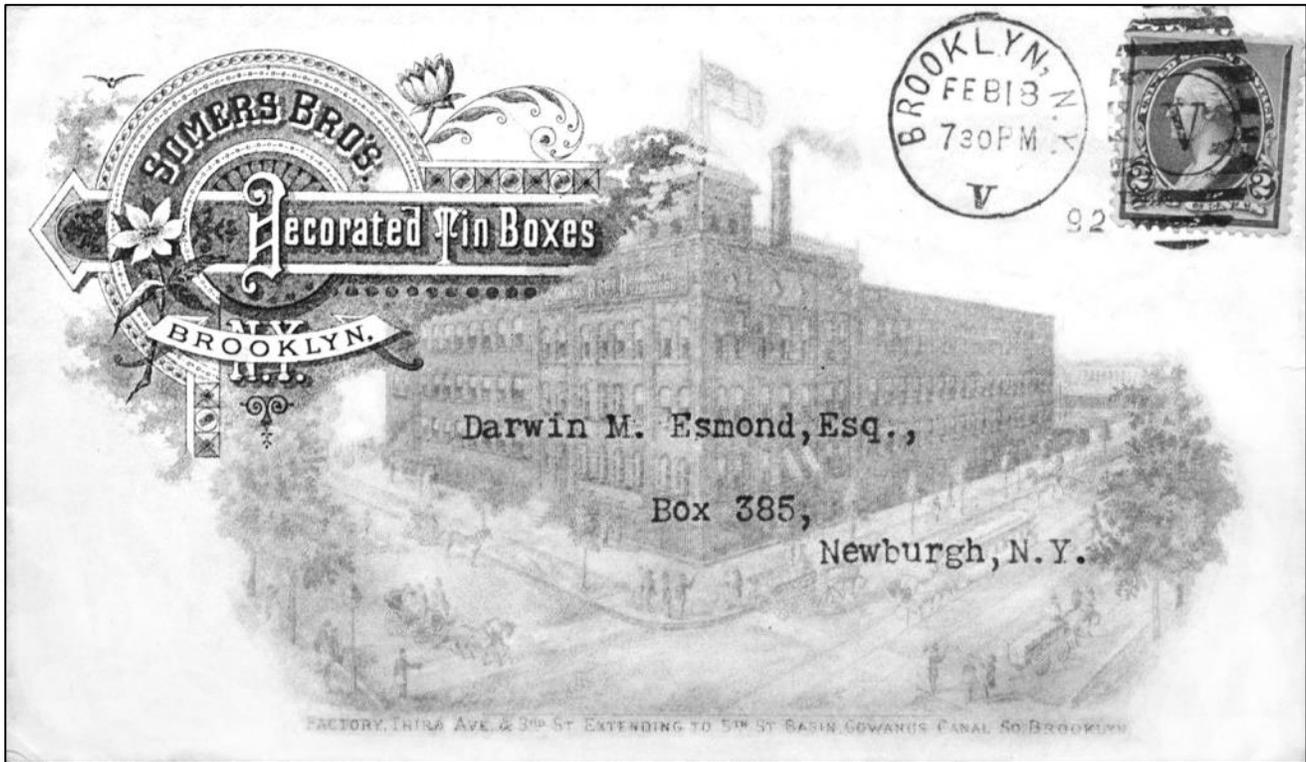
W.H. Atkinson.

E.E. Somers.



ATTRACTIVE PACKAGES IN DECORATED TIN.  
NOVEL ADVERTISING DEVICES, TIN SIGNS & TIN TOBACCO TAGS.

Brooklyn, N. Y. July 8, 1898.



(Above) July 8, 1898 letter from Somers Bros. to Mr. H. F. Chareayne, Private collection.

(Below) Envelope with view southeast from 3rd Avenue and 3rd Street (edited for contrast), Private collection, c. 1892



c.1940 Tax Photograph  
Department of Finance



**View southeast from 3rd Street and 3rd Avenue,**  
Landmarks Preservation Commission, c.1980



**View southeast from 3rd Street and 3rd Avenue,**  
Sarah Moses, Landmarks Preservation Commission, October 2019



3rd Avenue wing,  
Sarah Moses, Landmarks Preservation Commission, October 2019



**3rd Street wing,**  
Sarah Moses,  
Landmarks Preservation Commission,  
October 2019

