

National Canal Museum
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<http://www.canals.org>

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Abbott Street Industrial Area

The Abbott Street Industrial Area was one of the early industrial parks in America. It was begun by the Lehigh Coal and Navigation Company in 1832 to utilize both the waterpower of Section 8 of its Lehigh Navigation System and its close proximity to the Delaware Division and Morris Canals which linked Easton with both Philadelphia and New York. A manufacturing establishment at Abbott Street would have access to waterpower for its machinery, and cheap, efficient transportation to bring in raw materials from inland areas and to transport products to America's two largest cities.

Abbott Street grew rapidly under the direction of Abiel Abbott, the Lehigh Coal and Navigation Company's Easton agent for whom the industrial park was named. By 1840, over a thousand men were employed at 12 industrial sites manufacturing diverse products including pig iron, to cotton yarn, whiskey stills, gun barrels, piece dye products, flour, lumber and wrought iron wire. Among these industries was a cotton yarn mill developed by the firm of Swift and Breck, and later the firm of McKean and Raphael. Over 300 employees were at this site in 1872 which had added a weaving room to produce cotton cloth, the mill closed down in the late 1880s.

The most significant and lasting firm at Abbott Street was the Rodenbough and Stewart Wire Company. Begun in 1835 as a nail works, it had switched by 1843 to the production of wrought iron wire of the finest quality. Both Charles Ellet and John A. Roebling, prominent early developers of American wire rope bridge technology, purchased much of the wire that was utilized for their early spans from this firm. Renamed Stewart and Company in 1852, the wire works continued to expand until the late nineteenth century when it began to decline and by 1902 it had ceased to operate.

Due to its dependence on waterpower, the Abbott Street industrial area declined rapidly during the 1890s. By 1902, none of its industries remained intact and part of its land had been consumed by a widening of the Lehigh Valley Railroad's roadbed and trackage on the south side of the Navigation System.