

Kem Plastic Playing Cards, Inc

MaristLand



Kem Plastic Playing Cards as it appeared during most of its life in Poughkeepsie. Note the entrance in the middle of the photo. The metal electric poles behind the building ran along the right of way of the Poughkeepsie & Eastern Railroad. The wires on the black poles in the front of the building were probably of wood and carried power at lower voltage levels to the nearby buildings. [See note 2](#)



Washington Avenue was the path of route 9 before 1963, when the state constructed the road bypassing the center of the city, passing by the historic railroad station (constructed by the Warren and Wetmore, architects who designed Grand Central Station in New York City ([See Note 1](#)). The broader street passing between Kem Playing Cards on the right and the Steel Fabrication plant owned by Martin Kurkhill is Beck Place (it ought to have been called Bech Place [and *is* called Bech on many early maps, because it was named after Edwin Bech who owned the estate which became the location of Marist College).

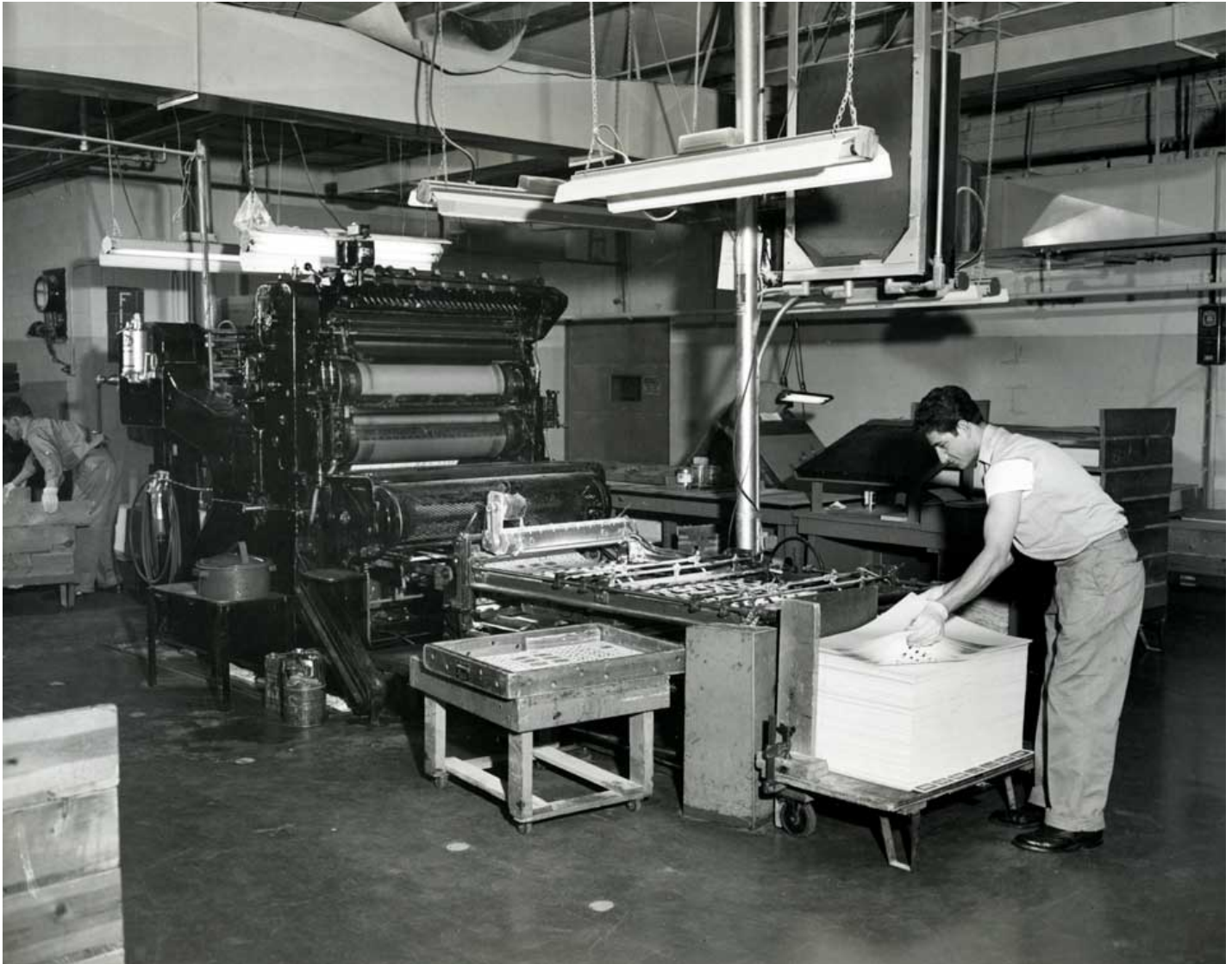
The Shell gas station tucked in the triangle south of the Steel Plant was a Clay service station in the 1940s; it was noted for keeping late hours until about 11:00 pm each night. It was taken over by two young Italian Giangrasso immigrants who operated the station until 1973. They then relocated their auto repair business to County Carburetor Inc on North Hamilton Street. On Friday 14 October 1914, the County Carburetor building collapsed during a heavy snowstorm. Town officials indicted that the roof was bowstring construction, not designed to sustain heavy loads. The seven cars inside the building and sustained damages, and the building itself which was built in 1959 must be demolished.

The Marist College land at the lower left, once a pasture, seems to have been leveled. The white concrete fence constructed by the Brothers in 1922, or at least the tips of the fence can be seen just behind the evergreens along the road. Brother Nilus Donnelly wrote that he helped build this wall and ironically was the one who demolished it in 1966. This leads the writer to guess the date of the photo around the early 1960s, when the Donnelly building was under construction.

Before construction of the New York Thruway in the 1950s, the principal route from New York to Albany and points west was route 9.

The Kem Playing Card building was probably originally constructed by the Permalife Battery Company about the time FIAT Motor Company operated in the space immediately north of Fulton Street. After Kem purchased the building, it was discovered that the eastern wall of the building was actually on the land of the railroad (which had passed

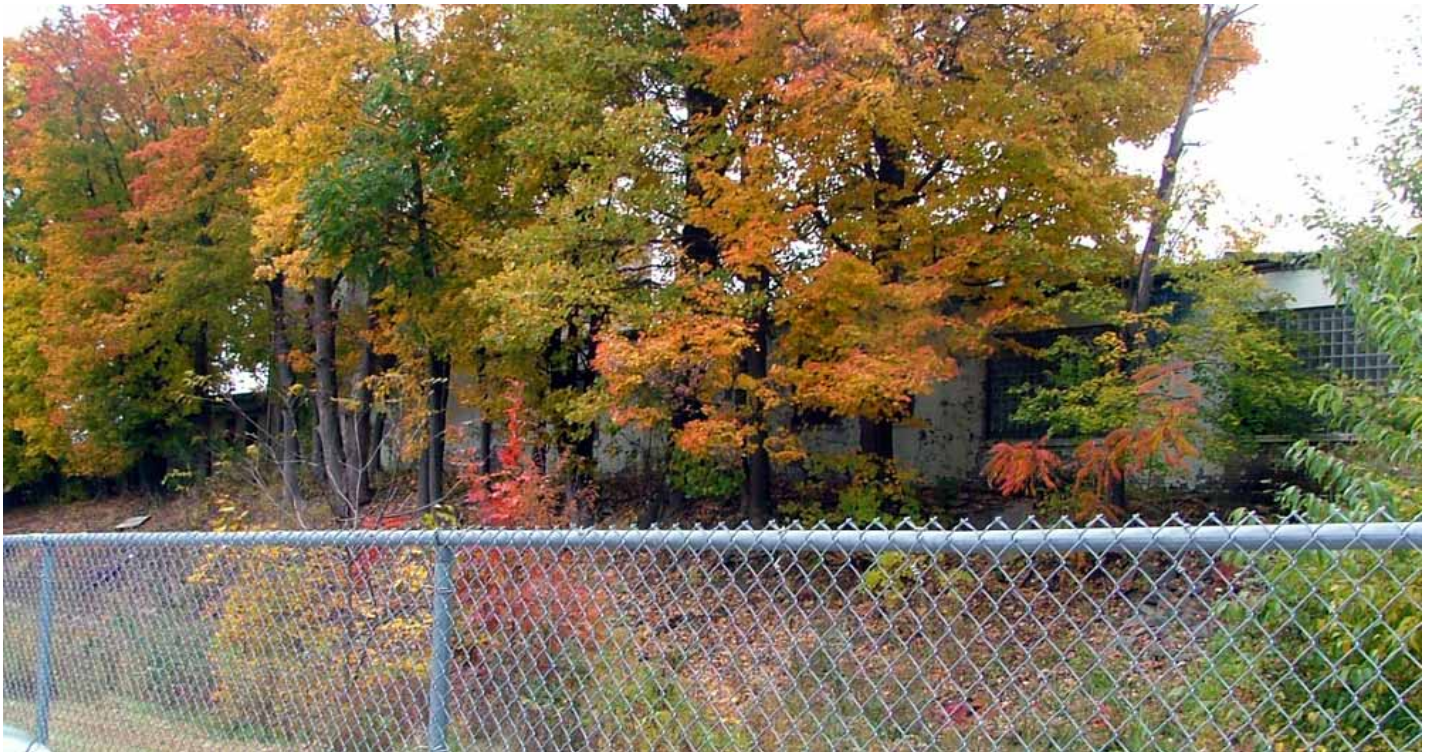
through there in 1868. The building was also about three feet over the property line at the north end. Kem solved the latter problem by purchasing the property to the north, seen here as two sheds and parking lot. The railroad charged Kem \$10 per annum rent for the incursion, which solidified the railroad's claim to its land. After Marist College demolished the Kem structure (both Permalife and Kem used strong chemicals in their manufacturing processes; Marist decided to not build on the site, probably because of the shape of the land area, but also because of the cost of clearing any contamination before rebuilding on the site.



A worker prepares a plastic sheet for printing. The cards were made of plastic, which made them durable, but also difficult to duplicate. This made them popular for casinos.



The Kem Plastic Playing Cards viewed from near the gatehouse across route 9. Note the edge of the steel structure of the Steel Plant Studio at the extreme left of the photo.



Fall Foliage cloaks the Kem building, but it is obviously very close ... in fact too close ... to the railroad land. Photo taken from the parking lot of the first row of dormitories along West Cedar Street.



This photo is dominated by the railroad right of way with the bridge over the railroad right of way in the far section viewed. The first college dormitory from Route 9 along West Cedar Street parking lot is at left and if you peek at the upper right, you will see the Kem building behind the trees.

Notes

Note 1. Warren and Wetmore was a firm with strong society connections. Whitney Warren (1864 - 1943) was a cousin of the Vanderbilts. He studied for ten years at the Ecole des Beaux Artes in Paris, as did McKim, Mead and White and Carrere and Hastings. Charles Wetmore (1866 - 1941) was trained as a lawyer, but had strong society connections which gained many projects for the firm. The firm was the preferred architectural firm for the New York Central Railroad, building not only stations but also many of the buildings near to the stations. Much of the work was designed in the first three decades of the 20th century, but the architecture resembled that of the earlier Gilded Age.
[back](#)

Note 2. Photos located in the Marist Library Archives, photographer unknown. Photos prepared for use by Gregory P Wiedeman, a student worker in the archives division. [back](#)

to return to main program, press the left arrow key <--- at the upper left of your screen.

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