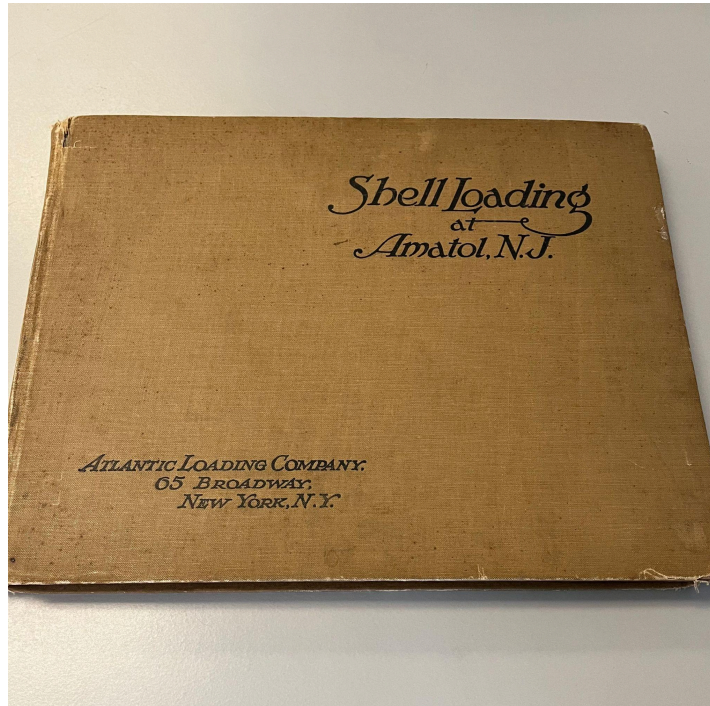# Atlantic County BOOM Town

You don't need to go west to find a ghost town; you only need to go as far as Mullica Township. Amatol, New Jersey – a now defunct town whose remnants largely have been swallowed by the Pinelands – was literally a BOOM town that the Atlantic Loading Company and the United States government built to manufacture ammunitions during the United States' formal involvement in World War I. However, with an armistice reached just months after the plant and town opened for business, the town emptied, buildings came down, and Amatol became fodder for ghost stories and legends.
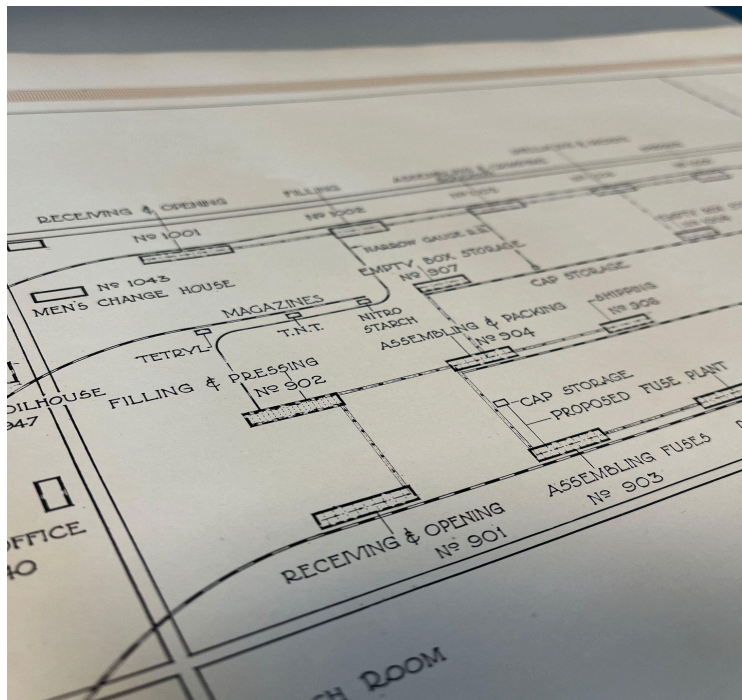
Shortly after the United States' April 1917 entry into World War I, the U.S. army began planning ammunition manufacturing operations to outfit its soldiers. The military settled on a 6,000-acre swath of land in present day Mullica Township due to its proximity to rail transportation but also its relatively secluded location. The army tapped the Atlantic Loading Company to oversee operations, and responding to "a call for speed", the company needed only nine months to construct a fully functioning plant and a quaint little town. By July 1918, the plant was producing a variety of ammunitions for immediate export including 50,000 hand grenades per day to supply American soldiers who fought daily in the gruesome trenches of the war. At the end of their work shifts, workers retired to their homes in the company town which featured a Main Street filled with shops, a theater, and a restaurant. However, operations quickly came to an end and residents returned to their former homes after an armistice halted the war and ammunition production was no longer needed. Amatol buildings, warehouses, and homes were torn down after only a four-month run at capacity.

Less than a decade later, a portion of the former Amatol site flipped to a completely new enterprise: a racetrack. The Amatol Speedway also known as the Atlantic City Speedway opened to racers in 1926. The track was a 1.5 mile wooden oval with grandstands surrounding its perimeter. The track hosted auto, motorcycle, and even airplane races, and it was known as being one of the fastest tracks in the United States with racers topping 140 mph in some races. Harry Hartz, a six-time Indianapolis 500 driver, was a frequent participant and champion in some of the first races at the Speedway. Unfortunately, the Speedway's success was also short-lived. Attendance began to dwindle in 1928, and 1929 brought even bleaker fortunes. By 1933, the largely abandoned racetrack was demolished.

A rare book in the Spangler Library's New Jersey collection titled *Construction and Operation of a Shell Loading Plant and the Town of Amatol, New Jersey* created by Victor F. Hammel documents the early military activities through essays, maps, diagrams, and photographs. The book provides insight into everything from the town's warehouses to the town's government. This book is one of many in the library's New Jersey collection which documents the state's history, geography, and culture. The New Jersey collection and the complementary Atlantic and Cape May counties Squires collection contain a wealth of primary sources that faculty, students, and community members can use for interesting and engaging research projects about New Jersey, our local counties, and the many cities and towns in the region.

This rare book in the Spangler Library New Jersey Collection provides intimate details about the creation and operation of the Amatol ammunitions plant and town.

Diagrams and maps throughout the book explain the planning and engineering behind the operations.
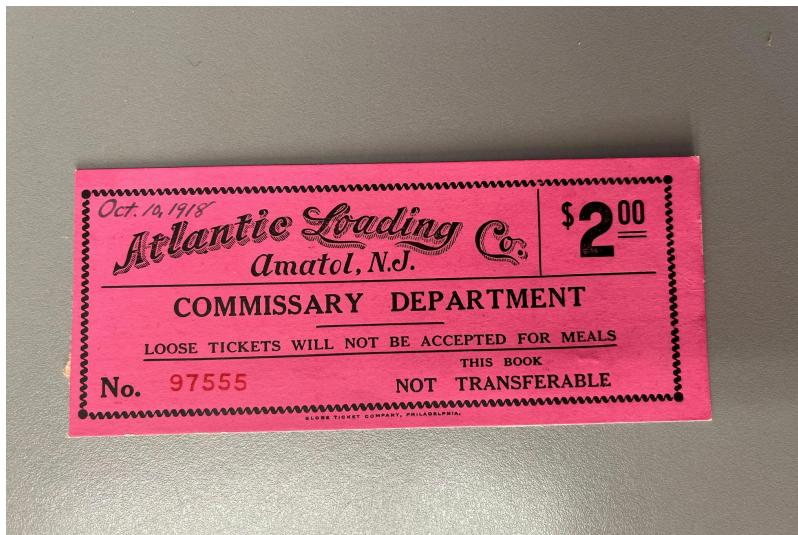
The town featured a Promenade (above) and comfortable living quarters for workers and their families (below)

With thousands to feed, cooks worked daily to prepare meals (above) which workers could purchase with a commissary ticket (below).

The commissary ticket is an artifact in the Spangler Library's New Jersey collection.

All images of Amatol operations are from *Construction and Operation of a Shell Loading Plant and the Town of Amatol, New Jersey* created by Victor F. Hammel

Photographs taken by Mickey DiCamillo

For more information about the Spangler Library's New Jersey and Squires Collection, send an e-mail to library@atlantic.edu