

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**
Tax Map Block 980 Lot 8 in part

Built: 1884

Architect: Daniel McLean Somers

Style: American Round-Arched

Action: Calendared June 25, 2019; Public Hearing September 24, 2019;
Proposed for Designation October 29, 2019

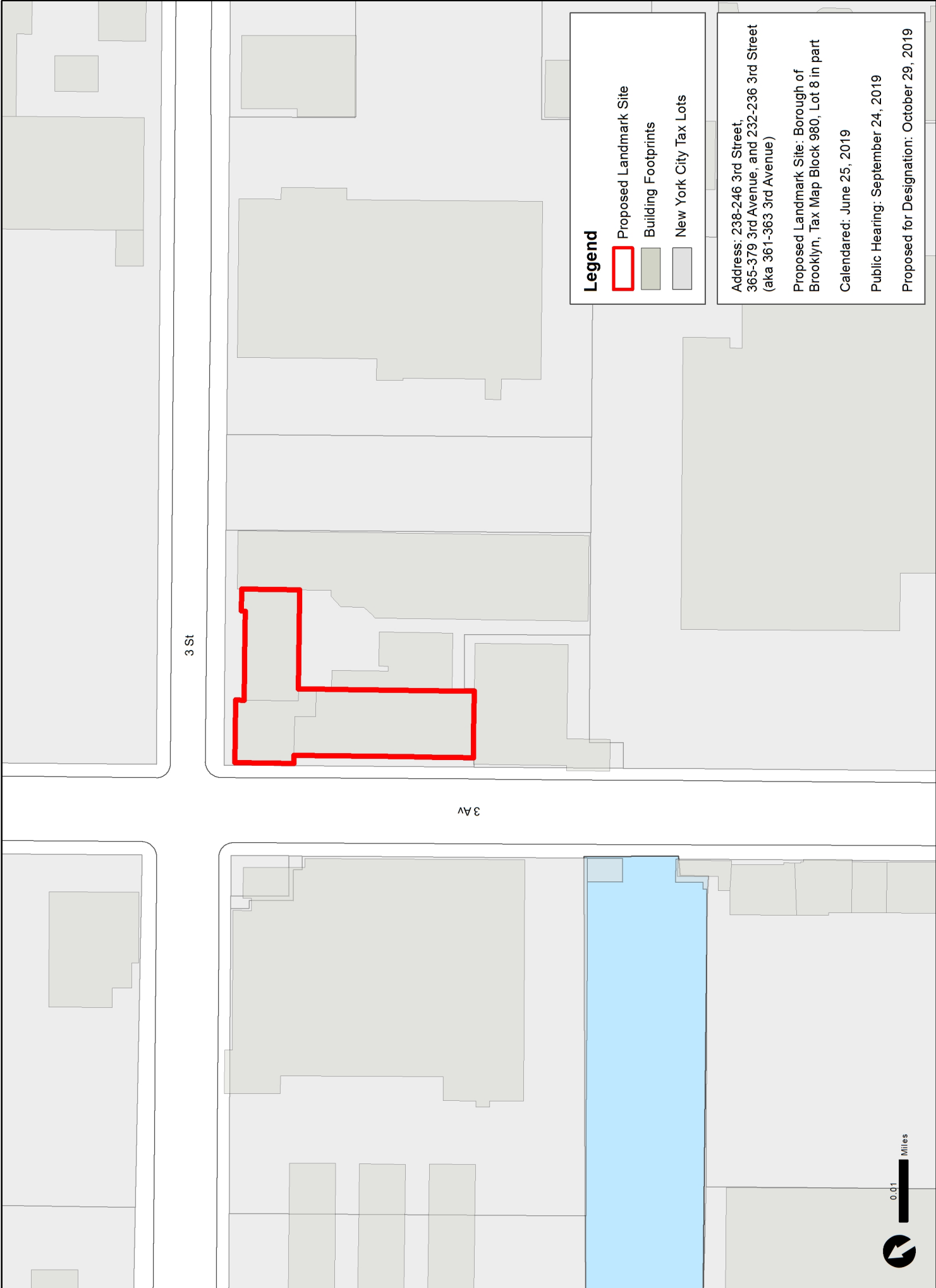


View from 3rd Avenue and 3rd Street, Landmarks Preservation Commission, 2019

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-arched 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.” 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.



Legend

- Proposed Landmark Site
- Building Footprints
- New York City Tax Lots

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

Proposed Landmark Site: Borough of
Brooklyn, Tax Map Block 980, Lot 8 in part

Calendared: June 25, 2019

Public Hearing: September 24, 2019

Proposed for Designation: October 29, 2019

