

# ROOTS: 1952

## The 'Golden Years' For Hosiery?

There are people around who still remember when the South was dotted with hosiery manufacturing companies. Almost every town in the Carolinas, Tennessee, Georgia, Mississippi and Alabama had at least one mill shipping seamless or full-fashion hosiery.

The 1952 Buyers Guide to Southern Hosiery and Knitwear Manufacturers listed over 600 companies and their sales agents, most of them hosiery operations. Today, only a few survive, although scores have started since.

For instance, only six manufacturers were listed for Fort Payne, Alabama, which today is touted as "the Sock Capitol of the World." W.Y. Shugart and Sons Inc. was listed with 160, 180, 200, and 220-needle knitting machines. The Cobble family owned Fort Payne Hosiery Mills Inc. and DeKalb Hosiery Mills, but the V.I. Prewett complex was yet to emerge.

The Alabama towns of Bridgeport, Eufaula, and Pine Hill also were home to hosiery companies.

Some 25 Georgia communities were supported by

hosiery companies and their personnel. Villa Rica had six companies and Carrollton had four including The Farmer's Mill Inc.

As today, North Carolina was the center of hosiery manufacturing. There were mills in 76 cities and towns across the Tarheel state and listings for Burlington mills cover more than seven pages. It took 11 pages to list all the Hickory mills, most of which are no longer in existence. Some, like B&K Hosiery which is now Huitt Mills, were ancestors to mills under new ownership.

High Point was a center of hosiery manufacturing with names that are familiar today: Harriss & Covington, Slane, Singer. Also in operation were Amos Hosiery, Silver-Knit, Crowne, O.E. Kearnes and Sons, Rice... now only part of the industry's history.

Asheboro's flourishing hosiery industry also has diminished. Acme Hosiery Mills Inc. -- now Acme-McCrary Hosiery -- remains the nation's largest private label producer of sheer products. Bossong Hosiery also is growing. But Asheboro Hosiery, Auman Hosiery Mills, Kennedy Hosiery Mill, Martha Mills Inc., Bunting Full Fashion, and scores of



greige mills are just memories.

Mt. Airy was home to over a dozen hosiery mills, including Renfro. But even coastal cities like Elizabeth City, and metropolitan centers such as Raleigh, Durham, Winston-Salem and Charlotte, had thriving hosiery operations. A conservative estimate would have 70,000 North Carolinians earning a livelihood in hosiery. Today that figure is maybe 25,000.

Few hosiery companies had sales operations, but among those with New York offices were Acme Hosiery Mills, Bossong, Burlington Hosiery, J.A. Cline and Son, Hanes Hosiery, May Hosiery, and Slane Hosiery. Yet the directory had over 10 pages listed the names and addresses of sales agents across the nation.

It was not until the 1970s when most hosiery companies began adding in-house sales people to their organizations. The mass merchants were insisting that "middle men" were taking 8 percent that should go to the retailers. We'll buy direct from the mills, the chains were insisting.

It was a different world in 1952 for suppliers as well. Morris Speizman was promoting Komets Links and Links. Royersford Needle Works in Royersford, PA, was "the master needle maker." American and Efird was the leading yarn supplier.

Advertisements in the directory were for companies that no longer serve the industry or which have disappeared through mergers, acquisitions or closings.

But while some of the companies -- hosiery and suppliers -- are gone, others have come to take their place. Moretz Inc., Thorlo, V.I. Prewett, Alabama Footwear, N.C. Socks, Catawba Sox Inc., Houston Hosiery, Denton Hosiery, and more have appeared in the last half of the 20th century. So has Neuville Inc... and DeSoto... and Four Star/Top Sox... the list goes on.

But given the number of companies and the business pace, 1952 must seem to old-timers like the golden years of the industry.

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