



# SAFETY makes SENSE



## Firestone textiles COMPANY NEWS

Gastonia, North Carolina • Bennettsville, South Carolina

Bowling Green, Kentucky

March 1981

**Cotton  
to  
'miracle'  
fiber**

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•• The American textile industry, established as a hearthside craft of necessity in the Colonies, started moving to the factory in the late 1700s. Textiles grew to industrial prominence and dominated manufacturing in the Northeast up to the 1930s. Then came the shift to other areas of the country, notably the South and Southwest.

Firestone Textiles Company has its roots in the New England beginnings. The Firestone Tire & Rubber Company, founded in 1900 at Akron, Ohio, started out making solid tires for horsedrawn carriages and after a while, the early motor vehicles. Tires soon went pneumatic and Firestone, meeting the changes, began building fabric reinforcement into its product. The fabric first came from outside sources.

AS EARLY as 1924, the company was producing its own fabric for better quality control. That was at Fall River, Mass., where the company had acquired an old-established mill that had turned out sailcloth and other products.

The fabric was cotton—the only kind there was for tires up to the mid-1930s when synthetics came on the scene. Demand led to another plant at New Bedford and Newburyport. New Bedford produced more cotton fabric, but Newburyport supplied rayon, through arrangement with the producer. This and a similar operation that had started in

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History—a Footnote • Some management and staff personnel transferred from Firestone's Massachusetts plants in the 1930s and early 1940s. By the time New England tire-fabric operations had been discontinued soon after World War II, some pieces of old textile machinery such as cards, spinning frames and looms were sent to Gastonia. A few pieces were in use and some—or parts of them—were around up to the early 1970s when cotton "went out."

Two old looms, remembered, were descendants of the Crompton variety, with drop-box shuttle arrangement, shuttles loaded by hand. The old looms, long gone, were in the tradition of a family of early power looms that hold an important place in the history of the Industrial Revolution.

Textiles reference (placard at left) is a quote from Victor Clark's History of Manufacturers in the United States: "...No other industrial arts were so universally practiced by our people and no other were so suddenly taken from their hands. The short period between

1810 and 1830 saw the center of gravity of textiles manufacture shift from the fireside to the factory."

One of the Museum's power looms of historical importance (right). The collection includes a rare early model of the Crompton weaving machine.

### Story of textiles 1750-1950

#### Merrimac Valley

Textile Museum • Located 800 Massachusetts Avenue, North Andover, Mass. 01844. Telephone 617/686-0191. Hours: 9 A. M.-4 P. M., Tuesdays through Fridays; 1-5 P. M. Saturdays and Sundays. One of America's most extensive collections/sources of materials having to do with the textile industry in the United States.

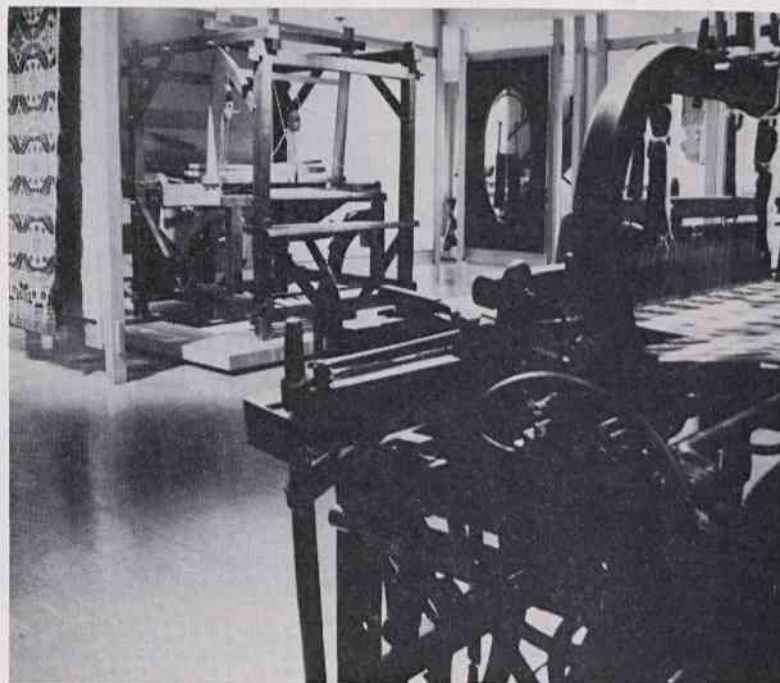
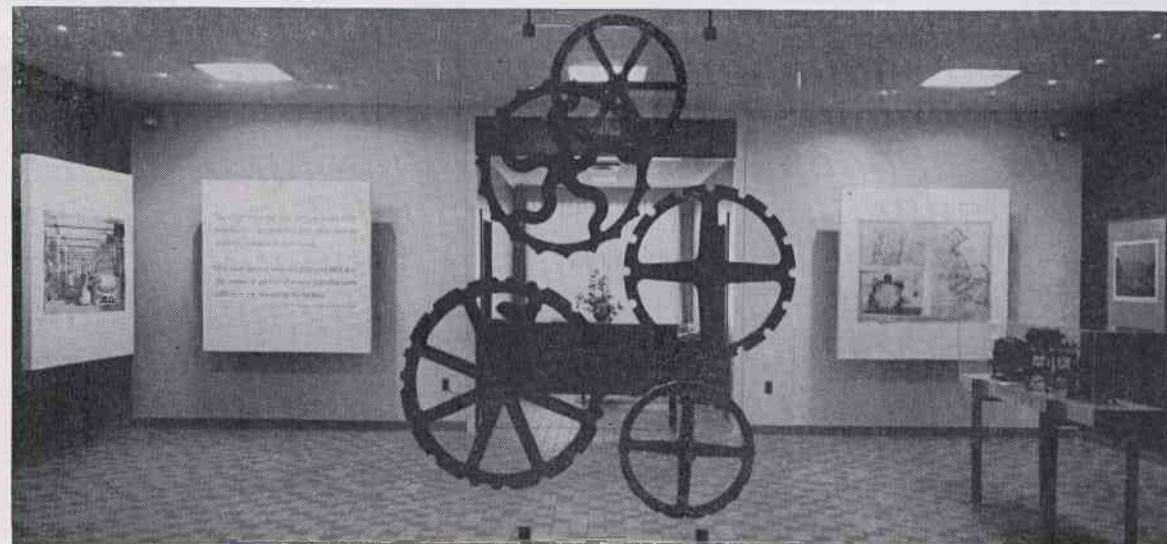
Museum collects machines, tools, documents, pictures, books and fabrics that tell the story of textiles in the U. S. from 1750 to 1950. Visitors can see spinning wheels, handlooms, cloth made in pre-industrial America, as well as the carding engines, spinning jacks (or jennies) and power looms from the early industrial era. Also there is an extensive collection of fabrics, textile sample books and swatch books, manuscripts, books, periodicals and photographs for reference purposes.

Roanoke, Va., supplied rayon during and shortly after World War II.

Meanwhile Firestone tire fabrics had moved further South. In 1935 the company began operating the former Loray/Manville-Jenckes mill at Gastonia, N. C. Eight years later the Bennettsville, S. C. plant was producing. By 1968 the new factory at Bowling Green, Ky., was producing. In early 1980 fabric production was discontinued, leaving Bowling Green as a treating facility altogether, its material being produced at Gastonia and Bennettsville.

AFTER WORLD WAR II the company acquired its Hopewell, Va., plant which produced synthetic fibers. That facility was a part of and headquarters for the Textiles division for a while in the 1960s. The operation today is Firestone Synthetic Fibers Company. It and the Textiles Division are part of the Firestone North American Tire group.

For Firestone Textiles Company, it all began 57 years ago, with tire fabric of "finest upland cotton" cord fabric from Fall River. Today, Gastonia (headquarters of the Textiles Division) and Bennettsville produce tire fabric in several 'families' of synthetic (chemically-engineered) fibers. Of the domestic plants, Bennettsville and Gastonia supply the product and Bowling Green and Gastonia plants treat the fabric for building into tires. The other facilities of the Textiles Division are at Woodstock, Ontario, Canada.



WALL OF HISTORY  
1750-1950