

# Fifty Years Of Textile Progress In State

**BY BEN E. DOUGLAS**  
 Director, North Carolina Department of Conservation and Development

In a way the cotton textile industry had its beginning in North Carolina as far back as 1775, a year or more before the adoption of the Declaration of Independence at Philadelphia.

It was in 1775 that the Safety Committee of Chowan County raised a fund of 80 pounds sterling to encourage a British textile mechanic to come to North Carolina and start a cotton manufacturing business. But the Revolutionary War interfered and the project was abandoned.

Later on, in 1789, the North Carolina General Assembly authorized Christopher Taylor to raise by lottery \$5,000 a year for seven years to establish a factory that would spin, weave and dye cotton. But the mill was never built.

All this is somewhat of a prelude to what later occurred in North Carolina as the Tar Heel State began its march onward and upward as a cotton textile manufacturing center and to where during the first half of this century it reached the very top as the nation's premier textile state.

According to the records, the first successful cotton mill established in North Carolina was the one constructed and operated near Lincolnton in 1813 by Michael Schenck and Absalom Warlick. About the same time that Messrs. Schenck and Warlick were establishing their mill near Lincolnton, Joel Battle, a large plantation owner living near Rocky Mount, began to envision a cotton manufacturing plant of his own.

He and a brother-in-law, Peter Evans, and Henry A. Donaldson, who had had some cotton mill experience and whom Messrs. Battle and Evans had persuaded to come to North Carolina, founded a mill at the shoals of the Tar River near Rocky Mount. That mill continues today under the management of the same family and is the oldest mill in the South.

Shortly before the turn of the present century, the Dukes, the Cones, the Erwins, the Harts, the Holts, and numerous other industry builders of that era really began to develop the textile industry in North Carolina.

Washington Duke, his sons, James B. and Benjamin, and William A. Erwin constructed mills at Durham and a little later expanded their operations to include mills at what is now Erwin in Harnett County and at Coolee in Davie County. The Cone brothers, Moses and Caesar, reportedly borrowed all they could and with what money they had of their own they started a cotton textile manufacturing plant in Greensboro in 1894. They named this mill the Proximity, reputedly because of its nearness to the cotton fields that dotted North Carolina then as they do now.

The Harts and Battles and others continued to develop textile plants in Eastern North Carolina, but it was in the Piedmont, especially in the Gaston County area, that the cotton textile business began early in this century to flourish so greatly and mean so much to the economy of North Carolina. And much of the credit for making the textile industry what it is today in the State's great Piedmont area is due such people as the Line-

bergers, Loves, Grays, Armstrongs, Stoves, Rankins, and numerous others.

"Fifty Years of Textile Progress in North Carolina" is truly an interesting topic on which to write.

What has been accomplished in making North Carolina the premier state that it is in cotton textile manufacturing is something that is little short of being miraculous.

In the promotion of industry in North Carolina, a State dependent in the main for generations on agriculture as its basic—and, in many ways, its main—economy, the industrialists were largely on their own. It must be admitted that they did not get too much help in planning from the State level until the business-minded Angus Wilson McLean of Lumberton was elected Governor of North Carolina in 1924.

Governor McLean saw the need of gathering the various State agencies engaged in developing and conserving of North Carolina's vast natural resources into one department. He had for some time envisioned what he persuaded the 1925 General Assembly to create—namely the North Carolina Department of Conservation and Development.

This is not the time nor is it the place to go into detail and tell what the Department of Conservation and Development and its various divisions are doing to help conserve and develop the State's natural resources and to bring about a better balance between agriculture and industry.

Suffice it say, then, that here in North Carolina we have a population of about four and one-quarter millions of people. Sad to relate, we rank 45th in per capita income and that is something all of us must do something about. And we are, too.

The textile industry has for generations provided thousands of jobs for North Carolinians. It still is, and it is to the great credit of this industry that it continues by reason of the wide variety of products it manufactures here in North Carolina that it helps the Tar Heel State to rank so high industrially in the nation.

**Big Factor in Economy**

Textile employment in North Carolina is said to be a weighty indicator used for measuring the trends in the economy of the State. There is no doubt about this as records of the Employment Security Commission of North Carolina reveal that more than one-third of all workers engaged in manufacturing jobs in the State are covered by the Employment Security Program are employed in textile plants. Textile employment in the State actually accounts for more than 50 per cent of all manufacturing employment covered by the social security program.

While North Carolina is intensifying its successful efforts to diversify its manufacturing activities, it must not be forgotten that there is no other State in the union to which textiles are so important to the economy than they are here in the Tar Heel State. Textile industry records a short while ago revealed that two out of every three industrial employees in North Carolina is a textile operator.

**Great Value Rise**

Some idea of the growth of textile manufacturing in North Carolina from 1900 to 1950 may be seen by a look at some figures. In 1900, for example, the value of textile products manufactured in North Carolina was placed at \$28,372,798; in 1952 they had a value of \$2,870,000,000, or almost a gain of three billion dollars. This was almost one-half of the total value of all products manufactured in the State during 1952. Actually, the value of all manufactured goods in the State that year was put at \$6,426,000,000.

**1,100 Plants**

These textile products valued at almost three billions of dollars were manufactured in some 1,100 textile plants in North Carolina in 1952, last year for which complete figures are available at this time. The products were produced by approximately 234,000 workers. They had a capital of \$33,011,516, a total of 30,273 employees, paid out a total of \$5,127,087 in wages, and value of products was put at \$28,372,798.

It is interesting to note that in 1900 these 177 textile establishments gave work to 42.9 per cent of the wage earners employed at that time in the State. The products valued at \$28,372,798, or 29.9 per cent of the total value of products manufactured in the State.

**Rank In 1900**

The increase in the value of products from 1890 to 1900 was 196.7 per cent. In 1900 North Carolina ranked third in the nation in the manufacturing of cotton goods. In the South it ranked second in value of products, first in the number of establishments, first in average number of employees, and first in total wages paid.

The amount of cotton consumed yearly by the spindles running in 1900 was almost equivalent to the annual cotton crop of the State, which in 1899 was 473,155 commercial bales.

In addition to cotton goods, there were listed in the 1900 Census 90 apparel manufacturers employing 1,107 workers, with products valued at \$1,291,382. There were also 14 dyeing or finishing plants and 24 hosiery and knit goods plants.

Fifty years later—in 1950—there were 213,424 textile workers employed in North Carolina. Value added by manufacture was \$862,480,000. (The U. S. Department of Commerce defines "value added" as something approximating the value created in the manufacturing process, and is derived by subtracting the cost of materials, supplies, etc., from the total value of products shipped.)

In 1952 there were 218,993 persons employed in North Carolina textile plants. They earned \$498,979,000, and the value added by manufacture of products was put at \$868,939,000.

**Big Gains**

From 1900 through 1952 there was a 623 per cent gain in the number of wage earners employed in the textile industry, while value of products increased in excess of 10,000 per cent.

Home city pride naturally accentuates a personal desire to point out in this article that the American Cotton Manufacturers Institute, Inc., which represents over 85 per cent of the spindleage of the American textile industry, both Southern and New England, has its main offices in Charlotte, North Carolina.

In fact, according to an excellent article written some time ago by Henry Lesesne, roving editor, Textile Information Service, there is such a great concentration of the industry in and around Charlotte and Gastonia that only two other areas in the world can even compare with it on a textile poundage basis. These are Lancashire, England and Osaka, Japan.

Within a 50-mile radius of Charlotte, Mr. Lesesne wrote, there are more spindles—the industry's measure of productive capacity—than there are in all the New England states put together. North Carolina leads the country in number of spindles in place with 6.1 million. South Carolina is second with 5.9 million.

It has been said that North Carolina and textiles have "sort of group up together." There is something to that statement, because textiles were North Carolina's first manufacturing industry.

The Department of Conservation and Development is charged by law among other things with (1) promotion of the conservation and development of the natural resources of the State, (2) promoting the development of commerce and industry, and (3) promoting a more profitable use of lands, forests, and waters.

In the current campaign to bring more industrial payrolls into North Carolina, a State truly blessed with native labor easy to train and willing to work, as well as with numerous other natural advantages, the established industries, which have done so much to give North Carolina the place it holds in the industrial sun, are not by any means being overlooked or forgotten. To these old, established industries the State and its people owe a lasting debt.

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## New Peanut Tested In Demonstrations

In order to keep a close check on the yielding abilities of the two newly released peanut varieties, N. C. No. 1 and No. 2, eight demonstrations have been set up on farms in the eight major peanut producing counties of North Carolina.

This series of demonstrations will likely be released within the next two years as a third new hybrid variety known only as c-42, according to Asst. Director Perry, peanut specialist for the State College Extension Service.

In the tests, N. C. No. 1 and No. 2 will be tested for yield against farm stock nuts and the c-42 variety. Perry says each demonstration consists of five pounds of N. C. No. 1, No. 2, c-42 and farm stock nuts.

In tests by the North Carolina Agricultural Experiment Station the c-42 has shown up well, says Perry. If it continues to do so, it will very likely be released within the next two years as a third new hybrid variety resulting from the breeding program under way at State College since 1944.



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