

Erwin Takes On New Look With Changes

Erwin, a community of 3,000 located near the Cape Fear River and site of Eastern North Carolina's largest textile producer, has long been known as a mill village. And, for good reason: Practically everything in the community once belonged to Erwin Mills, Inc. But, things are changing there.

There are a few Harnett County oldtimers who can recall when the present town of Erwin was forest and farm land. That was before J. B. and B. N. Duke, the Durham tobacco empire builders went into the textile business. The Dukes, along with the late W. A. Erwin and others, built a plant in Durham to make cloth which could be used to sew into tobacco bags. A little later, they began making muslin sheeting and, after some success at that venture, started the South's first denim weaving operation.

At the turn of the century, the denim business was good in a predominately rural South and Erwin Mills looked around for a place to expand. In 1903, the

company purchased 5,000 acres of land in this area and built a plant to manufacture denim cloth. This was the beginning of what is known as the town of Erwin. But, the village was then known as Duke -- after the founding company's fathers. Then in 1924, Trinity College in Durham changed its name to Duke University after the Duke family created a multi-million dollar endowment for the Methodist educational institution. In order to eliminate confusion for postal authorities, the Harnett County community's identity was changed to Erwin in honor of Mr. Erwin, president of the company.

The denim business flourished through the first quarter of the 20th Century and in 1926, the Company decided to expand and transfer denim production to Erwin. As a result, a second weave plant and large indigo vat dyeing plant was built there.

Thus, for over 60 years Erwin Mills has been the primary source of employment in this community and for many years was almost the sole employer. Today, Erwin Mills, (which became a division of Burlington Industries in 1961 after Burlington acquired Erwin) employs more than 1,750 persons in its local operations.

But, as some folks hereabout remember, there was a time when the present acres of manufacturing buildings, the paved streets and parking lots, residences and business structures were but farm land and virgin timber. Soon after erection of the plant there in 1903, the company began building houses for its workers, laying out streets and -- in general -- creating a community around the plant. In all, the company built more than 800 houses in the village.

It was soon realized by the company and local mill management that a community is more than a manufacturing facility and houses. It needs commerce. It got it in 1905 when the late E. R. Thomas established the first store -- to sell drugs and general merchandise -- in a house located at the corner of North 13th and East H. Street. Today, this is the site where Central Carolina Bank is constructing a new branch -- the first new construction in "downtown" Erwin since 1948.

The Thomas Dug Store was moved in 1906 across the street into a new building erected by Erwin Mills. About the same time the company constructed another building at the eastern end of what is now a block of business structures. This was occupied by Hassell-Simpson and operated as a company store for several years. Erwin's first school was conducted in the second story of this building until a school building was constructed.

The company built several more store buildings in 1925 to fill out Erwin's downtown business block and in 1946 three additional commercial buildings were erected.

Not only did the company extend its activities into construction of commercial properties, but it also built the first hospital and leachery, in addition to community activities buildings and recreational facilities.

The first major change from "mill village" status toward "home rule" came in 1951 when the company sold some 675 homes to employee occupants, while retaining possession of property adjacent to the mills -- should additional manufacturing area be necessary.

Now, a second major change is underway and nearing completion. This involves the sales of approximately 50,000 square feet of pro-

erty comprising the Erwin business district to the present store and office occupants. For the first time, the community's 15 different businesses, three doctors and a dentist will be downtown Erwin property owners rather than lease-holders.

C. W. Howell, manager of the local operations of Erwin Mills, explained the reasoning behind the company's decision to sell the business property. "We felt that it was in the best long-range interests of the community to sell the buildings to the present occupants. We found in the sale of the homes to employees, a developing

sense of pride in home ownership. The homes took on more individuality than was in evidence previously. Today, we think there is a better spirit of citizenship here because the employee owns his own home and is a more responsible part of the community.

"We believe that the sale of the business buildings will also act as a long-range benefit to the town. In the past, the business and professional people of the community were dependent upon the company to a large degree. Operating under a sort of 'gentleman's agreement,' the local bu-

sinessman found it difficult to plan long-term, because of a month-to-month, or year-to-year rent basis. Now, as owners of their buildings, they are free to develop for the future."

Yes, things are changing in Erwin -- and there are many signs of progress. The mills are in the midst of a multi-million dollar modernization program, a new bank is going up, an addition to the community hospital is nearing completion, and with self-ownership of community's businesses -- who knows what additional progress the future will bring?

Avery Services

Thursday afternoon

Kermit Holt Avery, 54, of Route 1, Erwin, died early Wednesday morning at his home.

He was a retired farmer, son of Mrs. Callie Morgan Avery and the late W. L. Avery.

Funeral services will be held Thursday afternoon at 3 o'clock from Pleasant Grove Free Will Baptist Church. Rev. M. L. Byrd will officiate assisted by Rev. J. M. Gre-

gory and burial will be in the church cemetery.

The body will remain at Hatcher, Skinner and Drew Funeral Home until one hour prior to the services.

Surviving are his wife, Mrs. Geneva Smith Avery of Route 1, Erwin; his mother, Mrs. Callie Avery of Raleigh; one son Willie Avery of the home; three daughters, Esther Mae, Shirley and Angeline, all of the home; three brothers, Ralph and Chester, Avery, both of Route 1, Erwin, David Avery of Route 3, Dunn; one sister, Mrs. Council Williams of Route 1, Coats.

TAKE THE STEP

RIO CLARA, Venezuela (UPI) -- Jose F. Reyes and Justa Medina, who had lived together for 18 years, were married here this week by Father Enrique Martin. Jose is 87. Justa is 85.

BAN BEATNIKS

BOURNEMOUTH, England (UPI) -- The town council here is considering a by-law to ban beatniks from sleeping on the beach and under the pier.



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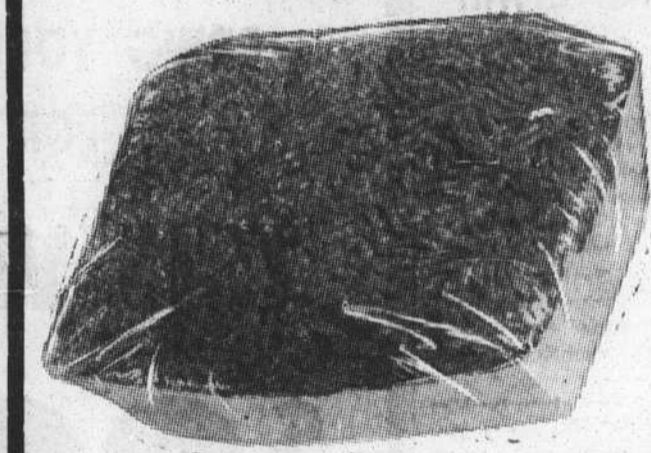
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FLOUR 5 Lb. Bag 63c

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CAMPBELL'S TOMATO SOUP

CAN

10c

PHILLIPS PORK & BEANS

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19c

CALIFORNIA RED TOKAY

GRAPES lb. 10c

VIRGINIA WINESAP APPLES

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