

# Paper Making In S.C. Began About 1810

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## South Carolina's Story The making of a state

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Paper making is a major 20th century industry in South Carolina. Pine trees are considered one of the major crops in the state — a crop that is harvest-ready in about 15 years.

The concept of trees as crops is fairly recent in South Carolina history. In our early history all paper stock was imported.

The first newspaper was the "South Carolina Journal," which was published in Charleston by Eleazar Phillips in 1730. The paper, each page individually pressed by hand, was made of cotton and linen rags. Because harsh chemicals were not used, the 1730 paper is more durable than the newsprint manufactured today.

The first South Carolina paper mill was probably constructed around 1810. Records are skimpy, but there was definitely a paper mill near Columbia in 1827.

Before the Civil War the price of paper was too high for most of the general population to buy books or to subscribe to newspapers.

The union blockade was so effective during the Civil War that most newspapers frequently suspended publication. The Northern states also experienced a shortage of paper but were able to find an unusual source of rags — Egyptian mummies. Each mummy was wrapped in about 30 pounds of linen cloth. This novel solution to the paper shortage ended when an outbreak of cholera in Maine was attributed to bacteria harbored in the ancient wrappings.

After the Civil War, various industrial chemists began to experiment with ways to substitute wood products for linen and cotton in the making of paper. Progress was slow. Not until 1887 was it commercially profitable to use trees to make kraft wrapping paper and fiberboard.

In 1889 the Coker family of Hartsville plunged into the infant Southern pine paper pulp industry. James Lide Coker Jr. wrote his senior thesis at Stephens Institute of Technology on the sulphite process of manufacturing cellulose and sold his father on the idea of constructing a pulp mill in the pine woods of the Pee Dee.

The original Coker intent was to make pulp to send to Northern paper mills for finishing. There were many problems. Patent rights had to be secured. Experienced paper mill workers and managers had to be imported. A railroad had to be built. Northern financial capital had to be obtained.

After the Cokers managed to solve most of the problems, they were still plagued with equipment breakdowns. One of the major problems lay in the nature of pine wood. The resin in the wood built up and clogged the machinery. James L. Cooper Jr. worked out a solution — to cut young trees and those only in late spring and summer when there was less sap. This discovery paved the way for a profitable Hartsville industry.

Coker's paper company was originally called "Southern Novelty Company," but in 1924 the name changed to Sonoco Products Company.

Since 1899 the major product of the Coker mill has been a small paper cone, only 6 inches tall, which is used as a base for wrapping yarn in textile mills. The textile industry uses and discards millions of these small cones each year and Sonoco has long been the world's major supplier. Paper tubes were another early product of pine pulp mills.

In the early 1930s, Dr. Charles Holmes Herty, an industrial chemist of unusual abilities, perfected a satisfactory method of bleaching pine-based paper. As a result of Herty's work, Southern newsprint gained a nationwide demand.

Coupled with the new market for pine wood was another project that has aptly been called "South Carolina's Green Revolution." Besides providing for the growth of commercial logging operations, the fast-growing loblolly pine has served to check soil erosion. Former cotton plantations have been reforested.

Pine forests grown from seedlings distributed by the State Commission on Forestry have done much to repair the damage done by a century and a half of over-reliance on cotton as a cash crop.