

# Lowenstein Chose Rock Hill Only A Month After '29 Crash

By LOUISE PETTUS

The night of Nov. 27, 1929, was a long one for the Rock Hill City Commissioners (equivalent to the present-day city council). The commissioners held an all-night session in response to the decision of M. Lowenstein and Sons to



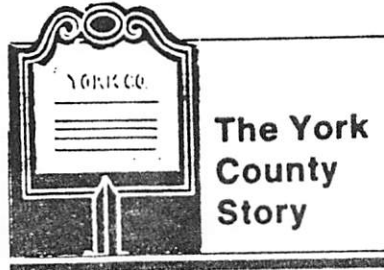
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build in Rock Hill on the condition that the city furnish an adequate supply of good water to the company. Since the city's waterworks were inadequate, a bond referendum had to be initiated as rapidly as possible. The commissioners wrote a petition to offer to Rock Hill's "freeholders" requesting a special election to ratify a bond issue of \$300,000 to expand the city's waterworks system.

Sixty people were recruited to gather signatures. The first day almost 500 freeholders signed. It was barely a month after the great stock market crash. Considering the economic conditions, the opportunity to get a plant the size of the bleachery was quite remarkable. The cost of building the plant was projected at \$2 million. The promise to employ more than 200 workers was enticing. The payroll, according to the newspapers, would exceed \$10,000 a week.

M. Lowenstein and Sons was headquartered in New York with numerous plants across the eastern United States, including a large bleachery in Lyman, S.C. A number of different cities had bid for the bleachery.

A major factor in Rock Hill's winning the bid was the availability of the huge Anderson Motor Co. building on Laurel Street. The



automobile manufacturer had recently closed. Also some adjacent property owned by Cutter Manufacturing Co. and W.N. Ashe had been secured. In all, Lowenstein got 12 acres that stretched along a railroad track from Laurel Street to Stewart Avenue.

Rock Hill expanded its waterworks and in the fall of 1929 good weather allowed the bleachery construction to move rapidly.

The old one-story Anderson building contained 65,000 square feet of space; an addition dwarfed the old with its 235,000 square foot of floor space.

A new roof was placed on the old building using an insulation of nonflammable paper and 1-inch layer of cork covered by tar and gravel. Steel rafters were installed and a concrete floor poured. Because of the amount of water used in the bleaching process, great effort was made to avoid condensation overhead.

All of the local cotton mills had villages; it was a custom of the time. The bleachery did not. The appointed executive manager, A.O. Joslin of Providence, R.I., correctly guessed that the bleachery would have plenty of applicants even if it did not offer housing. The decision saved money for other uses.

The first man put on the payroll was Joe Easley, an assistant dyer. Easley retired from the bleachery 39 years later as vice president and assistant general manager. At the time of his retirement, Easley recalled that when he arrived in Rock Hill from Greenville, he knew one person, Anderson Bass. Bass introduced him to Dr. Boulware at Central Drug Store, who let Easley have a room in his home.

Most of the first workers in the bleachery had some cotton mill experience, but immediately found that the only similarity between a bleachery and a mill was that both worked with cotton. The Rock Hill Printing and Finishing Co. was a converter of gray goods from cotton mills of the area. Easley recalled that the early dyes were often unstable and ran when the cloth was washed. The cloth was heavy with starch, which was removed by the first washing. The material was likely to shrink.

With time, all of these conditions improved and the bleachery grew.

In October 1985, Springs Industries, based in Fort Mill, purchased M. Lowenstein Corp. and its subsidiary Clark-Schwebel Fiberglass Corp. for \$265 million. It was the largest merger of two textile corporations in U.S. history.

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