

'Enlightened' mill owner employed modern-day perks

Property had child-care, kindergarten and adult education programs

In 1907, Hamilton Carhartt, a Detroit multimillionaire who made his fortune manufacturing work overalls, came South seeking a factory that would serve as an addition to his growing denim empire. Carhartt was the largest manufacturer in the world of work overalls and gloves with a production that exceeded \$2 million yearly.

Carhartt found a cotton mill on White Street in Rock Hill that he was able to buy from Sam Friedheim. It was Rock Hill's oldest mill and the first steam-powered cotton mill in South Carolina.

The mill had been incorporated in 1880 under the name Rock Hill Cotton Factory and opened in 1881 with A.E. Hutchison as president. Friedheim had changed the name to Bellevue. Carhartt renamed the plant Hamilton Carhartt Mill. He had other mills in Detroit, Atlanta, Dallas and Liverpool, England.

Carhartt built a winter home on the Catawba River. It was not long before he turned over the

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day-to-day management of his company to his son, Hamilton Carhartt Jr., and became a resident of York County. In 1912-13, Carhartt built Hamilton Carhartt Mill No. 2 near the Catawba River on 100 acres of land he purchased from the Childs estate. He added more farmland until he had more than 2,000 acres.

Carhartt's spectacular home on the Catawba River resembled a Swiss chalet done in stucco. Playing the role of gentleman-farmer, Carhartt set up Carhartt Farms with extensive dairy operations and a large number of blooded Arabian horses. At Carhartt Station, Hamilton Carhartt Mill No. 2 employed more than 3,000 people. The homes in the mill village were of stucco and resembled scaled down versions of Carhartt's personal residence.

The blue denim manufactured at Mill No. 2 was sent to Detroit where it was cut and finished. On the bib pocket of each pair of overalls there was sewn a small red heart with a representation of a car placed on the heart -

thus, "car-heart." According to the stories of the time, Carhartt was originally a railroad worker who was not satisfied with any work clothes then on the market. He told his wife what he wanted and she constructed a pair of overalls with a cut that he liked and with many more pockets than any work clothing then available. Carhartt liked his new overalls so much that he went into business manufacturing exact copies of his wife's work.

By 1920, Carhartt was spending most of his time on his model plantation on the Catawba River. That year, he sent the following telegram to President Woodrow Wilson: "I wish to offer my home on the Catawba River, in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains, with its complete equipment of servants, Arabian saddle horses, automobiles, etc., to Pres. Wilson for his summer White House. It has ample accommodations for everybody." There was no reply.

A community house was built at Mill No. 1 in the summer of 1920. The three-story building boasted a reception hall, reading room, assembly hall, a kindergarten, first-aid room, billiard and pool room, and a swimming pool that was 40 by 80 feet.

Hamilton Carhartt was considered to be an "enlightened"

mill owner. He had cooperated with Mary Frayser and Winthrop College since 1913 by donating mill property for child-care purposes, adult education and recreation programs.

The next year, 1921, was a hard year for cotton textile manufacturers. A post-war depression set in and Carhartt was overextended. He placed his Rock Hill mills in the hands of a creditor's committee. Charles Cobb, a Rock Hill banker, chaired the committee and attempted to sell the properties.

Finally, Cobb sold the Carhartt property to Red River Mills. In 1928, J.H. Cutter of Charlotte took over the Rock Hill mill. A Gastonia mill purchased the mill at the river and Weill Cotton Company took over 1,000 acres of the farm which stretched from the railroad trestle to the bridge (later Celanese Corporation property.)

About this time, Mr. and Mrs. Carhartt were killed in an automobile accident in Detroit. It was at the same street corner that their daughter was killed while taking her children to school. The Carhartts had made their last trip to Rock Hill in 1925.

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