P.H. Hanes Knitting Company

Davie County native Pleasant Henderson Hanes founded P.H. Hanes Tobacco Co. in Winston in 1872. He located his factory on the southeast corner of Chestnut and Third Streets, where today’s Forsyth County Government building is located. Under pressure from R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Co. and after several devastating fires, Hanes sold the tobacco company to R. J. Reynolds in 1900. Hanes founded P.H. Hanes Knitting Company in 1902, incorporating and issuing $250,000 in capital stock the following year with his sons P. Huber Hanes and William M. Hanes.

Pleasant, or “Early Bird,” Hanes located his knitting company a few blocks northwest of the former tobacco plant, at the northeast corner of Church and Sixth Streets next to the rail lines. The nickname “Early Bird” referred to Hanes’ habit of arriving at his desk by 6 a.m. Hanes Knitting began to manufacture ribbed cotton underwear for men, women, and children. The underwear was first sold under other brand names through a New York broker. However, in 1912 Hanes Knitting began working with advertising firm Ayer & Son to expand their market. Beginning in 1913, Hanes Underwear was sold under its own label, which read “We guarantee Hanes Underwear absolutely – every thread, stitch and button. We guarantee to return your money or give you a new garment if a seam breaks.” In 1916 Hanes Knitting was described as the largest mill in the world devoted to manufacturing heavyweight underwear, with a New York-based sales team and office by 1918.

The original 1902 plant was expanded in 1906. In 1907, construction of a four-story brick building at Church and Sixth Streets was begun by Fogle Brothers, complete with a bridge across the street to the original mill. The basement was used as a storage and drying room; the first floor for packing; the second floor for finishing; the third floor for manufacturing; and the fourth floor for storage. In 1914, Hanes Knitting built a factory for making underwear boxes adjacent to the knitting mills.

Meanwhile in 1911, at Hanestown, Hanes opened its own spinning mill and mill village west of downtown, located along today’s Stratford Road. The mill village housing was lit with electric lights and a “splendid water system had been arranged.” A second spinning mill was built in 1915 to help meet the increased demand caused by World War I. The market for Hanes Underwear continued to grow, and
Hanes Knitting awarded the construction contract for a new mill building in 1916. The new building at Main and Sixth Streets was five stories high and constructed of reinforced concrete by Travers-Wood Construction Company. With the completion of this modern building featuring a cafeteria serving hot lunches, sprinklers, and cooled drinking water, Hanes expected to employ between 1,000 and 1,200 workers in the knitting department.

In 1920, a second concrete mill building was added to the site just north of the 1916 mill. It survives, while the 1916 mill was demolished in the 1960s. The Knitting Building (or North Building), as the 1920 mill became known, was modeled on the 1916 mill in form and material, using reinforced concrete with brick curtain walls covered in stucco. The building is capped with a molded cornice interrupted by parapets at the corners. Cartouches marked with the letter “H” are found on the parapets facing Seventh Street at the north end of the building. A large opening at the northeast corner of the building allowed rail cars directly into the first floor.

During the early 1920s, collapsing cotton prices caused Hanes Knitting to experiment with new colors, prints, and products. The “tee shirt” was developed during this period, and Hanes began to manufacture undershirts, woven boxer shorts, knitted sleepwear, and briefs. Pleas Hanes died in 1925, leaving a company with 3,000 employees in Winston-Salem. His son, P. Huber Hanes Sr., took the reins, running the company until 1954.

In 1928, Hanes demolished the oldest mills and built a factory and power plant at the junction of Sixth Street and the rail lines. The Mill Building (East Building) is constructed of concrete, brick, and steel with metal windows in an unusual shape that follows the rail lines on the east. The powerplant with shortened smokestack, which once read “P·H·H·K·Co,” is located at the north end of the Mill Building. Elevated walkways connected the Mill Building to the 1916 mill to the west and the Warehouse and Shipping Building to the east.

In 1940, Hanes added another building to the downtown site with the construction of the Warehouse and Shipping Building at the corner of Sixth and Chestnut Streets, on the east side of the rail lines. The steel-frame building is clad with brick and has metal windows. Like the Mill Building, its irregular shape follows the rail lines to the west.

Under Huber Hanes Sr.’s leadership, the number of employees grew to 8,000. Hanes offered a generous and broad package of benefits, providing a pension that was 100% funded by the company, company-funded health care, paid vacations and holidays. Hanes developed an extensive employee recreation program during Huber’s tenure as well. Activities included golf, fishing and bowling teams, square dances and rodeos, barbecues and picnics, and a monthly magazine – *The Hanes Knitter*.

P. Huber Hanes Jr. assumed leadership of Hanes Knitting in 1954. He expanded the workforce by another 1,200 employees, building mills in Galax, Sparta, and Jefferson. Hanes Knitting and Hanes Hosiery, the company founded by Pleas Hanes’ brother John Wesley Hanes, merged in 1965 to form Hanes Corporation.

This information is also available at the Forsyth County Historic Resources Commission web site: [www.ForsythCountyHRC.org](http://www.ForsythCountyHRC.org)