B.F. Huntley Furniture Company

In 1906, Oakland Manufacturing Company bought out the Winston Furniture Company, forming a new enterprise called B.F. Huntley Furniture Company. Winston Furniture Company’s facilities at Depot and 11th streets (now Patterson Avenue and 12th Street) included multiple lumber sheds, a railroad siding, two dry kilns, a three-story brick manufacturing building, and water tanks, all of which became the new home of B.F. Huntley Furniture Company. In the manufacturing building, woodworking was done on the first floor, “erecting” or assembly on the second, finishing on the third, and warehousing in the attic. By 1907, a bridge had been built from the third floor finishing rooms, north across the railroad siding, to a new multi-story warehouse, packing, and shipping building. Improving safety, electric lights had replaced kerosene lamps and automatic sprinklers had been installed.

By 1912, the B.F. Huntley Furniture Company had expanded again. An additional story had been added to the warehouse building to provide more space for varnishing and finishing. The warehouse had also expanded to the south, so that it directly adjoined the original three-story manufacturing building. A railroad platform had been constructed east from the warehouse, providing easy access for loading and unloading on the north side of the railroad siding.

The factory had more than doubled in size by 1917 with new specialized spaces for veneering, sawing, planing, joining, painting, and crate making. It surrounded the railroad siding on the north, south, and west sides. A one-story office building stood at the corner at Patterson and 12th, apart from the factories and workshops. In 1920, Huntley expanded again by acquiring the Forsyth Furniture Company. B.F. Huntley Furniture Co. received the permit to build a two-story office building at the corner of Patterson and 12th in 1921. Additional storage and work buildings had also been added to the perimeter of the factory core and site by 1950.

On February 14, 1956, the B.F. Huntley Furniture factory caught fire. The factory was largely consumed in a loss costing just under $1.5 million. The two-story office building constructed in 1921 survived the fire, and the factory was rebuilt around it within nine months. In 1961, Thomasville Chair Co. and Huntley merged, adopting the name Thomasville Furniture Industries. Thomasville manufactured furniture in the facility until 2006.
Benjamin Franklin Huntley Sr., the son of John and Emily Huntley, was born near Monroe, NC, on November 7, 1863. At age nineteen, he lost his left arm while working a cotton gin on his father’s plantation. The injury prevented Huntley from continuing to work on the farm, so he moved to Columbia, SC, and worked as a salesman in a retail store. In 1889, Huntley married Eliza King. Their marriage was brief, as Eliza died in 1892, but they had one daughter. He married Josephine Leona Meyers in 1897. Together, they had six children: four girls and one boy who survived to adulthood, and one son who died as an infant.

In 1890, Huntley arrived in Winston and opened a furniture store. Huntley organized the Oakland Manufacturing Company, a furniture maker, with William P. Hill and Madison D. Stockton in 1898. Two years later, in 1900, the three men opened Huntley-Hill-Stockton Furniture Company, a showroom for their products, at 446-451 Trade Street. In 1904, they expanded with a second store in Greensboro. In 1906, Oakland Manufacturing Company bought out the Winston Furniture Company, forming a new enterprise called B.F. Huntley Furniture Company.

The B.F. Huntley Furniture Company grew to be the largest manufacturer of bedroom and dining room furniture in the United States. It brought Mr. Huntley significant wealth and an important role in the furniture industry. He chaired the Labor Committee of the National Council of Furniture Associations. He was also a director of the corporation that built High Point’s Southern Furniture Exposition Building in 1920, helping to make High Point home to the largest furniture industry trade show in the world.

Huntley was extremely active in his church and Baptist causes in general. He was part of the group that convinced the NC Baptist Convention to locate their hospital in Winston-Salem. In fact, he donated to the Convention eleven acres of land comprising the hospital’s main campus, and he was one of the first directors of North Carolina Baptist Hospitals. A trust created by his will continues to generate income to support patients at Baptist Hospital today. He was chairman of the hospital building committee, and also chaired the building committee for First Baptist Church on West 5th Street. He was also a trustee for Meredith College, a Baptist women’s university in Raleigh.

Huntley was also very active in the local business community, serving as chairman of the Chamber of Commerce Hotel Committee, president of the Kiwanis, a director of Wachovia Bank, and president of the Winston-Salem Hotel Company – owner of the Robert E. Lee Hotel. Tradition suggests that Winstonians considered Huntley the “builder” of the Robert E. Lee.

In 1924, Huntley and his wife hired Charles Barton Keen and Thomas Sears to design a house and landscape for them at 2900 Country Club Road. Keen designed the white stucco house in the Georgian Revival style and capped it with a green tile roof, a color scheme like that of Reynolda. Sadly, Huntley died at Johns Hopkins on October 23, 1925, just months after moving into his new home.