

The ELKIN SHOE COMPANY was founded in 1892 by A. M. Smith and started production in a wooden building located on the east bank of the Elkin Creek near the site of the present water purification plant. The building was acquired from the ~~CHATHAM MANUFACTURING COMPANY~~ ^{Guyton + Chatham Co} which had vacated it about a year earlier, when that business moved to a new brick building on the railroad.

Mr. Smith came to Elkin from Lynchburg, Virginia where he had been employed as a traveling salesman for the wholesale shoe jobber Witt & Watkins; later, Berry Gillian Company. After establishing the Tannery and Shoe Factory he continued as a traveling salesman for the Lynchburg firm for two years.

The Elkin Shoe Company had a modest beginning; an investment of \$600 was made in second-hand machinery; six vats were used in the tan yard; and the initial work force consisted of eight men. The primary product was men's brogan work shoes. About twelve pair of shoes were made each day; soles were fixed to the shoe uppers with wooden pegs. From the beginning horse collars and harness were produced. The leather was tanned using the extract of Spanish, White or Black Oak bark purchased from local farmers and mountain people. The bark was stripped from the trees in the spring of the year, dried in stacks during the summer and hauled on horse-drawn wagons to the tannery in the fall. Dried oak bark commanded a price of \$10-\$12 per ton. Cleaned cow hides were turned into leather by soaking them in the oak bark extracts for approximately six months. The factory was run on water power.

The attached sketch^{was} taken from letterhead used during the 1890's; it pictures the plant as viewed by an observer looking from the south.

The power plant is shown in the foreground. The lower floor was used for the tannery; shoes were made on the ground floor; shaving and "setting-out" of leather as well as manufacture of harness was done in the loft. Horse collars were made in the building across the road to the right. Hides were stored in a room built in the hillside.

7 The business grew and in 1909 a larger brick plant was built on the west side of the Elkin Creek. ^{on site of present water pump} The six million brick required for the construction were supplied by Mr. Bob Poindexter's brick plant located in the Yadkin River bottom a short distance east of Elkin. The brick were laid in the wall for \$8 per 1,000 ~~and were partially paid for by~~ ^{script issued in the Cleveland paper.} At this time new equipment to tan chrome leather was installed; the leather produced was called Elkin Tuff-Hide.

Another letterhead sketch shows the 1909 plant as seen from the north. The Elkin & Alleghany railroad can be seen on the left side of the creek. The new tannery is shown beyond the multi-storied shoe manufacturing buildings.

The primary product continued to be brogan work shoes. By 1914 the rate of production had reached 1200-1500 pairs per day. Approximately 225 people were employed. Will Gilbert was the first superintendent of shoe making; he was succeeded by Hough Transou and Lum Rogers. Joe Chatham was superintendent of fitting (sewing); James Transou ^{and his two sons Walter and Claude} supervised the tannery for many years. Sid Hudspeth ^{assisted by Charles Day and Arthur Rogers} was in charge of harness ^{and horse collar} making. ^{department}

During these years the Elkin Brogan shoes sold to merchants for \$1.70 to \$1.90 per pair. In the ^{beginning} ~~early years~~ selling was done by Mr. Smith. Later M. A. Biggs joined the firm as office manager and part-time salesman. Subsequently C. V. Smith and R. G. Smith became salesmen; even later Charlie White, S. O. McGuire and Foley Dockery participated in the selling.

After World War I customers were much less interested in the stiff brogan shoes ~~then~~ ^{previously} A change was made to welt type work shoes but business continued to wane. In 1924 Mr. Smith sold his interest in the ~~business~~ ^{company} to Mr. Thurmond Chatham and Mr. Jim Hanes. The new management set out to produce popular priced women's and men's dress shoes but the change over was not successful and the business was liquidated in 1927-28.