

## Mount Holly Cotton Mill, fourth oldest in the county, still standing

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Mount Holly, around 1875, began to establish what would become the backbone of the town and the surrounding area < textiles.

One of the first mills constructed was the Mount Holly Cotton Mill on Alsace St., just off N. Main, and perched on the north bank of Dutchman's Creek.

The Two and a half story brick structure, powered by water from the creek for much of its early existence, is still standing and housed a small knitting operation < Robela Knit Shop Limited in the last few years.

Robert and Pam Friedl own the mill today, and have considered converting some of the space into offices.

Friedl is known throughout the country as a pioneer in the knitting industry. He has rubbed shoulders with many people in the textile field who went on to become the giants of the industry. Roger Millikin of Deering-Millikin and Frank Hanes of Hanes Hosiery were two of his friends in the early days.

<sup>3</sup>I've been in the textiles business all my life,<sup>2</sup> Friedl said.

During his travels, Friedl spotted an old, but interesting, former textile plant and decided to buy it.

The building was not being used and was overgrown with vines and other vegetation. All the windows were broken out. It took him three months to clean up the building and the grounds, but when he had finished in 1974, he opened his knitting business.

Before all that, however, Friedl recognized the historical significance of the mill and decided to see what he could do about getting it recognized as a historical site.

His efforts came to fruition in 1973 when the facility was added to the National Register of Historical Places.

The plaque outside the plant reads: <sup>3</sup>The fourth cotton mill built in Gaston County and the oldest remaining. The Mill used water power. It was renovated after the 1916 flood and renamed Alsace Manufacturing Company.<sup>2</sup>

The famous flood caused \$20,000 damage to the mill.

The plant was built from March 1, 1875 to early 1876 on a 40-acre site.

The 2,800 spindle mill began purchasing cotton and warps for the production of yarn soon after construction was completed. The first floor was used for carding, the second floor for twisting and the third for spinning.

A partnership formed by A.P. and D.E. Rhyne and Ambrose Costner built the structure. Besides the Rhyne family, the mill was also operated as the Alsace Mill by C.E. Hutchinson, a leading southern textile pioneer.

The mill site was purchased in 1874 from the Rudasill family by V.L. Johnson for \$1,000 who turned around and sold the parcel to A.P. Rhyne for \$1,100 the same day.

The partnership, having acquired the Tuckaseege Mill in 1888, changed the name to Mount Holly Knitting Company. On July 28, 1908, the Mount Holly Cotton Mills Co., was incorporated. They built the Albion Mill in 1890.

Friedl, the present owner, came to Mount Holly in 1959, but continued to travel, setting up plants and training employees all over the world. He has been instrumental in many textile firsts where knitting is concerned.

<sup>3</sup>I installed the first double-knit machines for Roger Millikin in Spartanburg in 1961,<sup>2</sup> he said, and I set up Hanes first plant in Winston Salem.<sup>2</sup>

He also, personally made the first swimsuit worn by Esther Williams in the movies.

Many would be surprised to learn Friedl, one of the highest ranking officials of the Austrian government, operates the official Austrian consulate for North and South Carolina out of the old Mount Holly Cotton Mill.