

The National Silk Company, Coventry, Connecticut by Bill Jobbagy June 2007

The National Silk Company was formed in May of 1927. The company purchased the old Morgan Silk Mill on Mason Street, and started operations there. The company incorporated in 1928 with 1,000 shares of stock valued at \$100 each. It is remarkable that this company formed just two years before the stock crash of 1929 and managed to survive and grow during the Depression. The company's intent was to make silk thread, but market and economic conditions forced it to change its product. Mr. Schweyer, president and treasurer of the National Silk Company developed it to be the largest tax-paying corporation and the largest employer in Coventry. His home on South Street, the parsonage home of Dr. Joseph Huntington tutor to Coventry patriot Nathan Hale, was carefully restored and is one of the landmarks of the town. He became involved in many community activities including the Masonic Lodge, the Boy Scouts, the American Red Cross, and the Coventry Salvation Army. He purchased the old Methodist Episcopal Church in the Village and helped secure the Nathan Hale Community Center there in 1944 and was a member of the South Coventry Fire Department. He purchased and stored in the Mason Street building the material for a 100 bed emergency hospital including cots and supplies. The stock was still there in the 1960's.

By 1933 National Silk was making the famous trademarked Tioga Yarn and employing 150 people. The Mason Street site was used mostly for the mail order and retail business and storage. (A cedar lined room still exists today). In 1935 the company purchased the old Kenyon Mill on Armstrong Road and the production of yarn was done there. (twisting various single material yarn into blends for making different articles of clothing) The original mill building adjacent to the dam was the primary structure. The smaller buildings remaining there from earlier activities are torn down and the wooden structures adjacent to the brook are replaced with a one and a two story cinder block building which remained until they were torn down for the Kenyon Falls condominium project in 2008/9. The pond was called "Barber's Pond" on local maps. The company has an extensive operation that purchases all sorts of thread, then dyes and winds it into a huge variety of yarn. An extensive mail order business to women knitters across the country was developed and advertised widely in newspapers and magazines. In 1953 the average weekly wage of an employee is \$49.60. Records from the '50's and '60's indicate a wide array of yarns were sold including a Knitting worsted yarn 4-ply, 100% wool, 70 cents/skein- 140 yards and a Tioga 5-ply sports yarn, 100% wool, 50 cents/skein- 110 yards. The company operated two shifts using commercial electricity on the first shift, and during the second shift, opened the race gate and used their water turbine to supply electricity. Its likely they only ran the turbine for one shift because the water flow in the brook and the capacity of the pond would only allow five to seven hours of flow before being exhausted. In the '30's employment peaked at near 300 and production was 20,000 pounds of material weekly. Their Country Store located on Mason Street offered discounts from five to thirty-three percent depending upon the amount of the order. Sales tax in 1956 was three percent. They would send out sample yarn kits by mail that included, as an example, tufts of yarn of 100% wool and various mixtures and colors of acetate, nylon, rayon, and Lurex (A type of yarn with a metallic appearance. The twine is most commonly a synthetic fiber, onto which an aluminum layer has been vaporized). Their employees were nearly all women who were the best at the skills needed. Men handled the maintenance tasks. Their mail address was "The Coventry Yarn Mill" or "The Tioga Yarn Company", Coventry, Conn. No street address was needed.

In 1961 the company sold the Mason Street site and consolidated operations to the Armstrong Road location, Mr. Schweyer died in 1960 at age 71 and left his share of the company to his daughter Eloise Ryan, Her husband Harry Ryan became vice-president of the company until his death in 1964 at the age of 43, whereby Eloise took over the company. She is

the second woman to own and operate a factory on the Mill Brook. The first was Sarah Bottum in the late 1890's who took over the silk mill on Mason Street, the very site that is occupied by part of the National Silk Company, from her late husband. The factory employed 150 people at peak operations and averaged 25,000 pounds of novelty yarn and threads weekly. Their business started declining in the early 1970's and in 1972 the mill was sold and operations ceased.

Coventry was the home to several silk mills along the Mill Brook, making sewing and embroidery threads, from 1864 to 1915 and one mill remained- east of Woods Lane- until 1942 when it burned down. At the time it was making silk parachute cords for the military.

National Silk mortgage 1927; CLR Vol. 46 pg. 50 Equipment List

19 Raw silk winders, 28 spindles each	15 wood pulleys
2 doublers- 8-thread	thread reel and flys
2 doublers- 10-thread	4 x 4 steam box
1 hydro-extractor, belt driven	spirit level
soaking tub	24 band spinners- 100 spindles
sink	spinner- 50 spindles
balance scale	4 reels- 20 spindles
office desk	4 water stretchers- 32 spindles each
3 drawer cabinet	oil sprayer
revolving chair	power lathe
12 ft counter with drawers	waste cans
15 wood chairs	vise
16 low stools	tools
wall clock	block falls and rope
20 galvanized pails	thread cutting stock and die
18 bobbin boxes	twist drills
step ladder 3 ft	water pump
25 drying poles	water wheel- 25 HP
hand bobbin winder	GE generator 5.5 Kv, 125V, 44 amp
tables	25HP steam engine (Corliss)
scales	steam boiler- 40-50HP

