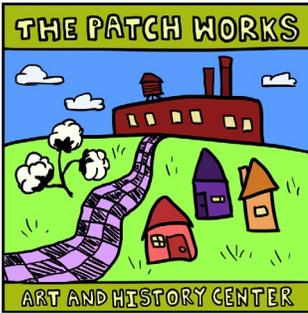


THE FINAL CHAPTER...

By Nina & Jake Elsas, The Patch Works Art And History Center



What better way to end the year than by finishing off Fulton Bag & Cotton Mills?!? Or, at least, to regale our readers with The Mill's final lap around the sun...?

From 1961 to 1981, The Mill really didn't have a fighting chance. Fulton Industries/Fulton Cotton Mills tried so desperately to keep the factory relevant throughout

the '60s – upgrading machinery, introducing new methodologies, producing cheeky, mod clothing lines that catered to a hip market – but none of that mattered: the factory's death knell could be heard clanging in the quickly closing distance. For what it's worth, during these heady but brief Fulton Cotton Mills years, the Elsas family continued to hold executive and managerial positions, with President Clarence "Red" Elsas wrapping up a century of Elsas domination. Alas, nothing lasts forever, and in 1968, both Fulton Industries and the Elsas family totally bailed.

That year, Fulton Industries was sold to Allied Products Corporation, which, in turn, effectively said sayonara to the Elsasseses, who had managed the company since Young Jacob and his pal Isaac May started their eponymous Elsas, May & Company in 1868. Parting is such sweet sorrow. Unless, of course, parting means dodging a killer bullet, in which case... thank the gods!

Allied was a multi-industry conglomerate out of Chicago, and frankly, it didn't really seem to give two hoots about breathing new life into the once-grand Atlanta plant. Over the next four years, company leadership changed twice – Lloyd O. Harris stuck it out from 1968 until 1971, whereupon Meno Schoenbach got saddled with keeping the damn thing afloat. In 1972, Allied decided to restructure its holdings by merging Fulton Cotton Mills with Geneva Mills of Geneva (redundant much?) and Enterprise Mills (Alabama) and Summerville Mills (Georgia). And from this mighty merger arose FabricsAmerica, which would triumphantly usher in The Mill's End of Days.

In 1972, with yet another leader (D.H. Morris, III) quasi-firmly in place, FabricsAmerica got straight to work. By 1973, FabAm ramped up our Atlanta factory's finishing and printing departments. Yay! Growth! Well, yes, buuuuuut it simultaneously began winding down cotton mill operations: the company reduced the number of functioning looms from 900 to approximately 450. Yet, to be fair, this disinterest in milling proved to be coincidentally fortuitous, because one year later, in 1974, Planet Earth's entire cotton textile industry was smacked up-side-the-head with a global recession. Not one to be caught with its burlap knickers down, FabAm took this as an omen and shuttered all of the Atlanta plant's mill operations on October 11, 1974. Instead, the Alabama-based plant would mill cotton,

while Atlanta's would be used for finishing (which became The Mill's raison d'être for the next few years). With the cotton mill operations kaput, FabAm unceremoniously cut its Atlanta workforce down to 750 peeps (from 2000 workers when Allied took over from Fulton Industries).

But it ain't over yet!

Not only had that massive recession taken its toll, but American consumers started turning their collective back on domestically produced cotton products, favoring instead foreign weaves (please don't ask us why... only the Shadow knows). In 1977, Allied ingeniously rolled with this threatening trend, unloading its Geneva and Summerville mills onto some schmuck with apparently no head for business. Well, even with this culling of the industrial herd, there's only so much "finishing" work out there in the world, and the Atlanta plant continued to hemorrhage the big buckeroonies.

In 1978, FabAm-ATL saw no other option but to end (finish?) its finishing operations as well. That being said, by closing down 99% of The Mill and firing most Atlanta-based employees, Allied finally figured out a way for FabAm-ATL to generate some profits: towels. Towels would save the day! Hallelujah! Starting in 1978, an enthusiastic sewing operation commenced, with a total of one hundred dedicated employees churning out industrial towels. Oh, Allied kept its Alabama cotton mill running and focused its cotton finishing operations at another plant in South Carolina, but turned the formerly-dominant Fulton Bag & Cotton Mills into a terry-towel afterthought. Ironically, this was actually a fitting bookend to Young Jacob's story: his Atlanta-based entrepreneurial legacy began and ended with the selling of towels.

For three years, until July 1981, FabAm-ATL managed to keep what was left of The Mill on life support, although it's kinda sad to envision just how pathetic the old factory must've been, with the majority of buildings vacant and crumbling. (In fact, our current Jacob used to come down to the 'Hood quite a bit in the 1970s and can attest, from personal experience, that The Mill had turned to crap.) Anyhoo, as breathtakingly absorbent as they may be, terry towels couldn't keep the lights on, and, finally, after 100 mostly glorious years, all operations ceased.

And so, here we are. The Mill has closed its doors.

Thus, we take our bow. This clearly is the last of our Cabbagetown Neighbor history articles...

Ha! Like hell it is.

Never fear! We still have so much dirt... hissssstory to tell. In fact, YOU, dear Cabbagetown-residing readers, are a part of this history. The Patch Works cannot stop until we tell all y'all's "story" too...

Next Chapter: The plausible but maybe not entirely true story of gentrification in Fulton Mill Village.