

**THE RISE AND FALL  
OF THE GARMENT INDUSTRY  
IN SCHUYLKILL COUNTY,  
PENNSYLVANIA**

by

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the University of Delaware in partial fulfillment  
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Distinction

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## **ABSTRACT**

The success of the garment industry in Schuylkill County is closely related to the status of Schuylkill County's economy—both rising from the 1930s to 1950s and declining from the 1970s to today. The purposes of this study are to determine what forces led to the rise and fall of the garment industry in Schuylkill County; to analyze if there is a possibility for Schuylkill County to establish a new, modern garment industry; and to bring awareness about Schuylkill County's importance to the nation and poor, current economy. Data were collected from books written by experts on the garment industry, the state of Pennsylvania, and Schuylkill County; primary sources provided by the Schuylkill County Historical Society; online articles; and one-on-one interviews of people who once worked in the garment factories of Schuylkill County. The data supports the conclusions that the rising and falling success of the garment industry in Schuylkill County was a result of the industry's pattern of moving to regions with the lowest cost of labor; globalization and reduction of barriers due to free trade; and the development of America, which increased demand for better working rights and more consumption. To establish a new garment industry in Schuylkill County, recommendations include expanding the local labor force with new immigrants and producing high quality, innovative products.

## **Chapter 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Stark differences exist between the past and present Schuylkill County. What was once a bustling area, leading the nation in anthracite coal mining and then textile and apparel production, is now a county where the population is aging; young people are leaving to find work; and the hope to regain prosperity like that of the past has deteriorated (McGuigan & Migliore, 2008; Miller & Pencak, 2002).

The garment industry, in particular, is closely related to the history of Schuylkill County affecting every aspect of the community from jobs and stores to family life and morale. Two very contrasting scenes are depicted of the county: the first scene more hopeful at the rise of the garment industry during the period of Great Depression, and the second more destitute at the absence of the industry by the early twenty-first century.

#### **Purposes of Study**

There are three purposes to this study—the first, to determine how and why the garment industry of Schuylkill County rose and then fell. I approach this by looking at the county’s history from several perspectives: a macroeconomic level, comparing it to the economies of the state and nation (Chapter 2); a factory level, delving into the microeconomics of production and business decisions (Chapter 4); and a personal level, through interviewing citizens that lived in the county and that worked in the garment factories (Chapter 5). Using this data, the second purpose is to

determine whether or not it would be beneficial and feasible to bring the garment industry back to Schuylkill County (Chapter 7). The third and final purpose is to raise awareness of Schuylkill County's rich past, its contribution to the nation, and its need for help in boosting the economy.

### **Tamaqua: An Example of Contrasting Times**

Tamaqua, Pennsylvania is one of many small towns in Schuylkill County situated in the northeastern region of the county. Tamaqua, like the other towns in the county, was involved in the anthracite, railroad and garment manufacturing industries. The town's garment industry was special, however, because it was led by what was once the largest underwear manufacturer in the world, J. E. Morgan Knitting Mills.

A drive through the streets of Tamaqua would be quite different in the mid-twentieth century than it would be today. During the forties and fifties, one would have noticed several garment factories lining the streets; an abundance of shops—from delis and bakeries to retail stores and shoemakers; hotels for tourists that came to enjoy the town and the scenic, mountainous terrain; a train often whistling in the background; and families with young children dressed up in their Sunday church attire (Detterline Jr., 1968). While the economy was dynamic and prosperous, daily life remained tough. The majority of people worked either in the mines or in factories that produced textiles and apparel, both of which had poor working conditions and low wages—but the citizens of Tamaqua coped so that they could support their families. Leisure time was often spent at community gatherings, such as picnics, block parties, bingo games and bowling leagues (Interviewees from Tamaqua; McGuigan & Migliore, 2008). (See Figures 1.1-1.4.)

1.1 Reading Railroad Station (Berner, 2014)



An iconic view of Tamaqua, circa 1950.

1.2 Betty's Luncheonette (Horton, 2014)



On High Street, circa 1950. Over the years, the building was transformed into an apartment, a church, a home building business and a garage.



### 1.3 Bright's Department Store (Suzadell, 2013)



The store bustled with customers on Friday nights and was known for its variety of merchandise and nice sales clerks, circa 1950.

### 1.4 A Street View (Serfass, 2013d)



Some stores and restaurants, circa 1960.

In contrast, a drive through Tamaqua today would draw a picture of less favorable conditions: the lack of any major industry; shops and buildings where businesses have vanished leaving empty storefronts or have been replaced by chain-stores like Rite-Aid or Burger King; a single motel where two of three Google reviewers explain they were forced by snow to stay there (A Google User, 2011; A Google User, 2008); and high school students, that if asked, would probably say that they do not plan to live in their hometown as an adult (Marchiano, 2013). Community leisure activities still occur, but attendees are becoming older due to the flight of the younger generations. Those that remain and participate in the labor force in Tamaqua work at auto shops, retail and convenience stores, local schools, restaurants and in others' homes babysitting. Current job listings looking to hire in Tamaqua can be considered low-paying jobs and include sales associates and managers at general stores, lab assistants and research technicians at St. Luke's in nearby Coaldale, assistant managers at auto repair and car rental shops, labor-intensive positions in warehouses and construction, babysitters, home care workers, salon assistants and truck drivers (Find Jobs, 2014).

Adding to the decline, Tamaqua has more than once faced conflict with the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, which seems to view the area as a place fit for dumping toxic waste from Pennsylvania, New Jersey and New York (Sturgis, 2008; Tamaqua Borough, n.d.). In the mid-2000s, the department decided to fill a large hole that was once the center of mining operations, called the Springdale Pit, with fly ash. This coal combustion waste has the ability to contaminate the surface, air and groundwater of the surrounding towns of Tamaqua, Coaldale and Summit Hill (Sturgis, 2008). Fortunately, the local residents united and ceased filling



the pit any further. In addition to fly ash, the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection has also chosen the Tamaqua area to dispose of the state's sewage sludge, giving farmers sludge for free to use as fertilizer. While the Department has deemed the sludge safe, there have been cases of sickness and death as a result of citizens' exposure. Tamaqua continues to fight against such dumping practice (The benefits, 2006).

While the town of Tamaqua is not as scenic as it once was, there have been some improvements. In 1992, for instance, the nonprofit organization Tamaqua Save Our Station, also known as Tamaqua SOS, purchased the town's abandoned railroad station for \$25,000. After twelve years, the organization collected \$1.5 million of public donations and funding from local politicians. On August 1, 2004, the Tamaqua railroad station was restored, looking like it did a century before, and opened to the public (Kneller, 2013; Leskin, 2013). (See Figure 1.5.) Since then it has served as a heritage center equipped with a restaurant and gift shop (Tamaqua Railroad, 2014). In December of 2012, the Restaurant at the Station closed because it was too much work to keep up. One of the owners mentioned, "The economy was part of it" (Leskin, 2013). Happily, a new chef from Lancaster and her husband re-opened the restaurant in the spring of 2013, renaming it Vonz Restaurant, and added a new dining room (Kneller, 2013). The Tamaqua Railroad Station represents the town's rich history and an inkling of hope for future growth.

### 1.5 Tamaqua Railroad Station (Tamaqua Railroad Station, 2014)



August 1, 2004. Train station re-opened to the public.

Tamaqua is a prime example of how the economy and morale have declined within Schuylkill County. The town's community has been strongly influenced by its industries in the first half of the 1900s and lack thereof in more recent years. Tamaqua is home to several founding industries of the United States, which have aided our nation's economy immensely and include the railroad, the coal industry and J.E. Morgan Knitting Mill. Tamaqua's industries and acceptance of cultures helped to integrate new immigrants and ethnicities. Despite Tamaqua's contributions to our country's prosperity, interest of the town and awareness of its bleak state is lacking.

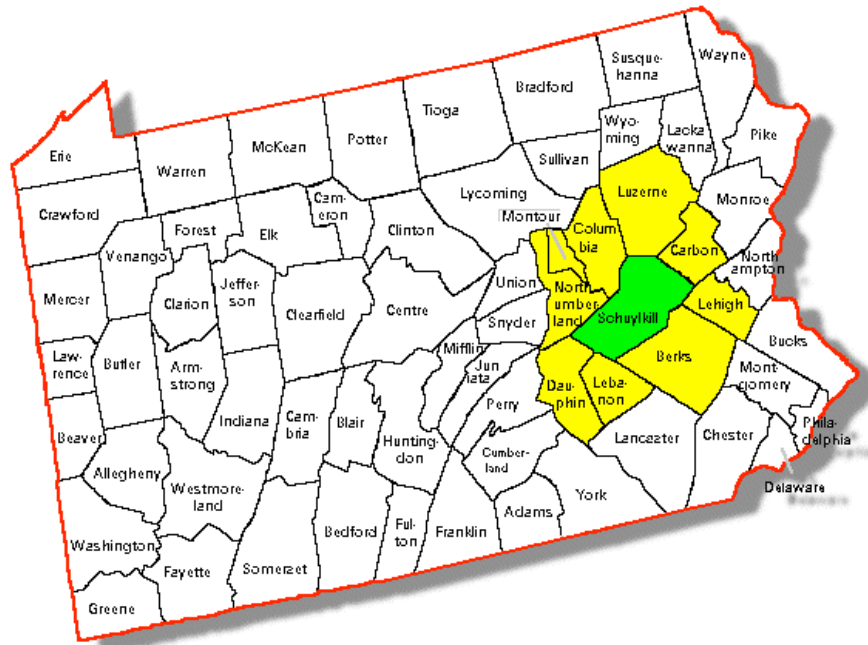
## **Chapter 2**

### **BACKGROUND OF SCHUYLKILL COUNTY**

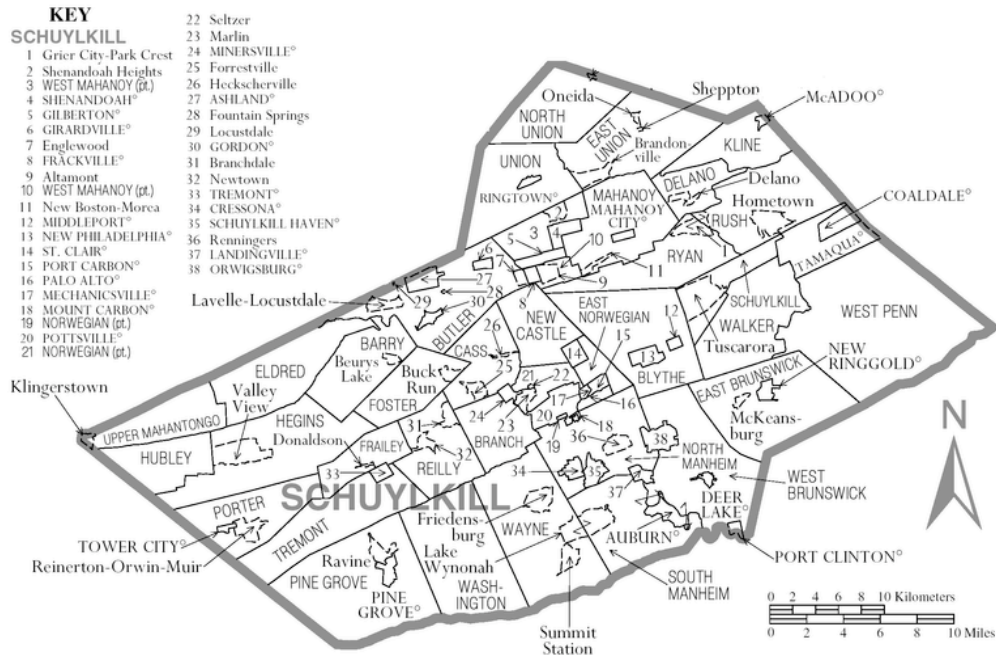
#### **Geography**

Schuylkill County is located in northeastern Pennsylvania in what is known as the anthracite coal region (About Crestview, 2014; Ramsey, 2006). (See Figures 2.1 and 2.2.) The county was founded in 1811 and named after the Schuylkill River, which begins here and flows through the cities of Reading and Philadelphia and into the Delaware River. The Appalachian Mountains run through this rural county, making for an abundance of mountains, hills, valleys and streams (Wilder, 1998).

## 2.1 Map of Schuylkill County in Pennsylvania (About Crestview, 2014)



## 2.2 Map of Schuylkill County (Ramsey, 2006)



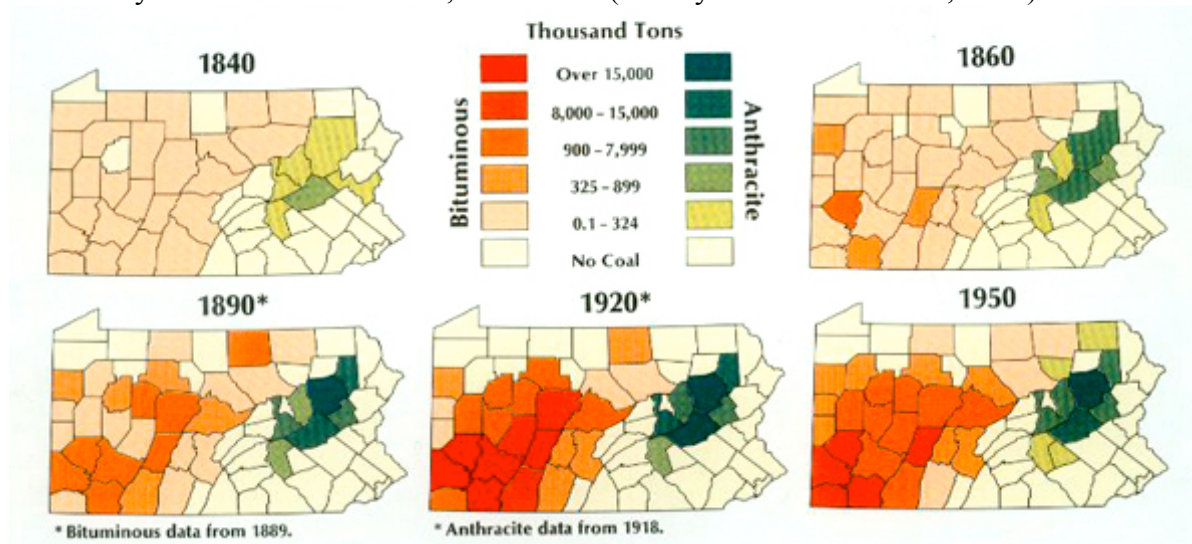
For centuries, sulphuric acid in the atmosphere and in the streams have been eroding the land, have created sand and gravel terrain and have led to countless, damaging floods. Despite the erosion, Schuylkill County is also home to long stretches of green foliage, large trees and many fertile farms (Wilder, 1998). Agriculture makes up for 18% of the land usage in the county, and the county's main products include Christmas trees, vegetables, melons, potatoes, turkeys, poultry and hogs (About Schuylkill, 2010).

Pottsville, considered a micropolitan area by the United States Census Bureau, is the county seat and largest city in Schuylkill County. The counties that border are Berks, Carbon, Columbia, Dauphin, Lebanon, Lehigh, Luzerne and Northumberland. Philadelphia, New York City and Washington D.C. are the closest large metropolitan areas to Schuylkill County and are each approximately two to two-and-a-half hours away by car commute (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011).

### **History of the Coal-Crackers**

Within the first decades of its foundation from the early to mid-1800s, Schuylkill County prospered because of its abundance of anthracite coal, a primary fuel source for the United States at this time. Anthracite coal was a better alternative than other fuel sources. Compared to the softer, bituminous coal, anthracite was preferred because of its intense heat and cleaner, less smoky burn (Grubb, 2013). The booming coal industry provided jobs for many of the men and even children in Schuylkill County, especially from the mid-1800s to the mid-1900s, as shown in Figure 2.3. While the wages were low and the working conditions were poor and dangerous, "coal-crackers," as the miners were called, worked daily to provide support for their families (McGuigan & Migliore, 2008).

### 2.3 Pennsylvania Coal Production, 1840-1950 (Pennsylvania Bituminous, 2011)



Schuylkill County dominates and peaks around the period of 1917-1918.

The coal industry led to developments in other aspects of the economy. For instance, transportation became important so that the coal could be shipped down from the mountains and out to consumers around the nation (Grubb, 2013). Schuylkill County is, therefore, connected to the first railroads and canals established in the United States (Grubb, 2013; Luther, 1998).

The coal industry, the main driver of the economy of Schuylkill County, boomed throughout the nineteenth and into the early twentieth century and was an important fuel source nationwide. The coal industry of Schuylkill County peaked in 1917 with close to 100 million tons of coal mined in just that year (McGuigan & Migliore, 2008). Within a little more than a decade, this amount fell to forty million tons of coal during the Great Depression. The coal industry existed in northeastern Pennsylvania until World War II, but by the end of the war, it had dissipated (McGuigan & Migliore, 2008).

### **Current Demographics**

Given Schuylkill County's unique geography and history, the people of the region tend to veer from the norm when put up against the broader population. To gain a better understanding of the county's deviances, the following sections compare the people of Schuylkill County to Pennsylvania and the United States as a whole. Topics of discussion that help to outline Schuylkill County's demographics include population growth, types of family households, ages of women who give birth, education levels, ancestry and current immigration patterns.

### **An Aging Population**

Table 2.1 illustrates that Schuylkill County's population has become older than Pennsylvania's or the rest of the United States'. While the broader populations of Pennsylvania and the United States continue to grow at a positive rate, Schuylkill County's population peaked in the 1930s and has been steadily decreasing ever since with the exception of the 1980s, in which growth was very minimal at +0.3% (Forstall, 1995; U.S. Census Bureau, 2012a; U.S. Census Bureau, 2012d). As was mentioned earlier, the coal industry in Schuylkill County peaked around 1917 and never returned after the Great Depression of the 1930s. The pattern of success in this major industry correlates to the changes in the county's population; it seems as though Schuylkill County's population never bounced back either.

2.1 Total Population 1900-2010 (Forstall, 1995; U.S. Census Bureau, 2012a; U.S. Census Bureau 2012d)

	Schuylkill County		Pennsylvania			United States		
Year	Population	Growth	Population	Growth	SC as % of PA	Population	Growth	SC as % of US
1900	172,927		6,302,115		2.74%	76,212,168		0.23%
1910	207,894	20.2%	7,665,111	21.6%	2.71%	92,228,496	21.0%	0.23%
1920	217,754	4.7%	8,720,017	13.8%	2.50%	106,021,537	15.0%	0.21%
1930	235,505	8.2%	9,631,350	10.5%	2.45%	123,202,624	16.2%	0.19%
1940	228,331	-3.0%	9,900,180	2.8%	2.31%	132,164,569	7.3%	0.17%
1950	200,577	-12.2%	10,498,012	6.0%	1.91%	151,325,798	14.5%	0.13%
1960	173,027	-13.7%	11,319,366	7.8%	1.53%	179,323,175	18.5%	0.10%
1970	160,089	-7.5%	11,793,909	4.2%	1.36%	203,211,926	13.3%	0.08%
1980	160,630	0.3%	11,863,895	0.6%	1.35%	226,545,805	11.5%	0.07%
1990	152,585	-5.0%	11,881,643	0.1%	1.28%	248,709,873	9.8%	0.06%
2000	150,336	-1.5%	12,281,054	3.4%	1.22%	281,421,906	13.2%	0.05%
2010	148,289	-1.4%	12,702,379	3.4%	1.17%	308,745,538	9.7%	0.05%

Table 2.2, which shows the number of childbearing women based upon age, may also hint at the aging population in Schuylkill County. The percentage of women who had children within the past year in the younger age categories, 15-19 and 20-34, is higher in Pennsylvania and the United States than in Schuylkill County. In consequence, the percentage of women who had children within the past year in the oldest age category of 35-50 is higher in Schuylkill County than both Pennsylvania and the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012e; U.S. Census Bureau, 2012f).



Schuylkill County has a higher representation of older women bearing children, which may be attributed to the decreasing amount of young people who choose to stay and raise a family in the county (Marchiano, 2013).

2.2 Number of Women 15-50 who gave Birth within Past Year (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012e; U.S. Census Bureau, 2012f)

	Schuylkill County	Pennsylvania	United States
Per 1,000 women	49	50	54
Ages 15-19	17	19	21
Ages 20-34	84	91	95
Ages 35-50	31	22	26

**Family Households**

The types of households that exist in Schuylkill County, shown in Table 2.3, are similar to that of Pennsylvania where married-couple families make up for almost half of all types of family households. One main difference is that households with one or more people sixty-five years and over are more common in Schuylkill County than in the rest of Pennsylvania (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012e; U.S. Census Bureau, 2012f). This stresses the idea mentioned above about the aging population of Schuylkill County. More households with older citizens living in them supports that the county's population is growing older at a quicker rate compared to the average in all of Pennsylvania and the United States.

### 2.3 Households by Type (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012e; U.S. Census Bureau, 2012f)

	Schuylkill County	Pennsylvania	United States
Family Households	65.1%	64.6%	66.0%
Married- couple family	47.3%	48.1%	48.1%
Female household, no husband	11.9%	12.1%	13.1%
Male household, no wife	5.9%	4.3%	4.8%
Household with at least one under 18	28.2%	28.8%	32.4%
Household with at least one 65 or older	32.4%	28.8%	26.0%

### **Education Levels**

Table 2.4 shows that educational levels in Schuylkill County are below the average of Pennsylvania, especially in higher education. The percentage of students that only achieve a high school degree in Schuylkill County is 49.2% and less in Pennsylvania at 36.8% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012e; U.S. Census Bureau, 2012f), demonstrating that other citizens outside of Schuylkill County tend to go on to higher education. Almost 28% of Pennsylvanians achieve a bachelor's degree or higher, whereas only 13.3% of citizens in Schuylkill County do the same (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012e; U.S. Census Bureau, 2012f), further emphasizing the lack of higher

education achievements in Schuylkill County. It is possible that Schuylkill County's historical focus on labor-intensive industries, such as coal mining and garment manufacturing, have led to slower development of higher skilled industries.

#### 2.4 Educational Attainment (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012e; U.S. Census Bureau, 2012f)

	Schuylkill County	Pennsylvania	United States
High school graduate (or equivalent)	49.2%	36.8%	28.0%
Some college, no degree	15.0%	16.5%	21.3%
Associate degree	8.9%	7.9%	8.0%
Bachelor degree	8.4%	17.0%	18.2%
Graduate or professional degree	4.9%	10.9%	10.9%

#### **Ancestry**

Ancestry plays a large role in Schuylkill County and is often expressed at block parties, family reunions, restaurants and parades. While the ancestries of Schuylkill County are similar to that of Pennsylvania and the United States, they are more concentrated. As depicted in Table 2.5, the top five ancestries in Schuylkill County account for 83.1% of the population, whereas the top five ancestries in Pennsylvania and the United States only account for 69.6% and 46.8% of the populations, respectively (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012e; U.S. Census Bureau, 2012f). A higher concentration of ancestries in Schuylkill County means that the citizens share

more of the same ancestors; this makes sense because families that live in Schuylkill County usually have a long history of being there. It is also a common fact that immigrants of the same country are attracted to communities of other immigrants with the same background and cultural values, making life more convenient and comfortable.

#### 2.5 Top 5 Ancestries (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012e; U.S. Census Bureau, 2012f)

	Schuylkill County	Pennsylvania	United States
#1	German 35.1%	German 26.1%	German 14.9%
#2	Irish 20.1%	Irish 17.3%	Irish 10.9%
#3	Polish 11.6%	Italian 12.2%	English 8.0%
#4	Italian 9.4%	English 7.4%	American 7.5%
#5	American 6.9%	Polish 6.6%	Italian 5.5%
TOTAL	83.1%	69.6%	46.8%

### **Immigration**

The following tables, 2.6 and 2.7, illustrate that Schuylkill County does not have as high of an immigrant population as the rest of Pennsylvania or the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012e; U.S. Census Bureau, 2012f). This can be attributed to the fact that Schuylkill County is a smaller region than Pennsylvania or

the United States, so the chance of an immigrant moving into the county is slimmer. Schuylkill County may also not be attractive to immigrants today because of its declining economy.

#### 2.6 Place of Birth (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012e; U.S. Census Bureau, 2012f)

	Schuylkill County	Pennsylvania	United States
Born in the US	97.9%	92.4%	85.6%
Born in state of residence	86.6%	73.8%	58.8%
Not a US Citizen	27.6%	48.2%	54.2%

#### 2.7 Entrance after 2010 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012e; U.S. Census Bureau, 2012f)

	Schuylkill County	Pennsylvania	United States
Native	3.8%	8.5%	6.7%
Foreign Born	4.2%	9.9%	7.0%

### **Current Economy**

The following data continues to compare Schuylkill County to Pennsylvania and to the United States focusing on current economic development. Overall, the findings demonstrate that the level of development in Schuylkill County is below the state and national averages. According to today's statistics, no industry ever succeeded in reproducing the prosperity in the economy like the coal and garment industries had done in the past.

General statistics about the median household income and poverty rate provide evidence that Schuylkill County’s economy is underdeveloped. The median household income in Schuylkill County only accounts for about 88% of the median household incomes in Pennsylvania and the United States. According to the most recent United States Census Bureau records, 15.2% of people in Schuylkill County live in poverty—a rate higher than the poverty rate in Pennsylvania and slightly lower than the poverty rate in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012b).

#### 2.8 Median Household Income (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012b)

Schuylkill County	Pennsylvania	United States
\$45,056	\$51,230	\$51,371

#### 2.9 Poverty Rate (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012b)

Schuylkill County	Pennsylvania	United States
15.2%	13.7%	15.9%

### **Work Life**

The labor force of Schuylkill County consists of 70,403 people, of who 6.1% are unemployed (see Table 2.10)—a percentage higher than both Pennsylvania and the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012b). The higher unemployment rate further implies that the current economy in Schuylkill County rates worse than the national average.

#### 2.10 Employment Status (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012b)

	Schuylkill County	Pennsylvania	United States
In labor force	58.9%	62.8%	63.8%
Unemployed	6.1%	5.6%	5.9%

As shown in Table 2.11, the top three industries of Schuylkill County are similar to the top five industries of the state and the nation. The fourth and fifth top industries of Schuylkill County, ‘construction’ and ‘transportation and warehousing, and utilities’ (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012b), are different, however, and representative of more labor-intensive work. The industries included in Pennsylvania’s and the United States’ economies that are not a part of Schuylkill County’s top five involve less physical labor and require higher-level education.

It is peculiar that while construction remains one of Schuylkill County’s top industries, the infrastructure of the county is not quite up-to-date; there still exist many old buildings and homes. A reason for this may be that a majority of the construction work in the area is done on state roads and bridges. According to the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation, current construction projects include replacing and repairing several bridges and improving the safety of state and interstate highways through widening roads, adding new traffic signals and guide rails, replacing concrete curbs and barriers and improving drainage systems (Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 2014).

The state’s and the nation’s top five ranked industries include the category of ‘arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation and food services’ while Schuylkill County’s does not (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012b). Overall, the top industries

of Schuylkill County show that the region's population is involved in more labor-intensive work, like manufacturing and construction, than the rest of the state or the nation, which could be a consequence of the county's history of coal-mining and garment manufacturing as well as a lower level of education in the area.



2.11 Top 5 Industries (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012b)

	Schuylkill County	Pennsylvania	United States
#1	Educational services, health care and social assistance 23.9%	Educational services, health care and social assistance 25.6%	Educational services, health care and social assistance 22.9%
#2	Manufacturing 19.0%	Manufacturing 12.6%	Retail trade 11.6%
#3	Retail trade 13.6%	Retail trade 11.7%	Professional, scientific, management, administrative and waste management 10.7%
#4	Construction 6.4%	Professional, scientific, management, administrative and waste management 9.6%	Manufacturing 10.6%
#5	Transportation and warehousing, and utilities 6.3%	Arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation and food services 8.0%	Arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation and food services 9.2%

Table 2.12 shows that typical to the rest of the country, the majority of people in Schuylkill County commute by car, truck or van. A smaller portion of citizens in the county use public transportation than in the rest of the state or the nation (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012b), most likely because it is a town in a rural area where public transportation is not as available. In Schuylkill County, compared to both Pennsylvania and the United States, more people walk to work, and fewer people work at home (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012b). Again, more people may walk to work because the town is smaller and in a rural area where public transportation is not available. Because the economy is generally at a lower economic level than Pennsylvania or the United States, more people may also walk because they do not own as many vehicles. Working at home tends to be a luxury for those with higher skilled jobs today. As stated before, more people in Schuylkill County work in lower skilled, labor-intensive jobs, which may be why fewer of them are able to work at home.

2.12 Commuting to Work (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012b)

	Schuylkill County	Pennsylvania	United States
Car, Truck or Van	91.1%	85.4%	86.0%
Public Transportation	0.7%	5.4%	5.0%
Walk	5.1%	3.8%	2.8%
Works at Home	2.4%	3.9%	4.4%
Mean Travel Time (in min.)	25.9	26.1	25.7

## **Infrastructure**

The years buildings were established, depicted in Table 2.13, are also telling of Schuylkill County's current economy because they show the progress and development that the community has made over the years. The majority of buildings in the United States were constructed between 1960 and 1980; in Pennsylvania, 1960 or earlier; and in Schuylkill County, mainly 1939 or earlier (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012c). Schuylkill County's buildings are far older than the rest of the state's or the nation's, which shows how deeply rooted the community is with its past. While there are positive elements of pride and tradition that go along with the large quantity of old establishments that exist in the county, there also may be setbacks, such as a lack of technology, efficiency, safety or environmental responsibility.

2.13 Year Structure Built (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012c)

	Schuylkill County	Pennsylvania	United States
2010 or later	0.3%	0.5%	1.0%
2000-2009	5.8%	8.5%	14.9%
1980-1999	11.6%	18.9%	27.8%
1960-1979	16.6%	22.9%	26.9%
1940-1959	18.5%	21.9%	16.4%
1939 or earlier	47.3%	27.2%	13.1%

## **Chapter 3**

### **THE RISE OF THE GARMENT INDUSTRY**

#### **The Early Twentieth Century**

During the years of the Depression and World War II, miners began to lose their jobs, and many men went to fight for their country. When the men came back from the war, they struggled to find employment. During and after the war, women and even children became the primary supporters of their families by working in newly established garment factories (McGuigan & Migliore, 2008).

During the first decade of the twentieth century, Manhattan was the center of the garment industry in the United States. By the 1930s, however, the Chamber of Commerce urged garment businesses to move some production to northeastern Pennsylvania, one of the areas that the Great Depression had hit the hardest (McGuigan & Migliore, 2008). The unemployment rate in the 1930s in northeastern Pennsylvania hovered around 35% (McGuigan & Migliore, 2008), high above the national average unemployment rate, which peaked in 1933 at about 25% (Haugen, 2009).

It is important to note that in Pennsylvania, a major shift in the manufacturing sector started to occur in the 1930s. After garment companies began moving to the state, factories transitioned from making fabric to constructing actual garments (Smith, Dublin, Hardy, & Pencak, 2011); this transition was manageable for

businesses and the labor force in the region because the products were comparable (McGuigan & Migliore, 2008).

The Great Depression pressured garment businesses in New York City to decrease their labor forces' wages, so apparel companies looked for contractors outside of the city to provide cheap labor. Because northeastern Pennsylvania was devastated, the citizens were willing to work at lower wages, attracting apparel companies to produce there. The New Yorkers turned to Pennsylvania leading it to become third highest-ranking apparel manufacturer in the country by 1940 with women's clothing as the state's fastest growing product (Smith et al., 2011).

Schuylkill County was a key area for New York's garment industry to send its manufacturing because, like the coal industry, while the working conditions and wages were poor, the people were still willing to work so that they could support their families. The collapsed coal industry provided an abundance of labor in Schuylkill County. In fact, the labor costs of Schuylkill County were low enough that even combined with the shipping costs, apparel companies in New York preferred to produce in Pennsylvania rather than New York City where there were high unionized wages (McGuigan & Migliore, 2008). Unionization attempts in the coal region's factories in the mid-1930s to the 1940s were unsuccessful, helping to keep labor costs low (Wolensky, 2003).

### **The Late Twentieth Century**

Schuylkill County became a choice location for garment production after the thirties and into the fifties. Small towns expanded to fit forty, fifty, even sixty textile mills and apparel factories onto their streets. Because of the abundance of factories, citizens in the county found it easy to obtain a job and switch to another

factory if they desired (McGuigan & Migliore, 2008; Interviewee who worked in industry from 1949 to 1998). As Schuylkill County approached the fifties, it began losing its share of the national market in garment manufacturing; however, it was still a dominant aspect of the economy (McGuigan & Migliore, 2008).

Also during the 1950s, unions, such as the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union became prominent in the anthracite coal region. The union promoted better working conditions and workers' rights. In 1963 in Schuylkill County, the ILGWU had 4,000 members in the town of Shamokin and 3,100 members in Pottsville. In 1966, 69% of American women and children working in the garment industry were ILGWU members (Wolensky, 2003).

The power of the industry and the labor unions lasted until the last few decades of the twentieth century (McGuigan & Migliore, 2008). Further details and reasoning for the decline of the garment industry in Schuylkill County are explained in later chapters.

## **Chapter 4**

### **THE FACTORIES**

While garment and textile manufacturing are no longer booming sectors in the economy, many citizens still catch glimpses of Schuylkill County's past: old brick factories sit abandoned yet bear their original names in white, painted lettering; new businesses move into buildings that were once factories and now have adopted a connection to the vintage industry; and older generations are reminded of past factory jobs when they buy textile goods that are now primarily made in countries overseas. Many of the garment and textile factories of Schuylkill County have closed down or transformed. The industry has become less familiar to younger citizens. As they become increasingly forgotten, a history and an awareness of these establishments lack today. The following sections portray histories of a small sampling of the many factories that changed the face of Schuylkill County's economy during the rise of the garment industry.

#### **Tilt Silk Mill, Pottsville**

##### **History of Pennsylvanian Silk**

Silk spinning was the first major facet of the textile industry to begin in Pennsylvania and peaked in the 1920s (Stepenoff, 1992). As Frank McNally, manager of a Pennsylvanian company that was once one of the largest silk weavers in the country, puts it, the high concentration of silk companies in northeastern Pennsylvania

made a natural transition for the garment industries to settle in the region (McGuigan & Migliore, 2008).

Silk production in the United States took off after tariffs on imported silk were enacted in the 1860s. In 1876, fewer than thirty silk producers operated in Pennsylvania; the number of producers rose between 1880 and 1925 by ten times making Pennsylvania the leading state in the industry by 1914. Similar to the coal industry and the rest of the textile industry, silk spinning was lucrative in northeastern Pennsylvania because it made use of the region's labor force, many who were children, willing to work at low costs to support their families (Stepenoff, 1992).

### **History of Tilt Silk Mill**

In April of 1887, the board of economic development in Schuylkill County announced plans to attract a mill and shirt factory, which would provide four hundred jobs for local citizens. Yuengling & Son Brewing Company was the project's first investor buying \$5,000 worth of bonds. Soon after, the community raised over \$90,000 to recruit the mill (Ward, 1994a).

In May of 1887, after searching throughout the region for a town with low cost labor and impressive waterpower, the leaders of Phoenix Silk Manufacturing Company, including their president Albert Tilt, settled on Pottsville as the location for their new mill (Shriner, 1890; Ward, 1994a). The Tilt Silk Mill, on 12<sup>th</sup> Street and Laurel Boulevard, took one year to construct, and it began operating on July 17, 1888 (Ward, 1994a). A journalist at New York Times had high hopes for the mill. A day after its opening, the journalist referred to the facility as "the most extensive and completely equipped establishment of the kind in the country, cost \$250,000 and will employ 1,000 operatives" (Pytak, 2013).



With another facility located in Allentown, a town in the neighboring Lehigh County, Phoenix Silk Manufacturing used the Tilt Silk Mill facility to throw the raw silk, or, in other words, make the raw silk into a durable yarn for textiles. The silk yarns were then sent to looms in Allentown to create different silk fabrics, such as Jacquard fabric. With the silk fabric, they made dresses, handkerchiefs, scarves, gauze and pongee goods, ribbons, lining and silk braids (Shriner, 1890). Phoenix Silk Manufacturing Company prided itself on their fully American-made products. The Tilt Silk Mill was part of a vertically integrated company protected by tariffs on foreign silk imports (Shriner, 1890).

At its peak, the mill employed 1,500 people (Ward, 1994a). Demand for Tilt's silk products waned until the mill was forced to shutdown in the 1920s (Ward, 1994a). At this point in time and into the 1930s, as garment production shifted from New York to Pennsylvania, the region was making a transition from textile to apparel manufacture (Smith et al., 2011). One record published in a local newspaper in August of 1932 suggests that the Tilt Silk Mill went idle and planned to reopen in Pottsville. While the new director of the facility issued a statement of determination to secure the mill's business, proof of its lasting success has not been found (Pottsville, 1932).

### **After Tilt Silk**

The facility that was once Tilt Silk Mill changed hands many times since the 1920s. From 1935 to the 1950s, clothing manufacturer Onyx Blouse Company operated in the same location (Ward, 1994a). In more recent accounts, the property became Edward and Mary D. Keese's who opened up an auto rental franchise there. (See Figure 4.1.) Parts of the original facility have been removed and modified, but

what is left symbolizes 125 years of changes that have occurred since the establishment of Tilt Silk Mill (Pytak, 2013).

#### 4.1 Tilt Silk Facility (Pytak, 2013)



#### **Phillips Van Heusen, Pottsville**

Phillips & Jones Co., established in Pottsville, Pennsylvania, was once Schuylkill County's largest employer (Ward, 1994b). Now known as PVH Corp. and headquartered in Manhattan, it has grown to be the largest shirt company in the world (PVH Corp., 2014).

#### **The Beginning of PVH: 1875-1910s**

In 1875, Moses Phillips brought his family from Poland to Pottsville and became the rabbi of the first synagogue in town. While he enjoyed his work, his salary was not sufficient enough to support his large family. Phillips' wife, Endel, however,

learned how to make flannel shirts, and by 1881, the family was focused on selling shirts door-to-door to neighboring coalminers (How Jews, 2012; Ward, 1994b). The family's business expanded so that they moved manufacturing from their home to a small house in Pottsville; then to a larger building in town; and finally, with a push from their son Isaac, to New York City around 1890 (Ward, 1994b).

In 1898, the Phillips moved back to Pottsville and continued to grow the business and contribute to the local economy. In the same year, they bought the property of the inoperative Standard Shirt Co. In 1904, they also bought the property of an old gristmill where they built a 25,000-square-foot factory. By this time, the Phillips' company, now known as M. Phillips & Son, employed 160 people (Ward, 1994b).

Phillips continued to grow business, and in 1907, merged with D. Jones & Son, another shirt company, which had in factories in Johnstown, Lebanon, Millerstown, Myerstown and Schafferstown—towns from 30 to 200 miles west or south of Pottsville. D. Jones & Son also had a factory in Mexico at this time. In 1910, Phillips's factory in Pottsville was enlarged and became the center of manufacturing for the company (Ward, 1994b).

Those that worked in the Pottsville facility were locals. They would walk to work and start each day at the whistle at 7:30 in the morning. Their tasks were to cut out the shirt pieces and then send the sleeves, collars, and cuffs out to specialty factories to manufacture. The pieces would be returned to Pottsville where workers completed the final assembly and finishing (Ward, 1994b).

### **The World's Largest Shirt Manufacturer: 1919-1960s**

In 1919, after teaming up with Dutch immigrant John Van Heusen, Phillips-Jones became the largest shirt manufacturer in the world (How Jews, 2012; Ward, 1994b). To accommodate business growth, the company bought more property in Pottsville in 1921 and built a new building, which by 1937, was 200,000-square-feet and housed cutting, manufacturing, finishing, laundry, shipping, and warehousing departments.

Sales peaked in 1922. By the end of the 1920s, Phillips-Jones was producing over four million dress shirts annually in addition to pajamas, underwear, nightshirts, collars, silk cloth and piece goods (Halasz, 2014). In the 1930s and 1940s, further growth led Phillips-Jones to open factories in Barnesboro, PA; Kane, PA; Troy, NY; New York City; Albany, NY; Meridian, MS; Geneva, AL; and Arthurdale, WV (Halasz, 2014; Ward, 1994b). Despite all of these new openings, Pottsville remained the main facility for manufacturing in the 1940s; however, corporate headquarters were located in New York City (Halasz, 2014).

During World War II, the company received a large order from the Army to manufacture shirts and sent the orders to facilities in Mahanoy City and Minersville—both in Schuylkill County—and also in Barnesboro, PA (Ward, 1994b). Sales boomed during and after the war, and in the 1950s, Phillips-Jones was producing 6.6 million dress shirts per year as well as a variety of other products (Halasz, 2014).

In 1954, Phillips-Jones was manufacturing in twelve plants (Halasz, 2014). By the 1960s, after changing its name to Phillips-Van Heusen, the number of manufacturing establishments grew to 15 and employed 3,970 people in total (Halasz, 2014; Ward, 1994b). The company continued to grow in the 1960s through several

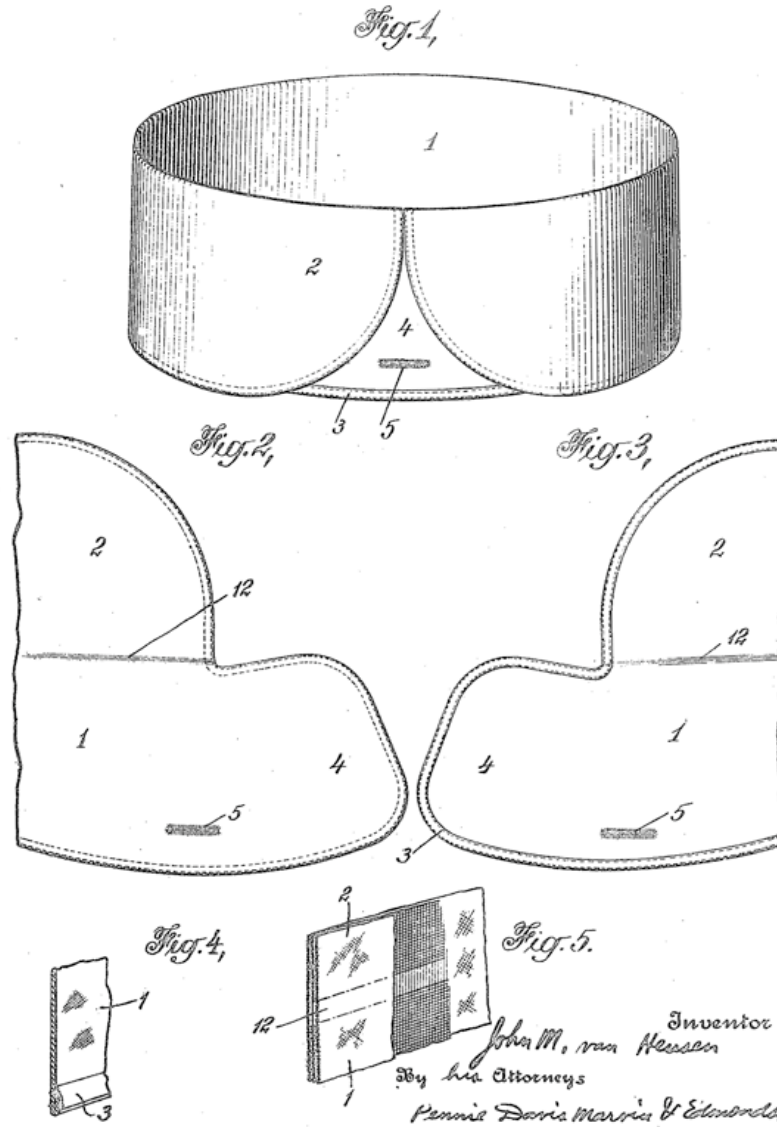
acquisitions of smaller companies and through the introduction of new product lines, such as Lady Van Heusen and men's toiletries (Halasz, 2014).

### **The Revolutionary Collar**

Invented by John Van Heusen Sr. in 1909 and bought by Phillips-Jones Co. in 1919, the Van Heusen collar "revolutionized" the shirt industry (Ward, 1994b). After nine years of research, Van Heusen developed a new process of fusing cloth into a three-ply fabric to produce a "soft-folding collar" (See Figure 4.2.) (Ward, 1994b; Van Heusen, 2014). The collar was special because it was the first to be attached to the dress shirt (Halasz, 2014). It was also semi-stiff as opposed to the highly starched, uncomfortable collars of that time (Ward, 1994b; Van Heusen, 2014). Phillips-Jones' adoption of the Van Heusen collar took business to the next level, and the company was soon listed on the New York Stock Exchange (Van Heusen, 2014).

## 4.2 The Van Heusen Collar (Van Heusen, 2014)

J. M. VAN HEUSEN.  
COLLAR.  
APPLICATION FILED JUNE 16, 1917.  
1,254,294. Patented Jan. 22, 1918.



### **The End of PVH Manufacturing in Schuylkill County: 1970s to Today**

By the 1970s, PVH began to experience losses leading to the decision to close down factories in Pennsylvania and move to regions in the South and in the Caribbean where people were willing to work for lower costs and in worse conditions. Ironically, the viewpoints of the leaders at PVH seemed to have change somewhat in the decades following as they have now focused on human rights for overseas workers, have served on a White House committee to abolish sweatshops, and have given free on-site health care and lunches to their workers in Guatemala (Halasz, 2014). However, despite small pushes towards better working conditions, PVH has continued to shutdown their American manufacturing facilities in preference for lower cost labor. In 1997, three-quarters of PVH's products were foreign-made. Some manufacturing remains in Alabama and Arkansas, but the majority of it occurs in the Caribbean, Eastern Asia and the Middle East (Halasz, 2014).

American Argo Corp., another large manufacturer of shirts and knit goods in Schuylkill County, moved into one of Phillips-Jones facilities in Pottsville (Ward, 1994b). As of 1992, two of Phillips-Jones Co.'s old facilities in Pottsville have been razed (Ward, 1994b).

### **J. E. Morgan Knitting Mills, Tamaqua**

J.E. Morgan Knitting Mills, a vertically integrated manufacturer of thermal undergarments and baby blankets, was once the largest employer in Schuylkill County and the world's leader in thermal underwear production, controlling 90% of the world's supply (Interviewee who worked in product development and costing; Serfass, 2013a). According to a PBS special on Tamaqua, entitled "Winners and Losers," the mills were "the last of twenty-five textile mills that

sustained the community after the demise of the coal industry” (Public Affairs Television, 2003). Morgan Knitting Mills was a conglomerate of four plants in Schuylkill County and others scattered from Pennsylvania to Virginia and Honduras. They produced products for the brands of Hanes, Duofold and Morgan and changed ownership twice before shutting down in Schuylkill County in 2009 (Serfass, 2013a).

### **The Growth of Morgan Knitting Mills**

John E. Morgan founded the company in 1945 in the heart of Tamaqua. With the help of his wife, Anna Hoban, Morgan’s company started as a small sewing factory. In 1954, the company became incorporated and because of growth, moved to a larger building right outside of town in Hometown. While Hometown remained company headquarters, Morgan Knitting Mills expanded, establishing plants in nearby towns within Schuylkill County: Tower City and Valley View and, also in Pennsylvania: Williamstown of Dauphin County and Gilbertsville of Montgomery County. A little further north, Morgan’s also had a plant in Illion, NY and offices in the Empire State Building in New York City (Serfass, 2013a). As business expanded, Morgan’s also established plants in the south in New Market, VA and Mount Jackson, VA (Serfass, 2013a).

Before the 1970s, Atlas Powder Company, a producer of mining explosives, was the largest employer in Schuylkill County with peak employment at 1,300 people. In the 1990s, ICI Americas, Inc. purchased Atlas and sold off most of its manufacturing operations, which led to a decline of employment within the company. By the mid-1990s, Atlas manufacturing had left the county completely (Atlas, 2005). During Atlas Powder Company’s decline from the 1970s to the 1990s, J.E. Morgan Knitting Mills became the new top employer of the county, making the



county switch focus in its manufacturing sector to garment and textile production (Serfass, 2013a).

At the peak of business, Morgan Mills employed approximately 2,000 workers, produced over 42 million thermal knit products annually, and had over \$45 million in sales in one year (Serfass, 2013a).

### **The Morgan Patent**

In 1957, the Morgans were granted patent rights to a knitting method designed by Morgan's wife, which involved the combination of the waffle stitch and the circular knitting machine (See Figure 4.2.). The innovation contributed to a great deal of Morgan Mills' growth and success in the thermal underwear market (Serfass, 2013a).

The waffle stitch knit fabric, which is still used today, is lightweight, warm and became a great substitute for wool. The waffle fabric, shown in the following Figure 4.3, creates warmth by entrapping air within each square-shaped cell; when on the body, the air that is trapped is body heat, and the fabric becomes an insulator (Jones, 1966). Besides being warm and lightweight, waffle fabric is also breathable, absorbent, durable and flexible (Cao, 2011) making it an ideal fabric for thermal underwear.

#### 4.3 The Waffle Knit (J.E. Morgan, 2012)



Before the Morgan patent, other manufacturers produced fabric with similar properties to Morgans' waffle knit, however, only by warp knitting methods. Morgans' fabric differed because rather than producing a warp knit, Morgan made waffle knit fabric with a circular knitting machine; the end product was in a cylindrical form rather than a single, flat layer of fabric (Jones, 1966). The combination of the waffle knit properties and the circular knitting method was advantageous because Morgan's mills could make sleeves, bodices, pants and other cylindrical shapes used in underwear more efficiently; the circular knitting process cut production time and fabric waste (Interviewee that worked in product development and costing).

### **Special Programs and Benefits**

After conducting several interviews of former workers and reviewing articles of the company, J. E. Morgan Knitting Mills proves to have integrated true corporate social responsibility throughout its existence. John Morgan went above and beyond the traditional corporate role of an owner, and even after he left the business, Morgan Knitting Mills continued to treat its employees well and provided them with great benefits despite the absence of a union.

John Morgan donated millions of dollars to the town of Tamaqua and to hospitals, churches and colleges in the area; these included Tamaqua Borough, the Tamaqua Salvation Army, the Lehigh Valley Cancer Clinic, Coaldale Miners Memorial Hospital, Gnaden Huetten Hospital, Saint Jerome's Church in Tamaqua, Marian High School, Penn State University, Delaware Valley College, the Tamaqua Public Library and the Bungalow—Tamaqua's public pool and recreation center. John Morgan was also passionate about antique cars and motorcycles and shared his own

collection to the community by establishing the JEM Classic Car Museum in 1985 (Serfass, 2013a).

Besides fair wages, Morgan Knitting Mills implemented several programs targeted to benefit its workers. In the early 2000s, it exercised the Innovation and Savings Plan initiative, in which workers suggested cost-saving ideas and received cash bonuses for ideas that the company used. In 2002, employees' ideas saved the company \$750,000, and Morgan's celebrated by suspending work for a day and hosting a barbeque with games and prizes (Serfass, 2013a).

One interviewee who worked at J. E. Morgan's described the mill's exceptional cafeteria:

One main thing that I always think about was Mr. Morgan, when he built that plant in '69, he provided a cafeteria for all of the workers. He had a cafeteria staff. He had a lady that ran it that planned the menus. He had a lady that made the meals. And that was everything from soup and a pork sandwich to a platter. Every Friday, we had baked haddock and macaroni and cheese and stewed tomatoes. Right down to bread and butter. You could get salads, there were all kinds of desserts, Jell-O, fruit cups, French fries, hamburgers and hotdogs everyday. That was one thing that I really missed when they closed down.

Additional benefits that J. E. Morgan Knitting Mills provided to both its workers and the community included a company store in Tamaqua that sold discounted, discontinued merchandise. They also had company picnics and sent products to troops overseas (Interviewees that worked for J.E. Morgan's).

### **New Ownership and the End of Morgan's in Schuylkill County**

In 1984, John Morgan sold his company to the Scotland firm of Dawson International, PLC. His health was declining at this time though he did remain on the board of directors. In 1999, the firm was sold again to Sara Lee Corporation, and two

years later, John Morgan died at the age of 89. This marked a turning point for the company. Like many other manufacturing companies at that time, Morgan Knitting Mills began moving production out of the United States to overseas countries—mainly to Honduras and China (Interviewee who worked in product development and costing; Serfass, 2013a). Tasks within the remaining factories in Schuylkill County also became more computerized (Interviewee who worked in product development and costing). The combination of effects as well as the increased pressures of international competition led to a decrease in Morgan’s employment in the county.

The 1990s were the beginning of the end for Morgan Knitting Mills. In 1999, the company laid off 300 workers (Parker, 1999), and in November of 2002, Sara Lee announced the plan to phase production out of Tamaqua, which would end the jobs for the remaining 460 workers (Serfass, 2013b). As the company continued to wane into the 2000s, it also liquidated Morgan’s collection of antique vehicles in 2003 (Serfass, 2013a). Employment continued to decrease until the Morgan Mills officially shut down in 2009 harshly affecting the lives local citizens and the economy (Serfass, 2013b).

While the mills no longer exist, John Morgan’s philanthropist spirit lives on. Morgan’s name is connected to the community’s hope in adapting to new industries. Lehigh Carbon Community College has a center for this purpose called John and Dorothy Morgan Center for Higher Education. The John E. Morgan Charitable Foundation, Inc. is another example of promoting higher education and has donated \$4.75 million to the cause in Tamaqua. In addition, the TASD-LCCC-Morgan scholarship program provides two years of free college tuition to students graduating from Tamaqua Area High School (Serfass, 2013c).

## **Chapter 5**

### **THE WORKERS**

#### **The Interview Process**

As part of my research, I interviewed twelve people who had once lived and worked in the textile and garment industry of Schuylkill County. The interviewees make up a convenience sample. There were limitations and biases to the findings as the majority of the interviewees are from Tamaqua or have worked in J. E. Morgan Knitting Mills, which was originally based in Tamaqua. The study findings are also limited because the sample is small, and the positions that they held are diverse. The study would be more representative of Schuylkill County's textile and apparel manufacturing labor force if there was a larger sample size, more randomness in selecting the interviewees, a wider range of factories included and stratification of the different positions. Despite the sample's limitations, I believe I fulfilled my purpose of conducting the interviews, which was to gain an understanding of the rise and fall of the textile and garment industry from personal, insiders' perspectives.

I found some that were willing to participate in my study through personal connections (mainly my grandmother who once lived in Tamaqua). I also found interviewees on Facebook simply by using the search engine and looked for Groups that related to Schuylkill County towns and history. I connected to interviewees through the following Facebook Groups: "Tamaqua Then and Now," "J.E. Morgan's Knitting Mill," "Old Downtown Pottsville: Schuylkill County: Frankie's Smoke

Shop,” “Schuylkill Haven History,” “Frackville PA” and “Orwigsburg Borough.” I find it important to note that on each Facebook Group Page, members were quick and eager to respond to my posts. Many members had either worked in the industry or had a close relative that did so, and they were happy to volunteer their experiences, memories and photos.

After making a connection, I further communicated with the volunteers via email. I sent each potential interviewee a sample of the questions I planned on asking them and a consent form, which was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the University of Delaware. (See Appendices A, B and C.) All of the volunteers agreed to continue to the next step, which was to set a date for the interview. The interviews occurred over the phone, which I recorded and saved to my laptop and then later transcribed. The rest of this chapter consists solely of the data collected from the interviews.

As shown in Table 5.1, the twelve interviewees were predominantly female, ranging from 1 to 49 years of experience in the industry. Roughly speaking, those that worked in the industry earlier on seem to have stayed in the industry longer. This could be due to the industry being more reliable and the growing trend of younger generations hoping to go to college rather than work in the manufacturing sector. Half of the interviewees worked in the sewing department at one point during their careers. The majority of the interviewees worked in several different departments throughout their careers.

### 5.1 Profiles of the Interviewees

Years Worked in Industry	Length of Time	Gender	Plants (Locations)	Position
1949-1998	49	Female	Cinderella Frocks (Lansford), Russ Tops (Tamaqua), Marcraft (Summit Hill)	Sample maker, floor lady, production costing
1950-1990	40	Female	2 small, unnamed factories (Tamaqua), Sue Frocks (Tamaqua)	Sewing snaps, floor helper, floor lady
1955-1989	34	Female	Sprite Manufacturing (Tamaqua), The Clothing Factory (Tamaqua), J. E. Morgan Knitting Mills (Tamaqua and Tuscarora)	Sewing machine operator
1973-1994	21	Female	Unnamed factory (Port Carbon), unnamed factory (Marlin), American Argo Mills (Schuylkill Haven)	Sewing machine operator
1976-2004	28	Female	J. E. Morgan Knitting Mills (Williamstown, Tower City, Valley View and Hometown)	Sewing machine operator, floor lady, trainer, supervisor, manager
1977-2012	35	Male	American Argo Corporation (Schuylkill Haven), J. E. Morgan Knitting Mills (Hometown), FesslerUSA (Orwigsburg)	Product development and costing
1978-2009	31	Female	J. E. Morgan Knitting Mills (Hometown)	Order picker, order packer, cutter, bagger, re-handling department



1979-1981	2	Female	Auburn Knitting Mills (Auburn)	Folder
1982-1999	17	Female	J. E. Morgan Knitting Mills (Hometown)	Sewing machine operator, research and development
1987-1993	6	Male	J. E. Morgan Knitting Mills (Williamstown, Tower City, Valley View and Hometown)	Bleachery and dyeing department, receiving and supply
1989-2007	18	Female	J. E. Morgan Knitting Mills (Hometown)	Finance department
1990-1991	1	Female	J. E. Morgan Knitting Mills (Hometown)	Cutter

### **Choosing to Work in the Industry**

“The pay wasn’t much, but being close to home, you weren’t spending money on gas and wear and tear on your car. In five or ten minutes you were home from work; it was great.”

*–Interviewee who worked at J. E. Morgan Knitting Mill for 31 years*

The main reason that the interviewees chose to work in the textile and garment industry was for the money. No one mentioned interests in the production and manufacturing process; they just needed the job and financial support.

Many of the interviewees also cited close proximity as the reason they decided to work in the textile and garment industry. Many did not own a vehicle, and the factory they worked at was within walking distance. The close proximity was also beneficial for workers with dependents, which included children or older parents. While one interviewee without a vehicle was too far to walk to the factory, she was able to carpool with her neighbor into town.

The garment and textile industry was also one of the only industries around for work. For those that were in or recently graduated from high school, it was one of the most common places to work and paid fairly well. One interviewee worked at J.E. Morgan’s during her time in high school even though she was on the track team. She worked the night shift, and they would allow her to come in late after track meets. Another interviewee worked at Auburn in the summers between her years in high school and before college. It was convenient for high school students to work in the garment industry because they did not have to travel out of town to make extra money. Others did not plan on going to college, so this was one of their only options near home.

Many interviewees had grown up while the industry was booming and, therefore, saw it as a steady place for work. Some interviewees even turned to this industry after being laid off in other ones. When taking the job, some interviewees had expected to retire in these positions in the factories; some still did but would have been willing to work longer.

It is also important to note that those who began working in the textile and garment industry earlier on, from the 1950s to the 1970s, were able to get the job quickly and easily; rejection was not common. In the 1980s and on, however, jobs in this industry were more difficult to acquire; the interviewees who started working at this time believed they only got the job through their connections to relatives and friends that already worked in the factories. This correlation between time period and job acquisition difficulty helps to illustrate the broader picture of the rise and the fall of the textile and garment industry.

### **A Day in the Life**

“I just got a greater appreciation of the hard work that the textile industry had to go through in terms of making money.”

*—Interviewee who worked in industry during summers of high school*

Workers that worked on the factory floor had the choice of working at minimum wage or at piece-rate. Piece-rate workers got paid by their daily output, which seemed to be the more common choice; they received higher wages but their jobs, which were time-driven, were also more stressful both physically and mentally. Sewing machine operators and more intricate operations tended to be done by female workers. More dangerous jobs, such as bleaching and dyeing, heavy-lifting jobs, and upper management tended to be males. Those in the warehousing, distribution center, and product planning varied.

The factories of Schuylkill County operated on a bell schedule. Workers would come in about half an hour before the workday to set up their station. The typical workday was from 7:00 am to 3:30 pm with a half-hour lunch break. On hot summer days, the workday would start as early as 5:30 in the morning so that workers did not have to work as long in un-air-conditioned rooms.

The interviewees tended to think of their work as mostly individualized; however, they also noted that it was necessary for all of the workers to come together as a unit in order for them to be successful. Near the end of the factories' times, interviewees noticed that more and more work was getting sent out to contractors. In addition, contractors would come in temporarily to set up a system and then leave.

When asked what the best parts of working in the textile business were, almost always, the first few words were, "the people." Because most of the workers were from nearby towns, they shared a common culture. Both young and old, they all seemed to be in the same situation, making money in one of the few industries left to support themselves and their families. Older women taught the younger ones how to sew, and throughout the workday, they would chat and socialize.

### **Conditions and Union Influences**

"Everything ran like a tight ship, honestly, so that's good. And they made good work because of that, too. If you're in a chaotic situation, it could cause a lot of stress and problems."

*—Interviewee who worked in industry throughout high school*

While many interviewees explained that working conditions certainly could have been worse, one of the main complaints was that there was no air-conditioning in the summer or heat in the winter. One interviewee explained, "It was a very physically demanding job, which wasn't an issue, but in those extreme

temperatures, it was very, very difficult and demanding. That was the worst part.” Other interviewees noted that new windows were also necessary and part of the rooms’ temperature problems; however, it was never in the company’s budget to fix these issues. Physical comfort seems to have been of low importance to some of the factories in Schuylkill County.

Many mentioned that upper management was not quite receptive to the workers on the factory floor. If there was an issue or a suggestion, the floor workers did not feel welcome to share it with their managers. While some interviewees took this as something that could have been improved, another interviewee showed more faith in the upper management explaining that if the factory hadn’t run like this, like a “tight ship,” it would have been chaotic and problematic to the company’s success.

Many of those interviewed worked in non-union establishments, and most did not find the union to be necessary because they were generally pleased with working conditions. In fact, some thought becoming unionized would just cause problems. In recognizing a decline in the region’s garment and textile industry, some even worried that unionization would cause the industry to leave even more quickly. While unions were not prevalent in some of Schuylkill County’s factories, one interviewee cited them as still being important in improving conditions. She said, “When I worked for American Argo—they were non-union—one of the old-timers said to me, ‘You should respect the union because we have what we have because of unions.’” In other words, unions most likely raised the bar in terms of working condition standards for all of the factories in Schuylkill County—unionized or not.

### **Signs of the Industry's Decline**

“You got used to seeing signs. You were over here and they hadn’t paid their electric bill, or they hadn’t paid their oil bill. And it was kind of like, uh oh. Here we go.”

*–Interviewee who worked as sewing machine operator for 21 years*

Overall, many of the interviewees noticed signs of the industry declining while they worked in the factories. Some of the signs were gradual. For instance, as mentioned above, the company would stop paying the bills. Or departments would shut down one after another. An interviewee who worked in the industry for 40 years illustrates:

The way they closed, they phased out department by department. They stopped weaving the material; those people were gone. Then whatever was left in there was cut. When everything was cut, those people left. Then when everything was sewn, those people left. It was just slow. It was a horrible thing to watch because I was in IT at the end. And it was like watching somebody with cancer die. It was a very slow death, and we were one of the last departments to go. It was difficult, very difficult.

These gradual signals were emotionally devastating for workers who scrambled to look elsewhere to support themselves and their families. Sudden closings were just as bad though. One interviewee noted that she showed up to work one day to find the factory padlocked. There were many signs throughout the county that the industry was declining, but it was still shocking because business seemed so stable just years before.

### **Life after the Industry**

“None of the places that were there when I was working are there now. Well, the buildings are there, but nothing’s in them. They all folded up.”

*–Interviewee who worked in the industry throughout high school and still lives in the county*

The younger of the interviewees were not severely affected by the closings of the textile and garment factories as they were there temporarily and planned on getting college degrees after a few years of work. Some of the older workers, however, had been in the industry for their entire time in the labor force; they had enjoyed their jobs, and would have continued to work in the industry given the opportunity. Those who had invested their time developing sewing techniques struggled to find employment where they could translate their skills.

In addition, some were mothers and could not find jobs in the area that were mother-friendly. Some factories allowed them to bring their children to the factory if they could not find someone to watch them. The daytime shift at the factories also generally coincided with the school day, so mothers were able to be home when their children got back from school. After these factories were gone, the mothers were forced to find the time or pay for daycare services to watch their children. These consequences of factory closings led some workers to drop out of the labor force entirely and even retire earlier than planned (Interviewees who worked in the industry for 28, 34, 40 and 49 years).

Workers that did not drop out of the labor force went on to work at manufacturing plants of different industries or stores; one interviewee started her own business and another became a teacher. A few interviewees cited the North American Free Trade Agreement as a major reason for the fall of the industry. One proactive interviewee even went back to college to become a Paralegal Major, as a result of the free trade agreement (Interviewee who worked in product development and costing).

While some interviewees are understanding of the changes in their local economy due to outside forces, all were negatively impacted and still incur transition

costs. The workers are nostalgic of the time when industry was booming and when the country depended on them to supply its citizens with a great deal of its apparel. Some, more protectionist than others, are even angered by the labels they read on clothing that say they are made in other countries. The fall of the textile and garment industry has created both emotional and economic woes.

“There are not many opportunities in this area for locals for someone in the apparel industry. The industry’s just not there anymore. So I’m trying to branch out.”

*—Interviewee who worked in industry for 35 years*



## **Chapter 6**

### **THE FALL OF THE GARMENT INDUSTRY**

#### **Decline in the Late Twentieth Century**

In 1969, the number of apparel and textile workers in Pennsylvania peaked at 200,000 and has been declining ever since. In 1984, there were 102,000 workers, and in 1998, there were 25,000 workers. Concurrently, in the early 1960s, 5 out of every 100 garments sold in the United States were foreign-made. By the 1990s, this number rose to 60 foreign-made garments (Wolensky, 2003). By the last decade of the twentieth century, it was clear that the garment industry was leaving the anthracite region and other regions of the United States and moving to foreign countries.

Jobs in the textile and apparel factories of Schuylkill County were unsteady in the 1990s; layoffs and factory closings were all too common. From 1990 to 1997, garment industry jobs in Schuylkill County dropped by 60%. While jobs in the garment industry were disappearing, citizens of Schuylkill County naturally turned to other jobs to support themselves and their families. During the 1990s, service jobs, such as cashier and restaurant waiter, increased by 18.3% (Parker, 1999).

Another sign of the declining garment industry in the United States and especially in the anthracite coal region was the collapse of labor unions. Backed by several bills and government assistance to uphold workers' rights, labor unions were still fairly powerful until the 1980s and 1990s. From 1966 to 1986, American women

and children working in the garment industry who were ILGWU members dropped by 60%. In 1995, because of decreasing membership, the ILGWU merged with another large union, Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers' Union to form Union of Needletrades, Industrial, and Textile Employees (UNITE!). Despite the establishment of UNITE!, union membership continued to dissipate (Wolensky, 2003). A correlation exists between the decline of the labor unions and the decline of the garment industry in the region. It is important note, however, that while the textile and apparel production has moved elsewhere, unionization within this industry is no longer common in international garment factories.

### **The Twenty-First Century: What is Left**

Tables 6.1 and 6.2 show the number of establishments and the number of employees in the textile and garment industry in the years of 1999, 2005 and 2011. Based upon the North American Industry Classification System, the textile and garment industry are a conglomerate of textile mills, textile product mills and apparel manufacturers. The tables compare Schuylkill County to Pennsylvania and the United States to show that the decline of the textile and garment industry in Schuylkill County was more dramatic than the rest of the state and country; this is especially obvious in the Table 6.2, which shows that Schuylkill County's decrease in textile and apparel establishments range from 15.8 to 25.9 percentage points more than the broader populations' (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011).

6.1 Establishments and Employees: 1999, 2005 and 2011 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011)

		United States			Pennsylvania			Schuylkill County		
		1999	2005	2011	1999	2005	2011	1999	2005	2011
Textile Mills	Establishments	9	3	2	219	168	123	4,587	3,411	2,461
	Employees	1,116	N/A	N/A	13,054	7,592	4,922	362,286	208,968	109,816
Textile Product Mills	Establishments	4	3	3	261	251	226	7,152	6,891	6,221
	Employees	390	N/A	N/A	8,744	5,841	3,385	221,971	163,675	111,550
Apparel Manufacturers	Establishments	31	17	6	729	404	209	16,721	11,165	7,137
	Employees	2,513	1,039	341	34,743	11,769	4,299	574,908	243,416	114,138
TOTAL	Establishments	44	23	11	1,209	823	558	28,460	21,467	15,819
	Employees	4,019	N/A	N/A	56,541	25,203	12,606	1,159,165	616,059	335,504

6.2 Changes in Establishments and Employees: 1995-2011 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011)

		Schuylkill County	Pennsylvania	United States
1999-2005	Establishments	-47.7%	-31.9%	-24.6%
	Employees	Data unavailable	-55.4%	-46.9%
2005-2011	Establishments	-52.2%	-32.2%	-26.3%
	Employees	Data unavailable	-50.0%	-45.5%

**The Effects on Schuylkill County's Current Economy**

The fall of the garment industry proved costly to Schuylkill County as the economy of the region heavily relied on textile and apparel production. As mentioned in the previous chapter, a main consequence was a major displacement of garment factory workers. Like other manufacturing industries and regions of the United States, workers in Schuylkill County still incur transition costs from the decline of the garment industry; however, Schuylkill County differs from some other areas because rather than participating in a different industry, many citizens have chosen to leave. In relation to Chapter 1, the fall of the garment industry has been a factor in the county's declining economy, directly contributing to the decreasing and aging population and to the low employment status relative to the rest of the state and country. Without industry or a substantial labor pool, Schuylkill County's economy lacks potential for growth.

## Chapter 7

### CONCLUSIONS

#### **Why the Garment Industry Fell in Schuylkill County**

While the garment industry disappeared from Schuylkill County, it did not disappear from the world completely. The decline of the industry in the county and its movement throughout the world is a result of several dynamic forces. I have broken down the reasons for the fall of the industry in Schuylkill County into three perspectives: the garment industry on wheels, an *industry perspective* that uncovers a recurring theme of the movement of the garment industry around the world; opening borders, an *international perspective*, which describes economic changes due to free trade, globalization and cheaper foreign labor; and the transformation of America, a *national perspective* about how the development of the American people and the economy have altered the nation's industrial focus. Unfortunately for Schuylkill County, all of these forces—the nature of the industry, international relationships, and national changes—worked together to move the garment industry elsewhere. Schuylkill County was highly dependent on the industry that once seemed so prosperous and stable, and its economy struggles to bounce back.

#### **The Garment Industry on Wheels**

The garment industry is unique to other industries in the manufacturing sector in that it is more mobile. History has demonstrated that the industry moves to

areas around the world that have the lowest cost in labor. The industry is undoubtedly attracted to and dependent upon large labor forces that are willing to work intensively and at low wages with little to no benefits. This type of labor force allows textile and apparel firms to remain competitive by producing and selling at the lowest possible cost while, many times, reaping substantial profits. The textile and garment industry is also quite mobile, leading firms to constantly seek the lowest-costing labor forces to either establish factories or make contracts with factories in these labor hotspots (Wolensky, 2003). As Sol Chanin, the ILGWU president from 1975 to 1986, has remarked:

Relocating the garment industry was not difficult since it is an industry on wheels. It can be moved overnight because capital investment is low, machines are easily transportable, and materials are comparatively light. Clothes are not steel, not copper, not lumber, not brick (Wolensky, 2003, p. 109).

Low capital investment for the garment industry has facilitated mobility and allowed firms to target their focus on minimizing the cost of labor.

The modern textile and garment industry began to develop in the 1700s during the Industrial Revolution in the West. With the help of important inventions, such as the cotton gin and the sewing machine, mass production became possible (Warshaw, 2011). Since its establishment, the textile and apparel industry has tended to develop in areas with large, low-costing labor supplies, and when the cost of labor rises, firms tend to look elsewhere for production.

By the 1800s, the garment industry became well established in New York City because of an influx of immigration to the area, which provided an abundance of low cost labor. As mentioned in previous chapters, the cost of labor in New York began to rise because of development. In the early to mid 1900s, firms moved

production to regions with lower-costing labor, like Schuylkill County where the economy was devastated and young women desperately looked for work to support their families (Bonancich & Waller, 1994). This pattern has continued to repeat since then. From the anthracite coal region, the industry began to re-locate in the 1950s to the newly industrialized countries of Japan, Hong Kong, South Korea and Taiwan as well as states in the southern United States. In the 1980s, after Asian labor costs started to increase and barriers gradually disappeared, Mexico, the Caribbean and Central America became the new target for the industry. In addition, there was a shift of textile and apparel production in the 1980s and 1990s to other Asian countries with low cost of labor in Thailand, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and China (Bonancich & Waller, 1994). Los Angeles, California also experiences expansion due to a high population of immigrants willing and able to work at very low wages because of lax regulations (Bonancich & Waller, 1994; Blumberg & Ong, 1994).

Tables 7.1, 7.2 and 7.3 include data from the International Trade Administration (2014) and show the top fifteen countries that export textiles and apparel to the United States—in terms of dollar value (Table 7.1) and quantity of exports by square-meter equivalent (SME) (Table 7.2). The last column of Table 7.3 shows the average cost of textile or apparel goods per square-meter equivalent that is exported to the United States. Table 7.3 reveals that the countries of Italy, Sri Lanka and Guatemala export goods with the highest value among all of the top countries that export textile and apparel to the United States. These higher average values may indicate that the countries' textile and apparel exports are of higher quality or that the cost of labor is more expensive than other countries' labor forces. The countries at the

bottom of Table 7.3—Korean Republic and Taiwan— have a low average value of textile and apparel exports to the United States. These low average values may indicate that the countries' textile and apparel exports are mass-produced, have lower quality and lower wages and benefits compared to the other top exporting countries to the United States. It is important to note that Korea and Taiwan are both part of the first Asian countries to which textile and apparel manufacturing moved. Perhaps, the reason their exports have a low average value per square-meter equivalent is because they specialize in fabric, which is a less complicated good than apparel.



7.1 Top 15 Textile and Apparel Exporters to the United States by Value of Exports  
(measured in United States Dollars) (International Trade Administration, 2014)

Ranking	Country	Total Exports to US in Billion USD
1	China (mainland)	41.673783
2	Vietnam	8.771748
3	India	6.298880
4	Indonesia	5.230321
5	Bangladesh	5.104875
6	Mexico	4.650215
7	Pakistan	3.052591
8	Cambodia	2.587479
9	Honduras	2.510397
10	El Salvador	1.886827
11	Italy	1.783376
12	Sri Lanka	1.652811
13	Nicaragua	1.430781
14	Canada	1.366249
15	Guatemala	1.324281

7.2 Top 15 Textile and Apparel Exporters to the United States by Quantity of Exports (measured by square meter equivalent) (International Trade Administration, 2014)

Ranking	Country	Total Exports to US in Billion SME
1	China (mainland)	27.115087
2	India	3.730122
3	Vietnam	3.602515
4	Pakistan	2.479930
5	Mexico	2.407401
6	Bangladesh	1.944621
7	Indonesia	1.726221
8	Korean Republic	1.328497
9	Cambodia	1.131519
10	Honduras	1.100741
11	Canada	1.055814
12	China-Taiwan	0.815816
13	El Salvador	0.817710
14	Turkey	0.611769
15	Thailand	0.551448

7.3 Top Textile and Apparel Exporters to United States by Average Value of Exports  
(International Trade Administration, 2014)

Country	Value of Exports to US (in Billion USD)	Quantity of Exports to US (in Billion SME)	Average Value of Exports per SME (Value/Quantity of Exports) (in USD)
Italy	1.783376	0.272535	6.543658613
Sri Lanka	1.652811	0.402598	4.105363166
Guatemala	1.324281	0.340216	3.892471254
Nicaragua	1.430781	0.441196	3.242960045
Indonesia	5.230321	1.726221	3.029925485
Bangladesh	5.104875	1.944621	2.625125924
Vietnam	8.771748	3.602515	2.434895622
El Salvador	1.886827	0.817710	2.30745252
Thailand	1.270796	0.551448	2.304471138
Cambodia	2.587479	1.131519	2.286730492
Honduras	2.510397	1.100741	2.280642767
Mexico	4.650215	2.407401	1.93163291
Turkey	1.048416	0.611769	1.713744894
India	6.298880	3.730122	1.688652543
China (mainland)	41.673783	27.115087	1.536922341
Canada	1.366249	1.055814	1.294024326
Pakistan	3.052591	2.479930	1.230918211
China-Taiwan	0.83591	0.815816	1.024630554
Korean Republic	0.920146	1.328497	0.692621812

### **Opening Borders**

Further facilitating the mobility of the garment industry, especially since the 1980s and 1990s, has been globalization, or the opening of borders among countries throughout the world. Trends of globalization include the improvement in transportation of physical objects and people; increased exchange of information and ideas via the Internet and networking systems; and growth in political and public support for free trade.

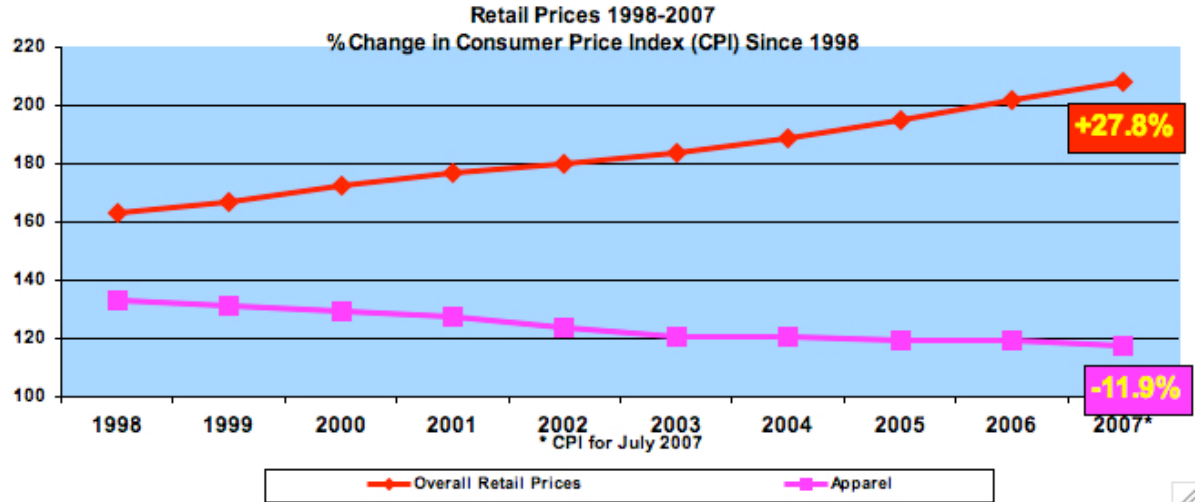
While the improved transfer of products, people and ideas have certainly affected the garment and textile industry, the ever-trending free trade throughout the globe seems to be a dominating force that has led to changes in the industry. Specifically focusing on the United States, free trade agreements have emerged since the 1980s to reduce barriers that otherwise distorted the global economy. According to the International Trade Administration, the United States is currently negotiating free trade agreements with Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore and Vietnam through the Trans-Pacific Partnership (The International, 2014). Another substantial free trade agreement affecting the United States is the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) with Canada and Mexico, which was put into effect on January 1, 1994 (Bonancich & Waller, 1994).

Free trade has been important in changing the garment industry because it has altered costs of production through the phasing out of tariffs and quotas (Bonancich & Waller, 1994). While many of the interviewees were opponents of free trade, specifically NAFTA, because it negatively affected their lives as workers, the

phasing out of trade barriers have also positively affected their lives because they are also consumers. Because of the implementation of free trade policies, consumers benefit as they are able to buy cheaper and a wider selection of goods. According to American Apparel and Footwear Association (AAFA), the percentage of American families' average expenditure on clothing has been dropping since 1977. In 1977, 6.6% of an average American family's Personal Consumption Expenditures (PCE) was spent on clothes and shoes. In 2006, this amount dropped to 3.9% (AAFA, 2007), and in 2010, the amount dropped further to 2.4% (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2014). Since 2010, there has been a slight increase of PCE on clothes and shoes, and the latest report estimates it to be 4.8%. While this is a slight increase, it is still below the percentage of consumption of earlier decades (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2014).

Despite the drop in households' budgets on clothing and shoes, Americans continue to buy more clothes and shoes than ever before as a result of the low prices. Figure 7.4, taken from a report by AAFA, shows that the retail prices of apparel have declined over the period of 1998 to 2007, yet overall retail prices have been increasing during the same time period (AAFA, 2007). Because of the changes in the textile and apparel industry, Americans benefit by saving money on such goods.

#### 7.4 Retail Prices and % Change in CPI 1998-2007 (AAFA, 2007)



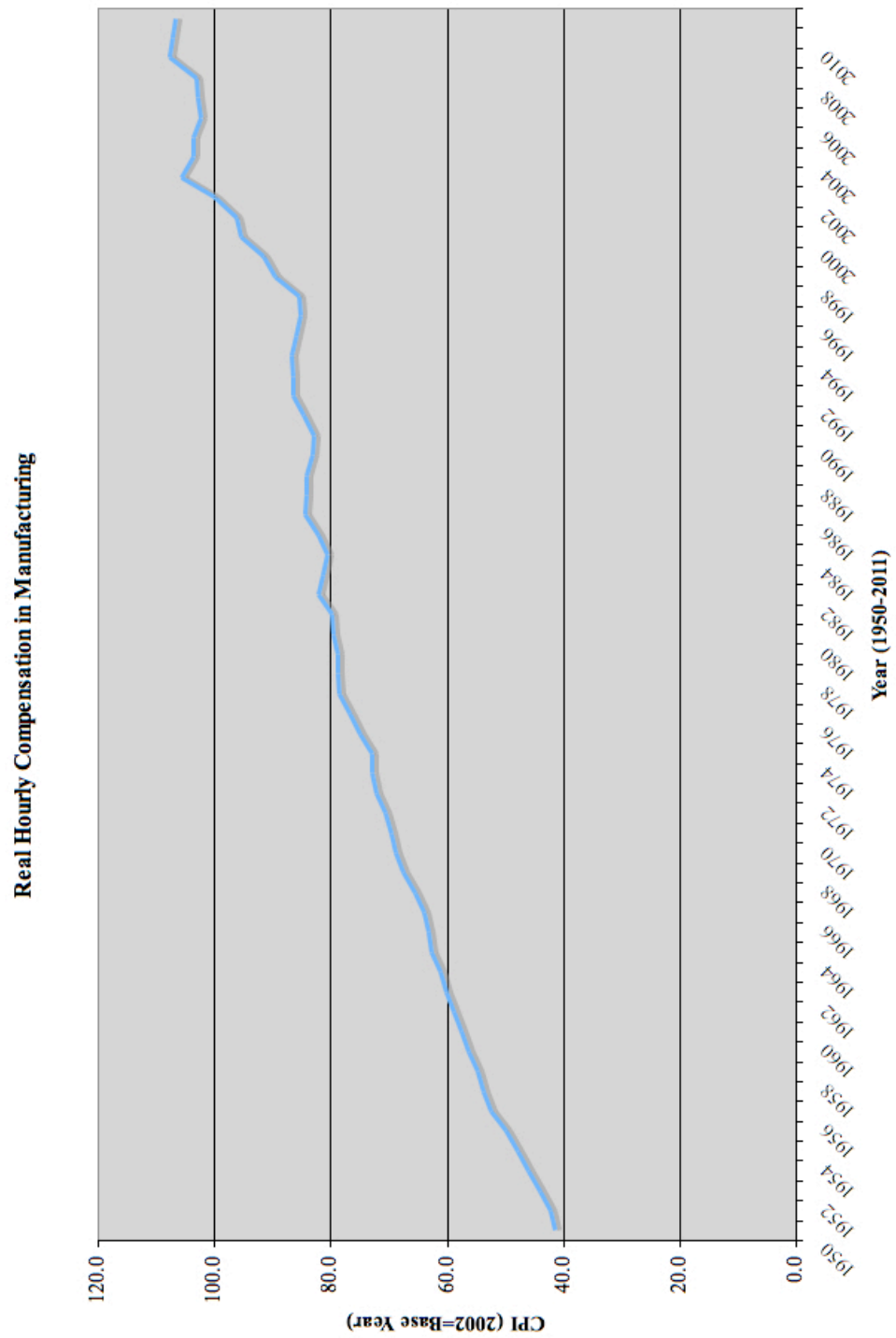
### The Transformation of America

Throughout the twentieth and into the twenty-first century, the United States has become one of the most powerful economies in the world with one of the highest standards of living, which has led to better education and higher-paying jobs. More knowledge and higher salaries have increased Americans' opportunities for leisure time and travel—all of which arguably improved life in the nation as a whole.

From the American workers' standpoint, the high standard of living and better education leads them to demand higher wages and better workers' rights and benefits. Americans wish to utilize their skills and knowledge to obtain higher-skilled and higher-paid jobs. As the United States continues to develop, the cost of the American labor force has been increasing. This effect can be seen in the garment industry with the emergence of unions in New York during the 1930s and then in the Northeast region during the 1950s, lasting until the end of the region's garment industry.

The increase in the cost of the American manufacturing labor force can also be seen in Figure 7.5, which shows an increasing trend in the real hourly compensation in manufacturing. The graph compares each year's hourly compensation to the base year, 2002. In other words, each year's real hourly compensation values are equal to the percentage of the value from 2002, and 2002 is equal to 100. These values are based upon the consumer price index and are, therefore, adjusted for inflation (United States Department of Labor, 2012).

7.5 Increasing Hourly Compensation in Manufacturing in United States (United States Department of Labor, 2012)





As Americans began to value better education and working conditions, the United States experienced a shift in the labor force. Americans increasingly preferred to utilize higher skills in service jobs and jobs in the fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

According to some of the interviewees, the parents of younger workers pushed their sons and daughters to get a better education. Some people became embarrassed, feared, or just preferred not to work in the manufacturing sector because it was associated with poor “sweatshop” conditions. These reactions show that the emerging American labor force is no longer as interested in low-skilled labor, nor willing to work in conditions comparable to those in less developed countries. Bonacich and Waller further explain this idea relating it to the movement of the industry:

U.S. manufacturers were able to survive by investing and contracting in Latin America and the Caribbean, while U.S. labor standards were undercut and U.S. workers lost their jobs. This impact is sometimes rationalized by the claim that the United States industry suffers from a labor shortage...but the shortage, in large measure, is a product of not paying competitive wages by U.S. standards (1994, pp. 32-33).

Other interviewees explained that they liked their jobs in the garment factories of Schuylkill County, but many of these workers were either older and had different views than the emerging American labor force or they already had jobs that required more skill and decision-making, working in departments like finance, costing and product development. The emerging labor force in the United States is different than the past because they value more rights, better working conditions, higher wages, and jobs that involve a higher level of thinking.

### **Restoring a Garment Industry in Schuylkill County**

As explained previously, the garment industry was a main driver of Schuylkill County's economy; restoring this industry could possibly boost the economy once again. Schuylkill County incurs two major setbacks in establishing a competitive garment industry. The first is the shortage of people willing to work at low wages comparable to foreign competition. The county also suffers because citizens were never able to organize a new industry that would reboot the local economy.

### **A New Labor Force: Immigration**

Many citizens of Schuylkill County who once worked in the textile and apparel industry expressed that they enjoyed their jobs and would be willing to go back to work if the factories were still there (Parker, 1999, Interviewees). Despite this enthusiasm, as mentioned in the previous section, these workers seem to be in the minority, and there is still a shortage of Americans willing to work in low-skilled labor. With the increased trends of globalization and foreign interest in immigrating to a land with better opportunities, immigrants may provide a potential new labor force that could restore the garment industry in Schuylkill County.

There exists a parallel between America's shift in free trade and what would happen if America enacted more open immigration policies. As explained previously, free trade was a force that led the garment industry to leave the United States; however, the country adapted and became more competitive in other sectors, like services and jobs requiring higher education. Just as the country adapted and developed due to free trade, the United States should do the same with an influx of immigrants. According to an economist, Alvaro Vargas Llosa, immigration benefits

society as a whole by filling the demand for low-skilled labor. Including more immigrants in the labor force would increase economic productivity and, therefore, decrease the price of some products (2013). If immigrants were to fulfill the demand for low-skilled labor in garment factories, it would also enhance the demand for natives to take on higher-skilled jobs, such as jobs in management, engineering, product development and design.

Opening up the country to more immigrants would require a lot of political effort and decision-making from the federal government. Due to the trends of globalization, the push for freer-flowing immigration has become a topic of increased interest and supported by more than those in the past; however, more time and support is necessary to enact such policies. Once such policies were enacted, Schuylkill County would have to make plans right away to start up factories in the area and attract the new immigrant population.

### **Finding a Niche**

If Schuylkill County were to re-establish a garment industry, companies would certainly have to find a new niche in the global apparel market. The products once made in this region have proven to be more successful elsewhere where the labor force is larger and willing to work in poorer conditions. Given the nature of the American labor force and the development of the country, the new garment industry of Schuylkill County would do better producing at a smaller scale and with higher standards of quality.

According to the American Apparel and Footwear Association, in 2012, 97.5% of the apparel in the United States was imported (AAFA, 2013). The textile goods that remain include clothing from American Apparel and Filson; select

Pendleton woolens; True Religion and Texas jeans; and Wigwam socks (Consumer, 2013). These apparel brands are competitive in the United States because their goods tend to be of higher quality or, in the case of American Apparel, produced in the Los Angeles area where there exists a high immigrant population and people that are willing and able to work in less favorable conditions than the typical American labor force of today.

Despite the push for free trade, the government still protects some textiles through copyright laws or because they are products for the military. Protecting both of these types of textiles are important for the promotion of innovation and the safety of our country. To become more competitive in the garment industry, Schuylkill County could also look into developing a platform for more inventive products or ones that would benefit the United States' military.

Social responsibility and sustainability are also increasingly valued in the United States and other more developed markets. According to Consumer Reports Magazine, when all other things are held equal, American consumers are more likely to buy from companies that give back to the local community; treat their workers well; express public support for causes the consumers believe in; and engage in environmentally-friendly practices (2013). Because efforts to promote better corporate culture and a healthier environment utilize higher levels of education, research and development, Schuylkill County has the potential to excel above textile and apparel industries in less developed countries.

Restoring a garment industry in Schuylkill County may not be a conventional method to boosting the economy, especially given all of the forces that have acted against it that are mentioned in the previous section. I think it is important

to consider, however, given its local historical importance and the area's current economic devastation. If renewed, the new garment industry should certainly operate differently to be competitive and successful in today's global market for textiles and apparel.

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## **Appendix A**

### **INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

Principal Investigator: Emma Sidoriak

Other Investigators: N/A

You are being asked to participate in a research study. This form tells you about the study including its purpose, what you will do if you decide to participate, and any risks and benefits of being in the study. Please read the information below and ask the research team questions about anything we have not made clear before you decide whether to participate. Your participation is voluntary and you can refuse to participate or withdraw at anytime without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form and a copy will be given to you to keep for your reference.

#### **WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?**

The purpose of this study is to learn more about the textile industry that existed in Schuylkill County. The research being done will account for a senior thesis project.

You are being asked to take part in this study because you have experience or know about the textile industry in Schuylkill County. If you do not know about the textile industry of Schuylkill County, you may be excluded from volunteering. There is expected to be five to ten participants in this study.

#### **WHAT WILL YOU BE ASKED TO DO?**

The research conducted will be in interview format. This may be in-person or over the phone. The interviewer will provide the subject with the list of interview questions as a reference. The interviewer will ask the subject these questions and may interject new questions based upon the subject's response. The interview will be based around the set of written questions but will also be open-ended should the interviewer want more information on a certain response.

The length of the interview should last no longer than two hours. The interview may be audio-recorded for note-taking purposes. The recording will be deleted at the end of

the research process.

### **WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS?**

There is a risk that during the interview process, the subject may feel discomfort when talking about hardships and tough economic times. The study is designed to minimize this risk by giving the subject notice of the interview topics beforehand. The subject should also know that their responses are completely voluntary. The subject does not have to respond if he or she does not feel comfortable doing so.

### **WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS?**

There is no potential direct benefit to the participants in the study; however, communities in Schuylkill County may benefit from the research as it may raise awareness and interest in the history of the region. In the future, increased interest could eventually lead to support for the community and its economy.

### **HOW WILL CONFIDENTIALITY BE MAINTAINED?**

Confidentiality will be maintained as the research will not specify names, addresses, or any identifiers that will directly link participants to the study. Because the participants will be chosen from a large pool of people who have worked in the textile industry in the region, the participants should not be able to be identified. If for some reason they are identified, there is no expected harm that should come to them because they have participated in the study. Research will be reported in groupings without identifiers and may include direct quotes from participants.

Paper research records will be stored in the primary investigator's personal room, which will be locked. Electronic research records will be de-identified and stored on a personal laptop that is secure and not shared.

It is possible that the investigator may ask to audiotape the interview. She will not do so unless the participant is willing. The participant should know that the audio-recording will only be used as a supplement to the investigator's notes in writing the research paper. After the research is closed, the recordings will be deleted.

Research will be reported in groupings without identifiers and may also include direct quotes from the participants. Research data will not be shared with outside institutions. The research will be used for an Undergraduate Senior Thesis paper.

We will make every effort to keep all research records that identify you confidential to the extent permitted by law. In the event of any publication or presentation resulting from the research, no personally identifiable information will be shared.

Your research records may be viewed by the University of Delaware Institutional Review Board, but the confidentiality of your records will be protected to the extent permitted by law.

**WILL THERE BE ANY COSTS RELATED TO THE RESEARCH?**

There are no costs associated with participating in the study.

**WILL THERE BE ANY COMPENSATION FOR PARTICIPATION?**

There is no compensation.

**WHAT IF YOU ARE INJURED BECAUSE OF THE STUDY?**

This study does not involve physical, medical, or psychological risks; therefore, injuries are not an issue.

**DO YOU HAVE TO TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?**

Taking part in this research study is entirely voluntary. You do not have to participate in this research. If you choose to take part, you have the right to stop at any time. If you decide not to participate or if you decide to stop taking part in the research at a later date, there will be no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Your refusal will not influence current or future relationships with the University of Delaware.

**WHO SHOULD YOU CALL IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS?**

If you have any questions about this study, please contact the Principal Investigator, Emma Sidoriak at 267-254-0660.

If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the University of Delaware Institutional Review Board at 302-831-2137.

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**Your signature below indicates that you are agreeing to take part in this research study. You have been informed about the study's purpose, procedures, possible risks and benefits. You have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the research and those questions have been answered. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.**

**By signing this consent form, you indicate that you voluntarily agree to participate in this study.**

---

Signature of Participant

---

Date

---

Printed Name of Participant



## **Appendix B**

### **INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. How was it decided that you were going to work in the textile business?
  - a. Were you looking at working anywhere else at this time?
  - b. What made you pick the textile business?
2. Did you work anywhere previously?
  - a. Why did you leave?
  - b. Did the textile business look more promising?
3. How did your career at the textile business end?
  - a. When did it end?
  - b. What did you do afterwards?
4. How did your life change going into the textile business?
5. How did your life change after you were done working in the textile business?
6. Do you remember any differences in the community between when you started working in the textile business and when you ended your time at the textile business?
7. What were the best parts of working in the textile industry?
8. What were the benefits of working in this company?
  - a. Were they different from anywhere else you have worked?
  - b. Better? Worse?
9. What were your least favorite parts of working in the textile industry?
  - a. Were there disadvantages compared to working in a different industry or company?
10. How were you treated?
  - a. Do you think conditions could have been better? Worse?

11. Were you a member of a union?
  - a. How did the union assist you while working in the textile industry?
12. What tasks did you do?
  - a. How was work delegated to you?
  - b. Did you work individually or in teams?
  - c. What was a typical day like?
13. Do you know if the company you worked for is still operating?
  - a. If so, did it change or move?
  - b. If not, how and when did it end?
14. Do you know of the company's big competitors?
  - a. What did you know about them?
  - b. How successful do you think your workplace was in comparison to competitors?
  - c. Did your company do anything exceptionally better than the rest?
15. When did you work in the textile industry? From when to when?
16. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about working in the textile industry?

**Appendix C**  
**IRB APPROVAL LETTER**

DATE: March 6, 2014

TO: Emma Sidoriak

FROM: University of Delaware IRB

STUDY TITLE: [573356-1] The Rise and Fall of the Garment Industry in Schuylkill County, Pennsylvania

SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: APPROVED

APPROVAL DATE: March 6, 2014

EXPIRATION DATE: March 5, 2015

REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

REVIEW CATEGORY: Expedited review category # 7

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this research study. The University of Delaware IRB has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a study design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

This submission has received Expedited Review based on the applicable federal regulation.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the study and insurance of participant understanding followed by a

signed consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the study via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require each participant receive a copy of the signed consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this office prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported to this office. Please use the appropriate adverse event forms for this procedure. All sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed.

Please report all NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this study to this office.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years.

Based on the risks, this project requires Continuing Review by this office on an annual basis. Please use the appropriate renewal forms for this procedure.

If you have any questions, please contact Nicole Farnese-McFarlane at (302) 831-1119 or [nicolefm@udel.edu](mailto:nicolefm@udel.edu). Please include your study title and reference number in all correspondence with this office.