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A Proud Heritage

Hickory, North Carolina can trace its furniture history back to the earliest part of the 20th century and a young merchant named George W. Hall. Standing in front of his general mercantile business on Hickory’s main street, Hall would watch the long freight trains rumbling through town, bearing load after load of southern lumber headed for furniture factories up north.

North Carolina had only a few furniture factories at that time. In 1890 the state had only six furniture plants employing fewer than 200 employees. In 1901, Hall and a group of other Hickory businessmen and bankers decided that some of the region’s lumber should be used to build furniture in Hickory.

When these entrepreneurs organized the town’s first furniture factory, Hickory Furniture Company, Hall was only 28 years old. Despite his youth, Hall successfully managed that first plant and within the year he helped to start the town’s second furniture manufacturing business, Martin Furniture Co.

The natural trade routes along the rivers in the region provided an artery by which both designers and craftsmen flowed into the Catawba Valley region in the early years of the 20th century. With the craftsmen came the knowledge and skills to train the abundant and willing labor force available in North Carolina’s foothills. There was no unionization in the industry, and workers were plentiful and eager to work.

By the 1920s and 1930s, more furniture plants were forming as the industry spread throughout Hickory and the surrounding areas. But the Depression years were especially hard on the industry because furniture was still considered a luxury and many people could barely afford food, much less furniture. Although some companies went under, others managed to stay afloat, due to smart mergers, frugal policies and loyal employees.

With the end of World War II, the furniture industry experienced its biggest boom as returning military veterans looked for jobs that would enable them to build homes and buy new furniture for their families. Hickory area companies grew and split off, creating even more new furniture companies. As generation followed generation in the business of crafting furniture, Hickory and the Catawba Valley became the furniture manufacturing capital of the nation.

A Second Industry Is Born

In 1960, a second industry arose to support the burgeoning furniture industry when a handful of furniture manufacturers gathered for the first time to display their products to retail dealers. This wholesale exhibition was held on the site of what is now known as Hickory Furniture Mart. And so the Mart became the hub of the wholesale furniture exhibition business and would flourish for decades in western North Carolina. In 1985, Hickory Furniture Mart decided to open its doors - previously open only to wholesale members of the trade - to the public for the very first time. Within a short decade, the Mart was the nation’s leading manufacturer-related furniture center and one of North Carolina’s top visitor attractions. Hickory Furniture Mart continues to transition as the industry evolves and is proud to celebrate its longevity with its customers, vendors and countless friends in the furniture industry.

Today, Hickory Furniture Mart’s expansive complex is comprised of four-levels housing 100 factory outlets, stores, and galleries, representing nearly 1,000 of the most recognizable brand names in the furniture industry. In addition to the acres of professionally decorated furniture showrooms, the Mart complex offers an on-site pet friendly hotel as well as a gourmet café and a coffeehouse with Wi-Fi internet access, both locally owned. The premier manufacturers represented throughout the Mart include most major quality domestic manufacturers as well as accessories, fabrics, imports, lighting, rugs, wall coverings and additional home furnishings.

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People from every state and international visitors from several countries visit Hickory Furniture Mart each year. Furnishings purchased at the Mart may be found in celebrity homes, apartments, condominiums, mansions and castles all around the world.

The Mart has been highlighted in the New York Times, Newsday, Los Angeles Times, Woman’s Day and many other national publications. The Mart has also been showcased on the “Oprah Winfrey Show” and the Discovery Channel’s “Interior Motives with Christopher Lowell. Hickory Furniture Mart is truly the Ultimate Furniture Destination.

For information about Hickory Furniture Mart, call 1-800-462-MART or email at info@hickoryfurniture.com.