

Home Front Soldiers:

The Johnson Family of Scottsville

In 1941, the United States was just coming out of the Depression. Jobs were difficult to come by. Factory jobs were largely the domain of men. As the United States entered World War II, the ever-increasing need for more men in uniform and more production resulted in more women leaving the home to fill jobs that supported the war effort. They became 'home front' soldiers.

Typical of large families in the Scottsville area was that of Charles Benjamin and Ruth Allen Johnson, who had nine children. Like most families, who lived in the country, they had a large vegetable garden, fruit trees, chickens, cows, and some pigs. The father, a miller by trade, went to work at DuPont in Waynesboro prior to the opening shots of WWII. Joining him at the plant was his youngest son, Gill, and two of his daughters, Rudy and Kitty. The oldest son, 'Benjy,' served in the Navy and was discharged; he also worked at DuPont before rejoining the Navy. A submariner, Benjy survived WWII when one in three submariners did not.



Benjy and Gill Johnson (L to R) both worked at DuPont before serving in the U.S. Navy during WWII.

After the war, Benjy stayed in the Navy and made it his career.

Eugene, also known as 'Dukes,' worked in a defense plant in Maryland. The younger brother, Gill, left his job at DuPont and joined the Navy in 1943 as the war progressed and more men in uniform were needed. Sadly, Gill went down with many of his shipmates when his ship, the USS Morrison was sunk by Japanese suicide attacks near Okinawa on 4 May 1945. He saw his baby girl, Jill, only once when home on leave.

Two Johnson sisters, Rudy and Kitty,



Kitty and Rudy Johnson in their DuPont uniforms circa 1943

worked at DuPont, which produced rayon. Work shifts stretched around the clock, and the Johnson sisters sometimes would finish one shift at midnight and then go back in to work at four o'clock the very next after-

noon. In Waynesboro, they lived with their sister, Dorothy, whose husband also worked at DuPont. Rudy returned to Scottsville in 1944 to work at the newly built U.S. Rubber Company, spinning rayon tire cord for U.S. military vehicles. After graduation from Scottsville High School in 1944, Frankie Johnson joined her older sister, Rudy, at the U.S. Rubber Company.



Frankie Johnson poses with her mother, Ruth Allen, on the University of Virginia campus where Scottsville High School's graduation was held in 1944.



Above are shown the I.D. badges used by Rudy and Frankie Johnson while working at the U.S. Rubber Plant during the war.

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Spinning rayon cord for military tires at the U.S. Rubber Plant in Scottsville during WWII.

Beatrice Johnson, known as ‘BB,’ was a homemaker with a new baby daughter. All of the unmarried Johnson girls dated servicemen. Rudy met Navy Gunners’ Mate Frank Shumaker from Buckingham at a dance sponsored by the Scottsville Lions Club at the Old Canal



GM3/C Frank Shumaker circa 1944; he married Rudy Johnson after WWII ended.

Warehouse. They fell forever in love and married shortly after the war ended. Frankie Johnson, who also worked at the Scottsville plant after high school graduation,

met and married Martin Turner, who served with the U.S. Army in



Martin Turner served in the U.S. Army and is shown in a peaceful moment in Hawaii; he married Frankie Johnson after WWII.

the Pacific Theater. Myrtle Johnson, better known by her nickname “Bubbles”, met Lewis Rhodes when he came back to Scottsville High School after the war to get his diploma. Lewis was inducted in the U.S. Army in 1944 and served as a



Sgt. Lewis E. Rhodes, U.S. Army, married Myrtle ‘Bubbles’ Rhodes after WWII ended.

sergeant in the European Theater from 1945-1946. All of these men and women served our country

so well during WWII on both the home front and battlefield and raised their children in Scottsville. They attended the Scottsville Baptist Church and became involved in various local businesses in the community. They supported many of Scottsville’s civic organizations such as the Lions Club, Masons, and the Volunteer Fire Department. The war years had been turbulent times for everyone ... a time of tragedy for many. For this family, the end of WWII brought a time of renewal, building, and peace. The World was safe for democracy again.



The Waynesboro Works War Memorial plaque was erected at the plant after WWII to honor those employees, who left the plant to enter military service and lost their lives in the line of duty. Gilbert Johnson is listed among the twenty-seven employees who lost their lives in WWII service.

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Overview of the DuPont Plant in Waynesboro, VA

DuPont acquired 153 acres near the small town of Waynesboro, Virginia, in late 1928 as a manufacturing site for acetate rayon fibers. Although the company had already established viscose rayon facilities in Buffalo, NY, Waynesboro became the only plant devoted to the acetate process. Production of yarn began in November 1929, and a year later, the Rayon Technical Division Acetate Research Laboratories were established at the site. By the time acetate production peaked in the early 1950s, researchers at Waynesboro were already beginning to develop new products. In 1944, the Acetate Research Section had taken over development of a product called 'Fiber A.' The road from research to product line proved a rocky one, but was eventually successful. Demand for the product marketed as Orlon soared and an additional plant was built, allowing Waynesboro to produce 40 million pounds annually after 1958.

By then, the market for acetate was disappearing. Production at Waynesboro was cut back and the Acetate Research Section was closed. A replacement was in the wings, however. DuPont had decided to use Waynesboro's Orlon spinning cells for the manufacture of Lycra elastane. Semi-commercial production began in 1960, and full production followed two years later.

Overview of the U.S. Rubber Plant in Scottsville, VA

The plant was built in 1944 by the Defense Plant Corporation to help with the nation's war effort. It was designed and constructed to provide tire fabric and was operated by the Textile Division of the U.S. Rubber Company (later to become Uniroyal). This effort helped provide rayon tire cord required in the heavy duty tires used on our military ground vehicles. In November 1945, Uniroyal purchased the plant from the U.S. Government, and the Scottsville plant officially joined Uniroyal.

Photos of U.S. Rubber Plant Construction, 1944

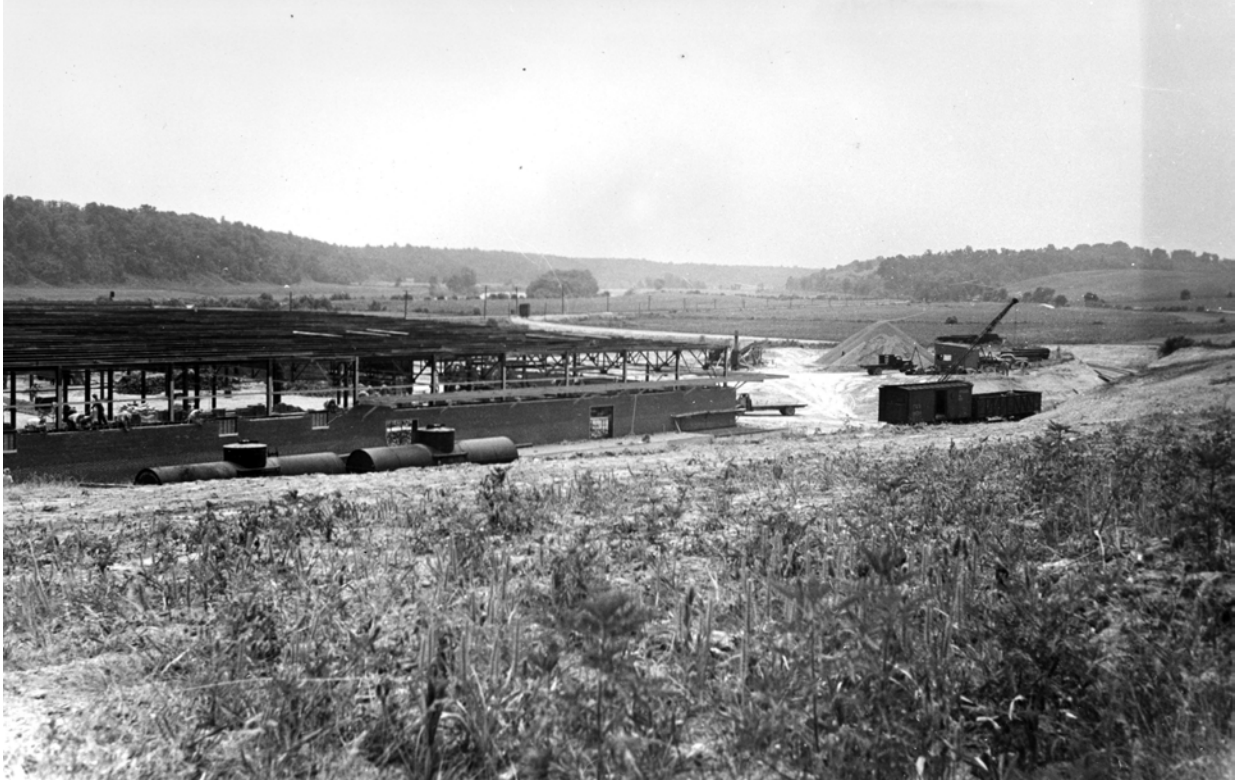


Excavation at the U.S. Rubber Plant site began in early 1944 at a site just west of Scottsville. This photo was taken circa April 1944, looking south at the plant site with the James River in the background.



This photo was taken on May 18, 1944, looking north at the plant construction in process from the C&O Railroad track.

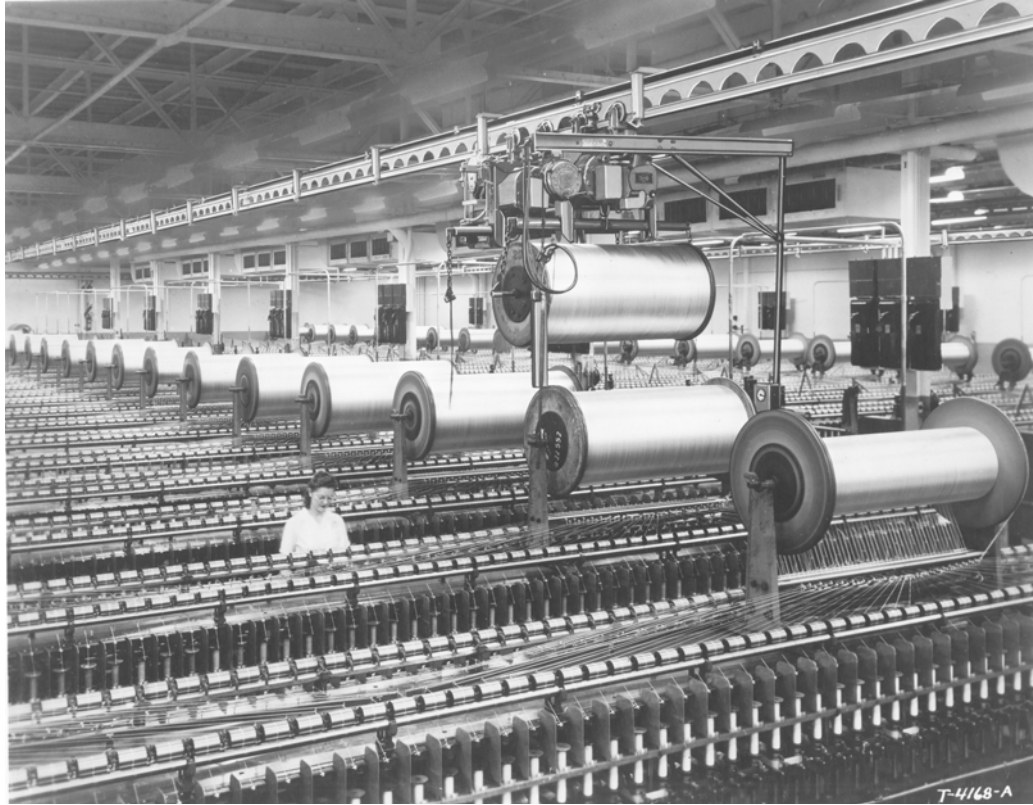
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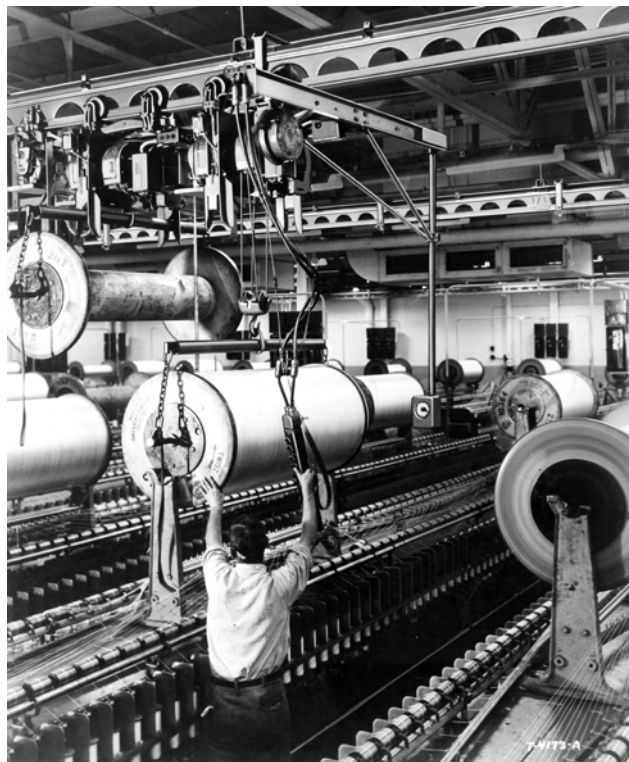
More Photos of U.S. Rubber Plant Construction, 1944



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Production of rayon cord at the Scottsville U.S. Rubber Company



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The cafeteria at the Uniroyal Plant (previously the U.S. Rubber Plant) in 1946.

Historical photos of the U.S. Rubber Plant in Scottsville, Virginia, were provided by Roger Hutchins of Hyosung America, Inc. This corporation currently owns this plant on 800 Bird Street in Scottsville, Virginia. Scottsville Museum is grateful to Hyosung America for granting us permission to use these photos in our WWII exhibit. We thank you!