

CATTLE CULTURE

by Lindsay King, assistant editor

The Hartt of Hearts

Carhartt: it's the trusted brand of cattlemen and women worldwide, but have you ever wondered how the brand came to be synonymous with coveralls and chore coats? It's 130-year history is full of triumphs and tribulations.

"One of our core values is to act like Hamilton Carhartt," says Carhartt archivist and historian Dave Moore, "be inspired by hard-working people."

Those inspirational people for the founder of the brand, Hamilton (right), came in the form of railroad workers. In the 1880s

Hamilton was traversing the roads around Detroit, Mich., as a traveling salesman in his horse and buggy.

"He visited a lot of railroad stations and talked to those guys about how they were not happy with the work clothes available at the time," Moore says. "Things were made cheap and rarely were they durable."

The inaugural set of Carhartt coveralls were born as Hamilton's first attempt at a side hustle. Though his initial experiments with the up and coming clothing line left something to be desired, he stuck to the origins of the young brand and talked to his customers directly.

"It is the foundation of our long history and what we base everything around: customer needs," Moore explains, adding with a chuckle, that it's a "novel" idea to simply ask what

the customer wants.

Many loyal Carhartt wearers might be surprised that the company's roots run deep into the streets of Detroit, says Erica Salomon, senior manager of corporate communications for Carhartt.

"Not many people know that we started in Detroit in 1889 or that Carhartt is a family-owned business,"

Salomon says. "Our CEO is the great-grandson of our founder, Hamilton Carhartt, and now the fifth generation of the family works here."

The first official production facility of Carhartt housed only two machines in a downtown Detroit loft. Though demand quickly grew, Hamilton never lost his focus on quality.

"It was always advertised that Carhartt was not the cheapest thing on the rack, but it would last the longest," Moore adds. This held true even as the Great Depression ravaged the country. Roughly 20 years after starting, Hamilton had production

facilities in the U.S., Canada and Europe. This proved to be Carhartt's saving grace.

"It was about getting leaner to survive," Moore explains of the production plants that closed their doors so the company could focus on core products in a smaller number of facilities. At the same time, the hefty price tag of operating in downtown Detroit led Carhartt to Irvine, Ky.

The town contacted Carhartt and made a deal they could not refuse.

"The town formed a joint-stock corporation, in the middle of the depression no less, to raise funds to build a factory for Carhartt to operate," Moore says.

"It opened in 1932 and is where most of the production took place until the 70s. Though we were born in Detroit, we were saved by Kentucky."

Many of the testimonies from the 1920s filed away in the archive read similar to the ones written today. The longevity and durability of Carhartt holds true to its modest launch from the rail-road.

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