

# From Cotton to Suits

Exploring Carroll County's Textile Stories



Carroll County cotton farmer sorts through cotton locks, 1940s.  
Courtesy University of West Georgia, Ingram Library, Special  
Collections, Carroll Service Council Records Collections.

## Self-Guided Tour



The Carroll County Spur  
of

West Georgia Textile Heritage Trail

# From Cotton to Suits: Exploring Carroll County's Textile Stories

Carroll County boasts a long history of cotton production and textile manufacturing, from its establishment in 1826 through the twentieth century.

Farmers began growing cotton here before the Civil War, many using enslaved labor. Cotton production continued to increase through the early twentieth century. For several years in the 1920s and 1930s, Carroll County was the leading cotton producer in the state.



Carroll County was home to one of the earliest cotton mills in the region. The Bowen brothers utilized the water power of Snake Creek for a small cotton mill here in the 1840s. The original mill burned in 1851, but it was rebuilt and resumed some operation in 1866. Arthur Hutcheson expanded and modernized the mill in 1885.

As New South advocates argued for bringing textile mills to the South, investors began to build cotton mills along the new railroads that criss-crossed the county in the late 1800s, including Mandeville Mills in Carrollton in 1899 and Villa Rica Cotton Mill in Fullerville, outside Villa Rica, in 1906. Both featured company towns with mill houses, businesses, churches, schools, cotton gins, and ancillary textile enterprises.

By the 1920s and 1930s, Carroll County also became a center of the hosiery industry, which moved down from the northern states and also



settled along the railroad lines. Carroll Mills, Lawler Hosiery Mills, Caroline Mills, and Maryon Mills all opened in Carrollton, with several clustered along Bradley Street near the depot. Villa Rica had four hosiery mills by the late 1920s, including Villa Rica Hosiery Mill in Fullerville and Golden City Hosiery Mills in Villa Rica. They produced anklets, half hose, crew socks, and hose.

The apparel industry also came to the region in 1928, when the Sewell

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brothers established the headquarters of Sewell Manufacturing Company in Bremen. In 1933, Sewell Manufacturing Company opened a plant in Bowdon to manufacture men's suit and sport coats.



*Virginia Manufacturing Company, Whitesburg.  
Courtesy John and Josie Hite.*

The apparel industry expanded dramatically after World War II, hiring many local women as seamstresses. Warren Sewell established the Bremen-Bowdon Investment Company or BBIC in Bowdon (1946) to manufacture suits for his new Warren Sewell Clothing Company (1948). Sewell Manufacturing Company built new facilities in Temple in 1953 and Mandeville, or Bowdon Junction, in 1960. LaMar Manufacturing and Bowdon Manufacturing Companies opened in Bowdon in 1955 and 1959. The Ray Sewell Company, founded in Bremen, built a new pants manufacturing facility in Mt. Zion in 1955. It seemed like every town had an apparel plant!

Other smaller textile companies opened at this time as well. After World War II, Carrollton boasted manufacturers producing chenille bedspreads, mattresses, elastic, laundry nets, utility clothes, potholders, braided cotton rugs, and knitted tubing for the meat industry.

By the 1950s, cotton manufacturing had already begun to decline in the United States due to overseas competition. Local mills began to close



*Inside of Villa Rica Hosiery Mill, courtesy Teddy Williamson.*

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or shift operations to other products. Mandeville Mills closed in 1953. Mandeville's grandson John Richard Newell, Sr. created a rope factory across the street from Mill #1. In 1968, his son Richard "Dick" Newell, Jr. began producing a synthetic climbing rope on the old Mandeville Mill property. BlueWater Ropes is still produced and known around the world.



*Women sewing zippers in men's slacks at the Sewell Manufacturing Company plant in Temple, Georgia. Courtesy the Harold Brock Family.*



*Interior photograph of BlueWater Ropes operations, producing American-made kernmantle caving rope. Photograph by Kymberli Darling. Courtesy UWG Center for Public History.*

By the late twentieth century, the apparel industry also began to decline from overseas competition, the Caribbean Basin Initiative (CBI), and the North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Carroll County has lost most of this industry now, but there are a few businesses that still produce an array of more specialized goods in Carrollton and military uniforms in Bowdon.

Visit this website for more information about this driving tour: <http://westgatetextiletrail.com/carroll-trail/>.

# West Georgia Textile Heritage Trail

## Regional Map



The textile industry touches us all. Our region has been a powerhouse of textile production, from cotton and hosiery to apparel, chenille, and carpet. The mills transformed families, livelihoods, and communities. We invite locals and visitors alike to explore and share their connections to this story, as well as discover the landscapes and cultures along the Textile Trail.

The Trail highlights historic communities that played a vital regional and sometimes national role in the cotton, hosiery, apparel, chenille, and carpet industries. Follow along the U.S. Highway 27 corridor and adjacent counties to hear the stories, visit local exhibits and archives, and explore historic textile buildings while enjoying Georgia small-town life and local shops and restaurants. Find your adventure on the West Georgia Textile Heritage Trail!

For more information about the West Georgia  
Textile Heritage Trail contact:  
**Center for Public History**  
678-839-6141  
<https://uwgcph.org>  
<http://westgatextiletrail.com>

# While You're Here

While you are in Carroll County, visit these places to learn more about the textile history of Carroll County:

## Carrollton Spur Walking Trail & Wayside Exhibit

Parking available at Adamson Square

<http://westgatetextiletrail.com/carrollton-trail/>

## Bowdon Spur Walking Trail

Parking available at Bowdon City Hall

<http://westgatetextiletrail.com/bowdon-trail/>

## Fullerville Walking Trail

Parking available at

Fullerville Soccer Complex, Villa Rica

<http://westgatetextiletrail.com/fullerville-trail/>

## Bowdon Area Historical Society Museum

105 College View Street, Bowdon

770-258-8980 or [info@bowdon.net](mailto:info@bowdon.net)

Call for visiting hours

## Southeastern Quilt and Textile Museum

306 Bradley Street, Carrollton

770-301-2187

Call for visiting hours

## West Georgia Textile Heritage Trail Archives

Center for Public History at University of West Georgia

678-839-6141 or [wght@westga.edu](mailto:wght@westga.edu)

Contact to schedule an appointment

## Carrollton Area CVB

770-214-9746 or 800-292-0871

[visit@carrollton-ga.gov](mailto:visit@carrollton-ga.gov)

## Historic Banning Mills

Whitesburg

770-834-9149 or [info@historicbanningmills.com](mailto:info@historicbanningmills.com)



Sharing stories that move us and make us



Warren P. &  
Ava F. Sewell  
Foundation



UNIVERSITY OF WEST GEORGIA  
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**West Georgia.**

This project is supported by the Georgia Humanities Council and the National Endowment for the Humanities and through appropriations from the Georgia General Assembly.

# What to see along the Trail Villa Rica

## Temple

Temple's local boosters encouraged Sewell Manufacturing to build an apparel plant here, investing in a new water system, donating 8.5 acres, and paving the streets. Sewell Manufacturing Company's plant #2 opened on Sewell Street, off West Johnson Street, in 1953. While the plant has been demolished, the water tower, which the city used to attract the company still remains, on **911 Sewell Street** off West Johnson Street/ Highway 113. Discover more: <http://westgatetextiletrail.com/temple/>



Women working on slacks at Sewell Manufacturing Company in Temple, Georgia, 1954. Courtesy the Harold Brock Family.



Sewell Manufacturing Company plant #5 in Bowdon Junction. Courtesy UWG Center for Public History.

## Mt. Zion

The Ray Sewell Company built a pants manufacturing plant here in 1955. The building still remains here at **4455 Mt. Zion Rd, Mt. Zion**, repurposed by the City as a public library and city office building. Visitors can see historic photos of the plant in operation in the library. Discover more: <http://westgatetextiletrail.com/mt-zion/>



Ray Sewell Company, Mt. Zion pants shop. Courtesy Sharon Sewell.

## Carrollton

Carrollton was a hive of textile activity in the twentieth century. Visit historic **Adamson Square**, which was the center of cotton trade, **Bradley Street** with its hosiery mills and cotton warehouses, the railroad depot that provided essential transportation for the cotton and manufacturing trade, and Mandeville Mills and mill village. Explore the downtown walking trail at <http://westgatetextiletrail.com/carrollton-trail/>. Discover more: <http://westgatetextiletrail.com/carrollton/>



Mandeville Mills mill no. 1, now loft apartments. Courtesy UWG Center for Public History.

## Bowdon

Follow the Bowdon Spur Walking Tour in the historic industrial center of Bowdon. Park and begin at the Old City Hall at **126 City Hall Avenue**, and follow the signs to learn more about the apparel industry in this community. The trail features three wayside signs and individual plaques on buildings along City Hall Avenue that interpret the processes of the apparel industry that took place here. You can also view the exhibit at <http://westgatetextiletrail.com/bowdon-trail/>. Contact the Bowdon Area Historical Society to visit the museum and see an exhibit on the city's apparel industry at **105 College View Street**. Discover more: <http://westgatetextiletrail.com/bowdon/>



Sewing collars at LaMar Manufacturing Company. Courtesy Charles & Marjorie Middlebrooks in memory and honor of the Plunkett family.

Industry developed in this historic railroad town at the turn of the twentieth century, after the arrival of the railroad in 1882. In 1906, Judson Fuller established a cotton mill and his sons added a hosiery mill in 1911 on the west side of Villa Rica, creating a company town called Fullerville. The old mill and much of the company housing still survives, illustrating a variety of plan types. Follow the walking trail of Fullerville, beginning your tour at the Fullerville Soccer Complex, **121 Ball Park Dr., Villa Rica** and follow: <http://westgatetextiletrail.com/fullerville-trail/>



Villa Rica Cotton Mill, ca. 1939. Courtesy Teddy Williamson.

Several mills and cotton warehouses filled what is now the North Villa Rica Historic District, north of the railroad track. Rica-Tex Hosiery Mill (1927) and Golden City Hosiery Mills (1929) were producing 1.8 million socks each week by the 1950s. The Mill, a downtown amphitheater, is at the location of the Golden City Hosiery Mills. The city had six warehouses which stored cotton bales until they could be shipped at the train depot, now gone, including the Pope Brothers Warehouse at **301-319 Temple Street**. Discover more: <http://westgatetextiletrail.com/villa-rica/>

## Banning

Banning was a thriving industrial community in the 1800s. The first cotton mill here was a small wooden building which burned around 1851. The current three-story brick mill reflects the architecture of the New South cotton industry in the late 1800s. Entrepreneur Arthur Hutcheson, who acquired the property in 1878, modernized the mill and its equipment, added steam power, and established a company town complete with company houses, store, school, and church.



Bowen Mill along Snake Creek, established in the 1840s and burned down in 1851. Courtesy UWG Center for Public History.

Today, visitors can take a half-hour hike from Banning Lodge at **205 Horseshoe Dam Road, Whitesburg** to see the brick mill, where scenes from the movie "Fried Green Tomatoes" were filmed. Banning Lodge has a display of historic photographs from the Banning community. Discover more: <http://westgatetextiletrail.com/whitesburg/>

## Whitesburg

Whitesburg became a booming railroad town in southern Carroll County with the arrival of the Central of Georgia Railroad in 1873.

The ca. 1885 railroad depot, which still survives at **717 Main Street, Whitesburg**, served cotton farmers throughout the region. Drive across the tracks to get the best view of the depot. Look for the brick wall on the north end of the depot. This is the only remaining wall from the Virginia Manufacturing Company built in the late 1940s to spin yarn and produced braided cord for venetian blinds. After the mill burned, stockholders sold the company to Wellington Technical Industries, which built a new facility north of town, off Wellington Mill Road. Discover more: <http://westgatetextiletrail.com/whitesburg/>



Virginia Manufacturing Company, in Whitesburg. Courtesy John and Josie Hite.

## Lowell

Fashion Star opened here in 1972 to produce high-end uniforms and business suits for women. The company acquired the former Lowell High School at **67 Liberty Church Rd**, Carrollton, GA and added several buildings as production grew. Its primary customers were small, independent banks. The company closed in 2010. This building is not open to the public.



This structure once housed Fashion Star. Photograph by Keri Adams. Courtesy UWG Center for Public History.



Lamar Plunkett walking the floor of LaMar Manufacturing Company. Courtesy Bowdon Area Historical Society.