

Interview #2 -

S: This is the fourth of March. This is the second of some tapes which I am making for you Raymond, and I will start this tape, as you suggested, with some ideas <sup>about</sup> ~~xx~~ the previous history of textiles in the garment industry.

S: If we go back to just before the 20's, we would find that the fabric market for textiles consisted largely of the demand for silk, woolen, cotton and linen. There was almost no synthetic fiber fabrics used in the apparel trade.               ?               rayon, had been developed, was rather ~~XXXXXX~~ inferior. It was not strong when it was wet. In other words if rayon,               ?               rayon got wet the tissue, the textile became tender, prone to break. When it dried again it had the remarkable property however of regaining its strength, in which it differs from cellulose products such as paper, for example. About the only significant fabric contamination <sup>7</sup> existed in the manufacture of silk, where loading was resorted to. Loading consisted of adding a metallic salt such as a lead salt to the mordant or a component which was added to the fabric after it was woven and before it was dyed. This tended, or not tended, but actually increased the weight of the fabric to which it was added. The explanation was that in dyeing a certain amount of the natural powders, the natural weight of the silk was lost, and that the manufacturer was merely resorting to this in order to restore that amount of weight. This was not so. Very often high ratios of these metallic salts were added, ~~xx~~ which meant that the fabric, while having a large increase in its weight, was not as satisfactory as pure dyed silk in that the mordant, the dye, or rather the weight, eventually destroyed the color and the fabric itself in the long run. It would not last, it would deteriorate, it would become tender and break. This was

dropped in the late 1920's and the early 1930's. This device was no longer used because of the resistance to it, and the fact that the price of pure silk <sup>was</sup> ~~was~~ <sup>sufficiently</sup> ~~appreciably~~ low, so that it wasn't necessary. Some of the types of fabrics <sup>which</sup> ~~that~~ were used in the early part of the dress industry were crepe de chine, which of course was a very light weight crepe, used mostly in dresses. Later there was developed a fabric - I remember a firm connected with that, I think one of the first introducers of that fabric, was ? and Fleisher (sp?), who introduced a beautiful, heavy crepe, which they called flat ~~xx~~ crepe. Subsequently <sup>this</sup> ~~was~~ was made by great mills like Cheney Brothers, Susquehanna, and other large American manufacturers. This was a beautiful fabric. In addition to that there were crepes called tanton(?) crepes, which were used more for daytime clothes. They were, as the name indicates, a crepeier (sp?) type, not much heavier than the flat crepe, but of a very crinkled yarn with a high twist, so that it gave a creping effect to the fabric. This fabric was made also by Cheney Brothers, J. H. and C. K. Eagle, Louie Roussel and Company, Malinson and Company, and many others. But they were pure silks; they were dyed in hundreds of colors, which were kept in stock and were ~~xx~~ available for ~~order~~ orders. In addition to those silks of that type, which were the crepe type, there were the large family of satins. Satin crepe, which was like the flat crepe except one side was made with a longer float so that it had a satin face. There were satin cantons (?) which were like the canton (?) crepe except with a satin face. There <sup>was</sup> ~~was~~ <sup>1</sup> duchess satins, which were like a satin taffeta. This was a classic fabric which dates back for hundreds of years. Taffetas were also made. The taffetas and duchess satins were yarn-dyed fabrics, that is to say the colors, the yarn was dyed into the colors first and then it was woven. With the crepes and the

various versions of crepes, the fabric was woven in the raw, and then ~~that~~ vat dyed or piece dyed, as it was called. In those days too there were many more sheer fabrics made than there are today--chiffons, georgettes, the next weight, then still another weight of crepe called Elizabeth crepe. Incidentally, both those names, georgette and Elizabeth, were trademarks of \_\_\_\_\_ and Company, a French manufacturer which eventually made fabrics here also in their mills upstate. These fabrics, along with another one called mousslin de soie, which was like a stiff taffeta, were used largely for - uh, not stiff taffeta, rather a stiff chiffon. At that period, the manufacture of silks in this country was a tremendous industry. There were mills throughout the country--in New England, and in the South particularly--and great merchants were at the heads of these concerns. There was not only the necessity for manufacturing controls, but the purchase of the raw silk itself was a tremendous financial problem in the industry, so that the silks had to be bought at the proper times ~~at~~ at the proper prices. Otherwise tremendous losses could be taken if you didn't have enough silk and the price went up, as it did frequently, or down--it fluctuated tremendously--and it ~~to~~ took a very wise merchant, not only a silk manufacturer, to be successful in that business. ~~There~~ There were tremendous dye plants, operated sometimes by the mills themselves, but mostly by dye specialists. Those mills practically went out of business when the synthetic field took over because it no longer paid to dye the quantities of silk when tremendously ~~ex~~ greater quantities of synthetics could be dyed for the same amount of money and less time and with less effort and with less problem, fewer problems because synthetic fabrics run more evenly in consistency than the silks, which were made of delicate animal fibers. In this period linens also were very popular, and mostly

~~these~~, these were mostly Irish linens, or there were some French and Belgian linens in addition. These were used for the lower priced clothes, and for clothes that were more suitable to linen than to silk. Of course there was also a great cotton industry in which our own cotton production was a factor, in addition to the importation of \_\_\_\_\_ ? cotton and Egyptian ~~and~~ cotton and other cottons. In connection with silk I might mention that one of the finest silk yarns in that period was the Italian silk yarn--the fine yarns that were used for gloves. The French also had a great sericulture (?) of very fine quality ~~filks~~ silks. Sericulture in this country was never successful. It had been tried many, many times in the South and California, but <sup>apparently</sup> we could not, the...the...the culture of the silkworms was not successful and this did not last. Apparently it had something to do...the...the silkworms subsist, of course, on mulberry leaves, and so it was necessary to have mulberry trees, and this might have been one of the problems in connection with the development of sericulture in this country, so that most of our silk was imported from China and Japan. A lot of romantic names were carried by the silk yarns. They came in in bales, and they were marked with a certain \_\_\_\_\_, which meant the thickness of it. But they also had very beautiful names like grand crack, grand double extra crack--these, I think, were the lower qualities. They went into great ~~extravaganzas~~ extravaganzas to name the fine qualities. The silk, as I say, was imported, Very often delivered to the dyer and kept in his stock until he received orders from the silk converters. For dyeing the yarn, for yarn-dyed fabrics, or delivering it back to the thrower where the silk was thrown into yarn and then woven into the various fabrics, and then back to the dyers, of course, and then back to distributors. It

a very exciting industry, and it has practically disappeared in favor of the synthetic industry, which is gigantic, but I may say from my own experience and my own feelings, no synthetic has been yet developed which can replace silk anymore than any fabric or any fibre has ~~been~~ developed which can replace what is to me the miracle fibre, wool. Many of these fabrics have many of the properties of the ~~new~~ original natural fibres, but none of them has all the qualities that the original fibre had. Many of them do things that the original fibres didn't, they have greater lasting qualities, but attendant on those things are other factors which do not make them as desireable. For example, you have wrinkle-proof fabrics. At the same time that a fabric is wrinkle-proof, once it gets a real wrinkle in it, the wrinkle doesn't come out. Of course, the very property which makes it wrinkle-proof is the property of the stiffness of the yarn, and when that yarn is bent, it is actually broken, so that if it gets a hard crease in it, that crease will not be removed in many of these so-called wrinkle-proof, which, or modified to wrinkle resistant fabrics. As well as the great silk industry in this country in that period, and for twenty or twenty-five years after the silk industry had disappeared almost, the wool industry was a great, great industry. We had manufacturers here who made fine woollens equal to many of the other famous woollens of other countries which enjoyed a great popularity because of very fine promotional work. One mill in this country I think was outstanding, and that was the ~~Forsman~~ <sup>FORSTMANN</sup> ~~Company~~ <sup>(?)</sup> Fabric Company, ~~Forsman~~ <sup>FORSTMANN</sup> ~~Company~~ <sup>(?)</sup> Fabrics. It had originally been started either - I don't know the exact dates - but early in the century or even in the latter part of the 19th century, and after Julius ~~Forsman~~ <sup>FORSTMANN</sup> ~~(?)~~, the founder, died, his sons carried on. It was Julius ~~Forsman~~ <sup>FORSTMANN</sup> ~~(?)~~ and Sons, and then



~~FORSTMAN~~ <sup>FORSTMANN</sup>

~~Forsman~~ (?) Fabrics, and later became part of a conglomerate and of course disappeared as

I daresay that ~~Forsmans~~ <sup>FORSTMANN</sup> (?) flannel, for example, was as fine as any ever turned out by the British. It was made of the fine Australian yarns. The quality control was magnificent, so that a defective piece of ~~Forsman~~ <sup>FORSTMANN</sup> fabrics rarely got into the market. They just took the fabric back and took their names off it, and sent it out to jobbers to be sold as a second quality fabric without their name; of course, this kind of merchandising hardly exists anymore. But it resulted in a tremendous faith in ~~Forsman~~ <sup>FORSTMANN</sup> (?) products. I will say that they did not have the styling that the French and the Italians do. Why, I don't know. Time has shown that our stylists and our artists in every field are just as competent as those in other countries. It was simply that they did not apply their talent to the textile art then as they have now, so that fabrics today have all the beauty, all the originality of any anywhere in the world. And in general I would say that our qualities are superior.

S: To get back to the ~~couturier~~ <sup>couture</sup> field, to that part of it for example, the importation of foreign models. . . . When I ~~said~~ say that we copied the foreign models, actually what we did was to have our representatives for many, many years, of course, <sup>that</sup> was Miss ~~FRANKAU~~ <sup>FRANKAU</sup> Franco. Many times Mr. Edwin Goodman would go over with her. Andrew Goodman would sometimes go over and purchase after having ~~gone~~ gone through the foreign collections, the models which we would get and then copy. When these models came in they were turned over to various of our fitters. The fitters would then examine these models, see how they were made, estimate the amount of

yardage that was required of the different fabrics that made up the dress, and then turn their figures over to someone else, from whom I would generally get them to estimate the cost of the various materials and trimmings that went into the models--the cost of the fabrics, the cost of the buttons, the findings, the linings, the embroidery and so forth. After these were all listed, a cost ticket would be made up with this information. For example, six yards of a certain fabric at ~~\$XXX~~ \$30 a yard, eight buttons at \$4.00 each, and so forth and so forth. These cost tickets in turn would be turned over to Max Cohen (P), who then, after consulting with the various fitters in the workroom, would determine the amount of labor required. This total information was then collated, and from this a final selling price for each model was determined. Now what we did with these models was to show them in collections. Our customers came in for the collections. We would show them regularly for a couple of weeks, and then after most of our customers had seen them, we would then show them only to customers that came in at their own time or made appointments to see the collections. Now when a customer selected a given model, that model was then turned over to her fitter who would copy it, who would make a pattern to fit her customer, and from that pattern would make a copy of the model suited for that particular person. It was tremendously expensive to do this sort of thing. In the first place, as I have intimated before, the fabric had to be bought in advance in order to make sure that you were able to fill an order within a reasonable time. Even at that, it might take six to eight weeks for an order to be made, and if you had to wait for additional fabric to come in, there was ~~an~~ <sup>that either</sup> possibility ~~that either~~ <sup>that either</sup> you would never get it, or that it would come in three months <sup>rather long</sup> ~~long~~ after the customer

would want it, and you'd be stuck with it, so that you had to buy what you knew was going to be too much in advance. After a period of years in which we might sell eight or ten copies of a model, the time came when we were selling two, two and a half, one and a half on the average, one and a half - I mean by that if you had two models you might sell three altogether of the two models. But, say you might sell two, three, if a model was tremendously successful you might sell it to five or six customers. Well, basically this was in the nature of what custom clothes should be. They should be more or less individual, and we were at great pains to avoid having customers who lived in the same areas or attended the same kind of functions, prevent them from buying clothes or at least prevent them from buying exact ~~ex~~ copies in the same colors. We tried to make variations to suit the ~~in~~ individual customer. This was very difficult, and timewise it was costly and in the fabric, as I say in having to buy this many fabrics, we at the end of each season would have to dispose of most of these fabrics because they were so clearly intended for one particular outfit that they could not be used again. And this was a tremendous loss. We might lose as much as \$50,000 a season just on the fact that we bought too much fabrics of many things, but we had no choice, because the Customs Department just did not want to have to say no to a customer, "we didn't have the fabrics," even it was necessary to buy thirty yards of a fabric for something of which we need three and a half yards at maybe thirty, ~~xx~~ thirty-five dollars a yard. So that that customer would not be disappointed, and we would take a loss of a few thousand dollars on the deal, but this was the nature of the business, and accounted for the fact that eventually it had to be closed. It just...there was no way of covering the tremendous losses which were entailed in this kind of business. ~~There~~ There were some houses which could work on a smaller scale with fewer customers and have the customers wait



or buy such small quantities of material that the manufacturer would give it to them, and they could survive. But, in the long run, this kind of business just had to go. As a matter of fact, at this point in time, if you will forgive the locution, even the French couture is deteriorating and disappearing. The market for their clothes as a wholesale business has rapidly disappeared for the reasons I've pointed out, and their sales to private ~~individuals~~ and individual customers is decreasing. They, as an industry, have had to resort to developing clothes and selling them as pret a porte, ready to wear. At this they are not too successful. For one thing, they have no ability to manufacture clothes as fine as they are made in our own country on 7th Avenue, for example. They just don't have the knowhow. They don't have the fit, and they don't have the economic sophistication to be able to make this kind of business successful. So that eventually they too will become known to close their doors, and the fashion industry will take on a different aspect, with possibly national inspirations being depended <sup>on</sup> rather than foreign inspirations. This might be a healthy thing. It is quite possible, therefore, that we have seen within our own lifetime the rise and fall of the couture. Or, what I should say, is the rise and fall of the <sup>haute</sup> ~~note~~ couture as an international industry. In any case, so far as we are concerned over here, the day is certainly long since passed when you showed a collection of clothes, and your customers would leave orders for twenty pieces at anywhere from a thousand dollars and up and come in three months later to see the collection over again and "have we added anything since the last collection" because really she just had to go to a special affair and simply had nothing she could wear. This kind of delightful time, I'm afraid, is a thing of the not too much beloved past.

S: Now, Raymond, to get on ~~some~~ to some of your mundane questions. I do not quite see their relevancy, but since you asked them I'll try to answer them.

You ask, is the code for <sup>cost</sup>coats prudential? Quite. If so, why is there a discrepancy between index call cards and *The fabric tags* ?

I don't know quite what you mean. But you ask, what was the numerical sequences year after year for their stock. Uh, well, we started for example with the number 100, and 100 up to a 1,000 was reserved for woollens. One thousand and one to about 1800 (eighteen hundred) was reserved for silks and silk-type fabrics, or dress weights. Nineteen hundred to about twenty-three hundred was reserved for prints. Three thousand, there were just a few hundred numbers, was reserved for metallic brocades, lamés, and novelty evening fabrics. Four thousand series was reserved for linings--chiffons, crepes and so forth. Let me see, I think 6,000 or 7,000, yes 7,000 was reserved for Fur Department fabrics. We also had a separate group of numbers, I think, for the Ready-to-Wear Department, but I've forgotten what it was. Certainly it's not important. Now, as for the matter of changing numbers... If for example, we had the number ~~16~~ sixteen twenty-three one season belonging to a piece of heather pink duchess satin, of which that particular group of numbers contained the satins, and we ran out of that, we would leave it blank for a season, and then the following season we might have to use that number for another piece of a different color of satin. But we did try to group them, our fabrics, within the limits of the numbers I have mentioned, we grouped them still further within those limits into particular type of fabrics. For example, in the wool books, you would find from one hundred - the one hundred group was

*either  
6000 or  
8000 was  
for RTW*

navy fabrics, and navy fabrics began with the low one hundreds with the lighter weight. Now, as they get up to one hundred fifty, sixty, seventy~~8~~, eighty, ninety, they ran into the heavy navy blue coatings. Then with two hundred we started over with light-colored dress weight woolens, and then gradually worked up to multi-colored woolens through the three hundreds to the suit weights and then the coat weights and then the very end of the book beginning with six hundred and running possibly to eight hundred, we would have the black fabrics arranged in the same way <sup>that</sup> the ~~navies~~ were, that is beginning with the light dress-weight fabrics and working up through the suit weights into the very heavy 23, 24 ounce coatings. The rest of it was pretty obvious. I'm sure you don't need <sup>further</sup> any/explanation about that. Now, I have covered most of what you asked me to do. How well, of course, is for you to determine. And, after you've listened to these, if there are any addenda, or repairs or alterations, you can make any you like, and let me know what you are doing, so that if there are anything I disagree with I can change it for you, or if there is any additional information from time to time that you want, I shall try and help you with it. In any case, good luck with whatever this material can help you with. Again, Raymond, I want to tell you that in listening to this tape, when the tape runs off through this end, etc.