

The Glove Industry In Grinnell, Iowa

1856 - 1974

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Gloves are probably one of the oldest kinds of apparel known. From earliest times, human beings have used some kind of covering to protect their hands for heavy laboring and for protection against the elements in seasons of severe weather.

Probably the earliest gloves were domestically made from animal skins sewed together by the most primitive means. Through the years the techniques and skills have improved. The development of the glove industry may have resulted accidentally, as some individuals made gloves for others, to use skins obtained through barter (Redmond p.25).

The first recorded use of gloves seems to have been limited to men and restricted to the ranks of the clergy and the military. It was not until the period of the Reformation that ladies began to wear gloves, during the sixteenth century. Gradually the custom spread to all classes (Ellis p. 7).

Glove making as an industry was first recognized in several locations on the continent of Europe in the tenth century. France was a

recognized leader in the industry and in fact had the first Corporation of Glovers in 1190 A.D. (Ellis p. 5).

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the glove industry in Grinnell, Iowa, and to view it in relation to the development of the country and the glove industry as a whole. The objective will be to understand the establishment and growth of this glove industry by studying:

1. The literature about the growth of the glove industry in America;
2. The historical development of the land and industry in Iowa, and particularly the city of Grinnell in the 1800s;
3. The growth of the glove making factory in Grinnell, Iowa, from its origin in 1856 to the present.

The Glove Industry In America

The beginning of the glove industry in America was in 1760. A company of glovers came from Perthshire in Scotland and settled in Fulton County, New York. (Redmond p. 12) This area, eventually known as Gloversville, New York, became the center of the glove industry, having about half of all the glove making establishments in this country (Redmond p. 86).

Glove making is a needle industry. After the invention of the sewing machine, an ordinary home sewing machine could be used in the production of gloves. For this reason in the early days of the American industry, skins or cut pieces were often delivered to homes to be cut and sewn into gloves to be returned to the factory or store for sale.

In the late 1800s factory organization, better sewing machines and the growth of population in the United States, increased the demand for gloves. (Redmond p. 15) Also at this time the glove industry came under stiff competition from the German and French imports. Higher wages in the United States meant imports could be sold for less than domestically produced goods.

A tariff was secured in 1890 to protect the industry and to meet the demands for increased wages for workers. The adoption of the tariff was the beginning of a period of rapid growth. A second tariff was approved in 1909.

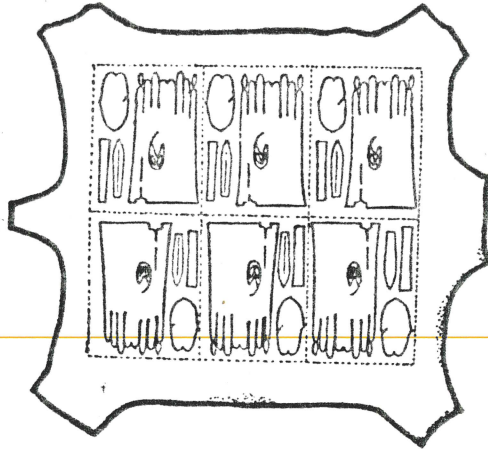
The glove industry reached its maturity during this period from 1890 to 1912. By 1912 there were twenty thousand workers in twenty-seven states (Redmond p. 67).

All glove making is piece work requiring careful attention to detail. For each glove made, care must be given in selecting the leather, stretching it, placing the die, cutting, sewing and finishing (Lannom). Training of the workers for each step of the process in making of fine gloves required a fairly lengthy apprenticeship.

Redmond (p. 19) quotes the following standard processes for leather glove making from the Report of the Bureau of Labor Statistics 1908, Part I:

"...sorting, shaving, cutting, slitting or punching trunks (a rectangular piece of leather from which the glove will eventually be cut), trimming of trunks, needle sewing to prepare the gloves for the silker, silking, pulling, making, hemming or finishing, laying-off, fastening, tacking, examining, sorting, banding and

boxing. Some of the processes blend into others by easy stages, yet in the main they are entirely distinct and most of them require a highly specialized grade of skill."



Showing general method of getting gloves from skin to insure sameness in leather. Parts of leather outside of dotted line are by-products going to make pocket books, etc.

Early History Of The State Of Iowa

And The Town of Grinnell

The white Americans gradually moved from settlements in the East further and further west. In the late 1700's and early 1800's as treaties were made with the native Americans, settlers moved into the areas now known as Illinois and Wisconsin. Eventually they poured into the Iowa area in 1833 in large numbers. By 1850, nearly 192,000 pioneers, mostly from New England, had settled in eastern Iowa. The area which includes Poweshiek County and the city of Grinnell was surrendered by the Sac and Fox (Musquakie) Indians in 1842. The Indians came and went from the land for about eleven more years. In 1857 they were allowed to purchase land and settle in the area where they still reside today near Tama (Parker p. 30-36).

The first permanent settlers in the Poweshiek County area arrived in 1843. The State of Iowa was organized in 1846, and by 1848 when the county was organized, there were 400 residents (Parker p. 38). The settling of Grinnell came in March of 1854.

J. B. Grinnell, the founder, had first traveled to Missouri, but disliked the atmosphere of the slave state. Fortunately, he met the builder of the Rock Island railroad who suggested Mr. Grinnell should go to Iowa. There was a plan to build a railroad across Iowa and one of his building engineers could suggest a desirable location.

The spot selected was a well watered, treeless prairie. The east-west railroad was expected to pass through this area and a flag had been posted at the junction where the topography suggested a north-south line might be laid. The area marked the natural grade between the Iowa and the Des Moines Rivers (Grinnell p. 92).

Census figures for 1856 reported there were 471 people in Grinnell including: 269 males and 202 females; 70 dwellings; 79 landowners. Among the occupations listed were 2 tailors, 3 dressmakers, a shoemaker. Of the 200 workers listed, 27% were farmers, 30% tradesmen, 17% professional and businessmen and 26% laborers (Gifford).

Development of Iowa Industries

Unlike her neighboring states, Iowa had no major metropolitan area that dominated her culture, wealth, or power. Development of states on the western frontier at this time, varied greatly in manufacturing, agriculture, population, transportation and communication.

The expansion of the railroad networks improved access to more raw materials, goods, tastes and markets of the areas to the east and south. Railroads extended from New York to Omaha, Nebraska, after 1870, and many north-south lines were opening (Cole). After 1880, railway stations were

within 25 miles of most Iowans. Iowa ranked fifth of all states in the number of miles of railway. This contributed to the rapid growth of small towns. Nearly all of the tillable land in the state was now being cultivated and the crops could now be exported out of state. The frontier days for Iowa were over (Wall).

No clear definition of what constitutes a factory appears prior to the census of 1910. The Iowa census data, however, reports the number of establishments in Iowa at 522 in 1850, 2,939 in 1860, and 14,819 in 1900. ~~Rapid industrial growth continued after the turn of the~~ century contributing also to the prosperity of Iowa agriculture (Brindly p. 9).

Choosing A Factory Location

Among the factories reported to exist in the 1860 census would have been the Morrison Glove Factory, the subject of this study.

In the study of an industry at any given location, consideration should be directed to showing the natural conditions that favored its development. The availability of raw materials, labor and proximity to markets are three such considerations.

The nearness to markets was less important in the case of gloves because gloves were worn by all people. At the time the company was founded in 1856, Grinnell was a rather remote locaton, with no large market nearby. There was sufficient market locally for all the gloves made in the beginning. Later, the arrival of the first train in 1863

(Grinnell A Century of Progress p. 86) and subsequent railroad expansion enabled the business to reach out to other markets. The 1878 Grinnell City Directory (p. 79) reports that by that time, approximately "one thousand, dozen (pairs of gloves) were sold principally in the State, a few sold to adjoining states of Minnesota, Missouri and Nebraska.

Regarding a potential labor force, as cited earlier, the 1856 census reported a population of 471 people. Two hundred workers were identified with their employment. It is reasonable to assume the remainder were mostly homemakers, children or elderly.

In considering the accessibility of raw materials, again conditions do not seem to favor development of the industry, as there was no readily available source of hides. There were deer in the country, and their skins were used for glove leather. Mr. Morrison also had difficulty in obtaining other suitable material for tanning, as the western oak-bark was not satisfactory. He experimented with smart-weed, sumac and other plants for the tanning process.

The conclusion would have to be that the location was chosen for reasons other than the availability of raw materials, labor or accessibility to large markets.

The Grinnell Glove Factory

Fredrick W. Morrison, founder of the Morrison Glove Factory, left Bath, New Hampshire, with his wife and five children in 1855 (Proceedings p. 32). They migrated to Grinnell, Iowa, to join the "New England Colony" in response to an advertisement placed by J. B. Grinnell in the "Congregationalist" (Morrison p. 1).

Mr. Morrison had learned the tanning business in Littleton, New Hampshire; and Mrs. Morrison had learned glove making in Plymouth, New Hampshire before their departure (Obituary).

Morrison, built a house for the family and started tanning in open vats that he dug at the lower end of his garden. This was Grinnell's first manufacturing company, started in 1856. From this simple beginning emerged the manufacturing enterprise which now claims to be the longest continually operating factory west of the Mississippi.

(Lannom) Today the company operates under the name DeLong Sportswear and makes athletic apparel at the Grinnell site and several other locations throughout the U. S.

Making all kinds of leathers for harnesses, horse collars, shoes and gloves in a general tanning business was Morrison's original plan. Since a variety of hides was not available, he eventually concentrated and profited most with glove making from deerskin he tanned. His workshop was the family kitchen. The gloves were cut on a pine board with a shoe-knife, and Mrs. Morrison sewed them up by hand (Glove Tips).

By 1859, he was able to finance the building of a tannery (Grinnell A Century...p. 30). In 1863 a new tanning material "Gambier" was purchased. He combined it in such a way to create a process that produced a very fine leather--the foundation for the successful glove business for many years to come. Manufacturers in the East repeatedly tried to obtain the process (Grinnell Directory 1878, p. 80) and urged him to come work in Goversville, New York (Glove Tips).

The supply of deer skins exhausted, goat skins were purchased in

Boston to meet the demand for gloves. The business was growing fast. It outgrew the home, and shared a building with a harness shop; additional workers were hired to sew in their homes; and the means of cutting out gloves became too slow.

David Morrison joined his father in the business in 1872, and it became F.W. Morrison and Son. He was sent to Gloversville to purchase dies and blocks to improve cutting of the leather. Grinnell Goat Gloves won a good reputation and were widely known now.

Fredrick died in 1876. David knew little of the tanning part of the business, and a tanner he hired proved unsatisfactory. Being determined to continue the business, he worked hard to retain the prestige of his father. Sales in 1876 were \$9000.00 (Glove Tips). He lost everything he had, but kept his credit good. According to the Grinnell Directory 1978 (p. 79):

"Morrison's Glove Factory...The specialty of the manufacture is the Goat Skin Glove. To the perfect tanning and fitting of the goat skin for a glove the late F. W. Morrison gave years of careful attention, added to a life long experience in the tanning business, and the result of which is that the manufacturer is turning out a goatskin glove nearly as soft and pliable as a buckskin, and more durable, and which will not get hard in wear."

By 1888 sales were \$50,000.00; and the 1900 Proceedings of the Old Settlers Association states the company employed 125 operatives and had an annual output of about \$250,000 (p. 32).

The great fire on June 12, 1889, destroyed most of Grinnell's

business district (Grinnell Herald Register p. 17) including the glove factory plant. The company's capital was reduced by one third (Glove Tips).

A. McIntosh bought one half interest in the business in 1882. E. C. Wadsworth joined the firm in 1891; at his death, his son E. A. Wadsworth assumed his interest. B. J. Ricker became a partner in 1895. Later Mr. Ricker bought out the McIntosh interests, and Fredrick Morrison, David's son, took the Wadsworth interest in 1903. The company name was changed to Morrison-Ricker Manufacturing, Company around 1907. In 1912 the company applied to the United States Patent Office to register a trade-mark to be used on the products produced. (Appendix)

Part of the present plant was built in 1896. It has been altered, expanded and used in different ways through the years. The headquarters of the DeLong's Sportswear occupy the original building today.

A legal case of interest was reported in the Redmond document to have occurred about this time (p. 38): United States v. Morrison...May 14, 1901. The objection being made was against Morrison of Grinnell, Iowa, for aid he provided in bring^{ing}/from Prague, Austria, Adolph Zuza, a cutter of ladies kid gloves. Following the hearing, the decision ruled that importation of cutters could not be stopped.

After the turn of the century, the firm continued to grow. Catalogues including photographs of the products were produced to show examples of the wide variety of gloves available. A national advertising campaign was begun. It included ads in specialized magazines like the Locomotive Engineers Journal, and magazines of general popularity

like The Saturday Evening Post. (See appendix). A force of 20 to 30 salesmen traveled the country.

A catalogue called "Grinnell Gloves" produced for the Morrison-Ricker Manufacturing, Company, includes data about the company operations and product promotion in the early teens. Of particular interest is information pertaining to:

Location-~~"To the southwest is the principal hide producing region of this country..."~~

"...Being located in the very heart of the middle West, we can deliver gloves quickly..."

Advertising- "...For many years we have been the largest and most constant glove advertisers in the leading journals for automobilists, physicians, farmers, railroadmen, sportsmen hunters, trappers, and other large users of gloves."

Plant- "...the most complete and modern glove manufacturing plant in the country." (p. 2)

"We own and occupy our own tannery and glove factory--largest combination glove plant in America selling direct to the retail dealer." (p. 3)

"All machines ...are driven by electricity."

"From hide to the finished product Grinnell Gloves are in the hands of experts..." (p. 2)

"...our shipping room has made it possible for us to have 1500 orders started on the floor at one time." (p. 14)

"...almost every process is done by machinery." (p. 20)

"All leather is measured on standard measuring machines giving accurately the number of square feet in each piece of leather." (p. 28)

Product- "...Grinnell Gloves have many exclusive patented features of style and comfort...the unrivaled 'Rist-Fit' the patented 'V' of soft leather set in the cuff...the original wrist fastening gauntlet...for summer wear...the 'Ventilated' back..."

"...numerous styles for all demands, for all climates, at all prices."

"The leading styles...about one-tenth of our line, are illustrated in this book." (p. 2) Ninety-two different gloves are actually pictured in the catalogue.

"Before banding and boxing, every glove is carefully and critically examined to insure that every pair is in perfect condition." (p. 12)

Distribution- "Shipments of gloves...are made regularly, not only to every state in the Union but also to Canada, Mexico, Panama, Cuba, South America, Hawaii, Japan, Australia and New Zealand." (p. 16)

Grinnell Gloves continued to enjoy substantial success in the teens, becoming the world's largest manufacturer of gauntlet gloves (Seeland). In 1921, a sales office was maintained in New York City (Lannom).

In the early twenties technological developments were not

particularly beneficial to the glove industry. The enclosed automobile provided protection from the elements in inclement weather, and the warm Grinnell Gloves which had been very popular in open carriages were no longer essential. Sales began to decline and the company fell on hard times.

In an attempt to keep the company solvent, Morrison and Ricker ~~sought other leather products to manufacture along with the gloves.~~ Their Chicago banker suggested ^{that} the G. Sharp Lannom owned factory in Tullahoma, Tennessee, and the Grinnell factory might enhance each other's business. Lannom agreed and the companies began to work together.

Lannom came to Grinnell in 1924. By this time Frank Shults had become a partner, and the company name was changed to Morrison-Shults Manufacturing, Company. In addition to gloves, a new line of sporting goods was introduced. Products included: baseballs, basketballs, footballs, soccer balls, mits, boxing gloves, helmets, etc. (Seeland). Business remained slow and bankruptcy was declared.

The Chicago bank assigned Lannom the receiver in the liquidation process. He then revamped the manufacture, reducing the glove line to the gloves that continued to sell well, ~~began~~ selling the large inventory of out of style merchandise, settling the accounts and back taxes. He began to rebuild the company.

Lannom was a good sales manager, successfully stimulating competition among the sales representatives. Young men right out of college were trained for the job by working in the factory the first six months for \$75 a month. Given a multi-state territory to cover, they

then went on the road for \$125 per month, a new car and expenses. Each was expected to sell \$25,000.00 a year, a 5% bonus to be paid sales above the quota. The men were not allowed to marry until they had saved \$2000 (DeLong).

The depression years were slower, but the company managed to adjust to the changing times. According to the 1940 City Directory, (p. 12) ~~the company produced 300,000 pairs of gloves and employed 180 full~~ time workers in 1939.

Charles DeLong joined the firm as a salesman in 1931. Living in Gary, Indiana, he covered his territory quickly and well. In his time off he borrowed \$1000 from his father. In Chicago he bought the makings-- leather, wool, zippers, etc. for jackets, and started a small jacket factory in his home. He sold gloves and jackets in his territory and soon other glove salesmen wanted jackets too.

The Grinnell factory workers learned jacket making from DeLong and the first jackets were produced at the Grinnell factory in 1939. All materials were then closely allocated during the war, and the jacket line was discontinued. Gloves were made for military use and the small number remaining each year were sold within a month by the salesman.

DeLong had moved to Grinnell, bought a big home, and once again started making jackets in his ^{free} time from glove factory. He used whatever materials he could get, over two or three years gradually went from two sewers to twenty employees. He left Morrison-Shults and went full time with two partners in the jacket business. The factory moved two or three times to larger quarters in the years that followed.

The Morrison-Shults company, now under the direction of G. Sharp Lannom, Jr., bought another tannery at Lynchburg, Tennessee, in 1946. This factory also made gloves. The Grinnell factory continued to profit from glove making but the line was gradually reduced to men and boys fur lined and dress gloves until gloves were discontinued in 1974.

Following the death of G. Sharp Lannom Jr. in the early sixties, his son G. Sharp Lannom III took over the Grinnell company.

DeLong, now firmly established in the jacket business bearing his name, was looking to sell the company. Lannom bought 20% of the jacket business. Over the next ten years, he bought out the remainder of the assets including the "DeLong Sportswear" name.

Today the company headquarters and a factory are located in Grinnell employing 353 people. At this plant award jackets and sport uniforms are manufactured including: wrestling, soccer, basketball, football, softball, baseball and volleyball uniforms.

DeLong Sportswear also has factories in ten other locations in Iowa, Tennessee, Texas, Maine and Ohio.

Summary

The glove factory, subject of this study, had very humble beginnings in the newly settled frontier town of Grinnell, Iowa. The development of the company has paralleled that of the state and town within which it resides.

The founder, F. W. Morrison, learned his trade among tanners in the East. Migrating west to a location that seemed to have little to

offer for development of his trade, Morrison created a successful business.

The company sold gloves of excellent quality from its conception in 1856 until 1974. At one time over 800 different kinds of gloves and mittens were being sold. Other merchandise such as sporting goods and sportswear were added to the product line in the last fifty years to maintain the company and enhance profits.

Appendix