

Oral History Interview with Robert Riley

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Riley recalls the greatest shock of his life: hearing that the White Furniture factory in Mebane was closing. While Riley remembers the news as a shock, he remembers also that the arrival of new management and a weak economy sent a clear message that the plant was at risk.

Audio

File:

Duration: 4:09

Transcript:

Audio Transcript
Chris Stewart When the Hillsborough plant was sold out is that when you moved over to Mebane?
Robert Riley, Sr. Well, the Hillsborough plant wasn't totally sold out, but I think it was in the makings. I didn't really know, but when I was asked to go to Mebane to that packing department they had some problems over there, so I went over in the packing department hoping to be able to help there and to try to make things run a little smoother. I was over there, I guess, maybe a year and a half before they decided to phase the Hillsborough plant out. Hickory had taken over at that time, so when they phased out the Hillsborough plant he had about twenty to twenty-five of those employees go over to the Mebane plant. The others were just unemployed. But as things rocked on down I think it was October or November in 1993 when we were told that Mebane was closing. It was a real shocker to me because I had been there so long and I planned to retire there. We worked there and everybody stayed there until his or her job was completed. And the way they did it they phased out certain departments at a time. If you stayed there until your job was completed you got a two-week severance pay. Some did and some found other jobs and moved on. I guess that was the biggest shock of my entire life in the president saying that we're going to have to shut the doors. **Chris Stewart** When did you find out? **Robert Riley, Sr.** They gave us a sixty-day notice. **Chris Stewart** Was it in December? **Robert Riley, Sr.** I think it was around November or December is when they told us that in ninety days they would start phasing men out. Actually I think the phasing part started sometime around January--the first phase of it. I didn't actually leave until the 15th day of April of 1993. What happened was at that time I was driving a truck. Our furniture show is every April, we have two shows, October and April. They were getting ready for the April show and any furniture that they needed from the Mebane plant to the High Point showroom they needed somebody there to be able to bring it backwards and forwards. So I stayed with them until the day of the show. That's the reason I stayed as long as I did. **Chris Stewart** Did you hear talk? Were people talking about it before you actually heard? **Robert Riley, Sr.** Oh, yeah, you could halfway see the handwriting on the wall. **Chris Stewart** What were they saying? **Robert Riley, Sr.** Well, after Hickory took over and started bringing in management from different companies with different ideas and different opinions, and the economy was kind of weak too. You could put it all together and you could halfway see the handwriting on the wall. So what Hickory chose to do was--which I guess was a smart move for Hickory--was to move a few key pieces of furniture from the Mebane plant to the Hickory plant, and at a certain time take the production from the Mebane plant to the Hickory plant and made a strong base to the Hickory plant leaving the people at the Mebane plant. **Chris Stewart** High and dry. **Robert Riley, Sr.** High and dry, high and dry.

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