

Robbins, Karl ^[1]

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Robbins, Karl

by Warren L. Bingham, 1994

1892–12 Mar. 1960

Karl Robbins, textile manufacturer and philanthropist, was born near Kiev, Russia, and in 1905 moved to New York, where his father had already been living for four years and operating a small clothing store. Clothing and fabrics interested Karl Robbins, and he began buying and selling fabrics in New England.

Robbins first purchased goods from small manufacturers of dress goods, but as he became more established in textiles he began to buy from large firms such as the Burlington Mills Corporation. By the late 1920s he was a stockholder in Burlington Mills. In 1930 he bought the Pinehurst Silk Mills, Inc., in Hemp, N.C., and began working to make his mill a leader in the production of rayon. The mill continuously expanded and improved; it was so prosperous that there was no period of unemployment, even during the worst of the Great Depression.

Recognized for his interest in his employees and the people of Hemp, Robbins made many improvements in the mill to provide more comfortable working conditions and he initiated work bonuses and low-cost insurance programs. For the town of Hemp he financed many projects, such as the building of a baseball park, a community center, tennis courts, and a playground and improvements to the local schools and churches. He was also responsible for lowering the town tax rate, paving streets and sidewalks, providing a dial telephone system, and buying a new fire truck. In 1943 the town's name was changed to Robbins in his honor.

By acquiring textile plants in [Red Springs](#) ^[2], [Aberdeen](#) ^[3], and [Rocky Mount](#) ^[4], N.C., and in Clarksville, Va., Robbins developed a textile empire. In addition, he built a large plant in Raeford that afterwards was operated by Burlington Mills. In 1954 he sold 41 percent of the common stock of Robbins Mills to J. P. Stevens and Company and retired to devote himself to philanthropy.

Robbins was generous with his wealth. He served as chairman of the Research Triangle Committee during its planning stages and donated over 4,000 acres to the state for the site of the research park. He founded a medical school at [Yeshiva University](#) ^[5] in New York City and was a founder of the [Federation of Jewish Philanthropies of New York](#) ^[6] and a patron of the [New York University–Bellevue Medical Center](#) ^[7]. In 1951 he established the Karl Robbins Scholarship Fund at the [Massachusetts Institute of Technology](#) ^[8] to further textile technology.

Although Robbins resided in [Pinehurst](#) ^[9], his permanent address was New York City. He and his wife Mary had three children: Edgar, Allan, and Anita. He died in New York City.

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