

A Look Back in Time

Nylon Capital of the World

Read this article and Seaford Historian Jim Bowden's commentary.

Workers Flood Seaford, Seek Jobs Building DuPont Plant

Seaford, Del., Jan. 4—Seaford became the mecca for hundreds of workers seeking employment at the beginning of the new year. These workers evidently thought that construction work on the \$8,000,000 textile plant of the DuPont Company here would begin at the opening of the new year.

It is estimated that from 300 to 500 workers, including carpenters, masons, plumbers, and laborers visited Seaford yesterday hoping to secure jobs at the new plant.

Construction work on the plant has not begun. These workers, coming in motor vehicles and on foot, were principally from nearby sections, with a scattering of people from the eastern cities.

This vanguard of workers gave Seaford an idea of what to expect when actual construction work on the DuPont plant gets under way. When construction work is at its peak from 1000 to 1500 workers may be employed. Mayor George W. Donoho, members of city council and the town's housing committee say that Seaford will do everything humanely possible to take care of the extra people in the way of housing and feeding them. Scores of Seaford's homes will be thrown open to take care of the workers. Extra bedrooms are ready to receive the workers in many local homes.

Notwithstanding actual construction of the plant has not begun there is a hum of activity at the site where the plant is to be built. Artesian wells are being driven, surveying and land testing is still going on, grading and laying of railroad sidings is under way, and an air of activity pervades the entire 340 acres of the DuPont Company. Local contractors say that the weather is the only thing holding the town back from the greatest building boom in its history, and that "when the blue birds sing again" Seaford will be a hum of activity from one end to the other. As many of the workers in the plant after it is built may make Seaford their future home, local contractors and real estate firms say that by that time there will be enough new and modern homes built here to take care of all who move from a distance to Seaford.

In 1939, hundreds of unemployed workers, some with families, flooded Seaford looking for jobs in the "Cinderella town." Once the news had spread across the country like wildfire of the coming of an \$8,000,000 nylon plant at Seaford, many workers came from as far away as Louisiana and Texas for jobs here. They thought the building would be in full swing at the first of 1939.

Seaford struggled to house and feed the influx of workers but by the time Spring came around even more workers showed up to live the American dream of working again after the Great Depression. Many Seaford families opened their doors to help house the new people. The rest is history of a company town that bloomed for many decades.

Mr. Bowden mentions "the Great Depression." Go online to learn a little more about the Great Depression, and then list three things about what happened in the United States during that time.

Secondary
Activity 1.2
DuPont

List two ways that the Great Depression and the COVID pandemic are similar, and list two ways that they are different.

What is meant by the term “Cinderella Town?”



This photograph accompanied the article on page 1. Given what you read, what do you think this photo says about the people in it?

The DuPont Plant Opens

One of Mr. Bowden’s readers said this about the opening of the Nylon plant:

“My daddy helped build the plant. He said that when it was getting near completion, he would stop by the guardhouse every day at lunchtime and ask if they were hiring yet. One day they said they would start hiring at the end of that day. He told my Uncle Vernon and when the whistle blew signaling the end of the day, he and Uncle Vernon went running to the guardhouse to be the first two hired for the plant. He was there for more than 30 years.”

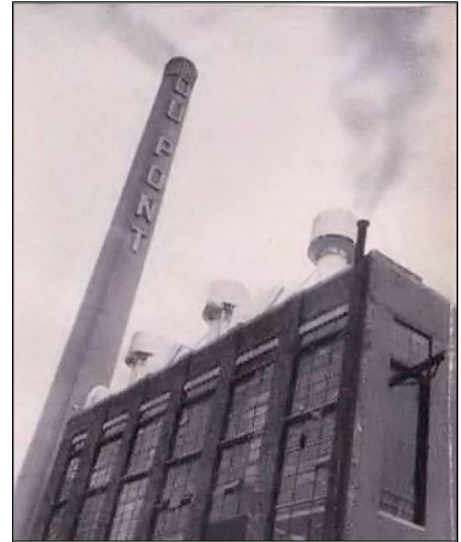
Many things changed in Seaford with the opening of the Nylon plant. For many decades more than 2,000 people worked there and many more worked in businesses that supported the plant.

List 5 things that are in Seaford because of the Nylon plant.

How do you think the opening of the DuPont Nylon plant changed the culture of our town?

Another of Mr. Bowden's readers wrote the following reply to his post about the opening of the DuPont plant in Seaford:

"It has bitter memories for some. Two deaths at the plant and all those people who have mesothelioma [a type of cancer caused by exposure to asbestos – a mineral used to insulate pipes]. But, it provided many families with food on their table and a roof over their heads."



DuPont and other companies have been in the news because of people getting sick from exposure to chemicals and pollutants from their factories. Given everything you've read in this lesson, are factories like the Nylon plant in Seaford, good for a community or bad? Defend your response.

Talk to someone who worked (or works) at the Nylon plant, or remembers when the plant was the biggest employer in town, and write about how that person feels about the relationship of the plant to our city.

Bonus Activity:

Use this link to see an amateur movie about the opening of the Seaford Nylon plant. (In those days, home movies didn't have sound).

https://digital.hagley.org/FILM_1990266_FC01?solr_nav%5Bid%5D=8e01b00bbc19ecff4b21&solr_nav%5Bpage%5D=0&solr_nav%5Boffset%5D=3&fbclid=IwAR1epdLYMmr6howD9PuDTNqDA22yRWBKpndpCOd_J7whDh-BZn8zZ1zVJFw

Other than it being in black-and-white with no sound, what are three things in the film that stand out to you?

Write down a question that you have about the Seaford Nylon plant as a result of watching this film. Go online, or find someone who remembers the plant to see if you can get an answer to that question.