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Cohn left his mark

In 1939, when the Electro-Motive Co. moved to Willimantic from its location on Southern Boulevard in the Bronx, it brought a number of talented individuals to the Thread City who left their mark on the community.

One such person was engineer Herbert Cohn.

Cohn settled in Willimantic, but in 1952 he left Electro-Motive and established a small company named Akim Engineering to manufacture hook and eyes for the clothing industry. Cohn took over the old cabinet making factory of Hillhouse and Taylor, located at 47 Milk St. and began production with just five employees. Cohn

created the name Akim to be a short and distinctive trademark, one easily pronounced, spelled and remembered and one listed near the top of telephone books and business directories.



Tom Beardsley

Business increased rapidly, and in September 1957, Cohn purchased Abe Cooperman's New England Pants factory on Ash Street, constructed in 1947 and transferred production there.

Cohn was a creative inventor, and successfully patented several machines to mass produce hooks and eyes. In 1960, he announced the invention of a press stop designed to control the millions of metal strips used by punching machines employed in all kind of industries. The device had been in the process of development and testing for two years, and driven by a small electric motor it weighed only 9 pounds. Unlike the patented Akim hook and eye machines, which Cohn leased to garment manufacturers across the nation, he sold the new press stop outright.

Cohn also announced the creation of a new division of the company to manufacture the press stops, applicable to metal punches used in industries ranging from the automobile and the business machine to the electronic and electrical fields as well as the making of typewriters, screws,

bottle caps and fountain pens. He appointed H. Keeney Lathrop, the treasurer of the Brand Rex Co., as the new division's senior executive.

After initially manufacturing hooks and eyes, Cohn turned his attention to machines that attached the hooks and eyes to trousers and skirts. The Ash Street factory housed 17 punch presses, which punched the hooks and eyes out of metal strips. However, defects in the metal and mistimed feeds had caused the breakage of the punch dies. Cohn strove to solve the problem by designing a regulator, which resulted in the new press stop that detected torn and bent edges on the metal strips.

Akim employed 60 people and the company intended to hire more before the end of the year to work in its newest and third division.

The factory housed a special engineering division, which employed skilled mechanics and die makers to develop new machinery. There was also a division employing semi-skilled operators who punched the hooks and eyes out of the strips. The company's plant manager, Charles Halbach of Hampton, ensured the completion of all orders and delivery to customers within a week.

If you worked at Akim Engineering when it was in full production, send me an e-mail at tom@threadcity, or write to me at the Chronicle. I am interested to know if anyone has photographs of the factory when it was ran by Cooperman or Cohn.