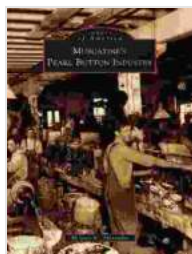


The Muscatine Pearl Button Industry: A Legacy of Craftsmanship



Muscatine's Pearl Button Industry by Melanie K. Alexander

★★★★☆ 4.7 out of 5

Language : English

File size : 40213 KB

Text-to-Speech : Enabled

Screen Reader : Supported

Enhanced typesetting : Enabled

Word Wise : Enabled

Print length : 128 pages

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The Muscatine Pearl Button Industry was a major force in the city of Muscatine, Iowa, from the late 19th century to the mid-20th century. At its peak, the industry employed thousands of workers and produced millions of buttons each year. The buttons were made from freshwater mussel shells, which were harvested from the Mississippi River and its tributaries.

The industry began in Muscatine in the 1870s, when a local inventor named John F. Boepple developed a machine that could cut and polish mussel shells into buttons. Boepple's invention revolutionized the button industry, making it possible to produce buttons quickly and efficiently.

Within a few years, Muscatine became the leading center of pearl button production in the United States.

The Muscatine Pearl Button Industry employed a wide range of workers, from skilled artisans to unskilled laborers. The most important workers were the button cutters, who used Boepple's machine to cut the mussel shells into buttons. Other workers included sorters, who graded the buttons by size and quality; finishers, who polished the buttons; and packers, who packaged the buttons for shipment.

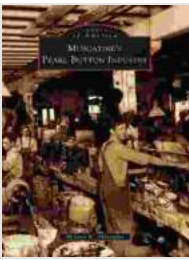
The Muscatine Pearl Button Industry reached its peak in the early 20th century. In 1910, there were over 20 button factories in Muscatine, employing over 5,000 workers. The industry produced over 100 million buttons each year, which were sold all over the world.



However, the industry began to decline in the mid-20th century. The advent of plastic buttons made pearl buttons less popular, and the rising cost of labor made it difficult for Muscatine manufacturers to compete with foreign producers.

The last pearl button factory in Muscatine closed in 1964. However, the legacy of the industry lives on. The Muscatine Pearl Button Museum tells the story of the industry and its impact on the city. The museum is housed in a former button factory, and it features exhibits on the history of the industry, the button-making process, and the workers who made Muscatine the "Pearl Button Capital of the World."

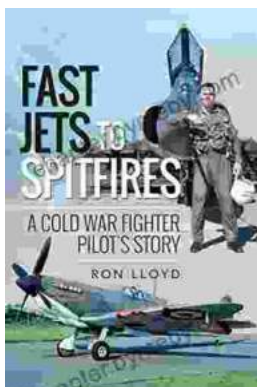
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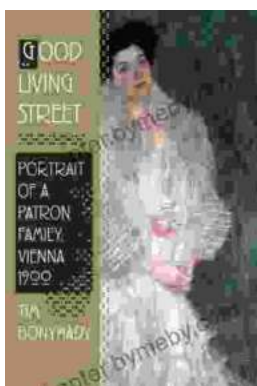
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