

nant, producers of leather gloves are quite vulnerable to an eventual lowering of tariffs.⁴ The increase in wool gloves imports—cut and sewn fabric gloves, as well as seamless knit gloves—would probably be “moderate.”⁵

The bulk of the American leather glove industry is concentrated in one upstate New York area, Fulton County.⁶ For some years (March 1952 to September 1955) this area was classified as one of substantial labor surplus.⁷

Gloversville and Johnstown are twin cities which contain the bulk of Fulton County's population (53,000 in 1954) and industry. The economy of the two towns and of the county revolves around gloves.

The leather industry (glovemaking and leather tanning) accounts for about two-thirds of the manufacturing employment of about 10,000 people in Fulton County. Altogether, nearly 90 percent of the area's factory workers are closely allied with the glove industry, including the production of knit gloves, glove linings, knit fabric production, and cut and sewn fabric gloves from knit fabric.

Glovemaking entails seasonal employment. But glove firms make it a practice to recall workers for orders coming in, and then laying them off when orders are completed. This practice affords a considerable volume of partial work. The staggering of work (or stagger week) is undertaken in agreement with the unions. Most wage earners earn some money during half of the week, and draw unemployment compensation for the remainder of the week. Unemployment benefits are less quickly exhausted, and workers can meet the minimum requirement of 20 weeks employment and of earning at least \$300 in any given year in order to be eligible for unemployment benefits.⁸

Because of these arrangements the Gloversville area has been able to get along through years of successive crises. Another, and perhaps even more important reason is that in many families both husband and wife work in the glove factories: Even when they are both jobless, they can subsist on unemployment insurance and other social benefits.

A third saving feature until recently has been the proximity of Schenectady with its strong demand for labor. In late 1953, for example, some 2,500 Fulton County residents worked for General Electric or Alco Products there, or at the Naval Ordnance Depot at Scotia. An additional 500 or 600 were employed by the carpet mills at Amsterdam.

THE DOMESTIC LEATHER GLOVE INDUSTRY

Early tariff protection of glovemaking in the United States⁹ encouraged an industry which has become essentially uneconomic on

⁴ See also Humphrey, Don D., “American Imports” (New York 1955) p. 401.

⁵ Piquet, op. cit., p. 89.

⁶ Nearly two-thirds of all leather-glove producing plants are located in New York State. A smaller concentration of plants exists in Wisconsin and Illinois.

⁷ See also Randall Commission, “Staff Papers,” pp. 401–406.

⁸ Unemployment insurance and related payments constitute a subsidy to the community. In view of the stable character of the arrangements in Fulton County, these payments have constituted a sustaining, not an adaptive, intervention on the part of the Government.

⁹ The development of the domestic industry was fostered by a protective tariff in 1862. In 1872 the tariff on imported skins was removed, paving the way for the manufacture of fine gloves. See Goldwasser and Huber, loc. cit., p. 36.