



## S.C Hall of Fame Transcript

### *James Lide Coker*

[James Coker IV:]

James Lide Coker... who was the son of Caleb Coker and Hannah Lide. One of his sons was Charles Westfield Coker. One of Charles Westfield Coker's sons was James Lide Coker the Third who was my father. And I'm James Lide Coker the Fourth.

**["Lide" has a long "i" rhymes with "ride"]**

[Narrator:]

**James Lide Coker, the First, was born January 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1837 in Society Hill, Darlington County, South Carolina. He attended The Citadel College, but was expelled because of an altercation with his math professor, returning home to his father Caleb...**

So you send your young son off to college. And he goes to college, and he gets sent home for challenging a professor to a duel... Well you know Caleb said something to the tune of, and I'm imaging this—he says, Well son that's too bad that Charleston didn't work out for you, why don't you go up to Harvard to study, maybe you'll do better there.

**So James spent a year at Harvard studying scientific principles of farming.**

**In 1860, James Coker married Susan Stout of Alabama, with whom he would have ten children. He was a planter in Hartsville when the Civil War began answering the call as an infantry commander, wounded at the Battle of Chickamauga. During five months recuperating in a prison hospital, Coker spent his time brainstorming with a textile entrepreneur from Massachusetts...**

They apparently came up with the idea that you could replace the wooden cones that we used in the textile industry with a paper cone—it would be lighter, easier to ship, and it would cost less. So, after the war, he's back in what is going to become Hartsville... And we're going to try to see if we can do this business of making paper cones. Well first you have to have paper.



They buy a junk paper machine from England. Have it sent over. They put it together, they get people who can work it, they learn from building a junk paper machine how to make paper. Then they together invent the mechanics for making paper cones.

And so that by 1899, \$1500 worth of paper cones was sold to the textile industry in New England, and that was the birth of the Southern Novelties Company.

Now it started as two companies—one was the Southern Novelties Company which made the cones from the paper. And that business he gave to his son Charles Westfield. Then to his other son James Lide was the paper end of it, the Carolina Fiber Company, which made the paper which then was sold to the Southern Novelties Company. And it was the junction of those that my father made in the 1930's—that made it Sonoco.

And today the company I think is on the neighborhood of four billion in sales and plants—approximately about 200 plants in the United States and all around the world in industrial and consumer packaging. But it all started from that paper cone.

**Coker, who by this time was known in Hartsville as simply “The Major,” was involved in many enterprises...**

He started the store. Which was J.L. Coker & Company, which became a major department store in Hartsville. He started the Coker Pedigreed Seed, which was the seed growing and scientific—tobacco planting, scientific cotton planting—and literally organic seed breeding.

**Coker also established the National Bank of Darlington, the Darlington Manufacturing Company, the Eastern Carolina Silver Company, and in 1889 he brought the Cheraw and Darlington Railroad to Hartsville. Later, he started his own railroad company.**

**The Major was a driving force behind the founding of Welsh Neck High School, which would become Coker College...**

One of his most important legacies was the starting and financing of the college... I think that one of the things the Major realized was so very important was the education of women and the providing opportunities for women to get a good strong classically oriented education... Because he realized the importance of education for young people... So his support for the college, as well as for other educational institutions was a real sort of centerpiece in his philosophy.



**Representing Hartsville in the South Carolina General Assembly, Coker introduced the state's first legislation for public education. He also served as Mayor of Hartsville.**

**Major James Lide Coker died June 27<sup>th</sup>, 1918. Beyond his impressive industrial and agricultural achievements, it was said that he was a man whose strongest principle was "an absolute inflexibility between what was right and what was wrong." A man who believed in the dignity of people. Whose legacy resides within the company he started...**

His values and ethics are still powerfully felt in Sonoco today. Sonoco's main goals are not just profits and earnings per share. Employee relations, the fair treatment of employees, honesty, safety of employees and how employees must be protected and kept safe on the job, the ethics which guide the company—not only in dealing with shareholders and financial institutions, but dealing with customers and even dealing with competitors. The sense of ethics and values permeates the company and are equally as important as the financial goals. And all of these were things that the Major left as unmistakable values to be supported in all of the businesses that he started.