

**Kershaw's Oil Mill**  
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of their income from cotton, but that by 1950 it furnished only a quarter. This was not because we were producing less overall but because we were diversifying into other crops and in livestock. By the late 1950's several cottonseed mills in the state (including Kershaw's) began to process soybeans as well. The two crops dovetailed or alternated because of their different seasons. Also the beans required less machinery, as there were no difficult hulls and lint to remove. At the beginning of 1960, the oil mill in Estill became the first in the state to totally abandon cottonseed for soybeans.

Kershaw was still handling cottonseed too, which led to an odd story that September. A middle-aged black man from Boykin had driven up with a truckload of cotton seed for his employer, Mr. T.J. Wooten. As he left for home on highway 521, he became ill, got out of his truck and lay down by the roadside for four or five hours, lapsing into unconsciousness. Finally a passerby stopped, found his apparently lifeless form and went back to Kershaw for a mortician. He was in the mortuary for some time before it was discovered he was not dead but seriously ill; he was then taken to a local doctor (who is still with us) and was revived with injections of glucose and other drugs, saving him from death by ptomaine poisoning.

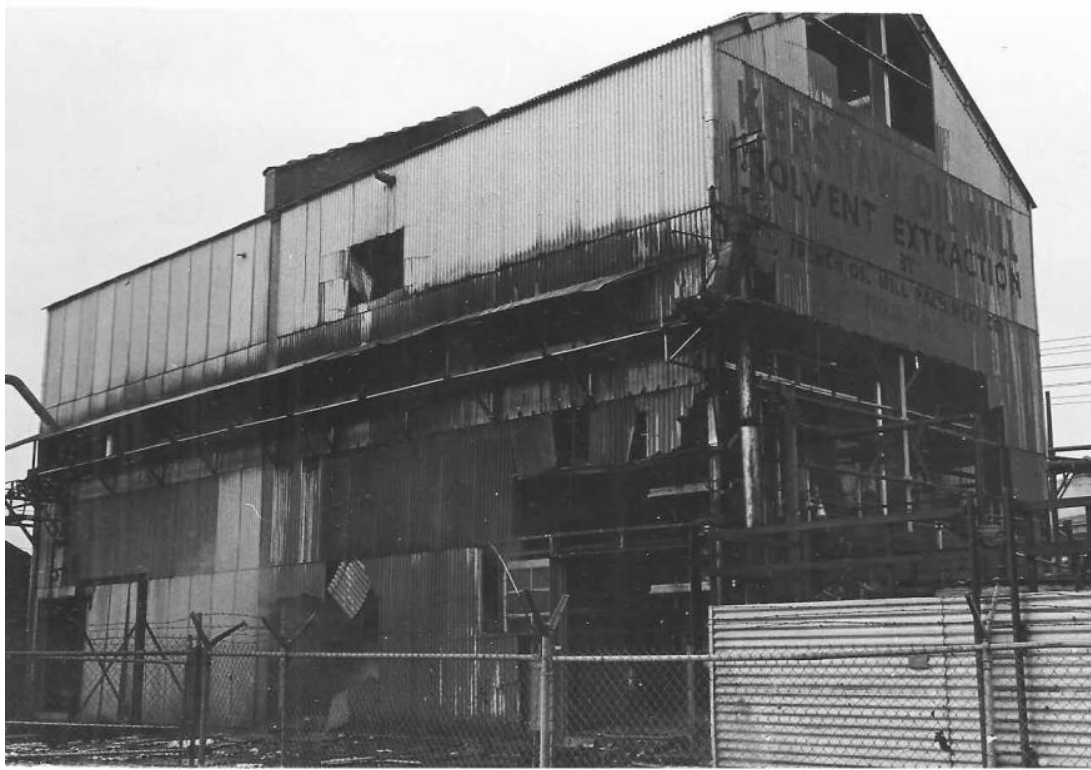
In July 1961, a \$400,000 expansion was announced, with a solvent extraction plant to be built across the railroad tracks from the original plant. The huge soybean tank had been completed by 15 December, and the contractor

was bringing in steel to build catwalks and elevator lifts for it. Their engineering foreman, William T. Wright, came with a crane for unloading the heavy steel, but his crane struck a high-voltage electrical wire and killed him almost instantly.

By 1966 cottonseed had become much scarcer, and soybeans took over the business. Crushing of the beans for their crude oil and meal was done at Kershaw, Cameron, Estill and Hartsville, though only Hartsville had the capacity to refine the oil they produced. The state produced more than twenty-one million bushels of beans that year, and half of the crop was crushed in its own mills, with a significant portion processed at another mill just over the state line at Augusta. The meal was used for poultry food and the hulls for cattle feed. The Kershaw facility built a new storage tank late that year, doubling their capacity to more than two million bushels. The new tank was more than ninety feet high and 142 feet in diameter. All this expansion was done under the leadership of then-president R.A. Beckham.

That almost half million dollar solvent plant made many of its neighbors nervous. It used a very combustible hexane gas to extract oil from the beans and was only a half block from the town library, two hundred yards from the grammar school, and quite close to a number of dwellings. It was a tall building of corrugated metal and was surrounded by a chain-link fence. Two extractor tanks sat on its ground floor; each was 19 feet in diameter and 38 feet tall. Right beside it was a 7,000 gallon solvent storage tank full of beans.

On a beautiful afternoon,



29 April 1970, school had let out, and the people of Kershaw were quietly going about their daily routines. At the solvent plant, however, six workers (four black and two white men) had been on the job since two that morning and were working overtime to repair and clean the apparatus. Plant engineer J.L Tennent, Jr. was about to enter the building when he heard a rumble. "I hit the dirt," he later said, falling between that building and the big storage tank. Two or three seconds later, a huge explosion rocked the entire town and its environs. Jimmy Green was watering his lawn four hundred yards away and saw the very trees in his yard shake. The combat veteran said he had never heard so fearsome a noise. One of the neighbors witnessed a dismembered body flying through the air. Five of the workers ran out of the solvent plant, their clothing on fire. Tennent tackled them and

tried to put out the flames. One worker, Tom McCain, had been on a catwalk and was killed instantly.

Meanwhile the town was alive with rumors. One said that the cotton mill in Lancaster had been bombed, and several men left for that town to check on their wives. Jimmy Green told authorities, "We've been expecting that thing to blow up." For two days everyone was kept at some distance while Kershaw and Camden firemen kept jets on water on the site, fearing that the second extractor tank or the storage tank might also explode. The injured men were taken to hospitals in Lancaster and Charlotte. The Kershaw paper noted the following week that they were "holding their own and improving slightly"—the two white men in Lancaster and the others at Charlotte Memorial. But one of them, Willie Ray Jones, age forty-four, died from his burns on 27 June, after an agonizing

almost two months. He left a widow who was housekeeper for the H.N. Hutchinsons and a number of fine children, some of whom are still in Kershaw. One of the white men, W.T. Hilliard, died in December of the following year at age sixty, though I don't know if his injuries contributed to his passing.

This horrific tragedy ended production at the mill until it was announced on 5 January 1973 that R.A. Beckham had sold the plant to Archer Daniels Midland, one of the nation's largest agri-producers. Its one-time president, Jack Daniels, married Martha Hill Williams, Chesnut descendant and heiress to Mulberry Plantation outside Camden, where their daughter still lives and where the extended Chesnut family gathers regularly. ADM still owns the business and is the only reason a train still comes to Kershaw—originally a railroad town.

**Town of Kershaw Upcoming Events**

Saturday, September 15th  
KARE Day in the Park at Stevens Park from 10 a.m. - 12 p.m. Several community agencies represented as well as activities for all ages. Visit all of the agency booths and receive a FREE hot dog lunch.

Saturday, October 27th  
Nature & Art Day in the Park at Stevens Park from 10 a.m. - 3 p.m. Brought to you by the Town of Kershaw and Kershaw Community Park Council will have programs from the Riverbank Zoo, learning activities, with plenty of fun and entertainment for all ages along with food for donation.

Sunday, November 25th  
Kershaw Christmas Parade will feature a home-made float theme contest with Santa in attendance. More info to come!

Monday, December 3rd  
Christmas on Main Street

**KCSD on regular schedule Tuesday, Sept. 11**

Although Gov. McMaster has closed neighboring school districts tomorrow because of Hurricane Florence, the Kershaw County School District (KCSD) will operate on a normal schedule for Tuesday, September 11.

KCSD officials will continue to work closely with local emergency preparedness officials to monitor the weather situation and if any changes are made to school schedules for other days this week, those will be communicated to families via the school district's automated messaging system and local media.

"Many of our neighboring school districts are being used to shelter the evacuees who are coming into the area via I-26, but the Governor did not determine that our facilities were needed for this purpose so we are on a regular schedule tomorrow," said KCSD Superintendent Shane Robbins. "We will continue to monitor the weather situation as the safety of our students and staff is always our greatest concern."

keeping students, parents and staff safe." Updates will be posted through local media and our social media sites.

**Kershaw Cruise-In**  
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and a race car in attendance. An announcement was made that next month, Saturday October 13th will be the last cruise in and will have a car show that will award prizes by category (more information on categories and judging to come). This will be starting at 10 a.m. in conjunction with the Chili Cook-off that will take place of the Hog Jam this year on Saturday, October 13th. Event will start at 10 a.m. and go all day long. Live music and other activities will be announced in the coming weeks as well as how to enter the Chili Cook-off!



**Lancaster County School District - Our decision will be based on keeping students, parents & staff safe**

A decision on what we'll do about school at the end of the week will be made by the district by noon Wednesday. "We're carefully watching the storm and consulting with emergency agencies and surrounding districts," superintendent Jonathan Phipps said. "We'll make sure our decision is what's best for



Are We There Yet?! Moses and the Exodus was AWESOME! It was held the end of August. Pictured above are some folks attending and also see page 3 for the cast. (Photos by Dayna Singleton)

photos submitted Dayna Singleton