

The William Carter Company



Building Carter's first mill, on the corner of Highland Avenue and West Street, 1865

At its height, Needham was home to at least ten large-scale industrial knitting mills, and innumerable smaller knitting operation. The largest was the William Carter Company, formed in 1864.

Carter came to Needham from Alfreton, England in 1856 and set up a hand-loom knitting shop in his home. His business grew rapidly, and he built his first factory on Highland Avenue at West Street. Carter's specialized in knitted underwear, union suits, children's clothes, and cardigan sweaters. As demand grew, the factory was expanded, then a second was built along Rosemary Lake; eventually the company had seven factories in MA and the South.

As their manufacturing operations moved south in the 1950s, Carter's took down the old Highland Avenue mill and built its corporate office in its place. The Carter family sold the business in 1990, and it now operates out of Atlanta; it is the largest manufacturer of children's clothing in the world. Its old brick office building was converted into a healthcare facility.