ONE day in 1823, a hundred years ago, Ezra Mallory stood in the dusty Great Plain Road a few rods from his farmhouse and selected the site for a hat-making shop. After long contemplation, for he was then thirty-eight, he had resolved to essay forth into manufacturing.

All-important to him was this adventure, though little could he foresee the future, or know that when a century had rolled into the past his enterprise, begun so obscurely, would be a great institution—his name a power in industry. Ezra Mallory is an outstanding figure today in the history of invention and manufacturing achievement, and now from the summit
of a hundred years a sentimental glamour hangs over him; and no part of the present narrative is more keenly appealing than the story of Ezra Mallory, the founder.

In the beginning, and always, his characteristics were strongly flavored with the finer sensibilities—with a love for the true and the better. And probably his inclinations toward the refinements of life moved him to choose for his first product—though made in a poor little frame building and the shed back of it—the high beaver hats of those days; the dignified "stovepipes" with their bell-shaped crowns and heavily-rolled brims. In all this region the beaver was commonly seen on dress occasions, though mostly imported from England.

Great Plain, two miles from Danbury, Conn., is not much different today. The old Mallory homestead still stands—and children play in the yard that borders Great Plain Road. Most of the scattering houses in the neighborhood were there a century ago. The graveyard where Ezra Mallory sleeps is not over-populous. Cornfields and meadows are still undisturbed, though the ox-cart that hauled the lumber for the little hat shop is rotted and the shop itself has succumbed and disappeared. Great Plain Road is still dusty and winding and gently hilly, and it runs, as it did then, into Danbury—now
the very center of hat-making in America. But the great Mallory hat factory at Danbury, in which are now merged the third and fourth generations of Ezra Mallory’s direct descendants, has kept pace with the giant strides of the world.

By comparisons we may judge the long growth of this business. Ezra Mallory was born at Redding, Conn., in 1785, when Stephenson, later linked with locomotive fame, was four years old. Fulton, of steamboat invention, was sixteen. When Ezra Mallory opened his little hat factory in 1823, Stephenson had not yet made his traveling engine possible for actual traffic.

Ezra Mallory as a youth lived on the home
farm, and, like all the boys around him, hunted and trapped; he knew how to judge furs. In the village of Danbury a market for pelts already existed; here many trappers exchanged their beaver, muskrat and rabbit skins for food and clothing. And here back in 1780 Zadoc Benedict's small red hat shop—long afterward the site of the Danbury & Norwalk Railroad depot on Main Street, now the site of the postoffice—employed a journeyman hatter and two apprentices and turned out three hats a day. Indeed, the first hat made in the United States came out of Danbury. As long ago as 1808 there were fifty-odd makers of hats in the Danbury region, employing from three to five men each. Many of these "hatters" were farmers who made a crude product and worked irregularly.

So it was natural that Ezra Mallory should choose the hat-making business when finally he made up his mind to quit agriculture and cattle.

In his primitive shop at Great Plain, Mr. Mallory began with one hatter and an apprentice. Indeed, he was an apprentice himself, and learned the composite trade. There were no skilled specialists, as now. Today the fur is bought detached from the pelt and partly prepared, but in that dark industrial era, Ezra Mallory began with the raw pelts themselves. One fertile source of skins lay in the sand dunes.
of Coney Island. This famous resort owes its name to the coney rabbits which lived there.

Ezra Mallory bought many of his pelts from the Indians, and sometimes went up into Canada to buy beaver, muskrat and otter skins. He and his two workers cut the fur from the pelts with long handled shears, and with their fingers separated the fur from the hair. And then they did the forming with a device resembling a violin bow, though five or six times as big. One old bow is now a treasured relic at the Mallory plant. By snapping the catgut string upon a pile of fur on a bench, the particles separated, scattered, and gradually deposited in a smaller and finer sheet, free from other sub-
stances. Each sheet represented one hat only. With further manipulation, the fibers hooked themselves together into what ultimately became the fur fabric of the hat.

Ezra Mallory himself used such a bow, and with his own hands dipped the bowed fur which he had fashioned into a large cone shaped form, into boiling water, and by alternately rolling and dipping, succeeded in shrinking and felting the fur into a cone shaped body about quarter the original size, which ultimately, under his skilled and laborious manipulation, was fashioned into a hat.

In a safe at the Mallory plant is carefully preserved the original ledger of Ezra Mallory, in the bold handwriting of the founder himself. Some of the entries are quaintly humorous, and give graphic pictures of life a hundred years ago. Thus in 1823 Jedediah Jones was credited, "By your old hat, $1." Apparently Jedediah bought a new hat and turned in his old one. Ezra Mallory sold hats at retail or wholesale, or in any possible way.

In another item a Danbury store was credited with a bill of groceries "in part exchange for a hat." A shoemaker received similar credit.

In 1823 the Astors received various credits for packets of furs. At that time beaver sold at $4.75 a pound, though today it brings around

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$45. Ezra Mallory bought twelve sealskins at $2 apiece which today would bring $100 each. In Danbury a hundred years ago beaver “plug” hats sold for $8; plain hats for $1.50 and up.

In 1825 James Woodward, an apprentice, was credited with services for two years and three months at $50 a year—$112.50. M. Benedict, another apprentice, evidently was boarded out at Mr. Mallory’s expense, for the latter credited the landlady with $12 for a month’s “keep.” Another woman was credited with “washing and mending, May 1 to Dec. 6, $10.” During this epoch, and indeed for twenty-five years, workmen were paid mostly in orders on Danbury stores, while Mr. Mallory
himself accepted merchandise whenever necessary in settlement of accounts.

Very early in the career of the Great Plain hat shop came an event of supreme importance. Ezra Mallory secured a contract from a larger hat manufacturer in Danbury. Other contracts came along, and the shop force grew to five or six men.

At first Mr. Mallory sold his hats mostly in Danbury and adjacent towns, for travel was slow and difficult. There was a stagecoach route—twenty-odd miles—between Danbury and Norwalk, on Long Island Sound, and the present generation of Mallory's treasure a printed notice once carried in the pocket of their ancestor. The post-coach left Danbury at seven in the morning, and the company, having bought a new vehicle, announced: "We flatter ourselves on the ability to give general satisfaction to all who may be disposed to favour us with their custom."

Mr. Mallory evidently was not so disposed to any great extent, for the ancient documentary evidence reveals partiality for his own horse. Whenever he accumulated a few dozen hats he packed them on the back of his equine, in front of the saddle and behind it, and rode off to Norwalk, from which point sailing vessels departed "with reasonable certainty" for New York.
Thus on one such occasion Mr. Mallory, his steed white with foam, arrived at “Uncle Kiah’s” tavern in time for supper, where his companions were a dozen other prospective voyagers. After refreshing himself, he went aboard and immediately sought his berth. In its own way, life was strenuous even then, and rest was sweet. The sloop had sleeping accommodations for ten persons.

Some time in the night, when the tide suited, the schooner got out into the Sound and turned her nose toward New York. Mr. Mallory had hoped to pass through Hell Gate the next evening, with his precious batch of beaver hats for
the aristocrats of New York, but a blow interfered and the vessel put into a cove. It was four days before she reached the metropolis. However, the price of table d'hote meals was only twenty-five cents—even when they included beefsteak fried with onions. And the price of the passage to New York was a lowly fifty cents.

Sometimes during bad weather on the Sound Ezra Mallory joined other hat manufacturers in chartering a special stage for New York, and they loaded it high with boxes of hats and rattled merrily down the Boston Post Road. There was a daily stage between Boston and New York, but it was always crowded.

Often a week or more elapsed before Mr. Mallory got back to Great Plain from one of these selling trips. Then somewhere about 1825 the first steamboat went into service between Norwalk and New York, with the fare at one dollar. Three years later Cornelius Vanderbilt put on an opposition boat, and a rate-war brought the fare down to a shilling. Crowds always flocked to the wharf to watch the steamboat leave, and in increased numbers returned at night to see the strange apparition come in. It was not uncommon for a thousand persons—on foot or in carriages—to wait in great excitement for the arrival.
Ezra Mallory made other styles of hats, too, after a while. For a time he sold his product personally in various parts of Connecticut, going forth on horseback for the selling fray. Later he sent out salesmen. His hats were sold usually on credit, and the process of collecting was slow and dubious because money was scarce. Buyers preferred to settle by trading. The old Mallory ledger shows how all sorts of curious stuff were wished on Ezra Mallory. Indeed, the collecting of actual money was considered at that time to be a calling of adventure and daring. Every small boy hoped some day to be a roaming collector for a hat factory, and to ride about New
England on a spirited horse, like a knight.

On one particular occasion a Mallory collector was gone many weeks, and on his return from the eventful journey, Mr. Mallory gave him a famous dinner, inviting a dozen men especially skilled in hat-making. The recital of this hero's experiences was given rather flamboyantly to a breathless audience, and the money collected on the journey was sorted in piles on the dinner table. This was a custom—the cash of that era being practically all silver.

Ezra Mallory's son, Ezra A., left school at sixteen and went to work in the little hat shop at Great Plain. Long before this he had really mastered the hatter's trade. As far back as he could remember, the lore of the little fur animals had been part of his life, and he had worked nights, mornings and Saturdays in the shop. Seven years later, in 1845, Ezra Mallory Senior finished his work and departed this life, while the hat shop was still in that first building at Great Plain. The continuance of the business fell to Ezra A. Mallory, and the enterprise took on bigger aspects though the plant itself was not enlarged.

Even previous to this, reports had been current that a railroad was to come that way, and one of Ezra A. Mallory's neighbors had voiced loud objection on the ground that his pigs
would be in danger. Then one day in the later forties the actual location of the line was made; and not far from that date Mr. Mallory decided to abandon the Great Plain shop for the larger town. But the railroad did not go into operation until 1852, and it was two years later before the Mallory plant was moved to the "Montgomery" shop on West Street in Danbury, leaving the little old shop to its memories and the cornfields around it. Yet even after this, Ezra A. Mallory lived at Great Plain; and the house still stands, on the Great Plain Road near the older Mallory homestead. So does the antiquated little schoolhouse where Ezra A. Mallory's elder son, Charles A., went to school
even after the family moved to Danbury. Charles A. Mallory is now President and General Manager of the Company.

In 1861 the plant was moved from the "Montgomery" shop to the present location.

It was Ezra A. Mallory who brought to the Danbury region the first sewing machine used in the hatting industry. In so doing he aroused antagonism which marked a wholly new epoch in this business. The women workers refused to use the machine, but his sister-in-law came to the rescue and went to work with it vigorously, patiently bearing the jibes that were heaped on her. She was the wife of Samuel Mallory, who for a short time was interested in the hat factory with his brother, Ezra A., but who went to the west and entered the mining business.

The modern era had now finally begun, and the sewing machine was followed by mixing, blowing and forming machines, and later by stretching, blocking and pouncing machines—all of which brought stormy but short-lived protests. Meanwhile the tall-hat fashion was sweeping New England.

Ezra A. Mallory was one of the first to travel on the new railroad, and on his frequent trips always gave himself the distinction of wearing the most aristocratic Mallory hat he could
make. Even in those days the Mallory hat, in Danbury and outside—in New York, to be sure—bore a certain distinction which was never lacking.

In 1856 E. A. Mallory & Company had a capital of $20,000. The firm manufactured 8,640 dozen hats that year, employed 95 workers, and made sales of $155,000.

Exact dates are of small consequence, but somewhere in this era the Mallory Company began the manufacture of soft hats—which had been introduced in America by Baron Kossuth, the Hungarian statesman and nobleman. The demand for this headgear became very great.

The civil war—and about the same time
the disappearance of a collector and his funds—brought Ezra A. Mallory great disaster. His southern accounts were confiscated and he lost everything he possessed, and more. For a time early in the war he sought employment in New York, but soon returned, and though nearing sixty started again to build up the business. Eventually he paid all his debts in full.

The building in which he made this new start is still a part of the present great Mallory plant.

The gradual introduction of hat-making machinery had eliminated the older generation of hatters, and when Ezra A. Mallory decided to make napped hats for women a new dilemma confronted him. These hats at that time could be made only by hand. Mr. Mallory conducted a country-wide canvass for men who could "bow a bat," offering a bonus of $10 apiece. Thus it happened that many picturesque old-timers were rounded up. Some of them, supposing their lifework over, had retired from labor altogether, and others were found in various pursuits elsewhere. When Mr. Mallory brought them back the tables were turned on him. They were the heroes, and their eyes were full of scorn for the machines that had displaced them.

These old hatters worked again at their
trade, at large wages. Secure in their fancied belief that their restoration was permanent, they refused with contumely to teach their art to apprentices. Meanwhile the demand for these hats became clamorous, and soon inventive genius brought new automatic machines; and suddenly the old-fashioned hatters found themselves minus their fine old-fashioned jobs.

The first machines used by the Mallory factory in making naps are still held as curiosities in the plant. They turned out from thirty to forty dozen naps a day, while under the old hand method a fast workman produced only a dozen and a half.

Charles A. Mallory, the elder son, became actively associated with his father in the management of the business in 1872, and the firm name was changed to E. A. Mallory & Son. From this time the growth was rapid. New York was now only a few hours away, and the principal cities of New England were within easy distance. Mallory hats were being made in all the various styles that the fashions of the day demanded.

Inventive genius, too, was at work and machinery continued to replace hand labor in many operations of hat-making. Under the guidance and inspiration of Charles A. Mallory, the place was no longer a shop; it was a factory
in every sense. To his knowledge of hat-making was joined marked ability for handling men and maintaining a high standard of production, with an ever-existing respect for his fairness in all questions that arose from time to time.

In 1886 the enterprise had grown to such proportions that the division of responsibilities became necessary, along with more highly-developed methods of dealing with policy and routine. The reputation of the business had then extended in all directions, and the firm's operations in the large cities of the west were as well founded as in New York and New England. Traveling representatives were selling Mallory hats.

It was then that the younger son, William E. Mallory, was admitted to membership in the firm and the name became E. A. Mallory & Sons. Charles A. Mallory continued actively in directing the operations of the factory, while William E. Mallory became the point of contact in the maintenance of relations between customers and the Company. It was his function to hold the Company to its original principle of fair dealing and happy associations under all conditions—to project continually the spirit of fine ideals which had distinguished the first Ezra Mallory. William E. Mallory continues to serve in this capacity today, along with his duties as
Treasurer, and the fact that the business has many times doubled and redoubled shows how well he has done his part.

Ezra A. Mallory continued to supervise the business in general until his retirement in 1897.

In 1887 Frederick T. Joy had come into the Mallory establishment in a minor capacity, from which he was promoted from time to time to positions of greater responsibility. In the meantime he took every opportunity to familiarize himself with the practical end of hat-making, going into each department and working there. He soon displayed his capacity, and in 1904, when the partnership was incorporated as The Mallory Hat Company, he became a
stockholder and director. Now he is one of the Vice-Presidents, and a strong figure in the administration of the business.

In 1895 Harry B. Mallory, great-grandson of Ezra and son of Charles A., after returning from an engineering college, began his apprenticeship of four years at the Mallory plant. In 1900 he was admitted to partnership. His mechanical ability and his untiring and persistent effort have been large factors in the advanced and economical methods employed in the manufacture of the Mallory product, and since 1904 has been one of the directors and Vice-Presidents.

Mr. Thomas J. Bowen, a graduate of Yale Scientific School and of Yale Law School, entered the business in 1911 to become Credit Manager and Secretary of the Company. He has made himself a valuable member of the firm in carrying out the policies laid down by the founders.

Ezra A. Mallory went on his Long Journey in 1902, but his contribution to the achievements of industry live on.

End of Part One
Picture at right, from an old photograph, shows the factory as it was in 1872. This three-story building is shown in the center of the large picture above.

Picture above shows group of buildings, with new addition, comprising the plant of The Mallory Hat Company, Inc., at Danbury, Conn.
F.T. JOY
Vice President

WILLIAM E. MALLORY
Treasurer

C.A. MALLORY
President

T. J. BOWEN
Secretary

H.B. MALLORY
Vice President