



The Elliott Island Button Factory, Daniel Martinek, 2 August 2006

The South Dorchester Folk Museum, in affiliation with the Dorchester County Historical Society presents a talk by Daniel Martinek about his family's button factory, which operated on Elliott's Island for more than half a century.

Chester and Jean Martinek, Daniel's parents, began to manufacture mother-of-pearl buttons in Little Ferry, NJ, but "It was too close to New York," Chester told a reporter from the Baltimore Sun in 1954. "Dress manufacturers found it too easy to ask for hurry-up orders and it threw us off schedule." Not a man to be rushed, Martinek purchased 2,000 acres of marshland in South Dorchester in 1949 and moved his machinery a year later to a small frame building tucked away in a grove of trees on Elliott. "Now, when we feel like it," he said, "we just shut up shop and go fishing and let the clothing men wait."

With shells imported from California, Australia, Indonesia, India and other locations in South East Asia, the Martineks manufactured 4,000,000 pearl buttons a year using a labor intensive process. At its peak the factory employed seven individuals and once supplied nearly all the buttons used by the New York manufacturers of baby clothes and doll dresses.

Daniel began working in the factory as a young boy, and when the elder Martineks retired in the 1980s, he took over the business, assisted by his two sons, Howard and Chet. Soon, inexpensive plastic buttons began to replace mother-of-pearl on all but the finest clothing, and the Martinek Button Factory closed its doors several years ago.