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### Industrial Ruins: Interbake Foods Factory

At the height of a booming economy, the Southern Biscuit Company expanded its prospects and opened a commercial food factory in the heart of Virginia's capital. After years of a shifty economy and overall change in supply and demand, the building now sits in industrial ruin, alone, on Terminal Boulevard.

1927 was a promising year regarding growth and monetary matters for many businesses across America. For the Southern Biscuit Company, it was a perfect time to further develop their enterprise. Packaged and processed foods were the face of a fast paced on-the-go lifestyle. Southern Biscuit Company was at the tail end of that plea, ready to appease its market.

The company changed its name in 1967 to Interbake Foods after the company's acquisition and consolidation of bakeries across the United States and Canada. It had not only survived the Great Depression, it actually flourished in it, since companies were selling out for practically nothing. This was a clever move for them, since they took a fairly substantial blow during World War II. Of course, it was nothing a multi-billion dollar company couldn't handle.

Many ups and downs brought Interbake Foods into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, but unfortunately, many more downs than ups. The corporation shut down its Richmond, VA processed food plant along with another factory in New Jersey in 2006. Company officials say the drop in business was a product of a solid decline in demand for high carbohydrate food, alongside an increasing demand for fresh food and organics. The consolidation of these factories was an effort to avoid further loss and "increase profitability (Plant, Warehouse Closings)." The Richmond plant alone

employed 300 people, a mere half of what the New Jersey plant employed, all who were left to find work elsewhere after the shutdown.

Besides being a lofty haven for the homeless in downtown Richmond and a free storage unit for the Children's Museum next door (now the Science Museum), the condemned factory hasn't been used since it's doors shut nearly 8 years ago.

Following the closure, the building was purchased by a development company that was ultimately unable to fork out the funds for the pricey renovation project. In 2011, the property was auctioned off for \$6.3 million, to a group of investors. The investors promptly unveiled their intension to restore the building to it's former glory as an apartment complex with a mix of retail shops on the ground floor. A Richmond Times journalist, Hazard, reported, "Historic tax credits will be used to offset the cost of renovations," totaling around \$24 million. The new apartment building is to be called the Cookie Factory Lofts, and will keep the building's original structure, flooring and rooftop signs, as part of the city's campaign to restore it's historic landmarks. Production begins this spring.

A byproduct of America's industrial decline, the Interbake Foods factory was neglected for several years, but retained it's solid concrete structure. By this time next year, one of 1927's biggest Richmond buildings will have been returned to it's former beauty as an upscale apartment complex in the heart of downtown.



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Virginia Department of Historic Resources ([www.dhp.virginia.gov](http://www.dhp.virginia.gov))