

## If the shoe fits: Hartt Shoe Company resurrected

### **2 Fredericton-born entrepreneurs buy the name and invest in tradition of quality shoes**

By Elizabeth Fraser, [CBC News](#) Posted: Nov 22, 2017 5:03 PM AT



Peter McMath, left, and Andrew Bedford are bringing back the Hartt Shoe Company, known to Fredericton residents as the Hartt Boot and Shoe Company Ltd., which started in the late 1890s. (Maria Jose Burgos/CBC)

A historic shoe company is aiming for a comeback in New Brunswick, and its co-owners think it's a pretty good fit.

The Hartt Shoe Company, also known as the Hartt Boot and Shoe Company Ltd., had roots in Fredericton going back to the late 1890s.

Now Andrew Bedford, one of the "refounders" of the new Hartt Shoe Company, has bought and revived the Hartt name.

"It's the lost art of being a gentleman," he said of the new Hartt shoes, for now made in Spain.

"It's images of shining your shoes and getting ready to go to a job interview, it's doing your best to look sharp and feel confident to take on the day."

The Hartt Shoe Factory, nestled between the corner of York and Argyle streets in Fredericton, opened its doors in 1898.



Hartt Boot and Shoe Company Ltd. in about 1940, when the company was making army boots. (New Brunswick Provincial Archives)

According to the Provincial Archives of New Brunswick, 10 local businessmen initially invested \$10,000 each in the enterprise to support shoemaker Odbur M. Hartt.

The goal was to produce a shoe to meet popular demand, but the plant later switched its focus to high-quality men's shoes. In the early 1900s, the company was led through a national expansion into the retail market.

Ownership later passed to a group of Toronto businessmen, operating under A.H. Marston Corp., which also owned Dock's shoes.

Hartt shoes produced army boots for soldiers in the First World War. During the Second World War, under the Reid family, it again produced army boots, and in 1974 began making Strathcona dress boots for the RCMP.

"Where Hartt employed so many people over the years, a lot of people have a mother, a father, a grandmother a grandfather who worked here in the factory, or who walked by the factory everyday," said Peter McMath, another refounder of the company.

"It's been exciting to see how many people locally have a connection to this factory and we're lucky and proud to be part of that and continue that forward."



Women sit at tables to work with material for Hartt shoes in November 1911. (New Brunswick Provincial Archives)

By 1991, the company had 145 employees and produced 450 pairs of shoes a day, under either the "Dack" or "Hartt" label.

The factory closed its doors the summer of 2000 because of a shrinking dress shoe market, and in December 2000 closed its Fredericton factory outlet store. The building was recently turned into apartments.



A customer receives a shoebox at the counter, with Hartt staff in the background in this photo from November 1911. (New Brunswick Provincial Archives)

"With the Hartt Shoe Company we have a very rich story to tell," said Bedford, who has a background in marketing.

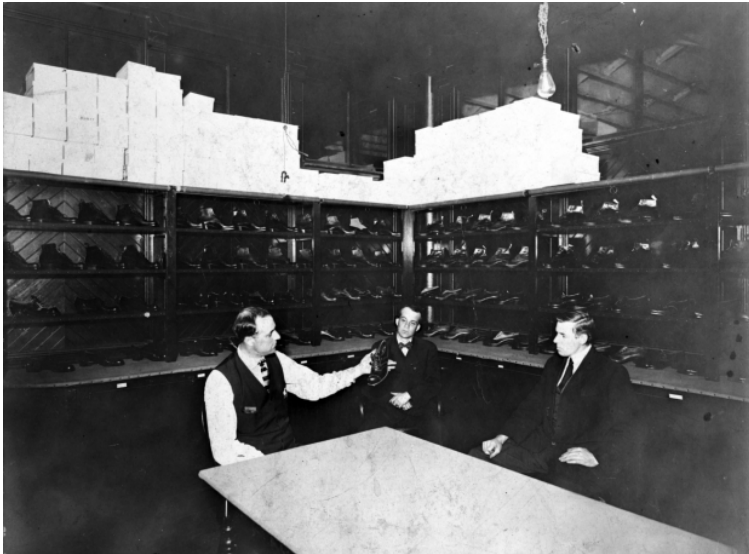
## Getting a foot in the door

He said the market is changing and based on what he sees on social media and with successes in the U.S. market, he believes there is a demand for good shoes.

"Everybody remembers Hartt, whether we're in Fredericton, Toronto or B.C.," said Bedford.

"Everybody has a story."

McMath and Bedford, both from New Brunswick, tracked down the owners of the Hartt trademark and acquired the rights to it from an investment firm in the U.S.



Men examine a shoe made at the Hartt plant in Fredericton, surrounded by racks of shoes and shoeboxes. (New Brunswick Provincial Archives)

Next, they looked for a shoe company that still made a high-quality shoe, settling on a factory in southern Spain that's more than 100 years old and has the same equipment that Hartt used. The co-owners wouldn't identify the Spanish factory.

"The end product is very similar," Bedford said. "A lot of the details and intricacies that Hartt was known for were already in their products."

*'We want to honour a proud New Brunswick heritage brand.'* -*Andrew Bedford, co-founder of Hartt Shoe Company*

A century ago, he said, there were thousands of shoe companies across Canada. Today, it would be hard to find one because of competition from cheaper products, he said.

"Like any skill, when you don't use it, it dissipates," Bedford said. "The supply chains have all gone away."

Right now, Bedford said, the revived company's biggest competitor is Allen Edmonds, an American upscale shoe manufacturing and retail company.



After closing its doors in 2000, the old factory was turned into an apartment building. (Maria Jose Burgos/CBC)

"I don't think people realized what they were giving up," he said. "When you're looking at a shoe that can last you 20, 25 years or longer if you look after it, there's a lot of value there. That stays with you for your career."

## A long-term investment



Although Bedford wouldn't disclose the cost of a pair of Hartt shoes, he did say the shoes will be available online and at the Robert Simmonds store in downtown Fredericton. Hartt will have women's shoes as well.

If sales go well, Bedford hopes manufacturing can be moved home to Canada and New Brunswick.

"We want to honour a proud New Brunswick heritage brand," he said.

