

Heyward Hamilton: the ‘tie-tan’ of Charleston clothiers

By Prioleau Alexander

If you were to meet Heyward Hamilton in person, it wouldn't surprise you to discover he's in the clothing manufacturing business — you'll never meet a sharper dresser. A Charleston native with roots stretching back to the arrival of the first ships, Heyward has been an entrepreneur all his life, but now channels his creative energies into manufacturing “niche within a niche” neckties, bowties, blazer badges, blazer buttons and rosettes. The idea first came to Heyward as he pondered the many clubs and societies in his hometown, each with rich histories and traditions. Many organizations wanted a piece of apparel that identified the wearer as a member, but subtly — not an embroidered logo or name; something with historic panache.

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Fowl play: Here is a Charles Brewster tie with an inimitable local touch.

Hamilton ties, cont.

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Heyward knew well of the classic regimental tie, introduced to the world by British military officers in the early 19 century. A true regimental tie is specific to one particular unit and is usually based on colors within the regiment's flag. Rare is the veteran who isn't fiercely proud of his unit's victories and accomplishments, and it's only natural for him to want to identify fellow officers who served with his beloved outfit.

The subtlety of it is quite impressive: You might have a hundred gentlemen mingling at a function, and the ties would be a confusing maze of stripes to most, but when a member (or former member) of the Royal Scots Dragoon Guards sees another man wearing his same tie, he knows he has a blood-brother to speak with. With time, the idea of custom regimental ties expanded to schools, universities, clubs and service organizations; if your organization doesn't have a tie dating back centuries, you'd want a custom tie designed and woven. Thus, Heyward Hamilton's company

Charles Brewster was born. Business for developing and weaving regimental ties has long served as the cornerstone of his business, but Heyward decided he needed to add a whimsical necktie to the mix. He wanted something for Charlestonians, but it needed to be something sophisticated and understated — something a tourist wouldn't buy because the concept is a bit too foreign. So, what do only Charlestonians know about? What's one little tidbit that could serve as a symbol saying, “I'm the real Charleston deal.” Heyward decided that this elusive factoid was the fact that wild guineafowl live South of Broad in the Lamboll St. area. Brilliant. The number of people who know this — even among natives — is small. “That was the idea,” Heyward said. “Happily, since introducing the tie, more and more Charlestonians know about our guineafowl secret. If someone hears that story, they never forget it, and when they see that tie, they know the wearer has pluff mud in his veins.” Heyward's next tie,



IMAGE PROVIDED

Mr. Hamilton with a flock of fine ties.

which he wanted for South Carolinians, was equally challenging. Again, seeking subtlety, he rejected the classic Palmetto tree and crescent moon. It needed to be something that every S.C. resident would see and say, “That couldn't be a better icon.” He founded his answer in a dog. Not a Lab or a golden or a springer, but the official state dog, the Boykin spaniel. Now that's a focused icon. Virtually no one

outside the South has even heard of a Boykin, much less seen one — but if you are at a business conference in Seattle and see someone wearing a Boykin tie? You're going to know a lot about the person before you even speak.

His hometown being Charleston, Heyward of course offers custom bowties and lapel-pin rosettes for every design. For those wanting to establish their personal

look with a true nod to the classic, Charles Brewster also designs and embroiders blazer badges. If you purchase one of his regimental ties, and wear it to a function in England, you might be alarmed to see their regimental ties flow diagonally down from your heart to the right — the opposite direction of yours. Fear not. Our American ties often have a cheeky backwards diagonal to show that we broke

from our British rulers. To see the detail and craftsmanship that goes into every Charles Brewster offering, a visit to their website is a must: Charles-Brewster.com.

Prioleau Alexander has been a Mercury contributor since 2006. He is the author of four books, all of which are available on Amazon.