

A SURVEY OF COTTON MILLS IN CHARLOTTE AND MECKLENBURG COUNTY
FOR THE CHARLOTTE-MECKLENBURG HISTORIC LANDMARKS
COMMISSION

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I. Statement of Purpose

The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission, formerly Historic Properties Commission, was created in 1973 by joint action of the Mecklenburg Board of County Commissioners and the Charlotte City Council. The Commission functions to identify landmarks of local, regional, state or national significance in Charlotte-Mecklenburg and to recommend their designation as "historic landmarks." Pursuant to this mandate, the Commission conducts surveys that permit it to formulate its recommendations on the basis of a comprehensive understanding and appreciation of specific categories of buildings, structures, sites, and objects. As a general rule, these surveys are organized in one of the three following manners:

- 1) to examine properties in a geographic area, district or neighborhood, e.g., Piedmont Park, Elizabeth, Biddleville, Steele Creek, and Davidson;

- 2) to examine properties which serve a certain function, e.g., transportation facilities, industrial plants, agricultural edifices and cemeteries; and
- 3) to examine properties which exhibit the characteristics of a certain architectural style or type of design, e.g., Federal, Queen Anne, Colonial Revival, Greek Revival or Bungalow.

It is the purpose of this survey to identify the buildings and structures in Charlotte and Mecklenburg County that were associated with the spinning and weaving of cotton fiber. For reasons of completeness, the survey includes both extant and non-extant facilities. The format is chronological, beginning with the earliest cotton mill and terminating with the most recent. The Commission recognizes that this survey of cotton mills is not definitive. Undoubtedly, additional sources of information will become known. Indeed, the task of identifying and evaluating the historic elements in the built or man-made environment is never done, because history itself is an evolutionary phenomenon. Accordingly, the Commission urges anyone having information or knowledge concerning the history of cotton mills in Charlotte and Mecklenburg County to contact us.

II. The Cotton Mills of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County

- **The earliest mills in Charlotte-Mecklenburg**

The first cotton mill in Mecklenburg County was located in the Steele Creek community of southwestern Mecklenburg. Its owner, William Henry Neel, was a prominent citizen, having been a County Commissioner, a member of the Steele Creek Presbyterian Church, an officer in the local militia, and a successful cotton farmer. He operated a grist mill near what is now Withers Cove on Lake Wiley. Sometime during the 1850's, he placed some spindles in this facility and produced yarn. The output was modest. The mill closed before the end of the Civil War. No physical remains of the mill survive.

The first facility in Mecklenburg County devoted exclusively to the spinning of cotton fiber was the Glenroy Cotton Mill. Founded by E. C. Grier and his son, G. S. Grier, the mill was located about half way between Matthews, N.C., and Providence Presbyterian Church, in southeastern Mecklenburg County. It contained 350 spindles and produced bale yarn. It was established in 1874 and operated for approximately eighteen months. The building was demolished in 1899.

- **The [Charlotte Cotton Mills](#)**



A momentous event in the industrial development of Charlotte, N.C., occurred in 1880-1881, when R. M. Oates and his brother, D. W. Oates, established the Charlotte Cotton Mills. The facility initially contained 6,240 spindles and employed approximately seventy people, mostly women. Construction began in April 1880, and the plant went into full operation on March 8, 1851. The *Daily Charlotte Observer* stated that the building was a "new departure" from the usual style of factory edifice, in that it was one-story in height.

Built in the shape of an 'L,' the Charlotte Cotton Mills fronted on West Fifth St., then near the edge of town. A substantial portion of the original edifice survives.

On May 27, 1880, the *Daily Charlotte Observer* speculated about the probable impact of the Charlotte Cotton Mills upon the industrial development of Charlotte.

That it will add much to Charlotte's material Prosperity no one doubts, and some predict that it will be the means of bringing similar enterprises into operation.

These were to prove to be prophetic words.

- **The [Alpha Cotton Mill](#), the Ada Cotton Mill, and the Victor Cotton Mill**



The Alpha Mill



The Orient (Alpha) Mill Village

A major expansion of the industrial base of Charlotte, N.C., occurred in 1888-89. Three cotton mills were organized and placed into production. All were erected by the D. A. Tompkins Co. This firm, co-founded by Daniel Augustus Tompkins and R. M. Miller, Sr. in 1884, included among its activities the construction and outfitting of cotton mills and cotton oil mills.

The Alpha Cotton Mill was the first mill in this region that sold its stock on the so-called installment plan. Investors paid 25 cents per share. Located on East 12th Street, at the very northern edge of town, the initial structure followed the local custom of being one-story in height.

Devoted exclusively to the production of yarn, the Alpha Mill opened in February 1889. E. K. P. Osborne provided the fundamental impetus for the establishment of the mill. In 1900, a stock company headed by H. D. Wheat purchased the Alpha Mill and changed its name to the Orient Cotton Mill. In 1901, the plant was enlarged by the erection of a two-story addition. The enlarged mill remains largely unchanged.

The Ada Cotton Mill, a one-story edifice on West 11th Street, was also financed on the installment plan. John L. Brown was president of the firm, which was organized in January 1888. The plant initially contained 8,320 spindles and went into operation in early 1889. Approximately one-half of the Ada Cotton Mill survives.

The largest and most imposing of the three mills that opened in early 1889 was the Victor Cotton Mill. Located on South Cedar Street, the plant contained 10,560 spindles. G. E. Wilson was president, and A. C. Hutchinson was secretary and treasurer. The Victor departed from Charlotte's norm in that it had more than two floors. The Victor Mill has been demolished.

- **Highland Park Manufacturing Company Plant No. 1 (The Gingham Mill).** On June 19, 1891, the Charlotte Democrat announced that the Highland Park Manufacturing Co., a firm recently organized with W. E. Holt as president and C. W. Johnson as secretary and treasurer, would erect a Gingham Mill in Charlotte.

Construction began soon thereafter, and the facility opened in early 1892. The plant, situated on North Brevard Street, then just outside of Charlotte, contained 465 looms and produced gingham. A portion of the mill survives.

- **Atherton Cotton Mills.** The Atherton Cotton Mills, located on the southern edge of Dilworth, was the first mill built, owned, and operated by the D. A. Tompkins Company. Construction began on August 23, 1892, and moved forward expeditiously until the facility went into full operation in April 1893.



The Atherton Cotton Mills was a spinning mill that produced two to four-ply yarns, sizes twenty to fifty. Containing ten thousand producing spindles and five thousand twisting spindles, the plant was a one-story structure with a basement. The Atherton Cotton Mills has recently been turned into condominiums.

- **Louise Cotton Mill**



The Louise Cotton Mill opened on May 31, 1897. Named for the wife of the president of the firm, H. S. Chadwick, the plant contained 7000 spindles and 368 looms. A two-story building 90 feet wide and 360 feet long, the Louise Mill was located on the Seaboard Airline Railroad just east of Charlotte. In 1900 a major addition was constructed, increasing the capacity to 20,000 spindles. A substantial portion of the Louise Mill survives.

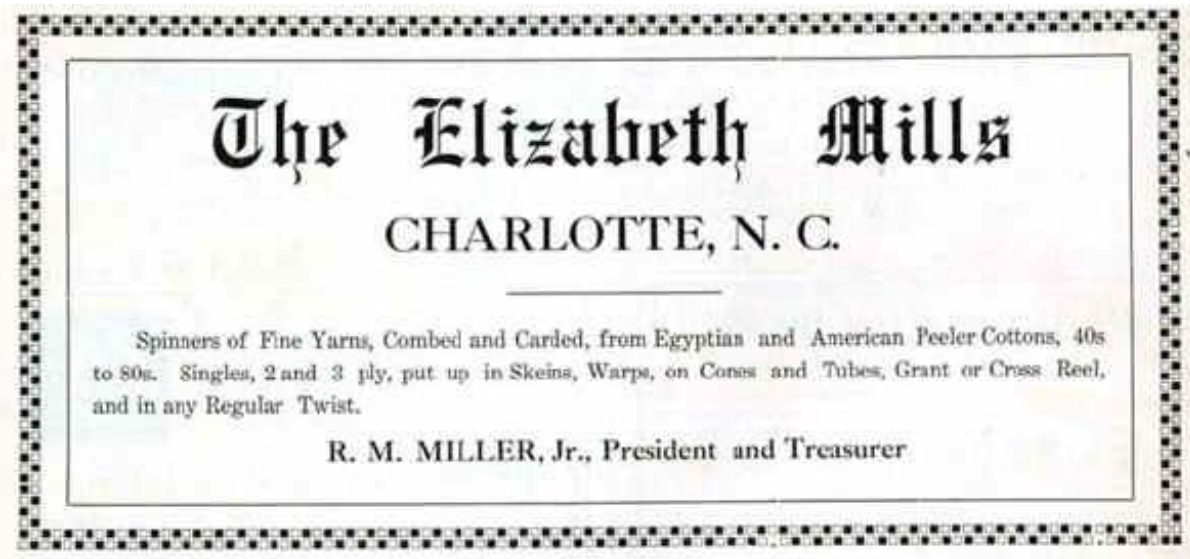
- **Magnolia Cotton Mill.** The Magnolia Cotton Mill was established c. 1899. It contained 3072 spindles and was located on South Graham Street. A. C. Summerville was the president. The Magnolia Mill has been demolished.

- **Chadwick Cotton Mill**



Named for H. S. Chadwick, the Chadwick Mill went into production on October 16, 1901. It was regarded as one of the finest facilities of its kind in the South. E. A. Smith was president. The brick work was done by the J. A. Jones Construction Company. Three-stories high, the plant contained 12,000 spindles and 300 looms. Its principal products were yarns and sheeting. It was located on the Seaboard Airline Railroad just west of Biddleville. The Chadwick Mill has been demolished.

- **Elizabeth Cotton Mill**



From a 1907 advertisement

The Elizabeth Cotton Mill was located on the Southern Railroad to the immediate southwest of Charlotte. It was named for the daughter of its president, R. M. Miller, Jr. Vinton Liddell, a local industrialist, was vice-president. The Elizabeth Cotton Mill opened in late 1901. It contained 5000 spindles and 3000 twistors. A one and one-half story structure, the plant produced fine yarn. A substantial portion of the Elizabeth Cotton Mill survives.

- **Hoskins Cotton Mill**



The Hoskins Cotton Mill opened in the spring of 1904. It was the sister mill of the Chadwick Cotton Mill, owned and constructed by the same firm -- the Chadwick Manufacturing Company. Located just to the west of the Chadwick Cotton Mill, the Hoskins Cotton Mill has been converted into housing. The J. A. Jones Company erected the Hoskins Cotton Mill.

- **Highland Park Manufacturing Company Plant No. 3**

Highland Park Cotton Mill No. 3 was the largest and the most imposing cotton erected in Charlotte. It opened in November 1904. Located on the Southern Railroad to the immediate

north of Charlotte, the plant was designed and constructed by Stuart W. Cramer. Highland No. 3 contained 20,000 spindles and 500 looms. Eight hundred people worked in the plant. The principal product was gingham. Highland No. 3 closed in 1969. The mill is largely unchanged from the original.

- **Mecklenburg Cotton Mill**



The Mecklenburg Cotton Mill opened in November 1904. It received its power from the power house of the Highland Park Manufacturing Company and was located just north of Highland No. 3. The mill is largely original and has been converted into housing.

- **The Savona Manufacturing Company.** The Savona Manufacturing Company opened in 1908 in the building which had formerly housed the D. A. Tompkins Company on South College Street. Its first plant has been demolished. A new factory for the Savona Manufacturing Company was built on Turner Avenue in west Charlotte in 1920.



- **The Johnston Manufacturing Company** The Johnston Manufacturing Company, located in north Charlotte between Highland No. 3 and the Mecklenburg Mill, was established in 1913 by C. W. Johnston. It manufactured cotton yarn. The plant closed in March 1975, thereby bringing to an end the history of active cotton mills in Charlotte, N.C.

Chronology of Cotton Mills in Charlotte-Mecklenburg

1.	The Charlotte Cotton Mills*	1881
2.	The Alpha Cotton Mill*	1889
3.	The Ada Cotton Mill*	1889
4.	The Victor Cotton Mill	1889

5.	Highland Park Manufacturing Co. Plant #1*	1892
6.	The Atherton Cotton Mills*	1893
7.	The Louise Cotton Mill	1897
8.	The Magnolia Cotton Mill	c. 1899
9.	The Chadwick Cotton Mill	1901
10.	The Elizabeth Cotton Mill*	1901
11.	The Hoskins Cotton Mill*	1904
12.	Highland Park Manufacturing Co. Plant #3 *	1904
13.	The Mecklenburg Cotton Mill*	1904
14.	The Savona Manufacturing Co.*	1908 (present plant: 1920)
15.	The Johnston Manufacturing Co.*	1913
<i>* Significant physical elements survive.</i>		