

A SURVEY OF COTTON MILLS
IN CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA
FOR THE CHARLOTTE-MECKLENBURG HISTORIC
PROPERTIES COMMISSION

I. Statement of Purpose. The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission, created in 1973 by joint action of the Mecklenburg Board of County Commissioners and the Charlotte City Council, functions to identify landmarks of local, regional, state or national significance and to recommend their designation as "historic properties." Pursuant to this mandate, the Commission conducts surveys which 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 common 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 and Bungalowoid.

It is the purpose of this survey to identify the buildings and structures in Charlotte, N.C., which 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 in the future. Indeed, the task of identifying and evaluating the historic elements of the man-made environment is never finished, because history itself is an evolutionary phenomenon. Accordingly, the Commission urges anyone having information or knowledge concerning the history of cotton mills in Charlotte, N.C., to contact:

The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic
Properties Commission
3500 Shamrock Drive
Charlotte, N.C. 28215
Telephone: (704) 332-2726

Dr. Dan L. Morrill, Director
October 1, 1979

II. The Cotton Mills of Charlotte, N.C.

A. The earliest mills in Mecklenburg County. 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 Steele Creek Presbyterian Church, an officer in the local militia and a successful cotton farmer.¹ 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.² No physical remains of the facility 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. It contained 350 spindles and produced bale yarn. It was established in 1874 and operated for approximately eighteen months. The building was demolished in 1899.³

B. The Charlotte Cotton Mill. A momentous event in the industrial development of Charlotte, N.C., occurred in 1880-81, when R. M. Oates and his brother, D. W. Oates, established the Charlotte Cotton Mill. The facility initially contained 6,240 spindles and employed approximately seventy people, mostly women.⁴ Construction began in April 1880, and the plant went into full operation on March 8, 1881.⁵ 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 Mill fronted on W. Fifth St. (Fig. 1).⁶ A substantial portion of the original edifice survives (Fig. 2).

On May 27, 1880, the Daily Charlotte Observer speculated about the probable impact of the Charlotte Cotton Mill upon the industrial development of Charlotte, N.C.

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.⁷

These were to prove to be prophetic words.

C. The Alpha Cotton Mill, the Ada Cotton Mill and the Victor Cotton Mill. 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.⁸ 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.⁹

The Alpha Cotton Mill was the first mill in this region which sold its stock on the so-called installment plan. Investors paid 25¢ weekly per share. Located on E. 12th St., the initial structure followed the local custom of being one-story in height (Fig. 3).¹⁰ Devoted exclusively to the production of yarn, the Alpha Mill opened in February 1889.¹¹ 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 and changed its name to the Orient Cotton Mill. In 1901, the plant was enlarged by the erection of a two-story addition (Fig 4).¹² This addition remains more or less unchanged (Fig. 5).

The Ada Cotton Mill, a one-story edifice on W. 11th St., was also financed on the installment plan. John L. Brown was president of the firm, which was organized in January 1888.¹³ The plant initially contained 8,320 spindles and went into operation in early 1889 (Fig. 6).¹⁴ Approximately one-half of the Ada Cotton Mill survives (Fig. 7).

The largest and most imposing of the three mills which opened in early 1889 was the Victor Cotton Mill (Fig. 8).¹⁵ Located on S. Cedar St., the plant contained 10,560 spindles. G. E. Wilson was president, and A. C. Hutchinson secretary and treasurer.¹⁶ The Victor Mill has been demolished.

D. Highland Park Manufacturing Company Plant #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 secre-

tary and treasurer, would erect a Gingham Mill in Charlotte.¹⁷ Construction began soon thereafter, and the facility opened in early 1892.¹⁸ The plant, situated on N. Brevard St. just outside of Charlotte, contained 465 looms and produced gingham (Fig. 9).¹⁹ A portion of the mill survives (Fig. 10).

E. The Atherton Cotton Mill. The Atherton Mill, located on the southern edge of Dilworth, was the first mill erected, owned and operated by the D. A. Tompkins Co.²⁰ Construction began on August 23, 1892, and moved forward expeditiously until the facility went into full operation in April 1893.²¹ The Atherton Mill was a spinning mill which produced two to four-ply yarns, sizes twenty to fifty.²² Containing ten thousand producing spindles and five thousand twisting spindles, the plant was a one-story, brick edifice (Fig. 11).²³ The Atherton Mill is largely unchanged from the original (Fig. 12).

F. The 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.²⁴ 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 (Fig. 13).²⁵ In 1900, a major addition was constructed, increasing the capacity to 20,000 spindles (Fig. 14).²⁶ A substantial portion of the Louise Mill survives (Fig. 15).

G. The Magnolia Cotton Mill. The Magnolia Mill was established c. 1899. It contained 3072 spindles and was situated on S. Graham St. A. C. Summerville was president.²⁷ The Magnolia Mill has been demolished.

H. The Chadwick Cotton Mill. Named for H. S. Chadwick, the Chadwick Mill went into production on October 16, 1901.²⁸ It was regarded as one of the finest facilities of its kind in the South (Fig. 16).²⁹ 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.³⁰ A substantial portion of the Chadwick Mill survives (Fig. 17). It is located on the Seaboard Airline Railroad just west of Biddleville.

I. The Elizabeth Cotton Mill. 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 Mill opened in late 1901; it contained 5000 spindles and 3000 twistors. A one and one-half story structure, the plant produced fine yarn (Fig. 18).³¹ A substantial portion of the Elizabeth Cotton Mill survives (Fig. 19).

J. The 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.³² Located just to the west of the Chadwick Mill, the Hoskins Cotton Mill is largely unchanged from the original (Fig. 20).³³ The J. A. Jones Construction Company erected the Hoskins Cotton Mill.³⁴

K. Highland Park Manufacturing Company Plant #3. Highland #3 was the largest and most imposing cotton mill erected in Charlotte. It opened in November 1904.³⁵ Located on the Southern Railroad to the immediate north of Charlotte, the plant was designed and constructed by Stuart W. Cramer (Figs. 21, 22, & 23).³⁶ Highland #3 contained 20,000 spindles and 500 looms. Eight hundred people worked in the plant. The principal product was gingham.³⁷ Highland #3 closed in 1969.³⁸ The mill is largely unchanged from the original (Fig. 24).

L. The Mecklenburg Cotton Mill. The Mecklenburg 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 # 3.³⁹ The Mecklenburg Cotton Mill is largely unchanged from the original (Fig. 25).

M. The Savona Manufacturing Company. The Savona Manufacturing Company opened in 1908 in the building which had formerly housed the D. A. Tompkins Co. on S. College St. Its initial plant has been demolished. A new factory was erected on Turner Ave. in west Charlotte in 1920.⁴⁰ The Savona Manufacturing Company is essentially intact (Fig. 26).

N. The Johnston Manufacturing Company. The Johnston Manufacturing Company, located in north Charlotte between Highland #3 and the Mecklenburg Mill, was established in 1913 by C. W. Johnston. It manufactured cotton yarn.⁴¹ The plant closed in March 1975, thereby bringing to an end the history of active cotton mills in Charlotte, N.C.⁴² The Johnston Manufacturing Company is essentially intact (Fig. 27).

Chronology of Cotton Mills in Charlotte, North Carolina.

<u>Name of Mill</u>	<u>Date Established</u>
1. The Charlotte Cotton Mill*	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 Mill*	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

* significant physical elements survive

Footnotes:

1. Dr. Dan L. Morrill and Jack O. Boyte, "Survey and Research Report on the Neel House" (May 31, 1976). A report prepared for the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission.
2. The Charlotte Observer (January 16, 1900), p. 6.
3. Ibid. There is reason to believe that "J.S. Grier," not "G.S. Grier" was a co-founder of the Glenroy Cotton Mill.
4. The Charlotte Observer (August 21, 1880), p. 3.
5. The Charlotte Observer (February 5, 1880), p. 3. The Charlotte Observer (February 11, 1880), p. 3. The Charlotte Observer (April 3, 1880), p. 3. The Charlotte Observer (May 27, 1880), p. 3. The Charlotte Observer (December 21, 1880), p. 3. The Charlotte Observer (March 2, 1881), p. 3. The Charlotte Observer (March 9, 1881), p. 3. Some articles refer to the Charlotte Mill as the "Alpha Mill." This is not to be confused with a later mill by the same name.
6. The Charlotte Observer (August 21, 1880), p. 3. For an illustration of the Charlotte Cotton Mill, see The Charlotte Observer (August 4, 1895), p. 5.
7. The Charlotte Observer (May 27, 1880), p. 3.
8. Howard Bunyan Clay, "Daniel Augustus Tompkins: An American Bourbon," (An unpublished doctoral dissertation at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, N.C., 1950), p. 103.
9. Ibid., p. 25.
10. The Charlotte Democrat (January 27, 1888), p. 3. The Charlotte Observer (October 27, 1901), p. 3.
11. The Charlotte Democrat (March 1, 1889), p. 3.
12. The Charlotte Democrat (January 6, 1888), p. 3. The Charlotte Observer (July 28, 1901), p. 5. The Charlotte Observer (October 27, 1901), p. 3. For an illustration of the platform district in Charlotte, see The Charlotte Observer (December 2, 1900), p. 12.
13. The Charlotte Democrat (January 27, 1888), p. 3. The Charlotte Democrat (February 3, 1888), p. 3.
14. The Charlotte Democrat (January 11, 1889), p. 3. For an illustration of the Ada Cotton Mill, see The Charlotte Observer (October 13, 1895), p. 5.
15. The Charlotte Democrat (February 1, 1889), p. 3. The Charlotte Democrat (April 19, 1889), p. 3.
16. The Charlotte Democrat (January 27, 1888), p. 3. The Charlotte Democrat (February 3, 1888), p. 3. The Charlotte Democrat (February 1, 1889), p. 3.
17. The Charlotte Democrat (June 19, 1891), p. 3. The Charlotte Observer (January 21, 1899), p. 12.

page 6.

18. The Charlotte Democrat (January 8, 1892), p. 3.
19. The Charlotte Observer (January 11, 1900), p. 5.
20. Clay, "Daniel Augustus Tompkins: An American Bourbon," p. 103.
21. The Charlotte Observer (August 31, 1892), p. 4. The Charlotte Observer (April 12, 1893), p. 4.
22. Clay, "Daniel Augustus Tompkins: An American Bourbon," p. 104.
23. The Charlotte Observer (August 18, 1892), p. 4.
24. The Charlotte Observer (May 20, 1896), p. 13. The Charlotte Observer (November 19, 1896), p. 1. The Charlotte Observer (June 1, 1897), p. 4.
25. For an illustration of the Louise Mill, see The Charlotte Observer (May 24, 1896), p. 5, and The Charlotte Observer (August 25, 1901), p. 2.
26. The Charlotte Observer (June 27, 1900), p. 5. The Charlotte Observer (August 25, 1901), p. 2.
27. Edgar T. Thompson, Agricultural Mecklenburg and Industrial Charlotte Social and Economic (Charlotte Chamber of Commerce, Charlotte, N.C., 1926), p. 141. Hereafter cited as Thompson.
28. The Charlotte Observer (October 17, 1901), p. 5.
29. For an illustration of the Chadwick Mill, see The Charlotte Observer (August 12, 1901), p. 6.
30. The Charlotte Observer (November 27, 1900), p. 6. The Charlotte Observer (February 11, 1901), p. 5. The Charlotte Observer (July 4, 1901), p. 5. The Charlotte Observer (July 25, 1901), p. 5. The Charlotte Observer (August 12, 1901), p. 6.
31. The Charlotte Observer (January 14, 1901), p. 6. The Charlotte Observer (March 8, 1901), p. 5. The Charlotte Observer (March 17, 1901), p. 6. The Charlotte Observer (September 15, 1901), p. 2 (contains an illustration of the Elizabeth Mill).
32. The Charlotte Observer (November 30, 1903), p. 5.
33. For an illustration of the interior of the spinning room at the Hoskins Cotton Mill, see Charlotte Evening Chronicle (January 10, 1914), p. 8.
34. The Charlotte Observer (June 18, 1903), p. 6.
35. The Charlotte Observer (November 19, 1904), p. 4.
36. Stuart W. Cramer, Useful Information For Cotton Manufacturers (Queen City Printing & Paper Co., Charlotte, N.C., 1906, 2nd ed.), vol. III., pp. 1227-1298.
37. The Charlotte Observer (February 27, 1903).

page 7.

38. The Charlotte News (March 23, 1975), p. 19.
 39. The Charlotte Observer (August 4, 1904), p. 4. The Charlotte Observer (November 19, 1904), p. 4.
 40. Thompson, p. 140.
 41. Ibid., p. 142.
 42. The Charlotte News (March 13, 1975), pp. 1 & 4.
-

Survey prepared by: Dr. Dan L. Morrill, Director
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic
Properties Commission
3500 Shamrock Dr.
Charlotte, N.C. 28215
Telephone: (704) 332-2726

Date Survey Completed:

December 15, 1979.