



**Survey and Research Report**  
**On The**  
**Ada Manufacturing Company**





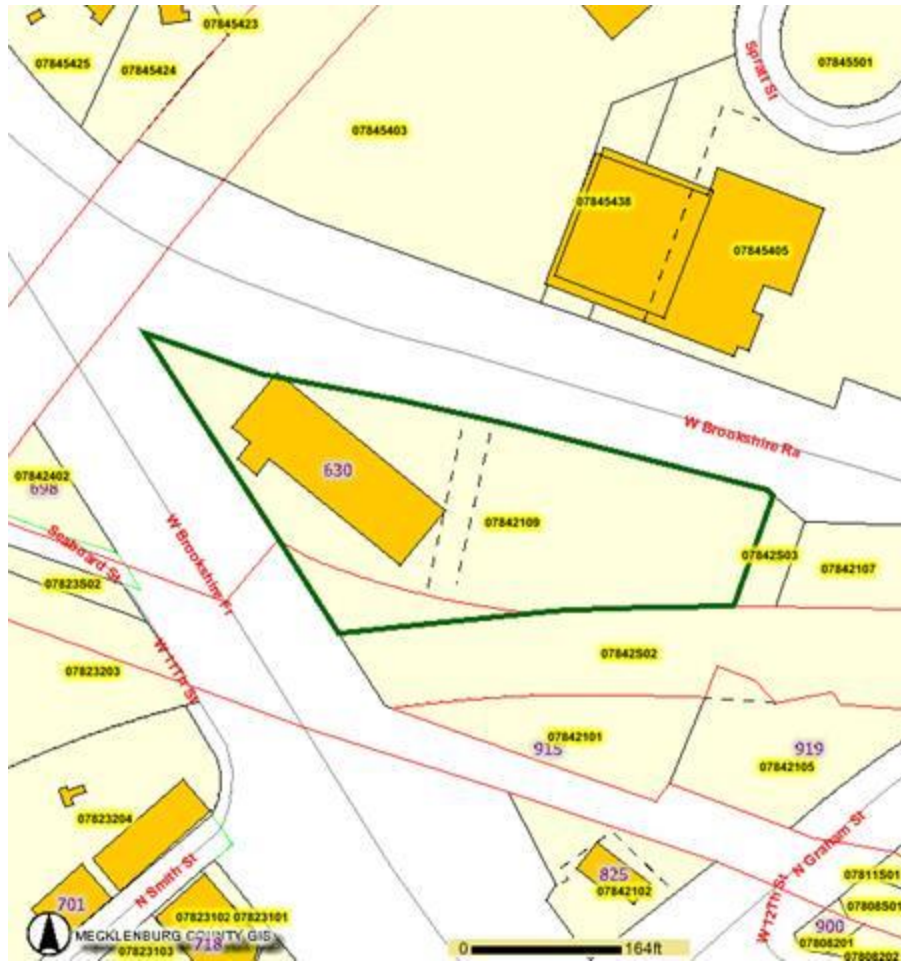
**1. Name and location of the Property:** The Property known as the Ada Manufacturing Company is located at 630 West 11th Street in Charlotte, North Carolina.

**2. Name, address and telephone number of the current owner of the Property:**

ADM Milling Co.,  
V121140 #136  
Decatur, IL 62525-9974

**3. Representative photographs of the Property:** This report contains representative photographs of the Property.

**4. A map depicting the location of the Property:** This report contains a map depicting the location of the Property. The UTM is 17 5144 97E 3899225N



**5. Current Deed Book Reference to the Property:**

The tax parcel number is 07842109. The current deed book number is 04016-486 (12/19/1977). The current tax value of the property is \$141,750.

6. A brief historical sketch of the Property: This report contains a brief historical sketch of the property

7. **A brief architectural description of the Property:** This report contains a brief architectural description of the property

8. **Documentation of why and in what ways the Property meets the criteria for designation set forth in North Carolina General Statute 160A-400.5:**

**Special significance in terms of its history, architecture and/or cultural importance:**

The Commission judges that the Property known as Ada Manufacturing Company does possess special significance in terms of Charlotte-Mecklenburg. The Commission bases its judgment on the following considerations:

1) Ada Manufacturing Company is representative of a new phase of industrial development in Charlotte. The mill was built at the beginning of a dynamic period of urbanization and industrialization, which transformed the city from a courthouse town into a regional center for manufacturing, commerce, and transportation.

2) The Ada Manufacturing Company was financed under a plan developed by local civic leader and engineer D.A. Tompkins who advocated selling shares in an installment plan. By using Tompkins's method, investors were able to build two other mills in 1888 in addition to Ada Manufacturing.

3) The Ada Manufacturing Company was built and equipped by D.A. Tompkins. Tompkins was highly influential in Charlotte's transition from small town to New South city, and he used his many talents to effect this change; he was an engineer and a businessman, he owned three newspapers, and he wrote extensively on the topic of cotton, cotton processing, the construction and management of textile mills, and how to raise the capital to build new factories.

4) The Ada Manufacturing Company and other factories like it built in the late nineteenth century encouraged the rural to urban migration of small farmers, increasing the city's population.

5) The Ada Manufacturing Company is the most intact example pre-1890 cotton mill construction in Charlotte.

6) The Ada Manufacturing Company is an important example of the use of Italianate architectural details on a commercial building in Mecklenburg County.

**Integrity of design, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling and/or association:**

The Commission contends that the architectural description included in this report demonstrates that the Property known as Ada Manufacturing Company meets this criterion.

**9. Ad Valorem Tax Appraisal:** The Commission is aware that designation allows the owner to apply for an automatic deferral of 50% of the ad valorem taxes on all or any portion of the Property that becomes an "historic landmark." The current appraised value of the land containing 2.92 acres and the building is \$141,750.

**Date of Preparation of this Report: March 4, 2003**

**Prepared by: Stewart Gray and Dr. Paula Stathakis**

### **Ada Manufacturing Company - Historical Context**

The Ada Manufacturing Company was one of three cotton mills that opened in Charlotte in 1889. While not the first textile mills in the city, the Ada, Alpha, and Victor Cotton Mills represent the opening phase of a comparatively more aggressive period of textile and industrial development and general economic diversification in the county. Historians of Mecklenburg County agree that Charlotte's location in the Piedmont region was a principal aspect in its transformation from a small hinterland courthouse town to the primary industrial center of the region.<sup>1</sup> However, it was not until the 1880s that local investors and entrepreneurs began to capitalize on the county's natural attributes and resources. In a pattern similar to other robust New South towns of the post war era, dynamic growth was spearheaded by new men who were not Charlotte natives, but who understood how to capture Charlotte's potential, and more importantly, how to finance it.

This change in the county's economic fortune occurred slowly; and even at the height of its manufacturing output, the county remained agricultural and rural in character. Although Charlotte made significant advances in the post-Civil War period, it did not develop to the extent that many other Southern cities did. In 1870, except for the Mecklenburg Iron Works, there were no major manufacturing concerns in Charlotte even though two major railroad lines converged in the city.<sup>2</sup> In a general report about the State's economic prospects, Vice-Consul H. E. Heide wrote, "The majority of the cotton and woolen manufacturing are situated in the central portion of the State, where numerous rivers and water courses furnish almost unlimited water power. Nearly all the industries of the state are in a very backward condition owing to the want of capital to develop its great natural resources. The greater part of the available capital the State possessed was lost in the late civil war."<sup>3</sup>

This economic languor would soon give way in the wake of an outpouring of entrepreneurial and manufacturing initiatives that were based in agriculture,

the primary pillar of the county's economic base. Cotton was the core from which most of Charlotte's new economic enterprises of the late nineteenth century developed. Cotton would be stored, marketed, and processed in and around Charlotte; textile engineering and machinery firms with legions of blue and white collar workers would find jobs in Charlotte; railroads transported cotton products out of the area; and some of the profits from all of these activities would be seen in the development of the downtown area, of new streetcar suburbs, in the increase of the retail and service sectors, and in the growth of new industrial zones on the margins of the city. By the late nineteenth century, Mecklenburg farmers, like most Piedmont farmers, devoted a substantial part of their crop to cotton. By 1896, over one-half of the cotton produced in North Carolina was grown in 28 counties, and most of it was grown in Mecklenburg.<sup>4</sup>

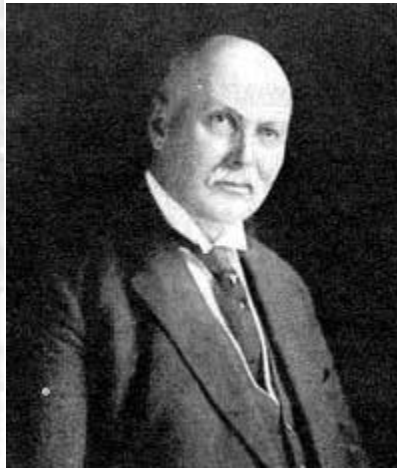
In addition to the proximity of a healthy cotton crop, Charlotte began to develop the other essential components that would support the new economic reality that was apparent by the late 1870s. Railroad lines destroyed during the war were restored, and two new lines were added to the network that served the county by 1873, making six operational lines by mid-decade.<sup>5</sup> By this time Charlotte already had five banks making it a regional financial center.<sup>6</sup> By the early 1880s, Charlotte mayor Col. William Johnston introduced a program to pave, or macadamize city streets. Concurrent with this program, county agencies began a similar plan to improve county highways. New taxes paid for most of these programs, and convict labor was used for the construction.<sup>7</sup>

Thanks in part to improvements in agriculture, banking, railroad, and infrastructure, Charlotte began to assemble its manufacturing base. By 1873, the city had 36 manufacturing establishments, and the number of these increased to 66 as early as 1877. However, city leaders lamented that in spite of this progress, Charlotte still had no textile mill. In an attempt to encourage the addition of textile mills to the city's industrial landscape, the Board of Aldermen passed an ordinance in 1873 stating any cotton or woolen mill built in Charlotte would be tax exempt.<sup>8</sup> The Aldermen got their wish in 1880 when R.M. and D.W. Oates established the Charlotte Cotton Mills. In contrast to the earlier cotton mills in Mecklenburg, Charlotte Cotton Mills was a substantial factory with 6240 spindles. The *Daily Charlotte Observer* hailed it as a "new departure" from the factory style usually seen in Charlotte and predicted that it would not only contribute to the city's fortunes, but that it was a harbinger of things to come.<sup>9</sup> By the early 1880s, industrial growth in Charlotte became more assertive, and this expansion was inspired and directed largely by

entrepreneurs who were not Charlotte natives, but who became synonymous with Charlotte in its new identity as a New South City.



Daniel Augustus Tompkins



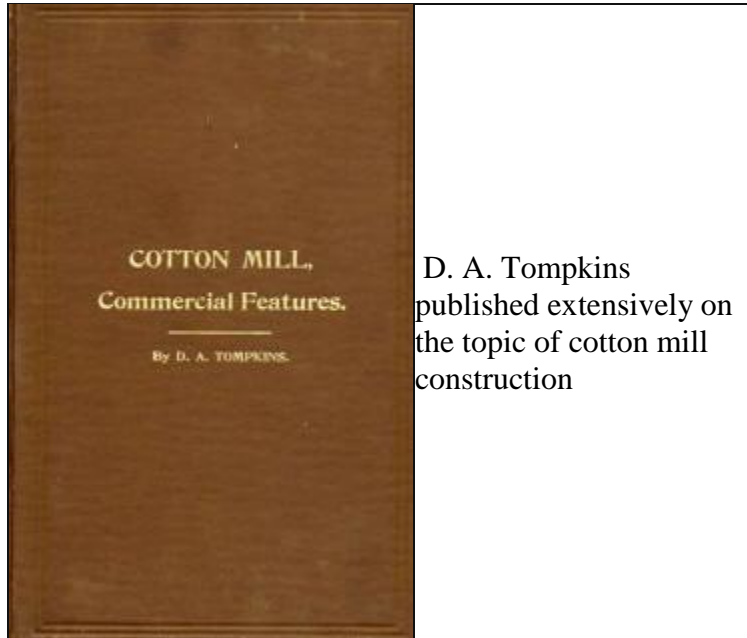
Edward Dilworth Latta

Notable among this new breed of civic leaders were Edward Dilworth Latta and Daniel Augustus Tompkins. Both Latta and Tompkins redirected Charlotte's disorganized enthusiasm for change, growth and progress. They understood the necessity of breaking the region's reliance on farming, especially on an agricultural system that operated largely through crop liens and tenancy. Instead they emphasized industrialization, urbanization, and scientific agriculture as the viable alternatives of a prosperous future.<sup>10</sup>

Tompkins opened a branch of the Westinghouse Machine Company of Pittsburgh in Charlotte in 1883, and by 1884 opened the D.A. Tompkins Company, a premier manufacturer of textile machinery, and a principal supplier of textile equipment to southern textile mills.<sup>11</sup> Tompkins wore many hats in Charlotte; he was an engineer and a businessman, he owned three newspapers, and he wrote extensively on the topic of cotton, cotton processing, the construction and management of textile mills, and how to raise the capital to build new factories. In his how-to manual for aspiring mill investors, Tompkins contended that the "average Southern town underestimates its ability to raise capital to build a cotton factory. Cotton mill property like all other property is cumulative. No town could raise the money at once to pay for all the property in it. When the author first went into business in Charlotte, N.C., in 1884 there was but little cotton manufacturing in the South, and in Charlotte but one mill. The author at once formulated a plan for enabling small towns to raise capital for manufacturing."<sup>12</sup> Tompkins advocated selling shares in an installment plan, a scheme that he had worked



out in his days as a machinist at the Bethlehem Iron Works in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. He published this plan in several manufacturers' periodicals, such as the Manufacturers' Record, and was able to demonstrate that several southern cotton mills were established through this system.



As three new mills opened in Charlotte in 1889, the Ada Manufacturing Company among them, Tompkins was able to claim credit for all three, as they were not only financed on the installment system he developed, but he built and equipped all three of them.<sup>13</sup> The Ada Manufacturing Company was organized in 1888 with \$128,000.00 and opened in 1889.<sup>14</sup> The first officers of the mill were Col. John L. Brown, president, M.C. Mayer, president pro tem, J.J. Gormley, secretary-treasurer, and A.M. Crowder, superintendent.<sup>15</sup> The land for the Ada Manufacturing Company was purchased in February 1888, comprising roughly twelve and a half acres that were purchased from William Johnston and S.B. Christenbury.<sup>16</sup>

Similar to the existing cotton mills in Charlotte, Ada Manufacturing Company was a one-story structure. A free standing cotton warehouse stood to the west of the building, and the large, rectangular brick factory had rooms for picking, carding, drawing, spinning and reeding. The mill was built on the northwestern edge of town near the junction of West Eleventh and North Smith Streets and was near tracks for the Southern Railway and the Seaboard Air Line and near the outer margin of Fourth Ward and Pinewood Cemetery. The mill had few neighbors in the 1890s; most of them were other industries.<sup>17</sup> When Ada Manufacturing Company began operations in 1889, it had 3120 spindles, with



the management anticipating the addition of four more warp frames within four week's time making 3952 spindles in all, leaving 4368 more spindles to be added in that year to bring the mill up to its capacity of 8320 spindles. The first annual meeting of stockholders for the mill clearly left the impression that the mill was in good hands under the direction of Brown, Gormley, and Mayer.<sup>18</sup> By 1911, the mill had 10,00 spindles, 50 looms, and was updated with Grinnell Automatic Sprinklers.<sup>19</sup> Shortly after the Ada mills began operating, positive reports appeared regarding the two other new mills opening in 1889, the Alpha and the Victor. The Alpha Mills were projected to open on February 1st and the Victor Mills were to open by the end of January.<sup>20</sup> Newspaper reports of the impending opening of the mills were optimistic:

The Alpha Cotton Mills began grinding cards today. The Victor Mills will begin business tomorrow or next day, and then all of Charlotte's new enterprises will be in full blast. A review of them will be interesting. We have now four cotton mills, one knitting mill, one spoke and handle works, one oil mill, two iron foundries, one furniture factory, one mattress factory, one cotton tie and bagging factory, one patent medicine factory, one bellows factory, three machine shops, one steam grist mill, three sash door and blind factories, two clothing factories, and a number of smaller institutions.<sup>21</sup>

Charlotte was poised to enter the twentieth century with a much stronger and more diversified economic base than it had in 1870, and clearly change had come rapidly and perhaps dramatically to the city. Certainly by the turn of the century one sees fewer complaints of war related impoverishment and more interest in the hustle of the new pace of life evident in town by the 1890s. The hum of the mills became part of the rhythm of city life. Mecklenburg never had as many mills as some neighboring counties, such as Gaston, but the cotton and textile industry were an essential component of the county's and the city's economy. As Holland Thompson observed in 1906 "The traveler through some parts of North Carolina is seldom out of sight or hearing of a cotton mill. The tall chimneys rise beside the railway in nearly every town. Side tracks from the main line lead to the low brick mills and the clustering tenements..."<sup>22</sup> Located at some distance from the working class neighborhoods of the city, the Ada mill housed employees in a village near the factory.<sup>23</sup> Like the Alpha and the Victor mills, Ada Manufacturing often employed entire families, many of who moved from farms to factory jobs in town. The village system was falling out of favor in northern manufacturing

towns but flourished in Charlotte and in the surrounding area. One of the leading proponents of the establishment of mill villages was D.A. Tompkins. Tompkins wrote extensively about mill villages, living conditions in mill villages, and he also designed several style of what he called factory cottages, which were in his estimation “very desirable and pleasing.”<sup>24</sup>

By the end of the 1920s, the once undeveloped area around the Ada Mill had filled in with other factories, such as The Mecklenburg Farmers Federation, the Buckeye Cottonseed Oil plant, a petroleum plant and a flour mill. Duplexes, boarding houses and small working class homes were also built in the small side streets adjacent to the Ada Mill, but the tenants of these houses worked at the other nearby manufacturing plants. These factories enjoyed a better fate than the Ada Mill. By 1903, the Ada Manufacturing Company had gone into receivership, and the mill and all of its equipment was sold on November 3, 1903 to the Fidelity Manufacturing Company.<sup>25</sup> The Fidelity Manufacturing Company was incorporated in August 1903 with a total authorized capital stock of \$500,000.00 that was divided into 5000 shares at a par value of \$100.00 each.<sup>26</sup> Fidelity Manufacturing purchased the Ada Manufacturing Company for \$62,250.00.<sup>27</sup> Fidelity Manufacturing went into receivership in 1922 and was sold to the Holly Manufacturing Company in April of that year for \$153,00.00.<sup>28</sup> By 1928, Holly Manufacturing was also out of business, and the plant lay idle on the eve of the Great Depression. By the 1970s, half of the original Ada Mill was demolished to make room for the Brookshire Freeway, (the warehouse and sections for picking, carding and drawing, as well as the boiler and engine rooms are no longer standing), and today the remainder is owned by the ADM Milling Company.

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1. See, for example, Thomas W. Hanchett, *Charlotte's Textile Heritage*, available on line at [www.cmhpf.org/educationhanchetttextile.htm](http://www.cmhpf.org/educationhanchetttextile.htm); Hanchett, *Sorting Out the New South City*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998; Dan L. Morrill, *Cotton Mills in New South Charlotte*, available on line at [www.cmhpf.org/educationtextilehistory.htm](http://www.cmhpf.org/educationtextilehistory.htm); Morrill, *A History of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County*, available on line at [www.danandmary.com](http://www.danandmary.com).

2. Carolyn F. Hoffman, *The Development of Town and Country: Charlotte and Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, 1850-1880*, (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Maryland, 1988), p. 201.

3. R.E. Heide, Report of Vice-Consul Heide, on the Resources, Trade and Commerce of North Carolina, (Wilmington, N.C., 1875), pp. 9-10. North Carolina Collection
4. North Carolina Board of Agriculture, North Carolina and Its Resources, (Winston: M.I. and J.C. Stewart, Public Printers and Binders, 1896), p. 158. North Carolina Collection.
5. Morrill, *A History of Charlotte and Mecklenburg*, Chapter 7.
6. Hanchett, Sorting Out the New South City, p. 24.
7. Daniel Augustus Tompkins, Cotton Mill. Commercial Features. A Text-book for the Use of Textile Schools and Investors. With Tables Showing Cost of Machinery and Equipments for Mills Making Cotton Yarns and Plain Cotton Cloths, (Charlotte, N.C. Published by the Author, 1899), p. 144.
8. Hoffman, The Development of Town and Country, pp. 202-203. According to Dan Morrill, *A Survey of Cotton Mills in Charlotte and Mecklenburg County*, July 1997. [www.cmhpf.org/essays/cottonmills.html](http://www.cmhpf.org/essays/cottonmills.html), cotton mills were built in the county in the Steel Creek township in the 1850s, and in the Providence township in 1874; the first textile mill in Charlotte was not built until 1880-81.
9. Morrill, *Survey of Cotton Mills*, p, 2.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid., p. 3.
12. Tompkins, Cotton Mill, Commercial Features, p. 40.
13. Morrill, *Cotton Mills in New South Charlotte*, p. 5.
14. Charlotte City Directory, 1902.
15. Charlotte City Directory, 1889.
16. Deed 60-2, William Johnston sold land to the Ada Manufacturing Company for \$3675.00; Deed 60-38, S.B. Christenbury sold a parcel to the Ada Manufacturing Company for \$150.00.
17. Sanborn Map, 1896, 1900.

18. "The Ada Mills" *The Daily News*, January 8, 1889.
19. Sanborn Map, 1911.
20. "The Alpha Mills" *The Daily News*, January 9, 1889; "The Victor Mills" *The Daily News*, January 22, 1889.
21. "Charlotte's Industries" *The Daily News*, January 23, 1889.
22. Holland Thompson, From the Cotton Field to the Cotton Mill. A Study of the Industrial Transition in North Carolina, (Ph.D. Dissertation, Columbia University, 1906), p. 74.
23. Hanchett, Sorting Out the New South City, p. 52. 24. Tompkins, Cotton Mill, Commercial Features, p. 116
24. Deed 182-57.
25. Mecklenburg County Record of Corporations, Book 1, p. 377. The incorporators were J.H. Weddington, J.H. McAden, F.D. Alexander, W.H. Belk, J. Graham, E.L. Keisler, Thomas Haughton, E.N. Clemence, W.E. Maxwell, John Van Landingham, W.R. Robertson, A.H. Washburn, and James C. Long. Each of the incorporators owned five shares of stock, with an aggregate value of \$6500.00
26. Deed 182-57.
27. Deed 470-144.

## Brief Architectural Description



### Historical Description

The building known as the Ada Manufacturing Company, and located at 630 West 11th Street in Charlotte, North Carolina, is a substantial remnant of an even larger 1889 cotton mill building. Approximately one-third of the present one-story brick building, the western section of the mill, was razed to make room for a nearby highway. The existing building now measures approximately 237' wide and 75' deep and consists primarily of the mill's large carding and spinning room. The room was originally 100' wider, having measured approximately 330' wide by 75' deep. The carding and spinning room abutted a narrow but deep 30' X 120' picker room, which has been entirely destroyed. The carding and spinning room along with the picker room formed a T-plan. The mill operated with a coal-fired steam boiler, which sat directly in front of the picker room, and would have featured a tall brick smokestack. No historic photographs or drawings of the Ada Manufacturing Company have been located, but the layout of the mill would have been similar to that of the 1893 Statesville Cotton Mills, which was also designed by D. A. Tompkins.

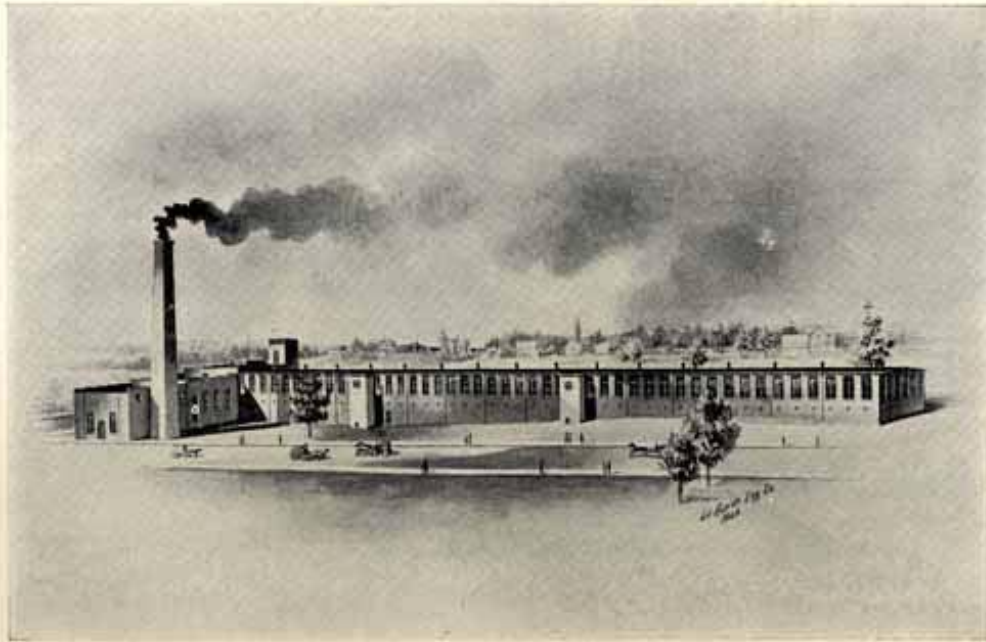


Fig. 20. The Statesville Cotton Mills.

Capital subscribed \$110,000.  
Product, sheetings and yarn.

Equipment 6,000 spindles, 200 looms.  
Subscriptions payable 50 cents per week per share.

D. A. Tompkins, Engineer.

A freestanding 35' X 100' brick cotton warehouse, now demolished, sat adjacent to the picker room, approximately 20' from the northwest corner of the larger mill building.

Originally the topography of the mill site was relatively flat and open. By 1911 the mill was nearly surrounded with a congestion of rail lines and sidings to the east and the west of the mill, and a major intersection of the Seaboard and Southern Railroads directly to the south. By the 1970's the topography of the site changed drastically with the construction of a raised-earth highway ramp to the north of the mill. The ground to the north of the mill now rises sharply to form the ramp which is taller than the mill's two towers, and which also necessitated the destruction of one-third of the building. Views of the mill's principal south elevation are obscured by massive webbed concrete piers that support a raised section of highway I-277. The piers are set at various angles to accommodate the various railroad right-of-ways. To the south of the site is one of Charlotte's best collections of historical industrial buildings, including the Interstate Mills on Seaboard Street, the John B. Ross Warehouse, and the People's Ice and Coal Company.

It appears that when intact, the Ada Manufacturing Company illustrated many of the basic tenants of D. A. Tompkins's mill design philosophy. Tompkins believed that a good mill design incorporated only one or two floors. He also suggested that a mill site required between five and ten acres of land.<sup>1</sup> It appears that the Ada site, which has shrunk to less than three acres, was originally four to eight acres. The isolation of the picker room with a firewall and the separation of the power plant from the principal section of the mill are prescribed by Tompkins as a protection against fire. Other design details associated with Tompkins can be identified on the extant section of the mill.

### Description of Present Condition

The one-story Ada Manufacturing Company features brick construction laid in American Bond. The building is approximately 237' wide and 75' deep, and is covered by a moderately pitched roof with asphalt shingles.

Perhaps the most distinctive feature of the building is the Italianate two-story tower projecting from the façade. Towers were a common feature of southern mill buildings in general, and of D. A. Tompkins's designs in particular. Towers were employed to house the water tanks for fire sprinkler systems, such as the Grinnell system found in this mill, and these water tanks needed to be located at least 12 feet above the sprinkler heads. A second smaller tower for this use was erected on the rear elevation of the Ada Manufacturing Company. However, early Sanborn maps indicate that the front tower of this mill housed the mill offices. It appears that the use of towers became so well associated with mills, that the form was employed for other purposes. Later expansions at the nearby Alpha mill resulted in a prominent Romanesque/Medieval three-story tower that was purely decorative.<sup>2</sup>

The tower projecting from the front of the Ada Manufacturing Company is three bays wide and two bays deep, and is now, like the entire façade, coated with stucco. A single door opening is centered in the tower's façade. It appears that the door opening may have been enlarged when a concrete loading dock was added. The outline of a small frame gabled roof addition can be seen around the door. Stucco may obscure other first-floor openings. Above the door is a recessed panel. The second-floor openings are symmetrical, with three relatively narrow segmental arch window openings. The tower's east elevation is pierced by more segmental arch window openings, with the two lower openings shorter than those on the second floor. The west elevation's fenestration is not symmetrical, with a low arched door opening tucked-in close to the carding and spinning room



wall. The tower's most distinctive feature is its low-pitched pyramidal roof with a bell-curve flare. The eaves are supported by large curved brackets.



### **TOWER - SOUTH ELEVATION**

The principal section of the mill, the large carding and spinning room is now 30 bays wide, based on the rear elevation, and five bays deep, based on the east elevation. The façade is coated with stucco, and nearly all of the building's original bays in-filled with masonry. An original door is located in the façade in the fourth bay east of the front tower. The door is of plank construction, and is bordered by fluted trim. Evidence of a small doorway shelter can be seen in the stucco over the door, and the outline mirrors the distinctive shape of the tower roof. The door is centered between two sets of four segmental arch window openings. Seven of the eight openings have been altered and transformed into two separate upper and lower window openings. To the east of these openings, a large floor-to-ceiling height door opening was cut into the wall and covered with a steel door. To the east of the steel door, a second large door opening was cut into the wall, and a concrete loading dock was erected. To the east of the loading dock, the long expanse of the façade is blank, although Sanborn Maps indicate that window bays also

pierced this section of the mill. The eave along the façade is supported by large exposed and decoratively boxed-in rafter tails.



## **EAST ELEVATION**

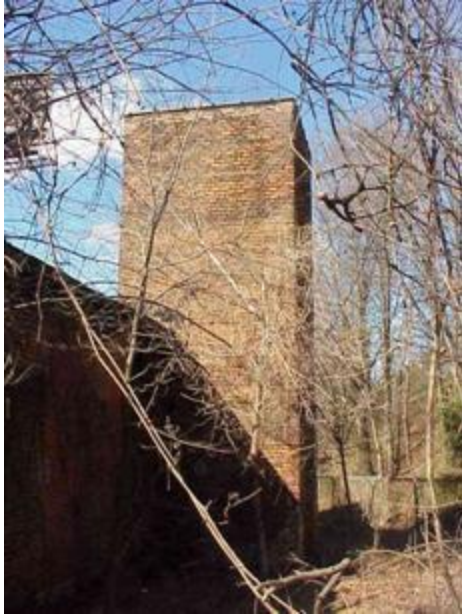
The Ada Manufacturing Company's rear elevation and east elevations possess the highest degree of integrity. Despite the in-filling of all of the window openings and the destruction of 100' of the rear wall, these elevations are the most intact unaltered.

The building's east elevation is five bays wide, with a large door opening, now in-filled with blocks, centered between 4'x11' segmental arch window openings. Early maps show that this elevation fronted on Smith St. The brick wall features a stepped parapet, and is topped with terra cotta tiles. Stucco was not applied to this elevation, and some of the bricks show extreme weathering.

The building's rear elevation extends for twenty-four bays from the buildings northeast corner, to a two-story brick water tower. From the tower, the building extends four bays to the building's northwest corner. All of the bays contain a single 4'x11' segmental arch window opening, all of which have been in-filled with brick. The same decorative treatment of the rafter ends found on the facade, continues to the rear elevation.



The most distinctive feature of the rear elevation is the square water tower. This two-story brick structure projects from the rear wall, and a low arched opening dominates the north elevation of the tower. On the second-story a small segmental arch opening contains a louvered wooden vent. The tower's east, north, and west walls finish in flat parapets topped with terracotta tiles. The south wall of the tower rises above the principal section of the mill, and is topped by a flat composition roof, surrounded on three sides by the parapet walls.



### **WATER TOWER - NORTH ELEVATION**

The mill's west elevation is of recent construction, having been built to enclose the building after the demolition of the western section of the mill. The west elevation mirrors the stepped parapet form of the east elevation, but is constructed of hollow masonry blocks. The wall is blank and is topped with terracotta tiles.

#### **Significance of the Architecture of the Ada Manufacturing Company in Terms of the City of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County**

The Ada Manufacturing Company is among the oldest surviving examples of cotton mill construction in Mecklenburg County. Four cotton mills were constructed in the immediate vicinity of Charlotte prior to 1890, and some original sections of three of these mills, the Ada, the Alpha, and the Charlotte Cotton Mills, still exist. With approximately 20,000 square feet of extant building, the Ada is the most intact of Charlotte's pre-1890 mills.

While the Ada Manufacturing Company is first and foremost a utilitarian industrial building, the strong influence of the Italianate Style can be seen in its design. The Italianate Style was compatible with mill designs because they shared some common elements, such as arched windows and low-pitched roofs. Historian Dr. Tom Hanchett writes, "Commercial architecture in

Victorian Charlotte was not subject to as many changing styles as was residential design. The blocky form of the Italianate proved economical to build, and it remained popular through the turn of the century.”<sup>3</sup>

Examples of Italianate homes such as the [McManaway House](#), and [Ingleside](#) can be found throughout Mecklenburg County. Fully realized examples of the Italianate Style among commercial buildings are more rare. The 1892 Atherton Cotton Mills, also designed by D. A. Tompkins, lacks the Ada mill's distinctive Italianate influenced tower, but shares details such as the low-pitched roof and ornamental rafter end.

1. D. A. Tompkins *Cotton Mill, Commercial Features. A Text-Book for the Use of Textile Schools and Investors. With Tables Showing Cost of Machinery and Equipments for Mills Making Cotton Yarns and Plain Cotton Cloths*, Charlotte, 1899 p.34.
2. Dr. Dan L. Morrill, "Survey and Research Report, Alpha Cotton Mill," Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission, 1983.
3. Dr. Thomas W. Hanchett, "Charlotte Architecture: Design Through Time Part 1," Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission.