

THE BEGINNINGS OF INDUSTRY IN GREENVILLE

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From its early beginnings as a county in 1786 down through the years Greenville has been a site for industry. Its rapidly falling streams permitting the use of water power were utilized early by industrious citizens for grist mills and others envisioned the continuing development of the county as a site for manufacturing.

The first mill of any provable record was surely the large grist mill at the falls of Reedy River, erected by the Indian agent, Richard Pearis, before the American Revolution. To this, he added a large saw mill for cutting of timber. In 1776, after Pearis cast his lot with the Tories, his mills and trading post were attacked and destroyed by an armed party of patriots in the year 1776. Pearis' claims for losses in this case are recorded in the British Court of Claims at Halifax, Nova Scotia; and we read the following:

"Item 3: A large grist and saw mill, cost of buildings - 1,000 Pounds, was burned by 400 partisans under Colonel John Thomas in the year 1776."¹

Probably other hardy pioneers had come into the Cherokee country even before the Revolution and built small grist and saw mills. Certainly, in Spartanburg County, Wofford's Iron Works was in existence as one of the Revolutionary skirmishes was fought at that place.

Greenville Court House, established in 1786, became only a straggling village of a few houses beside the log court house and jail.² Greenville was entirely an agricultural county in the beginning and little progress took place until about 1815. Prior to that date, however, we find a record that one Adam Carruth had established an iron foundry on Reedy River at the intersection with Laurel Creek. The Archives disclose that in 1812

¹Pearis, Richard," Court of Claims 1783, M/S Halifax, Nova Scotia.

²Edward Hooker, "Diary of Edward Hooker, 1805-1808," ed. by J. Franklin Jameson, American Historical Association, *Report 1896*, I, 897-899.

The legislature granted a loan of \$10,000 to Adam Carruth and one Thompson to establish a cotton mill on Reedy River.³ There exists no record as to whether or not this proposed mill was ever built.

In 1815 Lemuel Alston, who had accumulated large holdings comprising the site of Greenville village, sold this 11,000 acres to Vardry McBee of Lincolnton, North Carolina. Although Vardry McBee was not to move to Greenville until twenty years later, he began constructive development of his new purchase, industrially, educationally and religiously.⁴ He brought in artisans skilled in various trades, began some manufacturing and, along with this, he gave sites for a Male and Female Academy, sites for two churches, and later for two more.⁵

About the time of McBee's purchase, there occurred the beginnings of a movement which David Duncan Wallace describes as "The New England Migration." Skilled weavers moved down from New England into Spartanburg and Greenville counties. Phillip Weaver of Coventry, Rhode Island, along with his brother, John Weaver, Rev. Thomas Hutchins, Thomas Stack, William Bates, and Wilbur Weaver moved in to establish small plants for spinning and weaving to use the available water power, ready materials, and cheap labor for cotton manufacturing.⁶

Developments in England in the late eighteenth century paved the way for expansion in the textile field. Richard Arkwright had developed a successful water-driven spinner for producing yarn while Edmond Cartwright, a minister of the church of England, had developed and patented the first practical power loom. While the experts of that day in the textile industry felt that mechanical weaving has impractical if not impossible, this minister developed a loom which worked

³David Duncan Wallace, *South Carolina, A Short History*, (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1951), p. 380.

⁴S. S. Crittenden, *The Greenville Century Book* (Greenville, S. C., Press of the Greenville News, 1903), p. 22.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 29.

⁶David Duncan Wallace, *South Carolina: A Short History, 1520-1948* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1966, originally published 1951), pp. 380-381.

unusually well with the added feature that the loom could be automatically stopped upon the breaking of thread which made practical for the first time the production of fabrics by power machinery. It is said that this early loom first used a bull to supply the power pulling a long lever with cogs at its center to translate the power to the machine. Later, this loom was to use water power then steam.

While McBee was establishing his early grist mills at Reedy Falls, first a large brick mill, then later one of stone, other pioneers were going forward with manufacturing efforts. Adam Carruth, whom we mentioned as wanting to start a cotton mill in 1812 and may have, comes back into the story in a manufacturing venture, unique in Greenville history. During the War of 1812, the Federal Government awarded a contract to Elias Earle for the manufacture of muskets for the fledgling army who were fighting the British. Earle transferred this contract to Adam Carruth, and on November 14, 1816, he signed a contract with the government to furnish the Ordnance Department with 10,000 muskets to be delivered at the rate of 2,000 per year. By 1820, Carruth had manufactured and delivered 2,250 muskets. The value of his factory was reported to be \$60,000. His annual payroll and the Armory's productive capacity was reported to be \$30,000 worth of guns per year. Due to financial difficulties following the War of 1812, and, as Carruth maintained "the selfish views and narrow-minded policies of the Federal Agents," the enterprise failed in 1822.⁷ Carruth died that same year and is buried on the White Horse Road.

In the early nineteenth century, Greenville was fortunate to have the aid and interest of two prominent South Carolinians: Joel R. Poinsett, who was then serving as State Commissioner of roads and bridges, and his able successor in that post, Robert Mills, prominent architect and engineer. This man, friend of Thomas Jefferson, student of Hoban, and later co-architect of the National Capitol and Washington monument, took quite an interest in Greenville in those early years. In his *Statistics of South Carolina*,⁸ he foresaw and prophesied the future develop-

⁷Correspondence and data from the War Department in possession of Dr. H. L. Sutherland, Union, S. C. Dr. Sutherland owns one of the Carruth muskets. Ed.: See Dr. Sutherland's article in this issue of the *Proceedings and Papers*.

⁸Charleston, 1826.

ment of Greenville County industrially. One comment of Mills is especially interesting, made before the day of railroads: "It [Reedy River] might without great expense be made use of to feed a canal to communicate with Saluda River, five miles distant, and by means of this river, under improvement by the state, a navigable intercourse may be had with Columbia and Charleston." Mills also mentioned the minerals of Greenville as being iron, yellow ochre, pyrites, lead ore, emeralds, kaolin, tourmaline and titanium, all of which might be useful industrially. He also stated that the abundant clay of Greenville made very good brick.⁹

On his map of Greenville district published in Mill's *Atlas of South Carolina* a number of early industrial plants are shown: several grist and flour mills, McCool Shoals Cotton Factory on Beaverdam Creek, Lester's Cotton Factory, Benson's Iron Works on Enoree, Hutchin's Mill and Cotton Factory. McCool Shoals operated thru the Civil War, Hutchins Mill at Pelham burned in 1825 and was rebuilt of masonry. Carruth's Armory is also shown on the Mill's map, along with Vardry McBee's mills on the Reedy.¹⁰

Meantime, Vardry McBee had found John Adams, a very talented Scottish engineer and millwright, and persuaded him to move with him from Lincolnton to Greenville in 1836 and help him build some industrial plants of which he had dreamed. John Adams designed and built Reedy River Factory for McBee, also, the woolen and paper mill. Adams visited New England, Philadelphia and New York, studying machinery methods. He purchased machinery, adapted it and installed it. He built a dam for power. Adams also designed and built the octagonal church at Conestee which still stands and is one of three octagonal churches in the United States. Adams worked with and for Vardry McBee for over twenty years. He was a devout Presbyterian and he became the first Ruling Elder of the First Presbyterian Church of Greenville.¹¹ The family tradition and

⁹*Ibid.*, p. 573.

¹⁰Robert Mills, *Atlas of South Carolina*, (Charleston, 1826), Greenville District Map.

¹¹Mrs. C. M. Landrum in *Greenville News*, May 14, 1936.

talents of this Scotsman are carried on by his descendants, W. T. and Bob Adams, and the McPhersons.

The Rocky Creek Factory, later known as Batesville, was built by the New Englander, William Bates, in 1837. This mill used water power, and by 1862, had 300 spindles.¹² It was acquired in 1863 by the Trenholms of Charleston and later, by the Putnam family. The brick mill stands today. Bates' daughter married Henry Pinckney Hammett who was to later found Piedmont Manufacturing Co.

Last, but not least, was that unique manufacturing plant on the Reedy—the Greenville Coach Factory. In 1835, Ebenezer Gower came to Greenville from Massachusetts, and in partnership with Thomas Cox, started the business. According to Wallace, "By 1856, Greenville's Coach Factory, employing 100 men and selling \$80,000 worth of vehicles a year was said to be the largest in the southern country." By that time, Thomas Claghorn Gower, younger brother of Ebenezer, had joined the firm which became known as Gower, Cox and Gower. The plants covered several acres on Main Street at Reedy River and consisted of a four-story brick shop building (still standing), 46 x 100 feet, a three-story woodworking shop on the river with repair shops, drying sheds and other buildings. This plant produced all styles of carriages, buggies, coaches and wagons.¹³

The Civil War brought another unusual industry to Greenville—the Confederate Gun Factory. Built in 1861 along the Greenville and Columbia Railroad on land furnished by Vardry McBee, this plant was built and operated by George Morse (supposedly a relative of Samuel Morse of telegraph fame) and an inventor and designer of guns for the Confederacy. In this factory, Morse produced his famous Morse Carbine, using a metal-cased cartridge. This gun, said General Wade Hampton, was the best carbine he had ever seen. The factory manufactured 1,800 of these carbines and 200 muskets. The plant also produced for the Confederacy cannon balls and shells. The factory was burned by Stoneman's Raiders of Sherman's Army in

¹²Wallace, *Short History*, p. 381.

¹³James M. Richardson, *History of Greenville County, South Carolina*, (Atlanta, A. H. Cawston, 1930), p. 85.

1864.¹⁴ Gun collectors prize the Morse Carbine of which a few are still in existence.

During the War between the States, Greenville, in addition to the Confederate Gun Factory, turned practically all of its industrial production to serving the Confederacy:

The Batesville Cotton Factory and three other textile plants in the county manufactured cotton goods exclusively for the army, while a number of wagon makers and gunsmiths of Greenville furnished such supplies as they were able to turn out. In the town of Greenville, the Gower, Cox and Gower Carriage Factory furnished its entire output of wagons to the Ordnance and Quartermaster departments of the Confederate States. By 1865, these two departments owed the firm \$140,000. Just before the close of the war, the Ordnance Department paid \$70,000 in Confederate money which became useless before it could be utilized. The balance was never paid.¹⁵

During the war years, Vardry McBee, at an advanced age, sold his Reedy River Manufacturing Company to a new concern:

NEW MANUFACTURING FIRM

Grady, Hawthorne & Perry

Have entered into copartnership for the purpose of carrying on the business of

MANUFACTURING

and have taken possession of the well-known cotton manufactory, lately in operation by Vardry McBee, located six miles Southeast of Greenville.

The entire machinery has been placed in complete running order and we are now prepared to furnish *cotton yarns* of superior quality.

THE WOOL CARDS

Attached to the manufactory are also in excellent condition and all orders for carding wool will be attended to expeditiously

¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 86. Editor: See Dr. H. L. Sutherland's article in these *Proceedings* for details about this factory.

¹⁵*Ibid.*

and upon as good terms as at any other establishment in the country.

J. W. Grady
David O. Hawthorne
William Perry¹⁶

During the desperate decade from 1856 to 1876, Greenville tried as best it could to stage some recovery. The Gower, Cox and Gower firm, with great retrenchment, managed to survive. Several of the textile plants either closed or were transferred to new owners. During this chaotic decade of carpetbagger rule, Greenville industry virtually stood still. After the election of Wade Hampton in 1876, the state and Greenville took a new start toward industrial development.

About this time, George W. Sirrine came to Greenville to become superintendent of the Gower Firm. T. C. Gower left the firm and Henry Markley came in as a partner. It was a long salvage operation but, by 1876, the firm issued a new catalogue and began to resume its former operations. The catalogue listed carriages at from \$100 to \$260; wagons from \$65 to \$150.¹⁷ This great firm was to last well into the twentieth century. Its members Ebenezer Gower, Thomas Claghorn Gower, Thomas Cox and Henry Markley made real contributions to the town. George Sirrine lived well into the twentieth century and made notable contributions to Greenville progress both industrially and civically.

Reedy River Factory, sold by Vardry McBee in 1862, was reorganized and later became Conestee Mills. The old daybook of this mill's commissary or store covering the period 1844 to 1864 is now on file in the Greenville County Library.

At about this time Henry Pinckney Hammett acquired land at Garrison's Schoals on the Saluda and, by 1873, he had raised enough capital to start his mill at what is now Piedmont. The mill started with 5,000 spindles and 112 looms; by 1882,

¹⁶*Southern Enterprise*, May 15, 1862.

¹⁷*Greenville Coach Factory Catalog*, 1876.

it had 25,796 spindles and was the largest textile plant in South Carolina at that time.¹⁸

Other early Greenville mills of this period were the Huguenot Mills started in 1882 with 6,400 spindles and the first Camperdown Mill in 1874. A survey of the state's resources and its problems published in 1883 lists 26 cotton mills in the state, 7 in Greenville County, 6 in Spartanburg and 2 in Anderson. The Greenville mills listed in 1883 were Reedy River Manufacturing Company, Fork Shoals Mill, Huguenot Mills, Camperdown Mills, Piedmont Mills, Pelham Manufacturing Co., and Batesville Mills. All the listed plants used water power, some with small use of steam power. At this date Piedmont ranked second in the state, being surpassed now in size by Graniteville and with the Pelzer Mill in third place. Other Greenville industries of that period listed the Jones Paper Mill on Reedy River, Gower, Cox and Markley's Factory. In addition, the survey lists in Greenville a furniture factory, cotton seed oil mill, a mattress factory, a flour mill, a terra cotta factory and three brick yards. At that time, the town was lighted with gas and some mills with electric lights.¹⁹

During the period from 1883 to the turn of the century, Greenville made steady progress industrially. The coming of the Airline Railroad from Charlotte to Atlanta, now the Southern, and later, the Greenville and Laurens Railroad, together with the Columbia and Greenville Railroad, built before the war gave renewed impetus to growth in industry.²⁰ The gas and electric plant of the Asburys and a new power generating plant at Saluda River Dam created the sinews for increasing industrial plants. At about the end of the nineteenth century, Greenville families who had long been leading merchants became intrigued with the idea of becoming cotton manufacturers. Hence, the Poes, the Morgans, the Beatties, and the Woodsides moved into the industrial scene with new mills. In

¹⁸State Board of Agriculture, *South Carolina, Resources and Population, Institutions and Industries*, (Charleston: Walker, Evans and Cogswell, 1883), p. 582. This work was done by Harry Hammond and others under commission of Governor Hugh S. Thompson.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 710.

²⁰Crittenden, *Century Book*, p. 68.

fact, more than ten new mills were built in Greenville between 1895 and 1901, giving real substance to the later claim of Greenville as the Textile Center of the South. Along with these textile plants, also came some diversified industries. The enterprising young and newly organized Board of Trade in Greenville published an interesting booklet in 1901 and another in 1903. In this booklet, the Board of Trade proudly lists some of the growth and achievements of this growing little city. Among the other industries listed are: The Virginia-Carolina Chemical Company - maker of fertilizers, an additional oil mill- the Farmers' Oil Company, three large iron foundries, two flour mills, one roller cover shop, one suspender factory, two large lumber and mill work plants, and a bobbin and shuttle factory. Featured also was Greenville's new industry - the Seidenburg Cigar Factory. This new plant, housed on East Court Street in a new building financed through a cooperative of Greenville citizens, began its operations in 1901.²¹

The Greenville spirit is evidenced by the closing statement of the Board of Trade:

Greenville, however, is not satisfied. She calls for more, more and more. There are many water powers within easy reach and still undeveloped which could be used for the production of electric power. Transmission of the same is easy and there is a large use for it to operate the many industries now here or which will be here soon. Greenville wishes to extend and largely diversify her manufactures. She offers every facility and advantage. A healthful and mild climate for the operatives. A bracing atmosphere, stimulating action - railroads reaching to all parts of the country-a live, progressive people, ready to back liberally any enterprise contributing to the upbuilding of the city.²²

If the enterprising young men of the Board of Trade of that day could see the Greenville of today, they would be amazed at the progress of the past seventy years, at the modern city with its diversified industries, airports, networks of modern highways. But, these young men dreamed a dream which we have been privileged to see carried out beyond their wildest imagination.

²¹ Board of Trade, Greenville, S. C., *Brochure*, 1901.

²² *Ibid.*