

WILLIAM BATES AND THE BATESVILLE COMMUNITY MRS. DAVID WARD

In researching and writing the history of Batesville it is also necessary to research the history of Pelham for each is entwined with the other and joined by a common industry — textiles.

The 1890 United States Post Office location records of the National Archives describes the location of Batesville as follows: "The name of the nearest office to the proposed one, on one side is Pelham its distance is one mile in an easterly direction and the name of the nearest office on the other side is Walkersville, its distance is four miles in a westerly direction."¹ The number of inhabitants in Batesville was one hundred and twenty-eight and the proposed post office was to serve an overall population of three hundred.² Batesville was never incorporated as a town, therefore precise boundaries were never established. Today, it is generally accepted by local residents that Batesville begins at the crossroads of Pelham Road, South Carolina Highway 14, and Batesville Road, its outer limits still undefined, but merging with the communities of Pelham, Five Forks, Pliney, Boiling Springs, and an area once known as Walkersville.

The Batesville/Pelham area was originally known as Buena Vista and a North Carolina grant dated 1753 is the earliest record of the land in the present day town of Pelham. Early land grants for the Batesville area date to 1784.³ However, it is the land transaction of Rev. Thomas Hutchings which is of prime importance to the history of Pelham and the community of Batesville.⁴

The Rev. Thomas Hutchings had come South in 1816 from Rhode Island with Philip, Lindsey, Wilbur Weaver and others to establish a cotton mill on the Tyger River in Spartanburg District. Hutchings left the Weaver's Mill in 1820 and traveled

¹National Archives, U. S. Post Office Dept., Jan. 14, 1890.

²Ibid.

³Union County Historical Foundation, Land Grant Maps, (Union County Historical Foundation, 1976).

⁴Batesville Ties, 1:119-21, 151.

to Greenville District where he purchased three hundred acres on the Enoree River. Here he established a small factory, "possibly the first in Greenville County."⁷ His financial plight however, forced him to mortgage the land to one creditor and the machinery to another, but by 1821 he had redeemed the original mortgages on the small mill and built a second and larger mill nearby. Fire destroyed the larger of Hutchings's two factories in 1825 and he rebuilt on the same site, retaining control for several years.⁸

It is believed that during the years he was establishing his mill, he was also instrumental in establishing a local Methodist Episcopal Church for on December 20, 1828, he wrote the South Carolina Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church certifying his belief in the doctrine and discipline of the church stating that for sixteen years he had endeavored to preach the same doctrine to others and also stating, "I expect to continue to do the same if you elect me well."⁹

Sometime before 1830, Josiah Kilgore and Philip C. Lester took over the title to Hutchings's Enoree holdings and the mill became known as Lester's Factory.¹⁰ Hutchings did not leave the area but attempted to establish another mill on Rocky Creek adjacent to, but south of the land later purchased by William Bates.¹¹ There are no records of his having been successful although iron pins are embedded in rock at the shoals of Hutchings's land on Rocky Creek. Whether these pins are remains of his Rocky Creek mill or whether they are the remains of a paper mill which Philip C. Lester agreed to build in 1853 at the same location is unknown.¹²

Rev. Thomas Hutchings was never again associated with the textile industry of the Batesville/Pelham area and at the time of his death in April 1869, was residing in Savannah, Georgia. He was buried in the Old Mount Pleasant Methodist Church

⁷Ernest McPherson Lander, Jr., *The Textile Industry in Antebellum South Carolina* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1969), 16.

⁸*Ibid.*, 17.

⁹Letter to S. C. Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Dec. 20, 1828.

¹⁰Lander, *The Textile Industry*, 17.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 17.

¹²Greenville Deeds, P. C. Lester, P. F. Fowler to Ex. Parto, Feb. 18, 1853.

cemetery in Duncan, S. C., now the Duncan Baptist Church.¹¹

Lester's Factory, also called the Enoree Factory or the Buena Vista Factory, remained in joint ownership of Josiah Kilgore and Philip C. Lester until destroyed by fire in 1853. Kilgore sold his interest in the remaining property to Lester who rebuilt the mill taking in his three sons as partners and renaming the factory Lester and Sons. Philip Lester died in 1862 and by 1879 the mill had gone bankrupt.¹² In 1880 Lester's Factory was sold to a group of men from New York headed by Arthur Barnwell who renamed the mill the Pelham Manufacturing Co.¹³ The town, still known as Buena Vista was renamed Pelham. The Pelham Manufacturing Co. remained in operation until 1935. The mill buildings and warehouses subsequently burned in 1941.¹⁴

The early years of textile development in the Pelham area were significant to the history of Batesville and the man for whom the area was named — William Bates.

A direct quotation from the book *Textile Leaders of The South* written by Marjorie W. Young is a most appropriate introduction to William Bates:

At a time when the textile plants of the Palmetto State could easily be numbered on the fingers, there came to the Greenville area a man whose indomitable energy and farsightedness enabled him to write his name in large characters upon the pages of the textile history of South Carolina.

William Bates was born in 1800 in Pawtucket, Rhode Island, the son of John and Deborah Bates.¹⁵ He began his lifelong career in textiles at the age of eight when he was put to work in Green's Cotton Factory. Bates worked next for Senator De Wolf of Rhode Island and in 1812 was working at Sprague's Factory.¹⁶ Bates left Rhode Island in 1819 to work at the Tyger

¹¹*History of Duncan Methodist Church* (Published by Duncan Methodist Church, Duncan, S. C. 1968).

¹²Lander, *The Textile Industry*, 78.

¹³Greenville Deeds, KK-579.

¹⁴National Register of Historic Places Inventory, Apr. 20, 1981.

¹⁵Mary E. Henry, "William Bates: Aug. 11, 1928", 1.

¹⁶Fronde Kennedy, Supervisor, *A History of Spartanburg County*, Compiled by the Spartanburg Unit of the Writers Program of the Work Projects Administration in the State of S. C. (Spartanburg, S. C. 1940), 76.

River factory of Philip, Lindsey, and Wilbur Weaver. It is reported that Bates worked for the Weavers for two years without pay.¹⁷ Upon leaving the Weavers in 1821, he went to work for Leonard Hill and John Clark, also on the Tyger River in Spartanburg District, where he remained until 1824.¹⁸ During this time he married Mary McCarley, daughter of Moses and Jean McCarley of Rutherford County, North Carolina.

Joining William F. Downs and Hugh Wilson in 1824, Bates set up a small factory on Rabun's Creek in Laurens District. The enterprise was a disaster and Bates lost his capital investment of five hundred dollars.¹⁹

He left Laurens District and went to work as a wage earner for Dr. James Bivings' Factory at Lincolnton, North Carolina. He returned to Spartanburg District in 1827 and signed a three-year contract with Hill and Clark to oversee their Tyger River Factory. Bates was to receive one dollar and fifty cents per day plus living quarters and was to be paid at the end of the second and third years.²⁰

In 1830, Bates purchased at a sheriff's sale John Weaver's factory on Thompson's Beaverdam Creek. Weaver had left the original group on the Tyger River sometime in 1820 or 1821, and securing financial assistance from Josiah Kilgore established a new mill. Kilgore forced Weaver into bankruptcy in 1830.²¹ Bates purchased the mill for only one thousand, two hundred and thirty-five dollars but,

believing that the property if well managed will be worth a larger sum and feeling that it would be just and proper that I the said William Bates should in some degree share the benefit of the said purchase with the family of him whose enterprise and industry the said Factory was established²²

Bates deeded half interest in the factory land, machinery and implements to Francis Asbury Weaver, John Weaver's son.

¹⁷Kennedy, *Spartanburg County*, 76.

¹⁸Lander, *The Textile Industry*, 20.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 20.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 20, 27.

²¹*Ibid.*, 19.

²²Greenville Deeds, R 79-80.

This partnership proved unsatisfactory, and in 1832 Bates sold his remaining interest in the machinery "with liberty to remove off the premises when and where he pleases."²³

After leaving the Beaverdam Creek factory, Bates traveled to Lester's Factory at Buena Vista on the Enoree River. It has been reported that Bates entered into partnership with Lester and Kilgore in Lester's Factory then later exchanged his interest in that factory for a small mill Kilgore owned on Rocky Creek.²⁴ However, deeds on record show that the first use of the water power on the shoals of Rocky Creek is contained in a deed from William Harbin to Blagrove Glenn in 1810 and refers to "the grist mill built by said Glenn."²⁵

Prior to 1833 the property changed hands several times when the successive owners had financial troubles.²⁶ The shoals on the property were a good source of water power for the developing textile industry and in 1833 it was acquired at a sheriff's sale by Josiah Kilgore for eight hundred dollars. He immediately sold it to William Bates for eight hundred and ten dollars, both deeds dated September 10, 1833.²⁷

As already noted, Kilgore was known as a financier of textile mills and apparently he had conceived a joint venture with Bates who was noted for his textile genius, but had no apparent funds. Although purchased in 1833, the deed was not recorded until 1835, which was not uncommon in that period of history when deeds were often held by the seller in lieu of a mortgage with actual delivery of the deed withheld until the purchase price was paid. We can only speculate as to whether Kilgore financed the development of the Batesville Mill or actually participated in its ownership.

All evidence indicates that Bates constructed the mill in 1833, or shortly thereafter, as the deed of 1833 does not state that a mill was on the property. Bates moved his machinery from John

²³Greenville Deeds R 100.

²⁴Kennedy, *Spartanburg County*, 77.

²⁵Greenville Deeds, S-343.

²⁶Greenville Deeds S 102, S 93094, S 141-143.

²⁷Greenville Deeds, S 207.

Weaver's Factory and this new establishment became known as Batesville.

The Batesville Factory was especially significant for it had ties both with the beginning of the textile industry in South Carolina and also with the bright future that lay ahead.¹⁸ Batesville was enlarged as the years passed, and by 1840 the county was producing seventy-two thousand dollars worth of cotton goods, principally from that plant. Its product was sold throughout the country, being hauled by wagon.¹⁹

William Bates was joined by Thomas M. Cox in 1847 and in 1849 by Henry Pinckney Hammett. Hammett was a local school teacher and had married Bates' daughter, Deborah Jane in 1848.²⁰ The business with Bates as president, Hammett as business manager and Cox as a partner is what was then known as William Bates and Company prospered. It increased its capital from twenty thousand dollars in 1850 to fifty thousand dollars in 1860. No other cotton factory in South Carolina showed such a proportionate increase in capital during the same decade.²¹ The year 1860 found Greenville County producing cotton goods valued at one hundred, eight thousand and seventy dollars, still principally from the Batesville Mill.²² On the eve of the Civil War, the Batesville Factory was operating with twelve hundred spindles, thirty-six looms and seventy operators.²³

In 1862, William Bates and Company purchased two hundred and twenty-five acres of land at Garrison Shoals on the Saluda River as a site for another mill. Bates was not to see this mill built, due to the Civil War and his own death in 1872. Hammett later bought out Cox's interest in the land and began construction of a mill in 1874. In 1876 the Piedmont Manufacturing

¹⁸Marjorie W. Young, *Textile Leaders of The South*, (Columbia: R. L. Bryan Co., 1963), 524.

¹⁹James M. Richardson, *History of Greenville County*, (Atlanta, Ga.: A. H. Cowson, 1930), 97.

²⁰Henry, "William Bates," I.

²¹Lander, *The Textile Industry*, 77.

²²Richardson, *History of Greenville County*, 97.

²³Lander, *The Textile Industry*, 77.



began operation.³⁴

The Batesville Mill and six hundred, sixty-two acres of land were sold in 1863 for three hundred, twelve thousand Confederate dollars to a group from Charleston, S. C.³⁵ The mill remained in operation during the Civil War being commandeered by the Confederate Army. The mill was allowed to sell one day's output during a week to the civilian population. Presumably because of the collapse of the Confederacy, the property eventually came back into Bates' ownership.³⁶

William Bates died March 18, 1872, and Hammett kept Batesville Mill operating after his death. According to an almanac issued by Joseph Walker of Charleston in 1876, the

Batesville Manufacturing Co., Buena Vista, Greenville District, South Carolina runs 1,260 spindles, 36 looms and employs 50 operative; James Montgomery, Superintendent.³⁷

Batesville Mill was sold on November 1879, to George Putnam. The original wooden structure burned in 1881 and Putnam rebuilt a one-story brick factory on the same site. Putnam's brick factory is still standing.

The Charleston *News and Courier* printed the following statement in 1880:

The plodders who brought the development (of textiles) up to such a point that it could possibly be used as a basis for a double-quick movement after 1800 were such men as William Bates . . .³⁸

William Bates was a textile pioneer whose leadership spurred the growth and development of the textile industry in the Piedmont region of South Carolina. He has been referred to as "one of the most successful textile manufacturers in the state"³⁹ and his name is indeed written in large characters upon the pages of the textile history of South Carolina.

³⁴Greenville News, Aug. 25, 1979, "Piedmont Manufacturing Company,"; Greenville Deeds Z 357.

³⁵Greenville Deeds, Z 676; Z 285.

³⁶Greenville News, December 1976, "Batesville Mill, One of The Earliest Mills."

³⁷Young, *Textile Leaders*, 512.

³⁸Ibid., 512.

³⁹Lander, *The Textile Industry*, 21.