

**HENRY PINCKNEY HAMMETT:
PIONEER, REVITALIZER, TREND SETTER**

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From the pages of history, certain names seem to jump out and demand that the reader enhance his knowledge of them. Such a name for me has been Henry Pinckney Hammett, textile pioneer, revitalizer and trend setter of nineteenth-century Greenville.

Several statements made me realize about a score or more years ago that Hammett had accomplished something significant for the region right here in my own county, and I wondered why we had not heard more about him.

Dr. Albert Neely Sanders wrote:

In 1876, an important date in the local industrial revolution, Henry Pinckney Hammett opened the first cotton textile plant of the Piedmont Manufacturing Company.

Hammett ... built Piedmont into one of the great cotton mills in the world. His relations with his employees were so wisely paternalistic that his villages became models for other mills and his plant became a 'nursery' for the industrial revolution in the South. By the end of the century, thirty-eight mill superintendents were 'graduates of Hammett's mill.'¹

William Plumer Jacobs states in *The Pioneer: The Piedmont Manufacturing Company*, the first mill built by Colonel H. P. Hammett of Greenville, in 1873,² had a remarkable success and a great influence over the decision of Captain [Ellison] Smyth to enter the [textile] business."³

Thomas R. Nevin of Harvard University rated Piedmont Manufacturing Company as being to the South what Samuel Slater's factory and Francis Cabot Lowell's Boston Manufacturing Company had been to the North.⁴

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Several years ago my desire to know more about H. P. Hammett led me to his grandson, Mr. James D. Hammett, Jr., who has been immensely helpful in supplying information and in introducing me to a book entitled the *Hammett Families* by Dr. Thomas Edwards and Miss. Delphine Miller. Where there are discrepancies in dates - as the Colonel's birth date, for instance - I have elected to go with those accepted by the family. (That some sources give 1823 for his birth and others 1822, bothered me until I found out he was born during the night of December 31st.)

Many of the early and later successful textile manufacturers in this area came from the North in search of water power and cheap labor, but Henry Pinckney Hammett is one of our own. The son of Jesse and Nancy Elliott Davia Hammett, he was born twelve miles east of Greenville.

The Hammetts are of English origin and came to America before the Revolution. Soon after that war, John F. and Emena Underwood Hammett joined twelve families and moved from Culpepper, Virginia, to claim a large section of land in the current Chick Springs Township. Following family traditions John F. became a planter and proprietor. Son Jesse, H.P.'s father, became a planter and justice of the peace. (This Hammett family has always spelled their name with two "t's," but it will be found on some tombstones with one. The family attributes this to insufficient width for the long names.)

With only the education he could acquire in the country schools, Hammett began teaching at the age of eighteen. After two and a half years, he went into partnership with Nathaniel Morgan to run a country store. Obviously, this venture was successful because historians report that in 1848, he purchased considerable interest in the Batesville Cotton Factory. Thus, a career that was later to lead the South into recovery was begun. After Hammett joined the firm, it operated for 14 years as William Bates and Company under the ownership of Hammett, Bates and Thomas Cox of Greenville. Hammett served as financial and commercial agent.

The year 1848 marked another important step for Hammett as he married Deborah Jane Bates, the daughter of William Bates, on December 14th. A family that would bring leadership to the region

and to the textile industry was launched. The Hammetts had nine children, two of whom died fairly early. The others and their descendants have made and continue to make valuable contributions today.

Daughter, Mary Elliott, married John Byrd Henry and daughter, Elizabeth, married James Lawrence Orr, Jr., an attorney. Orr would succeed Hammett at Piedmont and would pursue the textile interest organizing Orr Cotton Mills in Anderson County. He preserved some of the Hammett story and I am deeply indebted to him for much of the information I have used herein.

Sons Edwin Pinckney, William Henry, James David and George Pierce followed their father into textiles for at least a while, with James David and George choosing the field for their life work. They both became associated with Orr Cotton Mills in Anderson, which James served as president and treasurer. He organized Chiquola Manufacturing Company and was president and treasurer there and of Watts Mill, of Bragon Mills and of Anderson Cotton Mills. James also chaired the American Cotton Manufacturers Association and the Cotton Manufacturers Association of South Carolina. Several of H. P. Hammett's grandsons have also contributed leadership to the textile industry.

When he entered textiles, Hammett appears to have been endowed with sound qualities and some business experience. His father-in-law and partner had textile expertise and ingenuity to share with him.

Writing for Crittenden's *Greenville Century Book* (in 1903), Orr stated that in 1819 William Bates, an orphan, had come from Pawtucket, Rhode Island, to seek his fortune in the South. Bates had a fair knowledge of cotton textile machinery and fifty dollars. Orr continued, "He also had grit, brains and character and these were the real foundation of his success and of Piedmont [Manufacturing Company.]"⁵

After working in small textile operations in North and South Carolina, Bates settled in the area that would bear his name and started the Batesville manufacturing firm. When the local market for yarn diminished, Bates bartered bunch yarn from a schooner wagon in North Carolina and Tennessee and sold the products he received -

skins, rags, meats, etc. from his company store at Batesville.

While Hammett was associated with Bates and Company, the operation grew and finally had 3000 spindles when it was sold to Trenholm, Frasier and Company in 1862. Most sources credit Bates with advising Hammett to buy Garrison Shoals on the Saluda River with part of the money they made from the sale of the mill. Whoever had the foresight, Hammett did buy the site, but the Civil War was in progress and Hammett delayed starting the endeavor until some recovery from the war had taken place. (Bates' 1872 death prevented his seeing his dream of manufacturing on the Saluda materialize.)

Meanwhile, Hammett made other contributions. In 1863, the Hammetts moved to Greenville, first residing on Buncombe Road (now Rutherford Street) and later on Augusta Street where the YWCA stands today. The same year as their move, Hammett enlisted in the Confederate Army and became Quartermaster of the First regiment of South Carolina State Troops. He was stationed in Charleston for a time until ill health necessitated his return home. Soon thereafter, he was named war assessor for Greenville County and served the Confederacy in that capacity until the end of the War.

In Greenville, Hammett soon became involved in his church, Buncombe Street Methodist Episcopal South, and in the community where he was a leader in many worthwhile endeavors. He served one term in the State House of Representatives and one term each as alderman and mayor. He declined to seek re-election each time as he did after serving for four years as president of the Columbia and Greenville Railroad. He may well have chosen not to continue with the railroad and town responsibilities because he felt the time was nearing to start the mill at Garrison Shoals. Hammett was a deliberate man and was probably carefully seeking an auspicious time. Even so, the way was hard and was made more difficult by the Panic of 1873.

In 1903 Orr described Garrison Shoals from the impression of his first visit in 1873: "... there was a small grist mill there and a little log cabin ... in which Judge Langston, the miller lived. The dam was one log to throw the water to the Greenville side of the river. There were no other buildings on the place except an old house where the hotel now stands (1903). A more desolate and uninviting

location, I thought I had never seen." ⁶

Such was the place with which Hammett had to work. He had bought out the other Batesville partners' interests and had purchased land to give the plant access to the Columbia and Greenville Railroad when he started raising capital for Piedmont Cotton Mills. On April 30, 1873, the mill was organized with \$75,000 capital subscribed. Hammett was chosen president and J. Eli Gregg, J. H. Martin, W. C. Norwood, James Birnie, T. C. Gower, Alex McBee and Hamlin Beattie composed a strong board of directors.

Before the charter authorizing capital of \$200,000 could be granted in February 1874, the severe panic of 1873 had struck, "crushing all hope and strangling all enterprise," according to Orr. Building ceased and machinery orders were canceled as some stockholders stopped paying their installments and others sold out at any price they could.

While Hammett waited, he ran or at least cleared the property and figured ways to get up the money. A lesser man might have given up but Colonel Hammett had perseverance, tenacity, and Bates' example for overcoming difficulties. He also had the motivation of believing that devotion to business was the best way to help the poor, displaced and fatherless after the Civil War. The textile business appeared to him the main chance to revitalize the South. ⁷

By the fall of 1875, Hammett had collected enough capital to resume construction and renew the machinery order. By March of 1876, the machinery (5000 spindles and 112 looms) was running and so was one of the first scientific mills in the South. It was partially financed somewhat as businesses are today. Hammett had the foresight to get Woodward, Baldwin, and Company to be the exclusive agents for sales, except for the local ones made directly from the factory. Thus the fine but unknown Piedmont products found good acceptance in the New York and Baltimore markets. In return for the sales contract, Piedmont received an immediate advance of \$5,000 to operate and the privilege of drawing up to \$10,000 a year. The Baldwins not only purchased stock themselves but also sold it in eastern financial circles. ⁸ A happy marriage had developed.

These days we hear how it will take at least five years for a

new business to earn a dividend but Piedmont paid a seven per cent dividend the December after it opened in March. This immediate success encouraged the sale of stock, and the approval by stockholders of Hammett's plan to increase the capital stock and equip the building with a complete cloth shop of 10,600 spindles and 240 looms. In the 1880's, the continually growing Piedmont was the largest mill in the state. By 1888, it had 61,032 spindles, 1,994 looms, four plants, and capital of \$800,000. However, by 1903 the size had been surpassed but not the quality of the products which were respected in the United States and in China.⁹

The immediate success of Piedmont did more than help its employees and stockholders, it inspired others to enter the field of textiles. I once heard a speaker on Greenville textile leaders say that when Hammett was praised for paying 20 per cent dividends that he said: "Oh, any well-run mill can do that..." I do remember that stockholders were always especially happy with their Piedmont dividends. Hence, the precedent of good returns that was set by the founder was continued by his successors, Orr, W. E. Beattie and S. M. Beattie until the firm was sold to J. P. Stevens and Company in 1946.

Around Piedmont was a village with good housing, schools, a library, recreational facilities, and churches. Apparently, Piedmont was a good place to work and live because it attracted and usually kept a well-respected class of workers. They reputedly liked their jobs, the community, and management.

Naturally, Hammett's expertise was sought by others who were venturing into textiles. He was among the group who purchased Camperdown Mills in 1885 and organized a new business with the name of Camperdown Cotton Mills. He served as president and treasurer of the firm until his death in 1891 at which time he was financially interested in many businesses within the state. Jacobs credits Hammett's leadership with the development of a "serviceable and progressive mill village around each enterprise in which he was interested."¹⁰

Henry Pinckney Hammett joined Henry Grady in the vision that industry would revitalize the South. And he did something about it. He created a mill that proved what could be done, a mill that did

so well that it inspired others to invest in textiles, that trained superintendents to manage the emerging plants and that set an example for selling products in the eastern United States and in the Orient.

The Hammett mills are silent now, but the industrialization H. P. Hammett promoted and the example he set continue and inspire.

Outstanding merits are proclaimed by a monument to Hammett erected by Piedmont Manufacturing Company in Piedmont: "Trusted by his stockholders, beloved by his employees, and respected by all who knew him."

If anything is left to be said, the Hammett family monument in Christ Churchyard speaks it well and simply, "Henry Pinckney Hammett, well done thou good and faithful servant."

Endnotes

¹ Albert N. Sanders, "Greenville and the Southern Tradition," *The Arts in Greenville, 1800-1960*, Albert S. Reid, ed. (Greenville, S.C.: Furman University, 1960), p. 139.

² Sanders uses the date the mill actually started operation. Jacobs dates the firm from its incorporation.

³ William Palmer Jacobs, *The Pioneer*. (Clinton, S.C.: Jacobs and Company Press, 1935), p. 30.

⁴ Marjorie W. Young, ed., *Textile Leaders of the South*. (Columbia: R. L. Bryan Company, 1963), p. 505.

⁵ James L. Orr, "History of Piedmont," *The Greenville Century Book* by S. S. Crittenden, (Greenville, S.C., 1903), pp. 65-66.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

⁷ J. C. Hemphill, *Men of Mark in South Carolina*. (Washington, S.C.: Men of Mark Publishing Company, 1909), Vol. II, p. 193.

⁸ Young, *op. cit.*, p. 504.

⁹ Orr, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

¹⁰ Jacobs, *op. cit.*, p. 73.