

**Don Koonce**  
**Southern Bleachery and Print Works**  
**and the Birth of Taylors Mill**

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For hundreds of years, the Cherokee tribe understood the value of mineral springs for their healing properties. Paris Mountain had sulfur springs and the Taylors area had medicinal mineral springs at Lick Creek near the Enoree River. Robert Mills remarked, "it smells like the washings of a cup barrel." Then along comes a man named Dr. Burwell Chick, who saw the value of opening this to people around the area. So, he re-named the area "Chick Springs" and built a spring house and hotel there in 1840. He constructed cottages in the area and invited people to come and enjoy the curing properties of these springs.

When he died, his two sons took over, but sold it in 1857 and it burned in 1862. They bought it right back and then sold it to an attorney from Atlanta, George Westmoreland. Under new ownership, a new hotel was built and the property was expanded to be a proper resort including tennis, swimming, horse-back riding, and other amenities to attract people to enjoy this beautiful part of Greenville County. Westmoreland ran the hotel for awhile but then sold it to a Greenville businessman names James Bull. After years of success, the hotel burned again in 1907, but Bull invested further in the property and built a magnificent new hotel in a Spanish architectural style with even more amenities than in the past. Bull also added a bottling factory to commercially sell the Chick Springs mineral water then later got into selling ginger ale made with that same spring water.



Postcard of the Chick Springs Hotel as it looked under owner George Westmoreland.  
*(Photo courtesy of the Greenville County Historical Society.)*

Meanwhile, in 1909 the national highway was built from Roanoke, VA, to Atlanta (and eventually further to Florida) and went through Chick Springs in the little community of Taylors, SC, and also traveled through the WWI Army Camp, Camp Sevier, and through Greenville. The road was paved with cement from Greenville to Camp Sevier in 1917 but didn't get paved to Taylors until 1925, one year after they built the Southern Bleachery building.

The Piedmont & Northern Railroad (P&N) came to the area in 1911 owned by textile executive, James Buchanan Duke. The line ran right along the backside of the property of the hotel. This allowed for hundreds and hundreds of new visitors to come and easily have access to staying at the hotel. Business was great for about five years but then the market started to wane and Bull released the operation to Bennette Geer, who was the head of the English Department at Furman University. With leisure travel at a low on the eve of WWI, Geer turned the former hotel into a military academy.



This photo shows the former Chick Springs Hotel as it looked as a military academy under the operation of Bennette Geer. *(Photo courtesy of the Greenville County Historical Society.)*



BENNETTE EUGENE GEER, M. A., M. M. P.

Bennette Geer was one of the most important businessmen in Greenville and took over operation of the old hotel. This portrait shows him in 1901. *(Photo courtesy of the Greenville County Historical Society)*

The cadets who trained here would go on to be part of the Butler Guards, which were part of Company A of the 118<sup>th</sup> Regiment of the 30<sup>th</sup> Division of the Old Hickory Brigade, who were the ones who broke through the Hindenburg line on September 29, 1918, and secured the victory for the Allies. When Bennette's brother, John, died of cancer in 1912, he left charge of his five textile mills to Bennette. One of those was Judson mill, which was on the brink of financially folding. Bennette visited James B. Duke and successfully borrowed \$75,000 to save the mill. An additional part of the bargain was for Bennette to bring textile business along Duke's P&N railroad line. Duke said, "I want you to build some mills along 'my little railroad.'" [He called it 'little railroad' because he could remember the name of it since he owned so many different ones.] Geer followed up with starting Southern Franklin Processing in 1921 and Southern Worsted and Southern Weaving in 1924. Duke was pleased but wanted more, so Geer contacted John Arrington, who was the president of Union Bleachery. Arrington advised Geer that the region really needed another bleachery because the in-demand product of that era was print cloth.

In order to have print cloth, you had to dye or bleach "gray" cloth and process it in preparation for printing. So Arrington told Geer to bring on a strategic partner named Harry Stevenson, who was named president of the new Southern Bleachery and oversaw its construction. Alester Furman was the land agent to secure the real estate for the new bleachery from the estate of Alfred Taylor and from the Hemmings property. Joseph Sirrine, who designed scores of mills throughout the state and in Greenville, designed the buildings and layout for Southern Bleachery. James Gallivan of Gallivan Construction, whose firm had built many mills already existing around Greenville, was hired to build the complex on six acres of land.

Stevenson predicted that the bleachery would process over three million yards of cloth in one week. Numerous extensions were made to the complex over the years. In 1928, thirteen acres of the property were sold to Piedmont Print Works to make the process even more efficient by getting printing facilities into the same buildings where the finished bleach cloth was ready for use. A decade later these two companies merged.

The mill village surrounded the bleachery and extended up Mill Street to Main Street over to Stevenson Street and down across the Enoree River and beyond the railroad tracks. Supervisor houses were located up by Mills Street and Hill Street. The company store was near the intersection of Main Street and Mills Street, but is no longer existing. Besides having a baseball team and a golf course, the village had all the amenities most textile mills had in this era.



A 1955 aerial view of the Southern Bleachery complex and surrounding countryside of Taylors. Notice the P&N railroad line just above the mill with the baseball field just above the railroad line. *(Photo courtesy of the Greenville County Historical Society.)*



Burlington Industries bought the mill in the 1950s, but soon demand for cloth printing and bleaching declined. Operation ceased in 1965 but warehousing facilities on the property were leased to JPS Automotive and to Stone Manufacturing. The majority of the complex stood empty for the next fifty years, and then came Ken Walker, who purchased the land in 2006 and then bought the buildings in 2008. Walker began developing the property into various uses with artists being the first to move in and set up studios. Due South Coffee Roasters then began roasting coffee and selling coffee and baked goods in a nice café space in a central area of what was now referred to as Taylors Mill. New ownership came in 2015 when Walker sold it to Caleb Lewis, who continues to provide space for small businesses, artists, and more.



After Don Koonce's presentation about the history of the bleachery, guests were led on a tour of the historic property. *(Photo courtesy of John M. Nolan.)*