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An Interpretive Plan for the Newry, South Carolina Cotton Mill Museum

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An Interpretive Plan for the Newry, South Carolina Cotton Mill Museum

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Gaffney, South Carolina

A Thesis presented to the Graduate Faculty
of the College of William and Mary in Candidacy for the Degree of
Master of Arts

American Studies Program

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Master of Arts

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The widespread movement of a large portion of the southern population in the late 1800s and early 1900s from small farms to textile mill villages marked the beginning of the South’s industrial revolution. The South was well equipped with the raw material and cheap labor to supply this cotton mill boom, and northern industrialists moved their interests to the southern United States. As agriculture became less stable, and therefore less profitable, white yeoman farmers and their families responded to manufacturers’ appeals for industrial labor. In search of steady wages, and with the promise of a better life, these farm families migrated from their country homes to textile mill villages that emerged from Virginia to Mississippi. As this mass internal migration occurred, people who left their farms experienced a drastic change in lifestyle. Life in small, identical homes, which stood side by side on narrow streets that almost always led directly to the factory, posed new challenges to those accustomed to life on rural farms, which provided a degree of freedom and flexibility, but manufacturers offered white workers steady wages and better housing in a system that perpetuated familiar “Old South” traditions that placed poor, whites over blacks and men over women. By the late 1970s, most of these southern textile mills had closed their doors and with them closed an important chapter in southern and American history.

This thesis provides an interpretive plan as the framework and foundation for the creation of a living history museum in an intact textile mill and village in Newry, South Carolina to commemorate the complex textile world negotiated by owners and workers, blacks and whites across the South in the early 1930s. More than just a recreation of daily activities, this plan aspires toward the ineffable by creating experiences that can be easily integrated into visitors’ own environment. Just as generations of workers created a community beyond the strict confines of the textile labor system, it is hoped that modern Americans, facing economic uncertainty and joblessness and who struggle to find their voice within government, will reach beyond the confines of this plan to become active participants in the meaning making process, constructing experiences that will resonate in their own lives.
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INTRODUCTION

Along U.S. Highway 123 through Seneca, South Carolina, a green road sign with a white arrow points to the right and reads: “Newry 4 miles.” Most likely the majority of passersby give this sign little attention since few people now have good reason to travel the road from Seneca to Newry. For those curious travelers who choose to turn right and venture the four miles to this little village, what awaits is hardly remarkable. A Baptist church sits at the top of the hill. Row upon row of 115 homes—identical except for paint color and minor modifications—line the streets. A small square, brick office building sits in an empty asphalt lot. As travelers make their way down this narrow and quiet street, a dilapidated clapboard building with a small sign that reads “U.S. Post Office.” At the foot of the hill stands an immense, brick industrial building with boarded up windows surrounded by a rusted fence and protected by a broken lock.

Travelers down this same road more than seventy years ago recall a much different village. A gothic-style interdenominational church at the top of the hill dominated the landscape. Row upon row of small and identical homes lined the main streets, their front porches bursting at the seams with visitors. A small square, brick office building sat in an asphalt lot full of Chryslers and Buicks. As the morning whistle blew, hundreds of workers poured from their homes and filled the narrow streets. Operatives dressed in overalls and aprons made their way to the immense, brick industrial building that loomed at the end of the muddy road. Smoke billowed from the factory’s smokestack. The morning silence was
broken with workers’ voices as they contemplated union organization and complained to one another about the stretch-out.

Both these scenes can be reconstructed in hundreds of former industrial villages across the South, but, as the economy came to rely less on the cotton cloth produced inside the factories where generations of southerners made their life and living, these once booming centers of industry were abandoned. The houses that lined village streets were left for a new generation of village residents, most of them far removed from the way of life that once existed in these communities. In the early twentieth century, danger, dirt, and despair coexisted with courage, compassion, and community in the South’s textile communities. Workers lived in homes provided by mill owners, but they earned low wages and labored in dangerous conditions. As company officials sought new ways of keeping mill operatives tied to this work, mill workers sought ways to assert their independence and demand better wages and working conditions.

The Abney Mills Company ceased production at the Newry mill in 1975. While the mill at Neary longer operates, the mill building and village remain largely intact, albeit in some disarray. When the mill closed its doors, most former mill workers left the village, selling their homes to new residents attracted to Newry primarily due to low cost of living. Other residents have purchased land in the village and have placed mobile homes where New England saltboxes once stood. In the fall of 2000, the mill was purchased by private owners and is currently for sale again for an asking price of $375,000. The intactness of the
mill and village make it imperative that foundations focused on living museums and workers’ lives purchase this property.

While the Courtenay mill and village in Newry is not the only surviving Piedmont mill community, it is an excellent, intact example of a mill site that captures the essence of a typical twentieth century mill town, due in large part to the fact that Newry remains a self-contained village. The restoration of the village in Newry and its opening as a living history museum comes at an important time in the life of cotton mills and villages. While many towns across the South have recognized the importance of mill structures and preserved them as town centers, shopping malls, and apartment buildings, these restoration and rehabilitation efforts have also stripped the mills and surrounding villages from their working-class culture and industrial context.

Many southern towns have been plagued by the notion that industrial sites are neither old enough, nor historical enough to be saved. Even though many of the factories have closed their doors, the people have remained. Many current residents of former mill villages have never lived anywhere else, getting married on the mill hill, raising their children in the same house, and visiting with neighbors on the same front porch for the last sixty years. For some former industrial workers, the civic condemnation of these structures as insignificant also directly condemns the people and work that occurred inside and reflects the obvious disdain with which their lives and work are regarded by others. Often, city planners and civic leaders see these structures as symbols of “poverty,
grimness, and exploitation,” and thus they neglect the memories of those who actually lived and worked in them. In the memories of former mill workers, the difficulties and joys of work are remembered as “inseparable parts of their life’s experience,” and “memories of struggle with poverty...unemployment and strikes, illness and death were all part of that story, and were intimately linked to the buildings.” Beyond workers’ experiences in the mills, buildings connect them to family, community, and neighbors with whom these experiences were shared.¹ Although this way of life is gone, and the work performed on the shop floor of southern textile mills is no longer essential to the local or national economy, these buildings are major and tangible links to a vital piece of regional, state, and national history.

Since the 1960s, there has been a shift in historical scholarship away from focus on the elite and towards the inclusion of ordinary people, such as mill workers, immigrants, and slaves. How ordinary people worked, socialized and made kinship and community ties now form the core of the historical narrative. As former mill worker Nell Sigmon put it, “You don’t have to be famous for your life to be history.”² While not often seen as extraordinary, these people’s lives are important to the greater understanding of everyday experiences in a particular historical context and culture.

Museums have responded to the social history of everyday life in a variety of ways. Monticello, in Charlottesville, Virginia, for example, exists because of its connection to President Thomas Jefferson. The historical interpretation now includes the history of the plantation's free workers and slaves, and much work has been done to explore the relationship between Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings, the slave by whom he fathered several children. Other historical societies and regional museums have expanded from a sole focus on a prominent family or person in the area, to include the daily life of people who did the majority of labor on farms and rural industries.

Living history museums have become another popular way to interpret the life of common people. Although living history museums have existed since the early 1930s, this method of interpretation was not popularized until the 1960s. At its core, living history seeks to help visitors "imagine life as it must have seemed at a particular place and time and to communicate the importance of understanding with your head and your heart." This type of physical and emotional interaction is precisely the connection that makes history meaningful to people.

Buildings, whether recreated or restored, and replica objects serve as backdrops for interpretation at most living history museums. Through material culture, visitors are encouraged to become participants in history, rather than

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merely observers, and as a result, play a more active role in creating meaningful experiences for themselves. Kinetic interaction is encouraged through an exchange between visitors and historical interpreters as “things and places can only be properly understood through nearness and intimacy, through bodily participation.”\(^5\) While living history museums have achieved some success in this endeavor, there is still much to be done to establish links between people and the places in which they lived and worked.\(^6\) In their effort to interpret the way of life of a particular group of people, living history museums often preserve existing vernacular structures, when they are available. When these structures are gone, they attempt to reconstruct the physical environment using archaeological findings, or other documentary evidence. Restored structures use building techniques and methods appropriate to the people and the period. Through these efforts, the buildings themselves become active and meaningful parts of the interpretation and foster collaboration between the site and its visitors.

One example of this practice is the Lowell National Historical Park, an industrial city “park,” which has restored many of its historic buildings for adaptive and interpretive use. Visitors to Lowell will find a variety of restored structures used by mill workers, including St. Anne’s Church, (built in 1825), Boardinghouse Park, which celebrates Lowell’s cultural traditions through music and drama, and the Patrick J. Morgan Cultural Center, housed in an 1830s boardinghouse. The

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\(^5\) Ibid, 37.

\(^6\) Hareven and Langenbach, 114.
restored Boott Cotton Mills Museum, which “traces the industrialization of Lowell” through exhibits and living history demonstrations in a “20th-century-style weave room with up to 100 operating power looms.”\(^7\) Just ten years before the National Park Service launched a large scale effort to save Lowell, many better-preserved mills in Manchester, New Hampshire, Lowell’s sister city, were destroyed as part of an urban renewal project. Lowell’s preservation reflects the nation’s change in attitude toward its industrial heritage.\(^8\)

Another museum dedicated to the preservation of America’s industrial heritage is the Slater Mill Historic Site in Pawtucket, Rhode Island. This historic site, which consists of the Old Slater Mill, the Sylvanus Brown House, and the Wilkinson Mill, interprets the history of the “innovation [of Samuel Slater], of labour, of women’s rights, of immigration and assimilation, as well as the story of industry.”\(^9\) In the years after World War I, a group of businessmen with strong ties to the textile industry, affected by the movement of industrialization from the North to the South, recognized the importance of this mill as the “birthplace” of the American Industrial Revolution and thus formed an Association to help save it as the “last vestige of their industrial heritage.”\(^10\) As the museum has evolved, it’s more than thirty thousand visitors each year learn of the historical and cultural significance of this place through living history demonstrations in the restored mill sites and Sylvanus Brown House, guided tours, and cultural festivals.

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\(^8\) Hareven and Langenbach, 114.


\(^10\) Ibid.
While both of these sites are formative examples of museums dedicated to interpreting our nation’s industrial heritage, they are also “exceptional, symbolic specimens” of buildings specifically associated with important people and events in American history. In order to establish “genuine links between community identity and the built environment,” however, it is necessary to preserve not only those that are exceptional, but, more important, “local workplaces and neighborhoods.”

While many museums, such as the South Carolina State Museum in Columbia, South Carolina, utilize restored historic structures for their exhibitions, they fail to connect the physical structure with the culture of those who spent their lives in them.

The Courtenay mill village in Newry, South Carolina, is one example of an appropriate site for the South Carolina Cotton Mill Museum and its interpretation of life and work in a southern textile mill and village. The village at Newry is typical of other mill villages in South Carolina, as well as those found all over the southern United States, because of its proximity to water, railroads, and cheap labor. The early 1900s saltbox homes that once housed two or more mill families still stand and now house former mill workers and other residents attracted to Newry. Although Newry is a typical example of a southern cotton mill for geographic and demographic reasons, Newry is unique in that the “town” has not grown up around the mill and its village as it has in many other South Carolina mill communities, making it a prime spot for this museum.

11Hareven and Langenbach, Chapter 6.
The South Carolina Cotton Mill Museum in Newry will interpret the buildings and people who occupied these buildings as inseparable parts of a distinct cotton mill culture. The mill and village are superior examples of an industrial community, and as a museum it will represent the culture that existed in other cotton mill communities in South Carolina and, more generally, across the southern United States. Newry will be the first large-scale living history museum dedicated to the South’s industrial heritage. More than just a collection of artifacts, this living museum will be a diorama of recovered fragments of textile workers’ culture, such as literature, art, crafts, architecture and customs. Few textiles exist in the South, now, and along with the passing of many of those who lived and worked in these mills a century ago, this history is largely gone from collective memory. The South cannot afford to lose this culture, and something must be done while the artifacts, people, and architecture are still available.

What follows is an interpretive plan to preserve the mill and village in Newry, South Carolina to create a living history museum that will commemorate the communities of thousands of southern Americans.

INTERPRETIVE GUIDELINES

The South Carolina Cotton Mill Museum will interpret the everyday lives of the thousands of men, women, and children who labored in textile mills across South Carolina. To guide the interpretive process and ensure that museum programming will enrich and expand visitors’ knowledge of mill history through specialized programs appropriate to the ages, abilities, and interests of its
audience, the museum will use interpretive principles established by National Park Service interpretive specialist, Freeman Tilden. This form of interpretive programming has proven to engage visitors’ senses because it will go beyond the facts to expose the diverse experiences and daily lives of ordinary people. Such intimate details of every day experience help visitors make this content relevant to their own lives. The museum will employ active teaching techniques such as questioning strategies, hands-on activities, and object analysis in a living-history environment, which will employ interpreters dressed in period clothing, recreating the daily lives of southern mill workers in the 1930s.

In order to present interpretations of the site’s history that are simultaneously educational and engaging, it is imperative that the museum obtain information from a variety of sources. The museum will use primary sources including newspapers, photographs, architecture, company records, archaeology and oral history accounts as the basis for interpretation of costumes, furnishings, and content for interaction between visitors and interpreters. Participation with costumed interpreters in hands-on activities appropriate to the period and site location will engage visitors in active interaction with the past and gain a better understanding of the information being presented and its relevance to their lives. This participatory approach to teaching has the ability to reach all three learning domains, the cognitive, affective, and motor skills domains. By carrying out a physical task, visitors will not only involve their motor skills, but

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they will also obtain new information about this period in history. Further, visitors will be encouraged to consider the emotional implications of these activities on those historically involved in them. Museum staff understand that each visitor brings her own unique perspective and life experiences, which shapes “her interaction with the site and thus affects the meaning derived. In this way, meaning becomes a creative process of exchange between the site and the individual.”

Identifying the demographics of potential visitors is foundational to how Newry curators will present the best interpretation of the history and way of life of the mill community. South Carolina is host to nearly thirty million tourists annually, 33 percent of them are in-state travelers. Additionally, visitors come to the state from nearby states, including North Carolina, Georgia, Florida, and Virginia. A 2004 analysis of “Travel to Historic Attractions in South Carolina,” determined that 63.8 percent of the state’s visitors recorded shopping and visits to beaches as their top activities, while only 5.2 percent identified museum visits as their top activities. Perhaps these choices have been influenced by marketing across the Southeast that promotes the resorts and beaches of Charleston and Myrtle Beach instead of South Carolina’s limited offering of museum experiences, but the South Carolina Cotton Mill Museum will provide an important addition to museum and cultural opportunities for visitors to the state.

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The museum will provide lectures on current research related to exhibits. Period music will play in non-interpretive spaces, such as the café and bookstore. To promote visitation among school groups in South Carolina, museum educators will align the content with school curriculum and state educational standards. To promote cultural tourism to the area, the museum will also form alliances with other textile heritage sites, such as the Boott Cotton Mills Museum in Lowell, Massachusetts, and the South Carolina National Heritage Corridor, which extends 240 miles from Charleston to Oconee County and offers the state’s travelers an alternative to Interstate travel and a glimpse of South Carolina’s cultural, historical, and natural resources.

Interpretive programming will be centered on the museum’s primary objective of helping visitors understand that while South Carolina’s company run mill villages attracted white workers from rural areas by providing all the necessities of life: steady work, housing, education, stores, a post office, a place to worship, and some outlets for recreation, this system valued long held southern traditions that favored whites over blacks and men over women and threatened workers’ independence. Nonetheless, white mill workers created a community that “armed them with experiential knowledge that the world did not have to remain as they knew, that better was possible,” and gave them a voice through harsh working conditions, periods of labor unrest, and national economic crisis.16

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16G.C. Waldrep, Southern Workers and the Search for Community: Spartanburg County, South Carolina (Chicago: The University of Illinois Press, 2000), 6, 186.
Secondary behavioral and emotional objectives will involve visitors through experiential learning and to reach them on an emotional level.

Utilizing these guidelines and objectives, the following interpretive plan establishes the historical narrative and themes around the content that the South Carolina Cotton Mill Museum is based. This interpretative plan provides interpretive opportunities as the methodology through which the museum’s objectives will be met.

Historical Context for the Interpretive Plan

The widespread movement of a large portion of the southern population in the late 1800s and early 1900s from small farms to textile mill villages marked the beginning of the South’s industrial revolution. The South was well equipped with the raw material and cheap labor to supply this cotton mill boom, and northern industrialists moved their interests to the southern United States.17

As agriculture became less stable, and therefore less profitable, white yeoman farmers and their families responded to manufacturers’ appeals for industrial labor. In search of steady wages, and with the promise of a better life, these farm families migrated from their country homes to textile mill villages that emerged from Virginia to Mississippi. As this mass internal migration occurred, people who left their farms experienced a drastic change in lifestyle. Life in small, identical homes, which stood side by side on narrow streets that almost always led directly to the factory, posed new challenges to those accustomed to

17 Waldrep, 1-2.
life on rural farms, which provided a degree of freedom and flexibility. The open
air of the country was replaced by the dark, lint filled air of the cotton mill, which
saturated their lungs and settled on their clothing, branding them as cotton mill
workers. The deafening roar of machines, which also posed a threat to their
health and safety, served as a constant reminder that they no longer worked for
themselves and their own profit, but labored for the profit of someone else. For
some, mill work was “nothing but a robot life. There’s no challenge to it-just
drudgery. But in farming you do work real close to nature. There’s always
something exciting and changing in nature.” Still others found mill work a
welcome change from the rigors of life on the farm. “Working in the cotton mill
was not as hard work as running one of them mountain farms.”

These industrial villages emerged as the South’s “modern” town where
managerial and working classes worked and lived. The rise and development of
the town provided a gateway through which social organizations, corporations,
and hierarchical divisions of labor based upon race and gender could permeate a
southern society previously centered on white planters and farmers. While these
two classes lived in racially homogenous communities, their class differences
were also referenced by the very places in which they lived: “town people” and
“mill people.”

By 1900, former proponents of mill building shifted their focus to the deep
differences they perceived existed between town and mill folk. Although many

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18 Quoted in Hall et al, 53.
19 Ibid., 56.
town folk had rural roots, life in the country was now unrecognizable to them. As mill workers conducted business in town, they were acutely aware that town dwellers did not want them there. This growing conflict between the middle class and mill workers was furthered by their opposing views of the Progressive Movement of the early 1900s. The rising middle class in South Carolina strongly supported reform of the Progressive Movement in the hopes that it would help “civilize” mill people and ensure a sense of safety and comfort within their towns. Operatives, however, were less than grateful for this “humanitarian” reform, which they believed threatened their independence as parents and a class as a whole. Mill operatives found a refuge in Governor Coley Blease, who opposed reform as an invasion of workers’ privacy. In a world where managers and mill owners controlled so much of their daily lives, workers’ desire for independence permeated the mill community for many years.

The divisions created by class between white mill workers, managers, and owners were bridged by the state’s racial politics. When the South Carolina legislature passed Jim Crow laws in the 1890s to deny the vote to African Americans, it did not disenfranchise poor white males, including those who were property-less mill workers. Politicians like Coley Blease recognized mill workers as an important bloc of voters and spent time campaigning in the social halls and on front porches of South Carolina mill villages. Blease, a former lawyer, “promoted white supremacy, derided national unions, rejected child labor restrictions, and lambasted compulsory school legislation,” and because mill
workers resisted this progress, they went out in droves to support him. Blease validated white operatives’ concerns with regards to eliminating child labor and encouraged a system that mirrored “Old South” principles that separated whites and blacks on the shop floor and village streets. While these ideas were foundational to the textile world established by owners and supported by operatives, they were not enough to keep Blease in mill workers’ favor indefinitely. As workers began to forge new networks and reorganize kinships within their communities, their political ideologies shifted from a fear of government interference toward the “aggressive pursuit of state action on their behalf.”

By the time second and third generation white operatives predominated in the textile mills, workers had created their own cotton mill system, centered not on work in the mill, but on each other. The social life of the mill village was its own world, and because their focus shifted to things in which they could believe: each other, textile baseball, mill village religion, and Franklin D. Roosevelt, it was a world not without power. When operatives saw this world being threatened by employers wanting to retain control over their work, social, and private lives, they challenged employer authority as a group. Historian Christopher Waldrep concludes: “What loyalty southern mill owners extracted from workers was indeed negotiated, even if workers were negotiating from a position of decided, and often extreme, weakness. Yet, they never let on they were weak, and in

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unbearable circumstances workers could strike, which they did sporadically, or they could always flee. ²¹

Interpretive Narrative: Work and the Mill

By the 1880s, the mill-building boom had begun in South Carolina. Factory buildings and company housing infiltrated the Upstate due in large part to the region’s proximity to water power, cotton farms, and cheap labor. Manufacturers offered white workers steady wages and better housing in a system that perpetuated familiar “Old South” traditions that placed poor, whites over blacks and men over women. After the cascade of strikes in the late nineteenth century, company owners sought docile workers. Textile owners moved mills to South Carolina because officials promised investors an abundance of “low-priced labor-100 percent American Anglo-Saxon stock, no foreign element, no textile strikes and ample labor for all enterprises.” During World War I, rural workers’ migration to mill towns slowed because these farmers considered mill hands as little more than “failed farmers.” Farmers considered moving to the mill hill as a defeat. Ironically, this provided workers already in the mills a unique advantage. To mill workers, labor shortages might force mill owners to provide better housing and higher wages. When owners refused, workers moved from village to village seeking better opportunities, always knowing there would be work for them when they got there. By 1921, labor

²¹ Waldrep, 6.
shortages ceased when the boll weevil attacked more than one third of the state’s cotton crop, forcing farmers, reluctantly, from the field to the mill.\textsuperscript{22}

For many workers, leaving the farm for the factory was a major transition. Life on the farm allowed men, women, and children to order their duties based on their own needs and the needs of their crops. In the mills, however, they no longer labored for themselves, but instead for the profit of someone else. Further, farm work provided families the opportunity to work side-by-side, while mill work was segregated by gender and race; husbands, wives, and children often found themselves working opposing shifts.\textsuperscript{23}

Jobs in the South’s textile mills were consciously segregated by both gender and race and supported a hierarchical division of labor that perpetuated the social and political ideologies of the “Old South.” According to historian Leslie Brown, “The race and gender hierarchy proved as useful to southern...industrialization...as it had to plantation society.” White men found themselves in higher level positions, earning higher wages than white women and African Americans. Not only did this align with white supremacy, but it also prevented white and black workers from forming “cross-racial alliances by fostering competition and racial antagonism” between blacks and whites.\textsuperscript{24}

Because white men were typically at the top of the mill hierarchy, they held jobs that required more training and mobility, such as supervisors,

\textsuperscript{22} Michael Hembree, \textit{Newry: A Place Apart} (Shelby, North Carolina: Westmoreland Printers, Inc., 2003), 15.

\textsuperscript{23} Hall et al, 53

\textsuperscript{24} Leslie Brown, \textit{Upbuilding Black Durham: Gender, Class, and Black Community Development in the Jim Crow South.} (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 45.
overseers, section hands, and machine fixers. Most white women who worked in
the mills were entering “public work” for the first time. Traditional notions of
women as primarily bound to work in the homes, whether for wages or not,
validated manufacturers’ belief that they were “patient, neat, careful workers.”
Manufacturers claimed that the dexterity of their fingers was well-suited to
working with fast moving machinery.\textsuperscript{25} Although white women did not have the
same opportunities for advancement within the mill as did their male
counterparts, they, too, became knowledgeable technicians and took tremendous
pride in their work and skills. Some white women found the adjustment to the
regimentation of mill work difficult, but they also considered the wages they
earned as providing more for their children. Mill worker Helen Butts described
how she managed the constant tension between her productive and reproductive
labor: “We had to get up every morning at 4:30. I’d fix breakfast, put it in the
stove for the children, and...I went to work at 6. I worked because I felt like I
needed to. I wanted my children to have an education. I wanted to keep them in
school.”\textsuperscript{26} While the entrée of white women onto the shop floor provided
additional income to the family and new possibilities for white mill children, it
simultaneously narrowed the economic opportunities for African American men
and women. Black men were relegated to menial jobs, such as draymen and

\begin{footnotes}
\item[25] Hall et al, 69.
\item[26] Hembree, 43.
\end{footnotes}
warehouse and yard workers. Mill owners did not hire African American women, who only found work as laundresses and child care providers for white women.\textsuperscript{27}

With the Segregation Act of 1915, which made it illegal for cotton mills to “allow...operatives...of different races to labor and work together within the same room,” blacks were denied work inside southern textile mills.\textsuperscript{28} Instead, manufacturers hired African Americans to perform the dirtiest, non-machine tending jobs such as cleaning the factory between shifts, providing village maintenance, loading finished goods and moving bales of cotton in the “yard.” Jobs within the mill were almost nonexistent for black women. As one African American woman recalled, “Wasn’t any jobs open to black women only in these white people’s kitchens.”\textsuperscript{29} Black women who worked as laundresses or domestic help in white mill families’ homes frequently faced the difficult decision of encouraging their daughters to take similar jobs to supplement the family income.

Initially, young white children made up a significant portion of the labor force in the South’s cotton mills. Manufacturers, eager to recruit whole families, supported the employment of children as a way to lure their parents and recognized that if started at an early age, these children would grow into skilled and loyal workers. Parents, desperate to supplement their meager incomes, supported child labor and fought against early laws mandating child labor restrictions. Middle-class opposition to the employment of young children was

\textsuperscript{27} Brown, 44.
\textsuperscript{28} Hall et al, 66.
not hard to find, and many states restricted the age when children could be added to a mill’s payroll. This age limit varied from state to state, and was generally ignored as superintendents and parents would take their children to work.

Work on the shop floor was an ever present part of mill children’s lives. Children entered the mills early, first learning from older siblings as they helped run their machines. As states curtailed child labor in industries, many nonetheless quit school as soon as possible and began factory work. Whether enticed by the possibility of earning their own money, or forced to supplement parents’ wages, children continued to work in the textile mills. Boys began as sweepers and doffers; girls started as spoolers, winders, and spinners. With little opportunity for leaving the village, many teenagers realized that starting mill work at a young age might help them advance more quickly. “Back then, that’s all there was,” Olin Hawkins recalled. “It was the cotton mill or a farm or a store in Seneca. That’s all there was for us to look forward to. College was out of the question.”

Although many children of mill workers went to work in the mill and remained in the same village house, others sought opportunities to leave Newry. Katherine Bottoms, one of six children of a mill family, worked for two years in the spinning room before getting married, but she soon left the village. Likewise,  

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30 Hall et al, 66-67.  
31 Hembree, 72.
Bottoms’ sister worked briefly in the mill but eventually quit for other opportunities. “I won’t work down there,” she decided. “I’m too smart for this.”32

Life in southern mill communities was centered on the mill, whose schedule dictated many aspects of mill workers’ lives. The mill’s bell or whistle served as a constant reminder that companies controlled residents’ lives. These bells woke workers in the morning, called them to the front gates to punch their time cards at the beginning of each shift, signaled shift changes, and sent them home to bed. As Grace Alexander Wilson remembered, however, the ringing of Newry’s bell was “enforced in the first years of the village, but we only laughed at it.”33

By the 1920s, most South Carolina mills operated with three eight-hour shifts. Shift work created an internal division among mill workers and was an “economically irrelevant but socially important categorization.”34 As one observer noted, “One’s shift indicates when he has spare time, when he eats, and to some extent his prestige, since the first shift carries highest prestige.”35 Manufacturers manipulated shift work depending on the number of workers available to them in periods of overproduction. During the Depression, most South Carolina textile companies operated only one or two shifts a day. According to Houston Hawkins, who lived in Newry during the Depression many workers “were lucky to get two days work a week.”36

32 Ibid.
33 Hembree, 27.
34 Coggeshall, 189.
35 Ibid.
36 Hembree, 35.
Work in South Carolina’s textile mills was always difficult. The lint-filled air, the long hours, and the mill machinery were hazardous to workers’ health and safety. Each area presented its own dangers. Heavy lifting on the yard, for example, injured workers’ backs and bloodied their hands. The carding room, with its belts and pulleys, threatened workers’ limbs and the sprinklers that hung overhead in the weave room produced a constant mist that caused many hazardous falls. The cotton lint that appeared on workers’ clothing also infiltrated their lungs, the effects of which were a source of fear for many second-generation village residents. “I didn’t hit a lick in the mill,” recalled Clayton Cater, son of two Courtenay mill workers. “I saw relatives die from inhaling that cotton. I went into the Navy and then into Construction work.”

In the spinning room, temperatures often rose to eighty or ninety degrees. Loud machinery led to loss of hearing, which worsened as workers aged. The potential for danger in southern cotton mills was all around and was exacerbated by workers’ knowledge that if some injury happened to them, they had no health insurance or financial relief. Some Newry residents had a “homemade” medical insurance program through the Newry Hospital Association. For those enrolled in this plan, a fee was deducted from an employee’s weekly pay envelope and provided some relief to families in need of hospital care.

Although work in a cotton mill was detrimental to operatives’ health and safety, the nature of their work provided some opportunity for socialization.

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37 Hembree, 73.
38 Ibid., 77.
Skilled workers who “caught up” their machines were permitted a little “catch-up time” to use the bathroom, go out to smoke, or sit in the grass outside the mill and fraternize with friends. As long as workers made production quotas by day’s end, overseers and superintendents tolerated this socialization. In keeping with their rural traditions, production would halt during the dinner hour, and both white and African American workers would break. Trulan Mulkey, whose parents worked opposing shifts in the mill at Newry remembered, “Mama would fix his [daddy] dinner, and some of us kids would take it to him...He wanted it when it was hot...You had to get down there before that coffee got cold.”

In the midst of harsh and dangerous working conditions, these often “stolen” moments that allowed for breaks and socializing among operatives, made work in textile mills more tolerable for workers. For southern laborers, the late 1920s ushered in many changes that altered such opportunities.

Mill workers encountered new challenges in the late 1920s, as cotton manufacturing became more competitive. Southern manufacturers incurred many new expenses just to keep mills running. Wages topped this list of expenses and mill owners found it necessary to cut costs somewhere. To cut wages, however, would prompt strikes, owners thought, and so they decided to leave workers’ wages alone. Instead, many bought new, faster equipment, while others decided to speed up employees’ tasks by refurbishing old machines. Still others introduced “minute men” with stopwatches and clipboards who recorded the time

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39 Hall et al, 86.
40 Hembree, 73.
it took a mill worker to perform his duties. A job that had once made possible an element of socializing among its workers became one where workers feared leaving their stations, even to go to the bathroom. As these men timed workers’ every move, their responsibilities and workloads increased, in some cases tripling. Often, the quality of work, so valued by many of the workers, deteriorated, causing the number of inspections per operative to increase. Workers described this new process as the “stretch-out.”

Owners’ fear of strike became a reality in the late 1920s and early 1930s. In 1929, South Carolina textile employees staged 14 strikes, involving nearly 12,000 workers. One observer of this labor unrest noted, “Contrary to the custom in most union strikes, they had only one demand and that was the abolition of the stretch-out.” A South Carolina worker declared, “It’s [stretch-out] killing [us] faster than the World War did.” South Carolina became inundated with union leaders, especially representatives from the United Textile Workers of America. But, textile workers thought they could deal with owners themselves and asked union representatives to leave their villages. As one worker remembered, “Two folks come down here from that bunch an’ we told ’em how much we appreciated their good feelin’ an’ gave ’em a drink of Coca Cola, an’ put ’em on the street car.” Although some mill communities enjoyed minor victories, leading manufacturers to abandon the stretch-out altogether or limit the increase of machines added to a worker, in large mill workers recognized that their way was not working. As a result, union organization among mill workers flew

through the roof, and between 1927 and 1931 the United Textile Workers of America saw membership increase to 17,000 textile workers in South Carolina. By 1930, the United States was in the worst Depression in its history. As elsewhere, South Carolina's Great Depression was characterized by high unemployment and rapidly falling wages. One out of every four Americans was jobless and once booming industries went idle. However hard South Carolina's textile mills were hit by the Great Depression, they did not feel its effects as quickly as northern cities because, as historian Bryant Simon suggests, "people had to wear clothes," and because South Carolina mill workers "didn't have as far to fall to hit rock bottom." Although it was slower to infiltrate South Carolina mill villages, the Great Depression was categorized in South Carolina by unemployment and underemployment. Seventeen percent, or nearly 13,000 employees, lost their jobs in South Carolina's textile mills between 1927 and 1930. In this same period, ten mills across the state closed their doors, and those that did remain open operated on an abbreviated work schedule that demoted workers to less skilled positions than they held previously. According to Simon, these new work schedules and falling wages "left a quarter of the state's population, and 14 percent of South Carolina mill families, in need of relief." Laborers launched a grass roots effort to take control of the high unemployment and falling wages and called on local and national government to step in on their behalf. Workers blamed mill owners and the stretch-out for

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42 Quoted in Simon, First quote, 51; second quote, 51; third quote 51.
43 Quoted in Simon, First quote, 61; second quote, 61; third quote 62.
starting the Depression and demanded that the governor pass legislation that would limit the number of looms workers were required to tend. On a national level, workers pushed for the government's regulation of workloads, thirty days notice before layoffs, workers' compensation, and laws that allowed workers to join unions. They also believed that if women were taken off public work, their jobs could be given to men. Many politicians from mill districts took this fight to Columbia, the state's capitol. Between 1931 and 1933, much of this pro-labor legislation enjoyed success in the House of Representatives, only to be defeated in the state Senate. With their fight going nowhere, workers turned to President Roosevelt and his New Deal to secure similar legislation. Many workers perceived Roosevelt to be the first President "who made us feel that we really are part of the United States" and the first to recognize that the Constitution "...was talkin' about the poor man right along with the rich man." As South Carolina mill workers became "Roosevelt" men and women, their long-held fear of the federal government slowly diminished.44

Mill workers hoped the New Deal labor policies, especially the National Industrial Recovery Act, would provide them with greater economic security and they flocked to the polls to vote for Roosevelt. This legislation "suspended antitrust statutes, allowing business leaders to fix prices and regulate output in their industries." Though Section 7 (a), gave workers the right to organize unions, mill owners and workers viewed this legislation in different ways. The loose organization of the NIRA and its codes allowed textile manufacturers to

44 Quoted in Simon, 84.
manipulate the law on their behalf, and they saw this legislation as their final
hope for financial salvation. To workers, this legislation validated everything they
had argued for: a regulated work week, the right to organize, and a higher
paycheck. As workers saw it, if manufacturers violated the Code, they were
breaking the law and violating Roosevelt's will.\textsuperscript{45}

The Cotton Textile Institute, a group of anti-union manufacturers, which
formed in the late 1920s, intended to outmaneuver the United Textile Workers of
America by implementing the industry's code of fair competition that would make
unions unnecessary and retain employers' control. Code #1, as it was called,
"loosened antitrust constraints for management, while vaguely spelling out
labor's right to organize." Section 15 of the code authorized a maximum
workweek of forty hours and established a minimum wage of $12 per week in the
South and $13 per week in the North. Section 15 also prohibited companies
from employing workers in a night shift, so as to limit output. Along with
responsibility to investigate code violations, the Cotton Textile Institute had the
ultimate authority to regulate machine loads and wages paid to operatives.\textsuperscript{46}

The CTI's approach proved effective with some South Carolina textile
workers, who celebrated Section 15. As one worker declared, "The industrial
recovery act is our industrial declaration of independence," once again asserting
workers' belief that President Roosevelt had waged war on the depression for
them. But, as Bryant Simon notes, "Faith in a better future can sustain people

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., 87.
\textsuperscript{46} Simon, 87.
through a dark day. But hope can also distort things.” They put their faith in Roosevelt, their “Moses,” and when the stretch-out did not end, they still believed in him. For a while, mill laborers and owners seemed to be on the same side, but when overproduction continued to plague the industry, South Carolina manufacturers blamed the Code. As a result, mill companies “increased workloads, eliminated jobs, pinched pennies, and stretched out the stretch-out further than before.”\textsuperscript{47} Recognizing the Cotton Textile Institute’s indifference to their plight, textile workers penned letters to President Roosevelt and began to organize.

Roosevelt’s New Deal gave new hope not only to white textile workers, but to African American workers as well. According to Leslie Brown, “the New Deal held the potential to change the South in terms of the region’s economic relations based on racial exploitation.” The rhetoric of the New Deal appeared to include groups accustomed to being excluded, but, in reality, most New Deal programs extended relief only to whites. Recognizing that economic relief was vital to achieving freedom, African Americans launched campaigns in support of the NRA and sent leaders to testify in congressional hearings. In his testimony before Congress, black labor organizer John Davis argued that “provisions be made to pledge employers to practice no discrimination by virtue of race, color, or creed.”\textsuperscript{48} Energized by the New Deal’s potential to better their economic lives, black workers wrote letters to President Roosevelt and began to organize.

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{48} Brown, 293-294.
As UTWA representative and white activist John Donnahoo remembered, “We didn’t organize them, they came to us.” Unsure of what to do with this new membership, and out of the fear of alienating their white membership, the UTWA decided to issue membership cards and set up separate black locals. Most black workers wanted integrated locals that pushed for their equal rights. The membership card for a segregated auxiliary was all some would ever know of union organization.49

By the spring and summer of 1934, the United Textile Workers of America built a following of 300,000 of the 700,000 textile workers nationwide. Over half of all South Carolina mill workers joined the UTWA locals. Manufacturers answered this mass organization by blacklisting workers and calling on strikebreakers to fill their jobs in the mill. The South Carolina Federation of Textile Workers voted unanimously in favor of strike, which began on September 1, 1934.

Interpretive Opportunities: Work and the Mill

The Courtenay Mill at Newry, built in 1893, is a typical example of a South Carolina mill structure where local workers cleared the site, chopped and prepared timber, and made brick from the bed of the Little River.50 The mill has a four-story brick façade, which insurance companies required after the Triangle fire in 1911. It is accented by a six-story tower, which contained both the staircase and bell. Buildings of this size and function were also required by

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49 Quoted in Waldrep, 118.
50 Hembree, 15.
insurance companies to have multiple layers of flooring, which were typically four to five inches thick. Following these specifications, the flooring in the mill at Newry is one-inch maple on the top, supported by a layer of virgin pine and another layer of one or two-inch pine positioned in opposing patterns, most of which came from the woods surrounding the mill site. While the mill is still standing, and structurally very sound, it needs significant restoration to the interior and exterior of the structure.

Visitors’ experiences will begin outside the mill’s guardhouse where visitors will purchase time cards, which serve as their admission ticket. Each time card will assign visitors an identity and position within the mill community. This experience will mimic the daily entrance of men, women, and children into the mill and will allow visitors to interact with the landscape, buildings, costumed interpreters, and one another as if they were mill workers.

Once inside the mill complex, tours will follow the process of production and will begin outside in the warehouse, an area called the yard. Because much of the back-breaking work required to turn cotton into cloth occurred in this large, exterior space, visitors will assist interpreters by hauling cotton bales, which often left operatives’ hands bloody and scarred. Visitors will encounter issues of labor and race relations and discover that African American men were confined to positions outside the mill building itself. In the opening room, visitors will remove dirt from the cotton and separate remaining seeds from cotton bolls. Through this kinetic interaction, visitors will understand the laborious process of preparing
cotton for cloth production and will understand how these tasks, while necessary, were deemed to require little skill and were therefore relegated to African Americans.

Visitors will follow the cotton into the factory building. Inside the mill, visitors will go to the picker, carding, spinning, and weave rooms. Because much of the work involved in weaving cotton into cloth requires the operation of dangerous machinery, visitors will observe the process while highly skilled costumed interpreters operate the period machines. Visitors will hear the deafening roar of the machines, which threatened workers’ lives and hearing. In the spinning and weave rooms, visitors help in this ongoing process by tying broken threads and assist with dipping yarn and preparing patterns for the newly made cloth. As visitors become confident with these tasks, costumed “minute men,” armed with their clipboards and stopwatches in hand, stretch-out visitors by adding more to their workload. Moving about these rooms, the dirt and dye that remains on visitors’ clothing, hands, and hair will serve as reminders of a hard day’s work and will stigmatize them as cotton mill workers, even if just for a day.

Interpretation of the mill complex will present workers’ efforts to insert their community relationships and mores into their work. Even in the midst of their demanding jobs, workers sought out opportunities to socialize and have fun. Folklorist Doug DeNatale noted that this humor “helped workers balance their
individualism with their interdependence." Visitors to the museum will be both participants in and "victims" of mill pranks. Whether fetching a bucket of steam, or helping costumed interpreters glue other employees' hats to a shelf, two popular pranks within South Carolina's mills, visitors will experience workers' efforts to carve out opportunities for humor and socialization, which became a vital part of their work day. Moving beyond the light-hearted nature of these pranks, visitors will encounter the underlying tensions among mill workers who used pranks to keep fellow workers in their place and reveal the extent to which this same process marginalized women workers and kept out African American workers altogether.

In contrast to the factory's dark and dingy walls, the crisp white walls in the mill office symbolize the class divisions that enabled mill management to escape the dirt and dust that settled on workers' clothing and lungs and the danger that they faced on the factory floor. Of particular significance in this interpretive space are the images of workers hung near the front door of the mill office. These images, customarily taken once a year to commemorate the "family" of workers and management, hung in the hallways of mill offices as evidence of the happy communities created by mill companies. Interpreter-led discussions encourage visitors to analyze these images from multiple perspectives. For mill owners, these images read as family portraits with mill management strategically placed at the center of a sea of "happy" workers. This reading perpetuates the way owners saw themselves, as benevolent patriarchs of this large family.

\[51\] Coggeshall, 92.
Likewise, when visitors apply the same familial metaphor from a worker’s perspective, the family captured in the same image is one created not by mill owners, but in spite of them. Furthermore, the absence of African Americans in these images reinforces racial divides in life and work in southern textile communities. By analyzing these family photographs through different lenses, visitors are confronted with the distinct ways in which these groups viewed their community.

In addition to public programs for general visitors, the mill complex will also offer hands-on programs for school groups. Students will be presented with timecards and assigned an identity and job within the mill. They will adopt this new persona throughout the duration of their program in order to better understand the effects of harsh working conditions, low wages, division of labor based on race and class, and the stretch-out that workers experienced in a 1930s southern textile mill. Guided by costumed interpreters, students will consider how workers decided whether to endure the conditions in the mill or join the thousands of others on the picket line.

Narrative: Community and Village Housing

Workers’ transition from farm to factory challenged the gendered economic familial roles established in rural areas, but the camaraderie among mill families mediated this shift. As historian Jacquelyn Hall observed, “Again and again, people chose a family metaphor to describe mill village life.
Historians have usually interpreted that metaphor as evidence of a paternalistic management style that provided for workers' needs while depriving them of independence and responsibility. But as we pondered mill workers' stories, we realized that they were not using this imagery to describe their dependence on a fatherly employer so much as they were explaining their relationship to one another. From a shared sense of the harsh realities of mill life and work, and the desire to unify themselves amidst discouragement and degradation, mill workers were able to create a community many called their “two hundred headed” family. As one villager states, “We visited each other, we talked to each other, we were concerned with each other.”

Mill villages were their own self-contained communities, and although they had very little, workers shared what they could with one another. Company officials found it both necessary and efficient to provide housing to the former white farmers who came to labor in the textile mills across the South. Many of South Carolina's textile mills were built along rural waterways where little else existed and were designed to provide all the necessities of life for their inhabitants. Built on hilly terrain, these villages earned the term “mill hill.” When new workers moved into these contrived villages, they found narrow, dirt streets lined with monotonous rows of houses built exactly alike—all of them dwarfed by the towering mill structure. Sociologist Harriet Herring determined that “the monotony of the average mill village is not alone due to identical houses but to

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52 Hall et al, xviii.
53 Waldrep, 7.
similarity in many details of the village pattern: the houses are all about the same size; they are set back precisely the same distance from the street; they are all in about the same state of repair or disrepair; [and] they often have no...other touches of individuality. To help ease country people into industrial life, some company housing reflected the rural landscape that surrounded them, while others followed the architectural styles of their northern counterparts in the construction of the New England “saltbox.” The houses provided for African American laborers were generally two-room houses and were typically located on the outskirts of the village. Although different in design, nearly all company housing was built quickly and cheaply out of local materials and scarcely had enough room for the number of people who occupied them.

Many mill owners did not live close to their mills and lived in town. For those who lived in the vicinity of the mill, such as the Courtenay’s of Newry, their houses were often referred to as “the big house” and were typically the furthest from the factory in the village. These homes tended to be the largest and most well decorated houses anywhere within the village.

Mill villages developed across the South out of mill owners’ desire to attract a viable workforce. Trying to attract cheap labor in an area of South Carolina saturated with textile mills, Newry founder William Ashmead Courtenay noted, Newry “will have all the advantages of its isolated position, as there are no mills, nearer than forty miles, on the east; none nearer than twenty-five miles on the south, while on the north and west the whole section is available to draw

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54 Coggeshall, 207.
labor from, in all the region, up to the Blue Ridge and to the Georgia line. As owners saw it, mill housing, no matter how hastily constructed, would attract laborers struggling to survive on the farm. To impoverished workers, these villages appeared attractive and seemed to provide all the necessities of life: steady work, a company store, a place to worship, and a school. As mill workers became more deeply imbued in the life of their communities, they recognized that the same hierarchical division that existed inside the mill spilled into village streets. Housing in mill villages was segregated based on a number of factors: the number of occupants employed by the mill, their position within the mill, their gender and age, and the color of their skin. Typically, those who were considered “decent” received houses on the main streets of mill villages and held supervisory and other high paying positions within the factory. Those with reputations for drinking or fighting were given housing on the back streets of the village. As longtime Newry resident J.L. Gaillard remembered, “The fact that you had a house and a job depended on the (mill) office. The mill management kept everything pretty well in order. People didn’t want to have to go to the main office to bring their troubles to iron them out.”

Company officials used this division to keep workers in their place and to both reward and punish workers’ behavior.

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55 Hembree, 14-15.  
56 Ibid., 19.  
57 Quoted in Hembree, 26.
This class division intersected with the mill’s racial division and African Americans did not live on the village’s main streets. If housing was provided for these workers at all, it was often on the periphery of the village, far away from the mill itself.

A white family whose husband, wife, and several older children worked in the mill might be rewarded with a larger house, though few mill houses had enough room for its occupants. Rent for company housing was charged per room and averaged 75 cents per week, which was deducted from occupants’ pay envelope.\(^{58}\) Most duplexes, like the houses found in Newry’s mill village, consisted of a living room and kitchen downstairs and a bedroom upstairs. If the family was comprised of several members, the living room was often converted into an additional bedroom. Typically, there was a shared outhouse in the backyard and spigots with cold water were found on the back porch. Many families brought furniture from their farms, while others bought furniture on credit from local furniture stores.

Generally, the furnishings in mill houses were meager, often consisting only of a bed, appliances and a few cane backed chairs. The transient nature of mill workers and their fear of job loss may have dampened the desire to invest in elaborate household furnishings.\(^{59}\) As mill owners recruited farm families for life and work in South Carolina’s mill communities, they provided opportunities for operatives to bring pieces of their rural past with them. In order to help families

\(^{58}\) _Ibid._

make the transition from farm to factory, many mill companies provided stalls to house livestock brought by villagers from their rural farms, and mill lots often boasted large yards to allow mill families space for vegetable and flower gardens. These practices persisted well after World War II and mill families found it a welcomed supplement to their meager diets.

Since the homes had limited space for visitors, front porches became an important space for mill workers to gather. After a long shift in the mill, villagers would congregate on their front porches to gossip, quilt, catch up on village news, or to debate the outcome of upcoming sporting events. As mothers and fathers sat and talked on one family’s front porch, they could supervise their children playing games on the sidewalk or empty village streets. These informal visiting practices reinforced the community’s sense of intimacy and family ties that created, as one Newry resident, David Hawkins remembered, “a togetherness feeling, much more than is now. Everybody knew each other. People gathered up after people got off of work at night, sit in straight cane-back chairs…and talk, and just had a good time.” Hawkins also joked, “this family could just about tell you what that next family next door ate every day or something like that.”

At a glance, mill villages appeared monotonous, but front porches served as a space for village residents to express their individuality. Mill owners could control the distance houses stood from the street and the color of their exterior,
but an operative took great pride in adding personal touches to this outdoor space, distinguishing her house from the others.

The South Carolina state government imposed many changes to the textile system in the late 1920s, several of which improved residents' lives within the village. As South Carolina's General Assembly mandated inspection of the state's mill villages, laws were passed to make improvements to the communities that housed so many of South Carolina's work force. As historian W.J. Cash has explained, when textile companies experienced an increase in profit, the federal government mandated that mill owners either put some of these profits back into the company, or pay corporate surtaxes on them.61 As a result, mill owners put plumbing inside workers' homes and many streets in the villages were illuminated by electricity for the first time. Some mill owners erected YMCA's and other community buildings for their workers.

Other technologies that became widely available to mass audiences in the late 1920s served to bring mill workers out of isolation. The radio, for example, offered mill workers an opportunity to hear advertisements for material goods, music, news, political addresses, and radio dramas previously unavailable to them. Workers were so loyal to their favorite radio programs that many petitioned mill owners to allow work to begin a few minutes earlier in the morning in order for them to make it home in time to hear their favorite shows, such as Amos 'n Andy. This new audience also introduced radio companies to a new music genre, hillbilly. Hillbilly music "transform[ed] ballad singing, fiddle playing, and

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banjo picking into one of America's great popular sounds.” As historian Jaquelyn Dowd Hall has noted: “Radio helped turn local musicians into country music stars; the result was an explosion of cultural creativity and, for mill hands, who heard their own music over the air waves, an intensified sense of group identity.”

Many mill hill musicians took their talents to the radio. Others, such as Newry resident Claude Anderson, proudly performed music on the front porches and social halls of mill villages. Despite the demands of work, the band often played well into the early morning hours. The band typically earned a total of $4 to $5 dollars per gig. Like the radio, print media also served to bring mill people out of social and cultural isolation.

The distribution of women's popular magazines, such as *Good Housekeeping*, and the accessibility of the goods they advertised, provided a host of brands and products previously unfamiliar or unattainable to these emerging consumers. Historian Rita Barnard suggests that the Great Depression, even though characterized by a scarcity of goods, did not diminish consumers’ hopes to acquire new products. In excavations of two industrial sites in Danville, Virginia, and Greenville, South Carolina, archaeologists found objects that reflect workers’ increasing participation in consumerism. The assortment of ceramics, glass, toys, and other personal objects suggests that these items were consumed in greater quantities. Consumer culture became a much larger part of people’s lives during the late 1920s and early 1930s than it had been for previous

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62 Hall et al, 237.
63 Claude Anderson, oral history interview
generations. The items uncovered in these two mill sites reflect mill villagers’ desire to make life more tolerable at a time when much of their lives were plagued with hardship and uncertainty.\(^{64}\)

Many workers found the changes in the work process difficult. The implementation of the stretch-out in the mills made an already grueling workday even more difficult. As the hope of Roosevelt’s New Deal faded, friendly gossip about one’s neighbors was replaced with debate over union organization, and economic uncertainty tested the bond of these tight knit communities. For rural farmers who had moved back-and-forth from the country to the mill village, work in a textile mill was a means to an end, and not a way of life. They remained tied to the land and found life in the textile mill and village depressing. They left their farms for a few months to work in the mills to earn enough money to hold off creditors or buy new machinery for their farms. By the 1930s, most South Carolinians living in mill villages across the state were second or third generation operatives and villagers, who were “born in a mill village, baptized in a mill church, educated in a mill school, and married to another millworker.” They were far removed from experiences of life on the farm, which existed only in the stories of their parents and grandparents. Neither of these groups understood what motivated the other to continue in their way of life, which created a mutual disrespect among the “country folk” and “lintheads.” When mill workers began to suffer under the stretch-out and Great Depression, and rural farmers fell victim to the boll weevil, these two worlds collided at the front gates of South Carolina’s

\(^{64}\) Rita Barnard, “Fabric of Life in a Southern Mill Town,” [http://www.wm.edu/wmcar/DanvilleDig.htm](http://www.wm.edu/wmcar/DanvilleDig.htm).
textile mills: mill operatives as potential strikers and rural farmers as potential strike breakers. 65

The decision to organize was a difficult one for most of South Carolina’s mill workers. To organize likely meant to strike, and to strike undoubtedly meant that they would lose their jobs and subsequently their homes. To leave the village meant to leave the mill community, something many mill village people were not willing to do.

Interpretive Opportunities: Community and Village Housing

As visitors make their way down the village’s narrow streets, passing rows of small, identical homes, they recognize the extent to which the social and racial division of labor inside the factory also permeated the streets of southern mill villages. Further, the factory, or the figurative center of the village, was the artery away from which all streets in the village flowed, suggesting that the factory itself was the blood of the community. As visitors explore the physical layout of the village and interact with operatives on the front porches of village homes, they discover the many ways in which cotton mill workers managed to shape a way of life beyond the confines of the factory system.

Several mill houses will be furnished and interpreted to reflect the class distinctions that existed in both factory work and village life. Visitors will interact with interpreters in houses representing that of overseers and supervisors, white operatives, African American domestics and laborers, and company officials.

65 Simon, 105.
The primary distinction between each of these homes will be seen and felt in the quality and number of furnishings.

Several of the larger houses closest to the mill will be furnished to reflect the income and status of mill supervisors and overseers. These workers generally had worked their way up from operative to overseer and were often resented by their former colleagues, who frowned upon such upward mobility. Because overseers earned higher wages, they could afford more decorative objects purchased in the nearby town and not the company’s own store.

Updated indoor plumbing and a separate phone line indicate inhabitants’ status within the mill. The more elaborate furnishings and decorative elements in these houses represent a worker’s mobility from operative to overseer, but conversations with costumed interpreters reveal the stigma attached to supervisors and their families for having done so.

In the heart of the village, museum visitors discover what life was like for white operatives by visiting both the exterior and interior spaces these workers occupied. Interpreters will use front porches to engage visitors in village news and gossip, and conversations and debates regarding the stretch-out and union organization will demonstrate the extent to which mill workers drew upon their strong community ties to make decisions about their own lives. Once inside, visitors will first encounter the living area, which will be furnished to reveal its dual role as both living room and bedroom. Sparsely equipped, the room will contain furnishings of the period as well as items that reflect operatives’
emerging consumerism: a couch, a few chairs, magazines, and a few personal effects. Adorning the white walls in several houses, visitors will find paintings of country scenes, which, as South Carolina poet Ron Rash suggests, not only served as a reminder of their ancestors' roots, but also symbolized a retreat to “open-air” and independence, to which many operatives longed to return and others could not fathom.66

Kitchens in these mill houses will contain a small, wooden table and several ladder-back chairs, and a wood stove. In the kitchen, visitors can help cook meals and wash clothes. As female interpreters prepare meals, the air filled with the smells of freshly baked bread, molasses, or grits, visitors and interpreters will determine which food items workers purchased from the company store and which items they grew or raised. Visitors will help gather seasonal vegetables from gardens in the yard and assist interpreters with canning, a process that helped sustain most Depression-era mill village families. While these activities provide glimpses of daily life inside village homes, they also demonstrate how some workers brought remnants of their past on rural farms with them to the mill village. Further, visitors understand that these practices were more than just pieces of workers' agrarian past; rather, they were "instruments of power and protection, survival and self-respect" that helped to create a distinct cotton mill culture.67 Many women continued to do most of the domestic work. Visitors will assist interpreters with the labor-intensive process of

67 Hall et al, 179-180.
washing clothes, undertaken by both mill women and domestic help, who worked
into the night scrubbing clothes on a washboard, their hands burned from the lye
soap that cleaned the clothing. As visitors participate in this domestic chore, they
will come closer to appreciating the beauty of clothes cleaned with lye, which
burns the hands.

Upstairs, the two bedrooms will be furnished with little more than a bed
covered with a quilt, a dresser, and nightstand. One bedroom will feature a
sewing machine, where female interpreters will engage visitors with sewing
demonstrations. Mill mothers made most, and in some cases all, of their
children’s clothing, gathering printed or patterned burlap feed sacks to do so. As
the burlap passes through their hands on its way through the sewing machine,
visitors are reminded of the painful stigma attached to wearing such clothes, one
that took some mill children years to overcome. Playtime activities will take on
new meaning for young visitors who will gather scraps to make doll clothes, an
exercise that prepared young children to work in the mill. In the second
bedroom, interpreters prepare letters for President Roosevelt. In these letters,
workers plead for anonymity, as their very letter would surely cost them their job,
thank the President for helping them feel like Americans for the first time in their
lives, and relay stories of being stretched out so far they were no longer able to
make production.

Moving from the main streets surrounding the factory to the outskirts of the
village, an area referred to in Newry as “up the branch,” visitors will glimpse life
for African Americans in South Carolina's mill communities. Several of these
two-room houses will be restored to their 1930s appearance and sparsely
furnished. The origins of foodways and food traditions were often blurry in South
Carolina’s mill communities as African American women cooked in white
operatives’ homes. For this reason, visitors will recognize many familiar smells
filling the air in African American homes, but they will also notice new aromas
that reflect the preservation of specific African American foodways. Visitors will
glimpse how domestic chores, such as laundry, were often doubled as many
African American women not only did their own family’s laundry, but also that of
the mill supervisors and operatives. Conversations with interpreters inside these
homes expose the resentment harbored by African American women at having to
leave their own children behind to care for the children of white operatives and
the guilt they held for growing close to these children. Similar conversations
reveal the frustrations of African American men, relegated to positions of
unskilled labor, and their contemplation of union organization as a means to
better themselves and their families.68

Visitors will also have the opportunity to experience what life was like for
company officials, who resided at the top of the factory system hierarchy. The
Courtenay family, owners of Courtenay Manufacturing in Newry, built a large
home and they named it Innisfallen after their ancestral home in Newry, Ireland.
Located at the top of the great hill, which looks down upon the village, this house
was occupied several times after the Courteney family left Newry, but was

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68 Hall et al, 157.
ultimately torn down. All that stands of Innisfallen today is its chimney. Although this home will be interpreted generically as representative of owner housing, this structure will be rebuilt using the original plans for the Courtenay's Innisfallen and will be furnished based on inventories conducted by company officials occupying the home in the early 1930s. Such an undertaking is vital in revealing the distinctions among class, gender roles, material culture and diet between mill owners and mill workers.

Interpretive Narrative: Company Store

Since many of South Carolina’s textile mills were located in rural areas away from towns with more shops and services, company owners built stores that sold everything from coffins to candy. As historian Jacquelyn Hall suggests, textile companies were often undercapitalized, and company stores helped keep workers money flowing back into the company. Their hope was to keep workers in constant debt, which would prevent them from moving elsewhere. Companies often spread pay periods out over several weeks, allowing operatives to incur a large amount of debt from the company store. “It sort of made you a slave to the company,” remembered Newry resident Houston Hawkins. “People got deeper and deeper in debt. The first thing you know, you couldn’t get away. You had to keep going back (to work).” As pay envelopes got smaller during the Great Depression, it was common for a family to spend their entire week’s wages in the company’s store. “A lot of people wouldn’t even go by the office on payday

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69 Hall et al., 129.
because they knew they weren't going to get anything," remembered Hawkins.\textsuperscript{70}

By the late 1920s, the Newry store, like many company stores, accepted cash, trade checks, and loonies—metal coins of various denominations that could only be used at the store that issued them. With few opportunities to shop elsewhere, and with credit for mill workers increasingly difficult to find elsewhere, workers often had no choice and found themselves in a vicious cycle of debt to their employers.

Operatives could purchase much of what they needed from these company-run stores. Items such as “automobile tires, nails, horseshoes, horse collars, bridles, plows, hardware of all kinds...flour, sugar, coffee...boxes of fatback meat, buckets of pure lard and compound lard. Chewing tobacco. Snuff. Smoking tobacco, pipes and ice cream,” were popular items in these stores. Pickles, candy, coffins, and clothing were also available for purchase. In a 1928 year-end inventory, a company store recorded, “$5,258 in groceries, $2,475 in shoes, $2,049 in dry goods, $2,234 in clothing, $2,665 in notions, $993 in hardware and $938 in “odds and ends.”\textsuperscript{71} Mill families typically took inventory of those items they needed and had their goods delivered directly to their house on a dray wagon. Workers’ vegetable gardens and animals curbed their dependence on the company store and some mill families purchased only the necessities, such as flour, sugar, coffee, and medicine.

\textsuperscript{70} Quoted in Hembree, 62.
\textsuperscript{71} Hembree, 63.
In addition to everyday items, the company store also served as social gathering places among South Carolina's mill village residents. On Saturday and Sunday afternoons, mill men would congregate on the large front porches and in the front yards of company stores to talk, drink and play games such as checkers, horseshoes, and marbles. These types of social "get-togethers" occasionally perpetuated townspeople's concerns about what they called the "mill problem." When tempers flared and unemployment rose, social gatherings on the front porch of the company store occasionally led to brawls among friends and neighbors. Operative Henry Cater recalled, "There would sometimes be 25 or 30 men hanging around and drinking and playing checkers. Two of them got into it about a girl both were trying to date. One was about to jump on the other one and backed him up in a corner and pulled out a gun and shot him. It didn't kill him." 72 Drinking among mill operatives, as a means of escaping the difficulty of their work and home lives, was rampant in mill communities and often exacerbated these problems. Although prohibition existed in the early 1930s, "moonshining" was a favorite pastime among many mill men. According to several residents, some mill men made liquor across the river, but much of it was obtained through peddlers who brought it into the village from the mountains. 73

72 Hembree, 94.
73 Ibid.
Company stores operated from the early 1900s until the 1940s. By then, mill owners relied less on the profits generated by these stores. Millhands’ complaints about being enslaved by debt also tempered its presence. 

Interpretive Opportunities: Company Store

Centered on themes of community, recreation, politics and economics, the company store at the South Carolina Cotton Mill Museum will operate as an interpretive center, with a portion dedicated to the sale of dry goods, candies, textiles, and other merchandise historically found in village stores.

Interpretation of Newry’s company store will begin in the exterior space surrounding the store. As visitors interact with costumed interpreters through intimate conversations about life and work in the mill villages, their significance as social gathering spaces is revealed. Further, conversations among interpreters about strikes and the stretch-out demonstrate to visitors the extent to which these issues were inescapable even in their leisure time.

Games waged on the front porches and in the yards of company stores were an important aspect of mill village culture. Checkers were most often handmade from supplies that were readily available in an industrial environment. Wooden boards were easily fashioned out of scraps found around the mill yard, and odds and ends, such as bolts and other hardware, worked perfectly as makeshift checker pieces. Horseshoes was a simple game to assemble, requiring a few horseshoes, available either in the company store or around

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74 Hall et al, 130.
animal stalls maintained by the company, and a small, metal pole. Marbles, another favorite pastime of mill operatives and their children were easily improvised by using tobacco tags. Because store-bought glass marbles were considered a luxury, many mill children could not afford them. Instead, they used the readily available tobacco tags, which were metal fasteners for tobacco plugs. These tags were differentiated according to their decoration. A dog adorned the tag for the Bloodhound brand, for example; a mule represented the Brown Mule brand of chewing tobacco. "Each player would put one tag on the ground, each on top of the other," and as mill worker Tom Davis remembered, "And you puffed real hard. If you turned them all over, you picked them all up. It's sort of like shooting marbles-puffin' tobacco tags." Playing these familiar games, visitors will discover how the rules and tools used in playing them were manipulated to meet the needs of village residents and provided hours of relief to the drudgery of mill work.

Using period photographs from Newry's company store, advertisements in local newspapers and magazine, and first-hand accounts from village residents, the contents of the museum's store and the arrangement of goods will recreate the sights and smells of a 1930s company store. As visitors move inside the store, the aroma of candies and other sweets collide with the smell of pine coffins, revealing these stores as keepers of both the desires and reality held by their patrons. Aisles of shelves containing food products such as Armour's Star Ham, Brer Rabbit Molasses, Pet Milk, Pillsbury's Pancake Flour, Coleman's

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75Quoted in Coggeshall, 128.
Mustard, and Del Monte Asparagus will be within visitors’ reach, yet in contrast with valuable items kept in glass cases, such as watches, bicycles, and wagons. This arrangement of goods reveals the distinction between those items villagers’ considered necessities and those that were literally and figuratively out of their reach.

Also located inside Newry’s company store was a small snack bar called The Junk. Here, mill village residents could enjoy hamburgers and hot dogs. Small cafés, like The Junk, existed in many South Carolina mill communities, and provided villagers an “occasional alternative to home-cooked food.” Once again, The Junk will occupy a portion of the company store and serve as a café for museum visitors. In addition to hot dogs and hamburgers, visitors can also dine on chicken salad and pimento cheese sandwiches, two operative favorites on the menu at The Small Fry, a similar mill village eatery in Gaffney, South Carolina.

Upstairs, the large room that once served as a social hall for the white mill community will function as a multi-purpose space for education and public programs. Historically, this room also functioned as a movie theatre, and many of Newry’s white residents remember spending Saturday nights at the movies in the hall above the company store. The museum will periodically host film series’ for the public, showing not only period films from the early 1930s, but also modern films, which document life in the South’s textile mill communities.

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76 Hembree, 77.
77 Elizabeth Childers, oral history interview, Gaffney, South Carolina, May 2008.
Similarly, lectures that explore various aspects of community life in southern mill villages, such as childhood and segregation will make available new scholarship for museum visitors.  

Architecturally, company stores were built of brick and boasted a design similar to the mill building itself, or were simple wooden structures with very little design. The company store at Newry, typical of other stores across the state, had a front porch, which ran the length of the building. Columns supported the porch’s slanted tin roof. The second story features arched windows across the front and sides of the building, similar to those on the mill structure. Although the company store still stands, it has not been in use for more than seventy years and much work will be needed to restore Newry’s company store to its 1930s appearance. During the early years of the company store, the post office was located in a small wooden building adjacent to the store. At some point between 1942 and 1950, the company built a new post office, which was attached to the store. To return the store to its appropriate state in this period, the “new” post office must be torn down and reconstructed next door.

Interpretive Narrative: Worship and Recreation

Churchgoing and religious practices were deeply woven in the fabric of South Carolina’s mill communities. From the very beginning, churches were among the first buildings constructed in the mill communities and they presented a prominent feature, second only to the mill building itself. As part of welfare

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78 Hembree, 81.
work established by mill owners, many mill churches received much support from the company. Often, the company bought the land, paid for the building, and added the preacher’s name to their payroll. “Ministers,” noted sociologist, Harriet Herring, “believe[d] and preach[ed] doctrines which would be acceptable in the main to a capitalistic employer—a gospel of work, of gratitude for present belongings, and of patience with economic and social maladjustment as temporal and outside the sphere of religious concern.”79 How workers received these messages, and the role religion played in both the religious and social lives of South Carolina’s mill workers’ lives, could not be dictated by company officials.

Regular religious practices were nothing new to the rural farmers who moved into South Carolina’s mill villages. Whether on the shop floor or inside the homes of South Carolina’s mill villages, religion and faith infiltrated the everyday lives of mill workers. To many villagers, the “cornerstones of evangelical faith were the Bible and prayer.” As one worker recalled, “Even though I had to work to make a living, I really enjoyed it. And my looms, they just run good. I’d pray a lot while I was working, and I felt like the Lord helped my looms to run.” They prayed about their work, their families, and their neighbors, and, though reading was not a prerequisite for work in the mill, many learned to read the Bible in order to “share God’s word.” In addition to religious instruction in the home, mill workers worshipped together at prayer meetings, youth groups, hymn singings,

mission and Bible studies, and choir practices, all of which served the dual function as worship and social activity.\textsuperscript{80}

Work came to a halt on Sundays and hundreds of mill workers would flock to local churches for religious instruction and social activity. Most mill workers shared the Protestant faith, with Baptists and Methodists being the predominant denominations. However, as was the case in Newry, many villages had only one church, which were often shared by these two denominations. One Sunday, the Methodist preacher would deliver the message, the next Sunday, the Baptist preacher. According to villagers, doctrinal differences among denominations mattered very little because mill workers insisted it was a mutual trust in the Lord that mattered most. From the pulpit, mill workers received messages meant to shape their moral code and judge their righteousness. They listened to ministers who encouraged them to live with “sobriety, thrift, and duty.” These messages against alcoholism and idleness were intended to remind workers of their duty and obligation to their work habits and their employers. Although workers had little control over the content of sermons delivered by mill preachers, they could certainly interpret the messages on their own. Many workers took these messages and applied them to their lives in respect to their community and their moral and religious responsibilities to one another, not to those of their employer.\textsuperscript{81}

\textsuperscript{80} Quoted in Hall et al, 176.
\textsuperscript{81} Hall et al, 178.
Not all mill villagers joined the Methodist or Baptist church. In fact, some did not attend church in the mill at all, opting to join churches in town instead. Still others belonged to non-denominational churches and others joined the Church of God or Pentecostal Holiness churches. Some mill owners encouraged the establishment of these churches and invited them into their villages, while others saw them as “Holy Rollers” who stood to “tear up a village and a community, keep folks at the meetings till all hours of the night so that they are not fit to work, and they keep the meetings going for two months with shouting and carrying on.” Away from the sanctioned messages of the company churches, mill owners feared that messages from the pulpits of these outlier churches would radicalize the workers and challenge the hierarchical model necessary for the mill.82

Not only was churchgoing important to South Carolina’s white operatives, it was one of the most important aspects in the lives of African American workers as well. As ethnographers and college professors Ralph Patrick and John Morland observed in their 1940s study of southern mill villages, for African Americans living in or around the mill community in Kent, South Carolina, “attending church and church meetings [was] a central activity.” Just as millwork was segregated, so were mill churches and many African Americans attended churches outside the village. Similar to whites’ churches, African American churches held Bible studies, Sunday School classes, and all day hymn singings. Out of these religious services came vital links between religion and community

82 Ibid
assistance. In the midst of racism and segregation, they developed clubs and other organizations that revolved around congregation and assistance.\textsuperscript{83}

As the hope for labor regulation dwindled, and the possibility of a large-scale strike became more of a reality, unions once again made inroads into South Carolina’s mill communities. Due to the religious make up of these communities, union organizers realized that they must reach workers by introducing pro-labor theology. As the rhetoric of union organization became wrapped in religious metaphors, church members who had joined locals began to describe union organization as a Christian responsibility. As one Clifton, South Carolina, worker noted, “organized labor stands for a Christian life”: “To be a Christian you must live a truthful life; you must be a good neighbor; you must try to improve the conditions in this world and make a better place for your children to dwell in. Christ came into this world to improve it and the principles of organized labor will improve it because they are based on Christ’s teachings...Let’s stand together for the common good of all and great will be our reward.” While mill preachers stood in front of their congregations preaching messages of individual duty, truth, and sobriety, mill workers, began to organize on behalf of their own values and communities.\textsuperscript{84}

Textile league baseball was an equally popular organized activity within textile mill villages. By the late nineteenth century, baseball had become widely played. Workers who labored in South Carolina’s textile mills and lived in their

\begin{footnotes}
\item[83] John Morland and Ralph Patrick “Field Studies in the Modern Culture of the South” (Southern Historical Collection of the Manuscripts Department, University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, 1948-1949).
\item[84] Waldrep, 120.
\end{footnotes}
villages from the 1890s to the 1950s played baseball, too. As one South Carolina worker remembered, "When you'd hear that music start on Saturday evening, everybody just about would go to the ballgame." Textile baseball was at its most popular during the late 1920s and early 1930s. As workers experienced difficulty on the shop floor, they found relief on splintered benches with family and friends. Historian G.C. Waldrep remarked, "It gave a sense of legitimacy in a society content to see the 'lintheads' remain invisible citizens somewhere far away on the wrong side of the tracks." There was, however, a dark side to textile baseball that most workers chose to ignore, which perpetuated rivalries among coworkers and further segregated white and African American workers.

Mill owners encouraged and supported baseball in their villages as a means of "release and achievement" for their workers, and most mill owners kept the games going, even during the Great Depression. As players wore uniforms displaying their company's name, and hundreds of villagers gathered at the ball field to watch their team play, mill baseball identified workers and spectators with their company, providing them "new, provocative, and even ritualistic" means by which they were bound further to the mill system. As mill owners became deeply imbued in textile baseball, fields were improved and mill owners made a serious effort to recruit players. Mill companies often showed preferential

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85 Betsy Wakefield Teter, Textile Town: Spartanburg, South Carolina, (Spartanburg: Hub City Writers Project, 2002), 166.
86 Waldrep, 24.
87 Ibid.
treatment to their most valuable players, bending the rules for men recruited more for their work on the baseball field than in the cotton mill. According to baseball historian Thomas Perry, “A man might push empty boxes for a while or walk through the mill in the early morning, carrying a hammer or screwdriver before going out to practice.”88 Most company officials promised better housing and higher wages to good ball players who would leave one company team to come play for theirs. Newry villager Olin Hawkins recalled, “My dad was a fair ballplayer. They got him to come here to play ball and gave him a pretty good job at the plant. He was playing ball for the mill in Pickens, and word got around-you come to play for us, and we’ll take care of you. He was a pretty good pitcher.”89 According to Perry, a ball player in the textile league could earn $100-$200 per week, whereas an average worker might earn $7-$10 for the same period.90

The racial hierarchy that existed on the shop floor was replicated on the baseball field, as segregation laws kept African Americans out of textile league baseball. African Americans had, however, gained attention around South Carolina through the Negro Leagues that were started in the late 1890s. Paradoxically, mill owners thwarted African Americans’ recreational efforts, but they also supported the establishment of the Negro Textile Leagues in 1921. Though little exists in the historical record with regards to company recruitment

89 Hembree, 50.
90 Perry, 50.
practices, statistics, and playing fields for Negro Textile League games, it is likely that these African American teams were treated in much the same way as similar leagues in the South’s lumber industry. According to historian Will Jones, most companies were unwilling to maintain separate ball fields and thus white and black teams would share one field, though their fans sat in segregated stands.91

Mill village games became quite a spectacle during their “glory days.” Not only did workers gather to watch the games, they also participated in sack races, barbecues, and musical performances. Once merchants, who were suffering under a poor economy, took notice of the droves of people who gathered to watch these games, they recognized this as an ideal opportunity to advertise their merchandise in front of large crowds. This prompted many to offer free products to those who could out perform other players. In one such display at Newry’s baseball field, the popular soft drink company, Three-Centers, offered a free case of drinks to players who hit home runs during a game. Ultimately the contest ended as too many players met this challenge.92

Interpretive Opportunities: Worship and Recreation

Interpretation of the museum’s church will be centered on themes of religion and community. While the museum does not seek to impart any particular religious education or affiliation which may alienate visitors, interpretive programs within the church will take as their focus the extent to which mill

92Hembree, 50.
workers turned to God and to their church and village community as they grappled with how to cope during a period of labor unrest and economic hardship, as well as the extent to which mill owners sought to further control operatives' lives and influence their decisions by providing both the building and the message its congregation received from the pulpit.

While visitors’ hands-on opportunities inside the church may be more limited than in other interpretive areas within the museum, public programming within the church will consist of periodical organ, piano, and choral concerts from local musicians, entertaining visitors with period musical pieces, both religious and secular. During periods when the museum is not open to the public, the church will serve alternative uses as well. The space will be made available to the community to hold recitals, graduations, and concerts in an effort to return a sense of community spirit and involvement, which was once a vital part of mill village life.

The union church at Newry, a Gothic Revival structure built in the early 1900s, still stands on Broadway Street, the village’s main thoroughfare. A wooden, white structure, the church featured arched windows and a large steeple, which was second in height only to the mill’s smokestack and bell tower. Purchased in 1977 by professional photographer Rick Hiser, the church was restored and used as both a residence and photography studio. After Hiser left Newry, the church, like much of the village, was divided into apartments.93 Using photographs as documentary evidence, the union church at Newry will be

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93 Hembree, 117-118.
restored to its early 1930s appearance, having changed little since its erection in the early 1900s. The interior of the church will be furnished, as described by several long-time Newry residents, with row upon row of long, hard, wooden pews. At the front of the church, will be the wooden pulpit and behind the pulpit, a choir loft facing the congregation, which will also hold the church’s organ and piano.

Against the backdrop of villagers’ favorite pastime, the baseball field will display company recruiting practices and race relations, neighboring village rivalries and the extent to which achievement on the ball field was often transferred to the shop floor. Whether through casual conversation with baseball players or by participating in a live game, visitors will come to understand the role baseball played in the lives of South Carolina’s mill workers. Regularly scheduled games on Saturdays will return to Newry as part of the museum’s public programming. Games will be waged between costumed interpretive staff and general visitors, and in keeping with the history of baseball in South Carolina’s mill villages, the museum will also recruit baseball players from nearby Clemson University to participate. Costumes, or uniforms, bearing various company names will be provided for visitors, reinforcing the relationship between players and the mill system. Spectators at these games will become participants in sideline activities such as foot races, sack races, and musical concerts from local bands playing traditional “hillbilly” music. Concessions of
hamburgers and hotdogs will be served, and visitors can also snack on the popular depression era snack of RC Cola and Moon Pies.

Historically, South Carolina’s mill villages did not have organized ball teams for young boys, but mill children nonetheless organized their own games, imitating the hometown idols they cheered on every Saturday. Children fashioned bats and balls out of scraps found around the mill, such as boards, balls of yarn and electrical tape. Sometimes, this created special problems for these young boys as former mill worker and village resident Everett Baker remembered: “Well, we’re playing along and this boy gets up to bat, a little bitty guy...And he swung away mightily, you know. Throws the bat down and takes off. Everybody starts looking for the ball...He just circles the bases, and we’re still looking for the ball...So somebody finally picks up the bat. Well, that floor plank had a nail in the end of it. So he swings—the ball sticks to the bat, he throws it down, gets a home run, the ball laying right in front of home plate!” 94 Young visitors to the museum will have the opportunity to make equipment out of scraps provided by the museum and participate in games against one another. Additionally, the museum, in conjunction with the American Legion, will sponsor a local team for young people. This will open Newry’s field for community use and provide community children an opportunity about which thousands of mill children before them only dreamed.

Mill village baseball enjoyed quite a following at Newry’s baseball field, which was located in the western part of the village, and is now under the waters

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94 Quoted in Coggeshall, 128.
CONCLUSION

The last bell rang at the Courtenay Manufacturing Company in Newry in May 1975 and created a silence that the village had never known. The roar of machines could no longer be heard from the immense, opened windows that lined each floor of the factory. Workers no longer filed past the old guard house to punch their time cards, nor did they congregate in the mill’s yard on their lunch breaks. As the symbolic heart of Newry ceased to pump life through the community, village residents, Courtenay retirees, and displaced workers grappled with what to do next. Together these groups formed an alliance to save not only the buildings in Newry, but also the way of life of its people.

One early idea, proposed in the 1970s by Clayton and Lynn Cater, two long-time Newry residents, was to preserve the village as an example of a late nineteenth-century cotton mill, but this effort did not generate enough interest. “We had dreams of Newry being preserved in its original state, but that wasn’t meant to be. It was a good dream. Too bad it didn’t work out,” Clayton Cater said. Among the explanations for the lack of support for a project such as this in the late 1970s is that since many of those who had lived and labored in these
villages were still living, this history was not deemed part of a distant enough past and therefore not significant enough to be preserved. Additionally, the bottom-up history movement was in its infancy and popular museum audiences were only beginning to recognize the contributions of workers typically left out of the historical record. Several decades have passed and the effort to preserve Newry’s textile mill and village is once again a viable proposal.95

This interpretive plan provides the framework and foundation for the creation of a living history museum to commemorate the complex textile world negotiated by owners and workers, blacks and whites across the South in the early 1930s. More than just a recreation of daily activities, this plan aspires toward the ineffable by creating experiences that can be easily integrated into visitors' own environment. Just as generations of workers created a community beyond the strict confines of the textile labor system, it is hoped that modern Americans, facing economic uncertainty and joblessness and who struggle to find their voice within government, will reach beyond the confines of this plan to become active participants in the meaning making process, constructing experiences that will resonate in their own lives.

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95 Hembree, 113-114.
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