

Mills operated on Chester site for 250 years

After the Civil War, textile mills moved south from New England.

Common wisdom in the 1880s held that the mills had come to the cotton fields where they rightfully belonged. Many mills were literally constructed in fields of cotton.

More cotton mills, however, were set on stream banks that had long been the sites of grist and flour mills. Water power was furnished by wheels before the streams were dammed to produce electricity.

Fishing Creek in Chester County had a mill of one kind or another for more than two and a half centuries.

During the Revolutionary War, Walker's Mill ground corn for combatants on both side. Near the mill the British officer Lord Tarle-

ton defeated Thomas Sumter in the fall of 1780.

In 1786, Hugh White, who had another grist mill upstream in York County, bought Walker's mill site. He milled flour and ground corn for local residents until he sold the establishment to Maj. Nathaniel R. Eaves in 1844.

In 1879 a group of local citizens pooled their resources to organize a cotton mill on the grist mill site. Fifteen men got together \$10,000 and petitioned the state legislature to issue a charter to the Fishing Creek Manufacturing Co. They chose Ferguson H. Barber, who owned the land, as the first president. Within three years, a simple frame building was constructed and the machinery was in place.

In its first 12 years, the mill underwent a fire, a flood and a labor dispute. The dividends were small, and most of the investors were willing to sell out to Barber in 1894.

The name was changed to Lewisville Mills. In its turn, the Lewisville Mills lasted for less than two years. By the mid-1890s, the proliferation of mills across the Piedmont made competition fierce. Only the strongest survived the national financial panic in 1893.

At this point, three Heath brothers picked up ownership of the mill — Benjamin Dawson Heath, Os-good Pierce Heath and Allen Watson Heath, natives of nearby Lancaster County. They named the mills Manetta, a combination of the names of B.D. Heath's wives.

As the Manetta Mills prospered, the surrounding area grew. A school was built near the mill. The settlement, on the Seaboard Railroad Co., was named Lando by the railroad. Lando was a combination of the last two names of Seaboard's first conductor and its first superintendent — Lane and Dodson.

Manetta Mills manufactured blankets and bedspreads. By 1916,

Manetta claimed to be the only Southern mill manufacturing blankets. Most of the blankets were shipped to San Francisco and from there became part of the China trade. Later, the blankets were sold worldwide under the Cannon label.

Manetta Mills would be run by three generations of Heaths. That included all the property that evolved to serve the mill's needs: company housing, stores, the school, church, short-line railroad (Edgemoor and Manetta) that carried the mill goods to a mainline railroad.

The pattern was typical of numerous places across upper South Carolina.

In 1939, an economic historian predicted South Carolina would not always have cotton mills. The historian traced the history of mills from their beginnings in England during the 1750s.

He pointed out that in England, about 1830, the machinery grew

old and management began to resist change. By offering cheaper labor costs, New England took the lead in textile manufacturing. Within 50 years, the same economic forces caused New England mills to move South, especially to the Carolina Piedmont.

The historian predicted cheaper labor and newer machinery elsewhere would cause the Southern textile industry to lose out. The questions in 1939 were where would the Southern cotton mills go and when?

Louise Pettus is a retired history professor from Winthrop University. Her column appears Saturdays.

Louise Pettus



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