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# A Case Study of Clifton Manufacturing

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A CASE STUDY OF  
CLIFTON MANUFACTURING

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A Thesis  
Presented to  
the Graduate School of  
Clemson University

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Masters of Arts  
History

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by  
Rosalia A. Vazquez  
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Accepted by:  
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## ABSTRACT

This case study of Clifton Manufacturing Company demonstrates the keenness of northern entrepreneurs who saw manufacturing opportunities in the American South. This involved taking advantage of water power, their commitment to make manufacturing thrive, and a manifestation of a new civic spirit to achieve prosperity. Moreover, these men of vision survived longer financially than most others in Upstate South Carolina. This study also analyzes the factors that led to the establishment and the development of the textile industry in Spartanburg, South Carolina. The industrial shift that occurred in Spartanburg County witnessed the formation of Clifton Manufacturing and its evolution into a thriving mill town.

## DEDICATION

Para mis padres, Guadalupe & Cecilia Araiza, que, sin saberlo, han inspirado el tema para esta tesis, pero lo más importante, es que me han enseñado a trabajar duro para lograr mis sueños.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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I am also indebted to the other members on my committee, Dr. Rod Andrew and Dr. Alan Grubb, who helped guide this research. The guidance and support of this committee made it possible to complete this work. I would like to also thank Dr. Paul Anderson for all of his direction and assistance. His high expectations truly enriched and enhanced my abilities as a writer, thinker, and scholar.

I would like to thank my friends and Clemson family who, in their own way, have influenced my graduate studies. A warm thanks also goes to my roommates, Alondra, Valentina, and Melissa, who patiently listened to me babble about textiles for two years.

My biggest thank you ultimately goes to my family and to God. To all of you, a sincere and humble thanks.

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## INTRODUCTION

“With the perfection of your machinery, a good location, steady water-power, and general organization, any sensible business man can carry on your affairs successfully.”<sup>1</sup>

This case study of Clifton Manufacturing Company demonstrates the keenness of northern entrepreneurs who saw manufacturing opportunities in the American South. This involved taking advantage of water power, their commitment to make manufacturing thrive, and a manifestation of a new civic spirit to achieve prosperity. Moreover, these men of vision survived longer financially than most others in Upstate South Carolina. This study also analyzes the factors that led to the establishment and the development of the textile industry in Spartanburg, South Carolina. The industrial shift that occurred in Spartanburg County witnessed the formation of Clifton Manufacturing and its evolution into a thriving mill town.

During the antebellum period, cotton manufacturing served as a prologue to the New South industrial movement.<sup>2</sup> The textile industry gave rise to manufacturing in South Carolina despite anti-industrial sentiment expressed by Southern businessmen who were wedded to agriculture. Lack of interest and capital were arguably the two main causes of why the textile industry failed early on in the

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<sup>1</sup> "Practical Results of Southern Manufactures." *DeBow's Review, Agricultural, Commercial, Industrial Progress and Resources*, 1855, 777-91.

<sup>2</sup> Hearden, Patrick J., *Independence & Empire – The New South's Cotton Mill Campaign: 1865-1901*. DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1982.

state.<sup>3</sup> However, the movement to “bring the cotton mills to the cotton fields” was staggered not exclusively by these motives, but also largely from the lack of effort of moral training of operatives.<sup>4</sup> Entrepreneurs who shifted their focus to dependable and happy operatives made the Southern textile revolution in Spartanburg County possible.

William Gregg, the antebellum South’s best known industrialist and industrial propagandist, created Graniteville Manufacturing Company near Aiken, South Carolina in 1847. He served as a paradigm for future entrepreneurs who entered the manufacturing arena. Gregg argued that the failure of the development of the textile industry in the South came about largely because of the lack of moral training of operatives, including maintaining good habits such as sobriety and going to church, as well as abstaining from gambling, fighting, and womanizing, apart from the lack of capital and skilled management. He often published his thoughts for industrial progression in periodicals, commenting on his victories and misfortunes, and seeking always to produce an industrial surge among Southerners.

Unfortunately, despite efforts of those such as Gregg, the risk of investing in industry was not the popular mindset of businessmen in South Carolina. Gregg concluded that it was Southerners’ own fault for their backwardness. After all, they had such valuable resources at their fingertips.

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<sup>3</sup> Lander, Ernest M. (1954) “Manufacturing in South Carolina, 1815–1860”, *Business History Review*, 28.

<sup>4</sup> Labyak, Gregory John. *Geographical Factors Influencing the Rise and Growth of Cotton Textile Manufacturing in the South Carolina Piedmont, 1880-1940*. Vol. 1. Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Dissertation Services, 1998, 74-5. Kohn, August. *The Cotton Mills of South Carolina, 1907: Letters Written to the News and Courier*. Charleston, SC: The Daggett Printing Company, 1907, 20.



Although Gregg did not live to witness the evolution of the cotton industry in the South, he was undeniably a shining example to Northern businessmen like Dexter Edgar Converse, founder of the Clifton Manufacturing Companies in Spartanburg. Converse, an ardent and forward thinking entrepreneur, understood the importance of the message of Gregg and others for industrialization and acted accordingly. By building his cotton factories along the Pacolet River in Spartanburg County, this northern genius took advantage of this venue, exploiting for example the abundant water power that was required to run the cotton-production machinery.

Converse became not only a successful cotton manufacturer, but also a philanthropist, treating his employees paternalistically. He believed his operatives would reflect his actions. By implementing a new, fundamental civic spirit in his three mill villages, Converse proved it to be an effective means of securing the worker's good will, but more importantly, securing their productivity. He undeniably became an invaluable asset in the development of Spartanburg and the greater Upstate region.

## CHAPTER I

### CONFLICTS WITH INDUSTRY IN THE ANTEBELLUM ERA

Cotton manufacturing in the antebellum era provided a prologue to what was to become the industrial South. The textile industry is considered as the initial stage of the development that allowed the successful and rapid growth in the post-Civil War period.<sup>5</sup> Anti-industrial sentiment expressed by Southerners failed to stifle the rise of manufacturing despite their persistence in agricultural pursuits. It was argued that the lack of interest and capital delayed the development of the textile industry in South Carolina.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, a fundamental reorientation of civic spirit was also a necessity that was absent in the antebellum South, something that was essential for embracing a new economic system that departed from agriculture.<sup>7</sup> Despite the hesitation expressed by some elite Southern businessmen, there existed those who worked to see manufacturing thrive in South Carolina, paving the way for future entrepreneurs.

During the antebellum period, it was difficult for the Southern elite to embrace industry. Revenues were higher in agriculture, making industry appear less appealing. The lack of capital also hindered Southern businessmen who wanted to

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<sup>5</sup> Smith, Alfred G., *Economic Readjustment of an Old Cotton State South Carolina: 1820-1860*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1958, 130.

<sup>6</sup> Lander, Ernest M. (1954) "Manufacturing in South Carolina, 1815-1860", *Business History Review*, 28(1).

<sup>7</sup> Mitchell, Broadus. *The Rise of Cotton Mills in the South*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2001, xxii-xxv.

invest in industry. Ernest M. Lander Jr. argues that although wealthy South Carolinians invested part of their funds in manufacturing, they lacked sufficient surplus wealth like the merchant capitalists of New England.<sup>8</sup> Modest returns from manufacturing generally made such financial commitments unattractive compared to agriculture. Planters in turn regarded manufacturing with hostility. They were confident that traditional ways would always generate higher returns. Not surprisingly this attitude hindered the textile industry. Simply put: it was the devotion and dedication to agriculture that delayed the growth of manufacturing before the Civil War.<sup>9</sup> The proclivity of wealthy South Carolinians to choose agriculture, despite many realizing that the North was prospering with increasing industrialization, prevented expansion. They failed to exploit the state's favorable conditions and natural resources. Yet there existed those who pushed for manufacturing, working slowly to break the agricultural norm.

It was a tedious task to get Southerners interested in industry. Wealthy South Carolinians who pursued this path did not have the support that they needed. It was up to them individually to find paths to become successful manufacturers. William Gregg, though, was a cotton manufacturer and recognized as the antebellum South's best-known industrialist and industrial propagandist.<sup>10</sup> He was an advocate of

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<sup>8</sup> Lander, (1954) "Manufacturing in South Carolina, 1815-1860", 28.

<sup>9</sup> Labyak, Gregory John. *Geographical Factors Influencing the Rise and Growth of Cotton Textile Manufacturing in the South Carolina Piedmont, 1880-1940*. Vol. 1. Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1998, 20-40.

<sup>10</sup> Mitchell, *The Rise of Cotton Mills in the South.*, xxxi.

industry and the advancement of the average man.<sup>11</sup> Gregg opposed an economic system that was dependent upon agriculture. He can be considered a servant of material improvement and a forerunner of a new era.<sup>12</sup> Although Gregg strongly believed that manufacturers such as he had to initiate business at a most unpropitious time, he thought that the textile industry could prosper in South Carolina. He took time to study industry's techniques in New England, expecting his education in textile manufacturing to be nothing less than perfect. Gregg understood that Southern mindsets did not match his but believed that, by gaining knowledge, he could make industry thrive in South Carolina. He took it upon himself to apply the knowledge that he acquired in New England to launch a mill on his own. Not only did Gregg advocate what he believed was the future of enterprise, but he also continued to publicize his beliefs. Within a few years, he would become a shining example of what future entrepreneurs followed in textile production and with community life in mill villages.

In 1847 William Gregg founded the Graniteville Company, which became the South's largest and best-known cotton mill.<sup>13</sup> He understood that apart from capital, South Carolina lacked skillful agents, such as himself, to attract capitalists to invest in textiles. There was that lack of entrepreneurs that were willing to abandon agriculture. He argued that they were not fully utilizing the resources of the state.

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<sup>11</sup> Mitchell, Broadus. *William Gregg: Factory Master of the Old South*. The University of North Carolina Press, 1928, 17-8.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> "Practical Results of Southern Manufactures." *DeBow's Review, Agricultural, Commercial, Industrial Progress and Resources*, 1855, 777-91.

Observed Gregg, "Our abundant supply of cheap labor, our mild climate, and above all, the raw material so cheap at our door, and a home market for our products, give us, with good management, certain and large profits, while the cotton manufacturers of no other country can more than make a living."<sup>14</sup> He could not see other Southern businessmen taking his initiative, having such rich resources at their fingertips. Gregg concluded that it was their own fault for their silly backwardness.

Graniteville's success was an accidental exception due to Gregg. He aspired for his fellow Southerners to attain the skillful management that he possessed, but the drive from elites was too low. Gregg considered himself so vital to the prosperity of the mill that he predicted, "As soon as I am taken from you, your brilliant prospects will vanish, your affairs relapse, and the property become unproductive."<sup>15</sup> He added, "With the perfection of your machinery, a good location, steady water-power, and general organization, any sensible business man can carry on your affairs successfully."<sup>16</sup> It was to his frustration that wealthy Southerners would not eagerly follow in his example. Gregg argued that failure of a manufacturing company occurred because of the lack of effort and determination of its founder.<sup>17</sup> Despite his high attempt to penetrate this thought to Southern minds, they were too resistant to pursue that path.

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<sup>14</sup> "Practical Results of Southern Manufactures." *DeBow's Review, Agricultural, Commercial, Industrial Progress and Resources*, 1855, 777-91.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 777-91.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 777-91.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 777-91.

This cotton company served as a paradigm of what future entrepreneurs would look to as a reference for future manufacturing. Gregg led by example and eagerly shared his trials and tribulations in southern periodicals and other publications. Not only did his words and successes later inspire South Carolinians to seek cotton manufacturing, but they also served to attract Northern investors to the South, thus increasing capital in regional industries. Graniteville survived before, during, and after the Civil War, proving that his thoughts and efforts were significantly valuable.

Economic depressions and lack of capital caused most of the hardships for the cotton mills before the Civil War, apart from lack of the spirit to do so. Having less money to invest, unfavorable conditions were inevitable for infant cotton companies. It was difficult for South Carolinians to raise funds to construct factories of significant size.<sup>18</sup> Small cotton factories in antebellum South Carolina were not prone to survive. Investors did not have enough expertise to make intelligent decisions when it came to the machinery, yet they often wanted to acquire the latest machinery that New England had to offer.<sup>19</sup> This led to inexperienced workers failing to operate equipment successfully, quickly leading to a loss of money invested and ultimately profits made. Smaller factories in South Carolina could not compete with Northern operating numbers. Many firms were often burdened with heavy debt, often resulting from the lack of liquid capital when operations began.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 777-91.

<sup>19</sup> Mitchell, *William Gregg: Factory Master of the Old South*, 31-2.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 33-40.

Competition grew harsher as Northern industries improved their production methods.

There existed other factors as to why the textile industry did not prosper in South Carolina prior to the Civil War. Ernest Lander argues that the development of the textile industry in the state failed to grow not only because of a shortage of capital but also because of the lack of skilled management.<sup>21</sup> Northern entrepreneurs invested capital and energy to industrialization just as much as Southerners devoted similar resources to agriculture. This gave Northern entrepreneurs an advantage in industries despite the hardships caused by the ongoing fluctuating economy. The shortage of experience in South Carolina aids the explanation of why a substantial part of its industry was owned by immigrant or Northern investors.<sup>22</sup> A number of founders of these companies hailed from Scotland, England, and Sweden, as well as several states in New England. Another contributing factor to South Carolina falling behind is that their producers were unable to get their costs low enough to compete effectively with the production mills in New England. Working or investing in industry did not seem worth the risk for South Carolinians if they could get higher returns with agriculture. And much of the 1850's cotton prices were generally robust. The drive for riches drove

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 20-9.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 20-8.

Southerners.<sup>23</sup> Taking risks by investing in industry was not the popular mindset of businessmen in South Carolina

Historian Alfred Glaze Smith Jr. argues that emigration called for an economic readjustment in South Carolina immediately prior to the Civil War.<sup>24</sup> It was perhaps the fluctuations of cotton prices that caused South Carolinians to look to foreign lands to relieve their concern of not generating decent revenues. Changes in the price of raw cotton in the late 1850s served as a stimulus for Southern industrialists to continue pursuits to exit agriculture.<sup>25</sup> The increase of soil exhaustion and the spread of cotton production to more fertile lands in the Southwest came partly as a result of South Carolina beginning to slowly invest in industry. Yet soil exhaustion did not necessarily refer to the land no longer being capable of producing cotton and other crops. It also had to do with crop yields failing to be high enough for farmers to make a handsome profit. This called for an increase the momentum for farmers to search for virgin lands. The shift westward triggered key changes in societies. There was an increase in the sale of land, slaves, and farm equipment as South Carolinians left the state.<sup>26</sup> It was evident that those who lacked ambition or the ability to abandon South Carolina's changing conditions or to delve into industrial pursuits fell behind. Those who struggled were often pushed onto less desirable lands,

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<sup>23</sup> Hearden, Patrick J., *Independence & Empire the New South's Cotton Mill Campaign: 1865-1901*. DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1982.

<sup>24</sup> Smith, *Economic Readjustment of an Old Cotton State South Carolina*, 1958, 6-44.

<sup>25</sup> Labyak, 66-70.

<sup>26</sup> Smith, *Economic Readjustment of an Old Cotton State South Carolina*, 8-11.



causing an influx of poor whites.<sup>27</sup> The antebellum era was not only forming the foundations of a new economic structure, but also more permanent changes in societies. This made residents uncomfortable and even more reluctant to accept the idea of investing in industry, adding to the lack of development of industry.

It was common for South Carolinians to not remain in their homes for long terms. Farmers looked to lands as investments in which their products would yield enough revenue to cover living costs. This was a reflection of the change in attitudes on major political issues such as slavery, the tariff, and internal improvements.<sup>28</sup> The most ambitious farmers left to explore the Southwest with their families, taking whatever property or slaves they could with them, leaving behind land where capital was no longer plentiful. Not only did they believe that they could increase personal income elsewhere, but they also wanted to get the most out of their investments in slaves. Most slave owners thought that slaves were more productive when their labor was applied to fresh lands. During the 1860s, over 170,000 slaves had been removed from the state, contributing to the development of a substantial interstate trade in slaves.<sup>29</sup> Nonetheless, the cotton economy was in part strengthened because of high emigration rates in South Carolina. The state was left with less pressure to provide for a larger population, leading to the readjustment of economic opportunity for those who remained. Although these factors contributed heavily to the digression of industry in South Carolina, there were those who did

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 8-11.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 8-18.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 25-26.

explore that option. The devastations brought upon by the Civil War, however, left little to nothing for these companies. It brought destruction to South Carolina's industry.<sup>30</sup> Despite the suffering that it brought upon antebellum manufactures, wartime conditions awakened the lethargic Southern industry. Eager manufacturers responded to the heightened demand of industrial activity.

South Carolina's attachment to agriculture previously hindered the state from becoming a major industrial state before the Civil War. However, entrepreneurs were willing to accept the changing economic atmosphere. At the time, other businesses that were also introduced included carriage and paper manufacturing, sawmilling, and turpentine distilling.<sup>31</sup> Entrepreneurs focused primarily on activities that took advantage the state's raw materials. The cotton industry still was the most promising one to yield high revenues. Cotton was abundant in South Carolina, making this industry considerably appealing. By 1860, the cotton textile industry surpassed all other manufacturing products in terms of capital, labor, and value of product.<sup>32</sup> Inventions and improvements in machinery also contributed to the gradual rise of mills. Entrepreneurs were likely to invest in power-driven machinery if the return provided benefits. Automated machinery allowed for the increase in production. It also called for stronger, more suitable yarn, making it more appealing than the cotton then being commonly woven in

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<sup>30</sup> Labyak, 70-7.

<sup>31</sup> Lander, "Manufacturing in South Carolina, 1815-1860", 1.

<sup>32</sup> Labyak, 73.

homes. In total, there were six cotton mills in South Carolina by 1860.<sup>33</sup> Like most of the previously mentioned industries, these mills were located below the fall line of rivers or close to streams where they could exploit one of South Carolina's most vital source for industrial pursuits, namely water power.

Advances in land transportation also contributed to the success of industrialization. The development of factories depended on the arrival of the railroad.<sup>34</sup> It allowed for increased access to raw materials as well as to consumers. Railroads reduced considerably the cost of moving materials and finished products. Expansion of these iron rails allowed factory owners to no longer rely as heavily on local consumers, opening doors for them to pursue business in Northern markets.<sup>35</sup> This was a major component of the progress cotton mills made in their attempt to prosper and expand. Apart from moving products, railroads aided population growth.<sup>36</sup> These were all valuable attractions for prospective entrepreneurs to use to their advantage to run a successful enterprise.

The cotton industry experienced hardships due to political, social, and economic effects of the Civil War.<sup>37</sup> Even though the South had damages done to its mill machinery as well as its transportation infrastructure and equipment, it was able to improve significantly during Reconstruction. One of the biggest factors that led to its industrial improvement was a more favorable economic climate. This

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<sup>33</sup> Lander, "Manufacturing in South Carolina, 1815-1860", 1.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>35</sup> Labyak, 68-71.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 68-71.

<sup>37</sup> Labyak, 60-77.

included the increase in federal tariffs to boost manufacturing profits and the decline of machinery prices. Also, the rise in the demand for cotton cloth across the South called for an increase in production. South Carolina was also able to improve public roads and railways during Reconstruction. For the most part, Southern railroads had been rebuilt before 1890, including becoming of standardized gauge in the early 1880's. The Southern industrial revolution played a major role in building a stronger and more progressive South. The textile industry flourished at a time of remarkable technological advancement.<sup>38</sup> The once labor-intensive production methods steadily improved with mechanization, allowing for increased production and reduced labor costs. Because of the new steam engine technology, mills in South Carolina were able to take better advantage of its abundant sources of water-generated electricity that maintained smooth operations.<sup>39</sup>

A key attribute to the success of the mills in Spartanburg County came from the prosperity of external capitalists. Northerners who migrated south, put to good use the knowledge they had acquired from their New England experiences. They were well-trained managers. The mills were often operated by men of unusual ability who, like Gregg, took the time and trouble to investigate thoroughly New England and European techniques in order to equip themselves with the necessary knowledge. The textile industry of the South Carolina Upcountry during the antebellum period is considered as the initial stage of the development that was to take place so rapidly and successfully in the post-war period. It was a time of

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 86-87.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 80-91.

experiment, trial and error, and learning.<sup>40</sup> It was the preface of what was to become the new economic and social order.

An economic departure from agriculture was something that entrepreneurs believed was needed not just to gain profits, but to improve the general well being.<sup>41</sup> This was a relentless battle that strong businessmen such as William Gregg had had. As Broadus Mitchell claims, "Water powers, cheap labor, proximity to the raw cotton, low wage tax, favorable freights rates, fuel in abundance...were helps to the building of mills, but they did not build them."<sup>42</sup> The Southern textile revolution was a development that had to be internal, not external. Those who did hear the call of Gregg paved the way for future manufacturers to succeed. A significant benefit to rising entrepreneurs in South Carolina was the opportunity to refurbish old plants and develop new ones using personalized methods and techniques. The antebellum era served as a prologue for the industrial movement in the New South.<sup>43</sup> Whether it was in ideas or in trial and error, these industries established the foundations for future growth.

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<sup>40</sup> Smith, *Economic Readjustment of an Old Cotton State South Carolina*, 129-34.

<sup>41</sup> Mitchell, *The Rise of Cotton Mills in the South*, xxxi-xxxiii.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>43</sup> Hearden, Patrick J., *Independence & Empire the New South's Cotton Mill Campaign: 1865-1901*. DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1982.

## CHAPTER II

### THE PROMISE OF WATER POWER

Spartanburg, South Carolina, formally known as Spartan City, is in the Upstate region of the Palmetto State.<sup>44</sup> Its location is perfectly nestled on the north by the Blue Ridge Mountains and to the eastern and western boundaries by the Broad River. Inhabitants of the community claimed to have the best climate in the world, having no severe seasonal weather patterns. Since before the Civil War, Spartanburg has been a mostly economic progressive place. It sought to make internal improvements continually, having officials who condemned it for having merely an agricultural economy.<sup>45</sup> Newcomers, were greeted welcomed and were encouraged to stay.<sup>46</sup> Spartanburg was unquestionably an energetic and forward-looking town filled with bountiful opportunities.

The streams that flowed from the Blue Ridge Mountains made for numerous springs and creeks that dotted the countryside. Although they primarily caught the attention of those interested in farming and livestock raising, they were later a key attraction to businessmen interested in cotton manufacturing. Flowing through the county are the Pacolet and Tyger Rivers, two important streams that aided the

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<sup>44</sup> *Spartanburg, City and County, South Carolina*. Spartanburg, SC: Cofield, Petty and Company, 1888.

<sup>45</sup> *A History of Spartanburg County*. 1st ed. Spartanburg: The Spartanburg Branch American Association of University Women South Carolina, 1940, 43.

<sup>46</sup> *Spartanburg, City and County, South Carolina*.

development of cotton mills.<sup>47</sup> These mills would become essential in the industrialization of Spartanburg County.

Spartanburg County was rich in natural resources. It contained iron ore, mineral springs, limestone, and forests.<sup>48</sup> From an early stage in the county's development, these were all recognized as advantages and essentials to wealth-producing activities. With the rise of industry, their value was aggrandized for their attributes as a basis for prospering industry.<sup>49</sup> The Broad River and its tributaries served as fundamentals to these natural advantages.<sup>50</sup> This stream was responsible for the seemingly limitless supply of water power. This was a vital asset for the county and also for operating machinery. Also important, the river provided flatboat and keelboat transportation for the products to go to market. This allowed a relief to hauling goods with wagons over horrible roads and trails. Water transportation was a necessity for entrepreneurs, especially before the development of railroads. However, by 1859, the sixty-eight mile Spartanburg & Union Railroad provided a connection to Columbia and Charleston, reflecting the progress the area had made in railroad construction, and offered an opportunity of expansion of markets.<sup>51</sup> Filled with these remarkable advantages, Spartanburg County was an ideal place of settlement for capitalists who sought industrial pursuits. But it was the

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<sup>47</sup> *A History of Spartanburg County.*, 66.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 66-7.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>51</sup> H. Roger Grant, *The Louisville, Cincinnati & Charleston Rail Road*. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2014.

predominantly the promise of water power that caught the attention of Northern investors who wished to promote the cotton industry.

The rigors of the Civil War and its aftermath called for a time to rebuild and reshape the economy. However, during the Reconstruction era in Spartanburg witnessed a great expansion of industry, especially in cotton manufacturing.<sup>52</sup> The International Cotton Exposition of 1881 held in Atlanta is an example of the spirit that augmented the growing industrial surge.<sup>53</sup> It helped convinced Southerners that their economic salvation lay in bringing the cotton mills to the cotton fields and it paved the way for Northern investment in the region.<sup>54</sup> The popular Exposition also pushed industrial ideas and understanding that the cotton industry was the solution to future economic growth outside of agriculture, being the point that William Gregg had advocated before the war. Prior to the boom of the cotton industry, the county had been heavily involved in the iron industry. But that changed. It was through the involvement of Northern entrepreneurs in constructing factories and improving existing mills after the war that later textile companies emerged and prospered.

The development of the Clifton Manufacturing Company had its start after Spartanburg's iron age. It could be argued that this step was needed for cotton mills to be successful in the future. During the 1830s, Spartanburg County was known as

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<sup>52</sup> *A History of Spartanburg County*, 73.

<sup>53</sup> Labyak, 77.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 77-8.



The Old Iron District.<sup>55</sup> As early as the 1770s, people like Joseph Buffington, an iron master, had taken to investing in iron production, establishing Wofford's Iron Works on Lawson's Fork Creek in Spartanburg County.<sup>56</sup> Despite its economic misfortunes that quickly made for its early closing, Buffington paved the way for others to invest in iron works, especially since they were vital for the manufacturing of products for the Revolutionary War, War of 1812, and more importantly the War Between the States.<sup>57</sup> Moses Stroup and Willson Nesbitt were two other entrepreneurs in iron manufacturing, developing furnaces that tapped resources in the area. They built much larger furnaces as well as a rolling mill. Besides producing iron products, they also made cotton gins, and sawmills and erected dwellings for their employees.

Companies such as these served as examples of strong businessmen enlarging their operations in Spartanburg. It also shows how the county was open to industry even before the Industrial Revolution took hold. Leaders of these plants opened ideas for entrepreneurs in the next few decades and in the process slowly created what would be known as company towns. These places held similarities to what were to later be the textile mill towns in Spartanburg County when cotton manufacturing came to dominate. Domestic developments offered plentiful incentives, including a major way to help attract workers.<sup>58</sup> It paved the way to

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<sup>55</sup> *A History of Spartanburg County*, 66.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 78-81.

constructing a more prosperous community, something that was necessary for the progress of the future mills.

The iron industry did not survive the Civil War despite wartime production. Iron masters had been paid by the Confederate government in bonds, which at the end of the conflict became worthless. The devastating conditions that lingered in Spartanburg after 1865 made for a substantial decrease of the iron goods market. Despite efforts once again to revive industry, Northern competition made that impossible. Northern iron enterprises were able to expand with the rise of demand for railroad and related products.<sup>59</sup> These enterprises flourished beyond what Southern factories could provide by having the best machinery and cheaper fuel costs, among other advantages.

The transition to cotton manufacturing occurred in Spartanburg after entrepreneurs realized that they could not compete with Northern iron manufacturers.<sup>60</sup> New entrepreneurs, though, wisely exploited the resources from previous iron factories. The foundations of their cotton mills occasionally consisted of the buildings and supplies previously used. The site of what was once the Kings Mountain Iron Company and Wofford's Iron Works became the locations of cotton factories.<sup>61</sup> The rapid rise in the industry was steadily altering not only Spartanburg

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 71.

but also the state. It was this industry that insured a new wealth and culture for the county and region.<sup>62</sup>

The first major textile mill to be established the Spartanburg area was in 1836. It was called Bivingsville Cotton Factory, or Bivingsville Cotton Manufacturing as it was later known.<sup>63</sup> James Bivings, a medical doctor and a particularly shrewd businessman, founded it. He altered his attention to building manufacturing establishments and other enterprises that tended to the common interest of the community seeing fit to fulfill a civic need.<sup>64</sup> Bivings was a man with good business sense and a careful financier. These traits made his capitalistic venture in textiles even more promising. Bivings purchased seven hundred and fifty acres to expand his enterprise. This included the site of the former Wofford and Berwick Iron Works.<sup>65</sup> By supplying \$100, 000, what is approximately \$1.57 million in current dollars, he and his investors were able to create Spartanburg's largest cotton mill. It contained a total of 1,200 spindles and 24 looms.<sup>66</sup> Previous, small-scale mills were mainly yarn plants that focused on producing coarse cotton yarn and linen warp for the use by local household looms. The changes brought about by Bivingsville Cotton

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 71-2.

<sup>63</sup> Teter, Betsy Wakefield, ed., *Textile Town: Spartanburg County, South Carolina*. Spartanburg, SC: Hub City Writers Project, 2002, 19-23.

<sup>64</sup> Obituary of Doctor James Bivings, M.D., *Southern Christian Methodist Advocate*, 1869.

<sup>65</sup> Teter, ed., *Textile Town: Spartanburg County, South Carolina*, 19.

<sup>66</sup> *A History of Spartanburg County*, 78.

Manufacturing, whose name subsequently became Glendale, represented a milestone in the development of the local textile industry in Spartanburg.<sup>67</sup>

The expansion of factories was not an easy feat for James Bivings. He undertook other mills to expand his enterprise, but he was not successful in doing so. Problems often derived from economic down-turns in agriculture. When agriculture suffered in the South from depression, overproduction caused a decline in the price of raw cotton, causing production to decrease.<sup>68</sup> This challenge, however, made the textile industry even stronger. Strong leaders such as Bivings paid close attention to what was being said in the *Charleston Courier* and *De Bow's Review*.<sup>69</sup> They quickly discovered and admired the advice of William Gregg. It was there that they found the inspiration to continue the industrial surge. These men focused their attention on bringing spindles to the cotton. Gregg argued that the absence of capital should not bring down factory owners. He insisted that mills be established on credit, which would later generate enough money to pay off the loans. Bivings listened to this advice and willingly endured the economic hardships. Those who continued in agricultural pursuits did not envy the tribulations that they encountered. The struggles of these businessmen were noted locally. Observed a Spartanburg newspaper, "It would make a book to tell how these men endured and toiled and hung on during long years, with only partial success. Anybody else would

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 78-9.

<sup>68</sup> Teter, ed. *Textile Town: Spartanburg County, South Carolina*, 22-5.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 22-5.

have quit.”<sup>70</sup> Bivings was a tenacious soul who refused to give up despite having to sell his shares of the company, which ultimately caused him to have to give up his position. It was when the plant fell under the direction of John Bomar, one of Bivings’ investors, that more improvements took place.<sup>71</sup> Bomar was smart enough to seek a higher experienced manager to lead and administer the firm. He recognized the need of someone with more experience and education in textiles. Bomar employed Dexter Edgar Converse, who was to have a major role in textile manufacturing in Spartanburg County.<sup>72</sup>

During the 1850’s, William Gregg had shared in *DeBow’s Review* what he believed were the leading factors as to why the cotton mill enterprise was failing. He concluded that it involved five reasons, these being injudicious selection of machinery and kind of goods being made, lack of steady and efficient motive power, injudicious locations, inadequate religious and moral training for operatives, and, lastly, launching an enterprise with insufficient capital.<sup>73</sup> Leading by example, Gregg left a valuable guideline for others to follow in the New South textile movement. With the Graniteville Company, Gregg was able to exemplify the value of his approaches, strongly and effectively encouraging entrepreneurs like Converse.

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<sup>70</sup> *Spartan* (Spartanburg), March 10, 1880.

<sup>71</sup> *A History of Spartanburg County*, 81.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>73</sup> Kohn, August. *The Cotton Mills of South Carolina, 1907: Letters Written to the News and Courier*. Charleston, SC: The Daggett Printing Company, 1907, 18.

The following chapter will follow extensively how the forward thinking mind of Dexter Converse, fulfilling the undertaking by exploiting available resources, altered the economic system in Spartanburg with cotton manufacturing. Against harsh economic calamities and Civil War, surviving mills in the Piedmont region were able to survive and in the process transformed Spartanburg County.

## CHAPTER III

### A NEW LEADER

The South's industrialization energized and enriched regions, dismissing its backward conceptions.<sup>74</sup> Broadus Mitchell attests that southern textile industrialization lifted the South from the wretched poverty and lassitude that slavery had created.<sup>75</sup> A new leader, Dexter E. Converse, would arrive in the Upstate, possessing the knowhow, but more importantly, the determination to make the Southern textile revolution a reality in Spartanburg County. He was a prime example of what William Gregg hoped a businessman would become in the mill industry in the South. Because of the Civil War and Reconstruction, there was only moderate cotton mill growth in South Carolina between 1860 and 1880.<sup>76</sup> However, under the right leadership, this enterprise would soon expand enormously.

It was typical for Northern investors to travel to explore locations before they fully invested in or established companies in local Southern venues.<sup>77</sup> Excellent sites existed and were available at reasonable prices in the uplands of South Carolina. This increased the lure to enter the region despite the previous local

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<sup>74</sup> Mitchell, Broadus. *The Rise of Cotton Mills in the South*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2001, 48-61.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 48-61.

<sup>76</sup> Lander, Ernest McPherson Jr., *A History of South Carolina, 1865-1960*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1960.

<sup>77</sup> Mitchell, *The Rise of Cotton Mills in the South*, 233.

prejudice against manufacturing industries. Since cotton was abundant in the state, this industry was the most appealing business for investments.<sup>78</sup> Many entrepreneurs came to the South with ideas that had already allowed for the growth of textile industries in the North. Their innovation came in part by the adoption of European approaches.<sup>79</sup> This entrepreneurial knowledge provided significant leadership for the prosperity of mills. The knowhow that these men possessed provided for the introduction of technology and the added boost needed for success. Dexter Converse, an ardent and eager Northern entrepreneur, was the primary spirit in the development of cotton mills and villages in Spartanburg County.

Dexter Edgar Converse was born in 1828 in Swanton, Vermont.<sup>80</sup> He did not grow up in his native state however. His father passed away when he was only three years old, prompting his mother to relocate. After his mother's remarriage, his aunt, Pamela Twitchell Brown, took him in and raised him.<sup>81</sup> Young Converse did not have an extensive education, and often he struggled with his studies. It was from his aunt's husband, Albert G. Brown, that Converse learned about business. The guidance and schooling from his uncle made Converse have the awakening for his future capitalistic ventures in textiles. Brown started his education by teaching his nephew about the manufacture of woolen goods. Years later, Converse worked at a

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid, 78.

<sup>79</sup> Labyak, 68-70.

<sup>80</sup> *The Clifton Review* 1 (October 1945).

<sup>81</sup> Teter, Betsy Wakefield, ed. *Textile Town: Spartanburg County, South Carolina*. Spartanburg, SC: Hub City Writers Project, 2002, 23.



cotton mill himself, starting from one of the lowest positions of the business.<sup>82</sup> He took careful notes and observed closely the successes and failures of the cotton-making process. His keen eye in the matters of operation allowed him to become expertly trained in the various phases of mill management.<sup>83</sup> It was after Converse obtained several years of experience that he decided to migrate south, having been offered a job in a mill in the western North Carolina community of Lincolnton.<sup>84</sup> He only worked there for a year, continuing to be observant at how operations were managed. This, of course, further increased his overall knowledge. Converse was not impressed at how operations were executed at the Lincolnton mill; however, he strongly believed that he could conduct production at a much better rate and run the machinery more proficiently. During this time Converse often wrote to his uncle, describing what he learned and indicating his opinion on how superintendents carried out their operations. In one letter he opined, "People here are the most cautious about doing anything on a large scale of any I ever knew. They are particularly afraid of the manufacturing business."<sup>85</sup> This mindset demonstrates his longing for more than what he saw in existing Southern mills. Converse had greater aspirations for industry than that of what he witnessed. Bivingsville Cotton

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>83</sup> *A History of Spartanburg County*. 1st ed. Spartanburg: The Spartanburg Branch American Association of University Women South Carolina, 1940, 81.

<sup>84</sup> Teter, ed. *Textile Town: Spartanburg County, South Carolina*, 23-4.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 23.

Manufacturing, his next venture as an entrepreneur, would provide him the opportunity to expand his ideas on cotton manufacturing.

In 1855 Dexter Converse began working for Bivingsville Cotton Manufacturing in Spartanburg County. Upon his arrival, he was hired as a superintendent.<sup>86</sup> It was about the time that he came into the picture that the company entered bankruptcy proceedings.<sup>87</sup> Converse was observant of the way the president had conducted Bivingsville Cotton's operations in comparison to what he had observed at Lincolnton. He was more impressed with matters in Bivingsville, but he still was not convinced that its affairs were being addressed at their full potential. Converse anxiously awaited the chance to make suggestions and incorporate what he believed to be more favorable improvements. It did not take long before he made himself stand out to the leaders at Bivingsville. After having been impressed with his work and perseverance, John Bomar, the current president of the Bivingsville company, gave Converse the opportunity to become a partner in the company. After its reorganization in 1856, the firm changed its name to John Bomar & Company.<sup>88</sup>

Converse did not make his transition to Spartanburg County alone. He brought with him his brother-in-law Albert H. Twitchell. They both came to the South with strong hopes of launching an energetic and prosperous manufacturing enterprise. Having their start with John Bomar & Company opened numerous

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<sup>86</sup> *The Clifton Review* 1 (October 1945).

<sup>87</sup> Teter, ed., *Textile Town: Spartanburg County, South Carolina*, 23.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

avenues for them. Their experience and charisma brought a new vitality to the mill. Within three years of these strong leaders working side by side, the firm tripled in value.<sup>89</sup> Not only was its capital increasing, but it also attracted more mill hands to the area. Yet as the Civil War began, conditions started to become bleak.

To the company's dismay, within just a few years of Converse's arrival, South Carolina seceded. Both Converse and Twitchell volunteered for service in the Confederate Army.<sup>90</sup> These men likely volunteered because as Northerners in the Deep South they found themselves in an uncomfortable situation. The laboring class, most of all, looked upon them as the Northern enemy.<sup>91</sup> Despite their absence, the mill continued to operate. This task, however, became an exhausting and troublesome feat as financial struggles created barriers. In spite of challenges, the mill ran 14, 435 spindles and 26 looms during the Civil War.<sup>92</sup> The implementations that Converse had incorporated allowed the company to keep afloat, although sparsely. Converse was recognized as an extremely valuable asset for the mill's survival during the war. Employees responded to his absence by petitioning the governor for his immediate discharge.<sup>93</sup> They advocated for the potential contributions of fundamental items that could be provided by the mill for the

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 23-5.

<sup>90</sup> Hembree, Michael, and David Moore. *A Place Called Clifton*. Clinton, SC: Jacobs Press, 1987, 22.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>92</sup> Teter, ed. *Textile Town: Spartanburg County, South Carolina*, 24.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 24-5.

Confederate soldiers under Converse's leadership.<sup>94</sup> Operatives worried that the mill would close and they would lose their economic livelihood with his absence. Their pleas did not go unanswered; Converse was only required to remain in the military for a few months. His discharge meant that the company could maintain the production of materials for Confederate uniforms, together with other much needed supplies. Twitchell himself, however, did not enjoy the same fate as his partner as he was required to remain in service for the duration of the war.

One of the key factors that led to the survival of John Bomar & Company throughout the war was that it produced various products that were not solely cotton related.<sup>95</sup> This was a fundamental aspect that distinguished it from other mills and saved it from bankruptcy. With the initiatives coming from Converse's fertile mind, the firm owned and operated a flouring mill, carpenter shop, circular sawmill, wool-carding mill, and two cotton gins.<sup>96</sup> It also manufactured Bowie knives and swords by using a cupola furnace for smelting iron ore.<sup>97</sup> Additionally, Bivingsville was the only location in the Confederate States of America where wooden shoe soles were manufactured by machine as opposed to being handmade.<sup>98</sup> These advances generated more activities, allowing the company to become a desirable place to do business, while many other companies continuously

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 24-5.

<sup>95</sup> *A History of Spartanburg County*, 171-2.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 171-2.

<sup>97</sup> Teter, ed. *Textile Town: Spartanburg County, South Carolina*, 24-5.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid, 24-5.

diminished throughout the war years. Thus, being able to attract capital by means other than cotton production contributed to the mill's success for several years.

After the Civil War, the South was confronted by an obviously unfavorable economic climate. John Bomar & Company was one of the few mills that survived. Converse, however, had a difficult time maintaining steady production since demands for its products were no longer as intense as they had been during the war. Former businessmen who did business with John Bomar & Company no longer had sufficient funds to purchase its products. The firm also could no longer rely on the government in Richmond for adequate aid; there no longer existed funds to subsidize needy industries.<sup>99</sup> Something had to be done not only to aid the mill, but also to continue to provide jobs for those who had immigrated to Spartanburg. It wasn't until the realities of the Civil War that those who had persistently invested in agriculture realized the dangers of the failure to diversify economically.<sup>100</sup> Reproaches in the newspaper included matters from locals such as: "We don't care now who gets the cotton or who wears it so we get its value in money – which money would go a long way to help us out of the fix we are now in."<sup>101</sup> Those in Spartanburg were eager for a positive shift in the economy, feeling it was time for the South to move in a new direction, one that would do away with the long-

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<sup>99</sup> *A History of Spartanburg County*, 166-174.

<sup>100</sup> Kohn, August. *The Cotton Mills of South Carolina, 1907: Letters Written to the News and Courier*. Charleston, SC: The Daggett Printing Company, 1907, 6-7.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 6-7.

standing bias against manufacturing.<sup>102</sup> The time was ripe for leaders with foresight, for what William Gregg longingly called for earlier, to use their industrial mindsets as opportunities to escape the war's devastations.

The strain on manufacturing equipment caused by the Civil War did not hinder the progressive mentality of its leaders like Converse. Under his leadership the company's operations were successful enough to cover the original purchase price of the mill. Furthermore, profits were high enough to pay fair dividends in the years preceding the war.<sup>103</sup> By having less debt, they were even able to invest in more productive equipment. Converse, Twitchell, Bomar, and their associates sought to expand. They manifested a transformation that allowed the company to become the show place of the county.<sup>104</sup> These men enlarged production aided by the use of two water-powered turbine wheels so that the mill operated 5,000 spindles and 120 looms, producing 6,000 yards of cloth.<sup>105</sup> The firm focused on manufacturing shirtings, sheetings, drills, and yarns.<sup>106</sup> The changes that were steadily being implemented resulted in the consumption of about 1,600 bales of cotton per year.<sup>107</sup> Converse and his associates were also able to enhance the use of water power with advance technology from new machinery. Converse took full

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<sup>102</sup> Teter, ed., *Textile Town: Spartanburg County, South Carolina*, 23-5.

<sup>103</sup> *A History of Spartanburg County*, 78-80.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 79-80.

<sup>105</sup> *The Clifton Review*, October 1945.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

advantage of the price of textile machinery declining from wartime highs. The increase of railroad lines during Reconstruction likewise aided the company, allowing for market expansion. Apart from Charleston and other main points in South Carolina, goods could be shipped to such major cities as New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, Atlanta, Baltimore, and Wilmington.<sup>108</sup> The company was quickly helping Spartanburg to becoming a prominent place in South Carolina.

The numerous improvements incorporated to the mill by Converse did not go unnoticed by the local community. His manufacturing successes increased his popularity and reputation as a civic leader. In the *Spartan*, Spartanburg's newspaper, it was happily reported that, "Converse and Twitchell let on a small stream of Yankee geniuses and Yankee energy, and the machinery moved with unwonted ease."<sup>109</sup> Converse organized a paying enterprise at John Bomar & Company despite the calamities of the state's economy, which he was able to do so by a new sense of stability, grit, and perseverance to the textile industry, traits that lasted for decades.

In the postwar era, Spartanburg County as a result no longer experienced industrial stagnation. Converse and Twitchell renamed the company D. E. Converse & Company, but by 1878 they rebranded it as Glendale, a name suggested by Converse's wife.<sup>110</sup> During Reconstruction, Converse took advantage of the changes

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> *Spartan* (Spartanburg), March 10, 1880.

<sup>110</sup> Teter, Betsy Wakefield, ed. *Textile Town: Spartanburg County, South Carolina*. Spartanburg, SC: Hub City Writers Project, 2002, 25-7.

in cotton prices to help revive the operation. The introduction of chemical fertilizers in the Upstate had resulted in increased crop yields, creating lower prices for raw cotton.<sup>111</sup> This essentially lowered the cost of producing cotton yarn and cloth, saving the mill more money than during the war. This allowed the Converse management not only to equip Glendale with replacement equipment, but it also made notions of constructing further mills a realistic possibility.

Spartanburg's city officials promoted industrialism.<sup>112</sup> The County proudly came to be the cotton mill center of the South, and it was not willing to give up on that honor. Local leaders supported Converse's initiative to build a new mill. They believed that cotton manufacturing would add wealth and prosperity to the county and help alleviate economic troubles. The Spartanburg business community worked incessantly to bring railroads to town, which benefitted the mill even more. By the early twentieth century, Spartanburg would be able to import and export goods to and from all four points of the compass.<sup>113</sup> This was a significant advantage for the cotton industry. With the county's most powerful leaders on Converse's side, it did not take long for him to expand his business and to continue pursuits in opening additional cotton factories. The triumph he had with Glendale thereby further ignited his entrepreneurial desires.

In 1880 Converse founded and assumed the presidency of Clifton Manufacturing Company along the Pacolet River at Hurricane Shoals in eastern

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 25-7.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 25-33.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 39.



Spartanburg County. He recognized the immense water power that this location offered.<sup>114</sup> Before the establishment of this facility, Converse already had plans to develop a chain of textile plants along this stream. With expansion in mind, he named the community Clifton.<sup>115</sup> Along with Twitchell and other business associates, Converse had purchased the water rights and site of the Old South Carolina Iron Works.<sup>116</sup> Clifton No. 1 was built on the old foundry site, just feet away from the Pacolet. It took sixteen months of improvements and additional reconstruction on the existing building to meet the demanding standards of Converse. When the mill opened, it sported 24, 984 spindles, 715 looms, and 600 employees.<sup>117</sup> The plant manufactured cotton cloth, notably sheetings, shirting, drills, and print cloth.

Clifton No. 1 became the first of three Converse mills that would prosper along the Pacolet River. The stream was inevitably the ideal vehicle to “fuel Converse’s dream.”<sup>118</sup> It created the perfect hydropower that was required to run the cotton production machinery. Clifton No. 1 turned out to be an instant success. Within the first year of operation, it employed four times as many employees than

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<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 30-3.

<sup>115</sup> Hembree, Michael, and David Moore. *A Place Called Clifton*. Clinton, SC: Jacobs Press, 1987, 23.

The exact origin of the name is unclear, but its assumed to be have been chosen for the many cliffs in the vicinity.

<sup>116</sup> *The Clifton Review*, October 1945.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>118</sup> Teter, ed., *Textile Town: Spartanburg County, South Carolina*, 30-3.

Glendale had had.<sup>119</sup> This was a significant change as Glendale had previously held the top spot for the highest number of employees for the past forty years in South Carolina.<sup>120</sup>

Converse's spirits continued to soar with the triumph of Clifton No. 1. He often wrote to his family and friends to paint a picture of the goals and successes that they had. As he told his brother, "I am hard at work on new mill and town – Clifton, I wish you could see what we are doing down here – I think we will have something to be proud of. Tell Mother she wouldn't know the old Rolling Mill place now if she was to see it..."<sup>121</sup> A few years later, Converse wrote, "I have been so busy the past few weeks that I have found no time to write. I know you requested me to report what was done at our Company Meeting in May, and I fully intended on doing so, but as it was then decided to build another mill and having begun the work only a day or two after which since then has kept me on the go... I am now as you can well believe heels over head in work."<sup>122</sup> It is evident that Converse was a man constantly in motion, continuously working on ways to improve the company. His perseverance was never deterred, contributing to Clifton's success above other mills in the county.

In 1888 Converse began construction on his second mill, Clifton No.2. A year later it was ready for operation. This facility was built about three quarters of a mile

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<sup>119</sup> *The Clifton Review*, October 1945.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>121</sup> Hembree and Moore. *Clifton: A River of Memories*, 13-14.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

down the river on Cannon Shoals. It featured Romanesque and Beaux Arts towers as its signature landmarks and sentinels of the new communities.<sup>123</sup> Converse believed the building of the mill village was just as important as the mill itself, believing that the workers happiness reflected their work ethic. Overall, the plant included 30,408 spindles and 806 looms.<sup>124</sup> In 1896, Converse constructed still another mill, Clifton No. 3, although later it would be renamed to Converse Mill. It was constructed about a mile north from the first facility, becoming the largest and most advanced mill not only of the three Clifton units, but also in Spartanburg County.<sup>125</sup> Clifton No. 3 contained 34, 944 spindles and 1092 looms, later soaring over the 100,000 mark of total spindles, a huge accomplishment for the company.

Converse invested in both new and secondhand equipment. He often made those purchases from New England-based companies.<sup>126</sup> Good secondhand machinery provided an affordable alternative that reduced costs as well as allowed steady production. Operatives who had longer tenure at the mill became experts at handling this machinery. It was more productive for Clifton to purchase the same type of equipment rather than experiment with more advanced models. This made possible dependable production by not having to slow down to train workers.<sup>127</sup> It was the unfortunate case for other mills in the Upstate that invested large amounts

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<sup>123</sup> Teter, ed., *Textile Town: Spartanburg County*, 75.

<sup>124</sup> *The Clifton Review*, October 1945.

<sup>125</sup> Hembree and Moore, *Clifton: A River of Memories*, 96-9.

<sup>126</sup> *A History of Spartanburg County*, 78-80.

<sup>127</sup> *The Clifton Review*, October 1945.

of capital to have all new machinery that required lengthy training. Those decisions called for a rapid decline in production and ultimately led the mills to face financial difficulties because the operatives lacked knowledge on how to utilize equipment fully.<sup>128</sup> Converse regularly observed the other mill owners in the area and took quick note of their methods that led either to success or to failure. He was determined not to let foolish mistakes cause a company crisis.

Dexter Converse did not only have his attention focused on the entrepreneurial side of running a mill. He focused too on the happiness and well being of his employees, attention that he believed to be mandatory of a successful enterprise. The following chapter depicts the measures that this leader took in the mill community in order to make his textile revolution a noteworthy and lasting success.

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<sup>128</sup> Kohn, *The Cotton Mills of South Carolina: Letters Written to the News and Courier*.

## CHAPTER IV

### INTERNAL, NOT EXTERNAL

Dexter Converse firmly believed that adequate supervision of a well-regulated manufacturing establishment over all employees was needed for its overall success.<sup>129</sup> He continued to follow the advice of William Gregg, understanding that the key to the development of a successful mill businessman did not only consist of his entrepreneurial triumphs, but also in perfecting internal measures in the community. Converse believed that proper moral training of his operatives was a key for the success of his mill communities. The deep civic commitment that he rendered was a vital component of his business model, making him an invaluable leader of Spartanburg County.<sup>130</sup>

At the same time that Converse was creating his mills, he was creating communities for his employees, putting heavy emphasis on constructing an attractive community environment for his operatives. Converse put substantial effort into constructing a self-sufficient village that would attract and retain workers. He became a firm believer that a mill village could work as a positive influence in a worker's personal development as well as make them loyal employees.<sup>131</sup> He was aware that South Carolina was filled with an abundance of

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<sup>129</sup> *The Clifton Review*, October 1945.

<sup>130</sup> *A History of Spartanburg County*. 1st ed. Spartanburg: The Spartanburg Branch American Association of University Women South Carolina, 1940, 81.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid*, 81.

people who desperately needed and sought paid work. This made Converse an even more prized individual as he offered the opportunity to utilize dwellings and commodities as part of their employment. Individuals in search of jobs migrated mostly from nearby farms and the mountain regions to the north and west of Spartanburg County.<sup>132</sup> His employees consisted of poor white farmers and their families who could no longer support themselves by agriculture. The argument of whether to hire former slaves versus hiring solely poor whites was always in question for Converse.<sup>133</sup> After the Civil War, the introduction of new socioeconomic adjustments in communities called for a separation not solely among race, but within the white community itself.<sup>134</sup> Even after abolition of slavery, it was argued that freedmen should work in agriculture and not industry.<sup>135</sup> Former slaves used in industry were thought of as being at a comparative disadvantage in comparison to agriculture.<sup>136</sup> Clifton was known to have hired only a few African Americans, mostly because of the high number of white small farmers in need of employment

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<sup>132</sup> Teter, Betsy Wakefield, ed. *Textile Town: Spartanburg County, South Carolina*. Spartanburg, SC: Hub City Writers Project, 2002, 30-3.

<sup>133</sup> *The Clifton Review*, October 1945.

<sup>134</sup> Carlton, David L. *Mill and Town in South Carolina, 1880-1920*. Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1982.

<sup>135</sup> Smith, Alfred G., *Economic Readjustment of an Old Cotton State South Carolina: 1820-1860*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1958.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*

who already lived in the area as well as to not cause tension among the community. This implied that his hiring practices were not based solely on race alone.<sup>137</sup>

Mill towns were the heart of any cotton mill enterprise. They transformed the degree of dependence of their employees as well as the distribution of power that made up the manager-worker relationship.<sup>138</sup> The dedication of Converse in portraying an enlightened civic spirit was appealing and succeeded in attracting workers and their families. The corporate dedication to providing suitable living conditions for employees made workers increasingly cherish their positions as well as the new societal opportunities presented to them. This civic spirit lifted operatives for the betterment of the company and of employee-employer relationships.

Many of those who transitioned from agriculture pursuits to the cotton mills did so because they “could not in justice to themselves and their families continue on the farms, and did not feel justified in continuing to neglect their children.”<sup>139</sup> The cotton mills provided, on the other hand, a steady income for families as they were guaranteed pay every two weeks, giving them this cash infusion. Economic security became a leading attraction for poor farmers who chose to enter mill life.<sup>140</sup> Having a household dependable income, as opposed to one at the end of a crop-growing

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<sup>137</sup> *The Clifton Review*, October 1945.

<sup>138</sup> Teter, ed. *Textile Town: Spartanburg County, South Carolina*, 31-33.

<sup>139</sup> Kohn, August. *The Cotton Mills of South Carolina, 1907: Letters Written to the News and Courier*. Charleston, SC: The Daggett Printing Company, 1907.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*

“settlin’ up” season, seemed almost like a luxury for these workers. Also, they were paid at a much higher rate than being farm laborers. It was common for former small landholders who could not make enough to keep them on the farm and for tenants who could not make enough money from sharecropping to seek employment in the cotton mill.<sup>141</sup> In this way, both groups avoided the pitfalls of the oppressive crop-lien system. The local newspaper often shared the contentment of mill workers that made this occupational move. The *Carolina Spartan*, for example, cited one who came to work in the mill as saying, “When I came from the farm, I had nothing. You could have carried my things on your back. Now I would not be ashamed for any man in the state to come to my house, or to sit down at my table.”<sup>142</sup> Clifton, it was said, permitted its employees to steadily rise in social standings and material well being, causing them to want preserve their jobs.

Only about four percent of the mill workers were African American. Converse would at times hire “colored help” for difficult jobs like moving heavy bales of cotton and janitorial chores.<sup>143</sup> They were also hired for doing hot and dirty tasks such as firing boilers and cleaning. At times, African American women were hired for simple assignments, such as washing windows and sweeping floors. Neither African American men nor women were permitted to run equipment, however. Besides having the worst of the occupations at the mill, they were paid significantly less than

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> *Carolina Spartan* (Spartanburg), 1885.

<sup>143</sup> Teter, ed., *Textile Town: Spartanburg County, South Carolina*, 42-4.



white workers, earning on average ten to fifteen cents less per day.<sup>144</sup> This did not hinder them from working at any of the Clifton mills, however, as industry still promised for them attractive pay, despite the income disparity.<sup>145</sup>

Mill villagers mirrored the nature of its leaders. Converse treated his employees paternalistically, keeping in mind that employees would reflect his own actions. Strong business leaders were not simply capitalists, but they were also philanthropists.<sup>146</sup> They were patriots who sought to modify their employees to transform them into what they deemed as “useful citizens.”<sup>147</sup>

Having contented and healthy workers meant for Converse the increase of job loyalty, enthusiasm, and good will. Mill workers at Clifton were better taken care of in a mill town than not being in one. The facilities taught workers better habits and looked after their overall health. They were provided a pure water supply and had physicians ready to help at a moment’s notice.<sup>148</sup> The Clifton community was in fact noted for its philanthropy.<sup>149</sup> Clifton owned its dwellings and provided its operatives with homes at reasonable rents, usually ranging from thirty or forty cents per week, depending on the size of the house.<sup>150</sup> The employees’ homes were

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 42-4.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 42-4.

<sup>146</sup> Mitchell, *The Rise of Cotton Mills in the South*, liv.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., xxv.

<sup>148</sup> Kohn, *The Cotton Mills of South Carolina, 1907: Letters Written to the News and Courier*.

<sup>149</sup> Teter, ed., *Textile Town: Spartanburg County, South Carolina*, 33-45.

<sup>150</sup> *The Clifton Review*, October 1945.

adjacent to the mills, designed for workers to lose as little time as possible to get to and from their job assignments.<sup>151</sup> The houses were saltbox-style structures that were built in neat rows along narrow, dirt streets and cut into the hillsides surrounding the mills.

The mill towns of Clifton Manufacturing played a major role in providing pleasant living conditions in the area. They offered the salubrious climate, internal improvements as well as attractions that made people attracted to the Upstate. Prejudice, though, often arose between mill workers and those that lived in the city, largely because of the appearances of their dwellings.<sup>152</sup> At times, the physical conditions of the mill villages and the dwellings of those who lived in the city of Spartanburg caused tension between its residents. Converse personally contributed in the efforts to maintain favorable physical appearances of his mill towns, believing that this action would decrease the bigotry and generally help provide a better quality of life for his employees.<sup>153</sup> Village appearance was also deeply taken into consideration by Converse. Having his mill villages appear physically attractive was one of Converse's leading goals. This factor contributed to having a well-regulated work force, advice that he had taken from William Gregg.<sup>154</sup> It was often the desire of mill operatives to maintain neat and comfortable homes. If a family earned extra money, it was not uncommon for them to invest in making their homes more

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<sup>151</sup> Kohn, *The Cotton Mills of South Carolina, 1907: Letters Written to the News and Courier*.

<sup>152</sup> Teter, ed., *Textile Town: Spartanburg County, South Carolina*, 42-6.

<sup>153</sup> *A History of Spartanburg County*, 81.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

pleasing.<sup>155</sup> As an incentive to maintain superior appearances, Converse regularly created contests between the three mill villages to recognize who had the best yards.<sup>156</sup> Incentives consisted of attractive cash prizes of fifteen dollars for first place, ten dollars for second, and five dollars for third.<sup>157</sup> This was an aspect that Converse saw as both benefiting to the communities and to themselves, contributing to the mill's success.

Homes varied in size, ranging from three to six bedrooms. Housing assignments were based on the occupation of the worker, the nicer houses being given to those who could afford to rent them. Occupation was not the only factor leading to their placement, however. The way that a family conducted itself and how they maintained the premises also played a major role. Before a family was given a house, its reputation had to be confirmed by the main office of any previous place of employment. The three Clifton villages kept up with the occupant's families to make sure they adhered to the company's regulations and did not damage the community's reputation.<sup>158</sup>

Within two years of the opening of Clifton No. 1, the village had over one hundred and fifty homes and a ten-room boarding house, accommodating more than

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<sup>155</sup> Kohn, *The Cotton Mills of South Carolina, 1907: Letters Written to the News and Courier*.

<sup>156</sup> *Contest Notice*. Clifton Manufacturing Company 1880-1971, Mill Villages, October 1918, Box 1, Folder 4, University Libraries Special Collections, Clemson University.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>158</sup> *Guide for Assigning Houses in Villages*. Clifton Manufacturing Company 1880-1971, Mill Villages, March 1919, Box 1, Folder 3, University Libraries Special Collections, Clemson University.

seven hundred and eighty people.<sup>159</sup> Converse provided luxuries not available in other mill town homes. These included electricity, running water, and indoor plumbing.<sup>160</sup> Each mill town steadily gave rise to schools, churches, playgrounds, and other recreation halls. A company store was provided at each mill village. Employees bought most, if not all, of their supplies from these stores for their daily needs. If they could not afford items at the time, they could purchase things on credit so long as they were in good standing with the company.<sup>161</sup> The costs of the items, moderately priced, were later taken out of the employee's pay at the following pay period. This same method of payment was possible if employees did not have enough money for their utilities. Converse's employees were able to purchase everything that they needed so long as they recognized these expenditures would be reflected in their earned income.<sup>162</sup>

With the rise of cotton factories and the increase in the population of the Clifton mill villages came even greater changes in the daily lives of workers.<sup>163</sup> Employees discovered a new type of social life within their communities. It was easier to partake in social activities after Southern mills began operating two shifts a

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<sup>159</sup> *The Clifton Review*, October 1945.

<sup>160</sup> Teter, ed., *Textile Town: Spartanburg County, South Carolina*.

<sup>161</sup> *Guide for Assigning Houses in Villages*. Clifton Manufacturing Company 1880-1971, Mill Villages, March 1919, Box 1, Folder 3, University Libraries Special Collections, Clemson University.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>163</sup> Hearden, Patrick J., *Independence & Empire the New South's Cotton Mill Campaign: 1865-1901*. DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1982.

day. Shifts opened newfound free time that most were not accustomed to, and eagerly readily took advantage of it. Some social activities included church circles, baseball games, a village band, and town meetings.<sup>164</sup> Converse, however, kept a keen eye on his workers abusing any such privileges. For example, he heavily advocated sober and virtuous habits for all employees. Most women strongly favored the mill owner's rules of behavior. These actions assured that their husbands behaved properly both in and out of the workplace. Converse made certain that his managers enforced rules to prevent drinking, gambling, fighting, and womanizing. Converse viewed success in these matters vital as he continued to firmly believe that good moral standing were a necessity for the well being of the mills and their communities.

Dexter Converse enthusiastically endorsed educational opportunities for his employees.<sup>165</sup> Just after the erection of each of the Clifton mills, a small, nearby

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<sup>164</sup> Teter, ed., *Textile Town: Spartanburg County, South Carolina*, 103-107.

Industrial baseball leagues were increasing in popularity. Converse often received correspondences of baseball players from the north inquiring open positions available in the mill to not only become an operative, but to help grow their baseball career by playing for the company. Converse, a promoter of recreation, however, focused deeper in hiring strong mill hands as opposed to focusing on athletic minded employees. *Baseball*. Clifton Manufacturing Company 1880-1971, Mill Villages, March 1919, Box 1, Folder 10, University Libraries Special Collections, Clemson University.

<sup>165</sup> Teter, ed. *Textile Town: Spartanburg County, South Carolina*, 107.

Dexter Converse also wanted the finest education for his family. By 1889, Converse provided the start-up funds to found Converse College, located in Spartanburg County. He created this college so that his daughter could obtain a better, higher education. This can be seen as an early example of philanthropy that he also applied to his mill villages. In the induction of the college, he stated, "It is my conviction that the well-being of any country depends much upon the culture of her women, and I have done what I could to found a college that would provide for women thorough and liberal education, so that for them the highest motives may become clear purposes and fixed habits of life; and I desire that the instruction and influence of Converse College be always such that the students may be enabled to see clearly, decide wisely, and to act justly; and

school was started. The first of these were two-story wooden structures, created to fulfill community purposes as well as education. They contained large auditoriums that were to be used for lodge meetings, Sunday schools, and church services.<sup>166</sup>

With the population of the mill villages increasing, it was not long after the opening of the third school that its size became inadequate for the number of pupils and teachers. A replacement one was devised and later constructed on the highest knoll in Clifton to serve all three mill communities.<sup>167</sup> This grand school was a three-story brick structure, containing fourteen classrooms, dining room, kitchen, boiler and coal room, two restrooms, library, and large auditorium.<sup>168</sup> Out of the five hundred and sixteen students enrolled, it was usual for only about four hundred and twenty students to attend regularly.<sup>169</sup> Regular attendance was not required since it was common for children to leave to work in a mill. The library was to be used by the parents just as much as by the students. It contained more than five hundred books, helping to increase the literacy rates of the adult residents. Twitchell, Converse's partner, frequently traveled north and elsewhere to purchase different collections of

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that they may learn to love God and humanity, and be faithful to truth and duty, so that their influence may be characterized by purity and power."

<sup>166</sup> *The Clifton Review*, October 1945.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*

books for the community, providing the library with over 250 volumes as early as 1885.<sup>170</sup>

Clifton also provided education for African Americans.<sup>171</sup> Their school was located about a half of a mile northwest of the all-white one. Unlike the latter one that taught to the seventh grade, this school taught only to the fifth grade. Enrollment consisted of fifty-six students, with an average of forty-four who attended regularly. This school had just two teachers, one for first and second grade and one for third through fifth grades. Maintaining a segregated African American school demonstrated the eagerness of Converse to see everyone in the community be content and prosper in all domains. The school was remarkable in contributing to the education and well being of African Americans in the villages.

Converse argued that previous mills did not provide adequate moral and religious training for their operatives.<sup>172</sup> Such training he believed essential to ensure the stability of the company and to maintain successful and profitable industrial operations. To him, a strong labor force required good habits and a persistence of the work ethic.<sup>173</sup> The three Clifton villages were well supplied with a variety of churches: three Methodist, three Baptist, one Presbyterian, one Wesleyan Methodist, and one Church of God.<sup>174</sup> Members of the churches as well as visitors

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<sup>170</sup> Hembree and Moore. *A Place Called Clifton*, 30.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>172</sup> *The Clifton Review*, October 1945.

<sup>173</sup> Mitchell, *William Gregg: Factory Master of the Old South*, 76-7.

<sup>174</sup> *The Clifton Review*, October 1945.

gathered every Sunday to participate in worship, music, and fellowship.<sup>175</sup> They all held services in the early morning and in the late evenings every Sunday. Church members from all three villages gathered often on Wednesday or Thursday nights for prayer meetings.<sup>176</sup> Converse and Twitchell believed that going to church would not only make their employers better people, but it would made them happy to be able to choose the church of their choice. He wanted them to understand the importance of what it meant to be good human beings, and ultimately, model citizens. Family, honesty, and community were messages strongly advocated at the services, creating unity among mill villagers.<sup>177</sup>

As industry prospered with the three Clifton mills, advertisements were published to attract more people to the villages. Converse often shared in the advertisements the number of spindles and looms used in production, being designed to emphasize a growing, stable business. Within the limits of Spartanburg County, there were nine distinct factory towns and villages. Apart from Clifton, there was Pacolet, Glendale Enoree, Whitney, Crawfordville, Fingerville, Valley Falls, and Cedar Hill.<sup>178</sup> Together these factories consumed about 50, 000 bales of cotton

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There was a Roman Catholic Church located in Greenville, South Carolina. Anyone was allowed to go to its service so long as they provided their own transportation.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> *Spartanburg, City and County, South Carolina*. Spartanburg, SC: Cofield, Petty and Company, 1888.



annually, aggregating 20,000,000 pounds of manufactured goods, but more importantly, bringing business and capital to Spartanburg.

As the dawn of the twentieth century approached, nearby Spartanburg City was blossoming. Civic leaders were elated in pushing for growth by recognizing the public sentiment and the pulse of the community.<sup>179</sup> The mayor, board of trade, and chairman of the county, among others, were equally eager to spread the news of the community's excellent attractions and marvelous advantages. The county leaders used newspapers and pamphlets to advertise the attractiveness and advantages of Spartanburg particularly for profitable investment of capital.

The cotton industry allowed for momentous growth for Spartanburg County. The population of the city of Spartanburg grew from 1080 people to 3300 people in the ten-year period from 1890-1900.<sup>180</sup> Civic leaders believed that the importance of their community however did not depend solely on the number of its residents but rather on their progressive spirit, thrift, and reliability.<sup>181</sup> Advertisements were therefore published for the town's greatest needs in attempts to attract even more investors. Businessmen grasped at any advantage or opportunity they could find for the betterment of themselves and for the county. For instance, Spartanburg's leaders saw the need for a bobbin factory. To captivate the attention of investors, they promoted, "Nearly two hundred thousand spindles are used annually in this county. The bobbins that are necessary in the manipulation of this machinery are

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<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

made in New England, but the material of which they are manufactured is shipped from the mountains of Western North Carolina. Now these facts are assuredly enough to open the eyes of the factory capitalists through South Carolina.” They continued their argument, “It is simply one of those cases where the South furnishes the raw material to be manufactured into articles of use by Northern people, who obtain all the profits and keep them. This evil ought to be remedied, and there is no reason why a bobbin factory should not be established in Spartanburg. In the event that such a factory is established the raw material for the manufacture of the bobbins can be obtained within a stone’s throw of the factory. The establishment of this factory would be most opportune.”<sup>182</sup> Like Converse, the city and county boosters wanted others to learn how to exploit the area’s available resources. Converse advocated growth and advancement of everyone, not just for his own textile communities. With Spartanburg’s officials on his side, there was no reason why aggrandizement should not happen for all partakers.

Although there was a heavy drive for industry, Spartanburg’s agricultural leaders encouraged experiments in farming, done in hopes of benefiting both the farmers and cotton manufacturers. The goal of improving agriculture, particularly cotton growers, contributed to the overall progressiveness of the county. A forward thinking agrarian named J. W. Wofford wrote to the state senator from the county to express his joys of how far developments had reached. “Cotton is the great money crop and brings the cash any day in the year at either of the cotton markets in the

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<sup>182</sup> *A Story of Spartan Push: The Greatest Cotton Manufacturing Centre in the South*. Spartanburg, SC: Cofield, Petty and Company, 1890.

county. I have not known of any failure in making remunerative cotton crop and I have been farming here for twenty-three years.” He added, “The boll worm is almost unknown in this county and the caterpillar seldom appears and when it does it is always too late to affect the crop. No crop grown anywhere is more certain than the cotton crop in the county.”<sup>183</sup> Although Clifton manufacturing turned to purchasing cotton from out of state, it did, however, rely for some time on locally grown cotton. Being able to support those in the community through steady industrial jobs attracted numerous individuals to migrate to the county. Local leaders took delight at the arrival of outside capital as they had always hoped.

The salubrious nature of the climate, good schools, churches, streets, and better roads contributed to improving living conditions.<sup>184</sup> More outside investors were attracted to the area. Moving to Spartanburg increasingly held opportunities that were excellent for capital investment, hearty cooperation, and warmly awaited anyone that wished to investigate the state’s conditions.<sup>185</sup> Attractive sites were available at reasonable prices, which also contributed to local attractiveness.<sup>186</sup> And bringing transportation facilities to less accessible areas greatly helped the expansion of the area that cotton could be sold from Spartanburg. Being able to expand markets became a major asset for Clifton’s growth and survival amongst

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<sup>183</sup> *Spartanburg, City and County, South Carolina.*

<sup>184</sup> Bryan, William Wright. *South Carolina Agriculture and Industry.* Columbia, SC: The State Company, 1925.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*

fierce competition. With that expanded rail network, materials, including coal, could be conveniently and dependably received. Paternalistic features portrayed acceptance and warm welcome for newcomers. All of the publications of the Clifton mills were filled with enthusiasm. *The Clifton Review* was created expressly to acquaint residents with the history of the three Clifton companies.<sup>187</sup> It served too, as an invitation to those who did not live in the mill village to learn how residents operated both in and out of the mill site. Pleasant and comforting advertisements in *The Clifton Review* consisted of these examples: “The People’s Drug Store, reportedly the only drug store in the Clifton’s, is owned and operated by Dr. W. E. Montgomery, in whom the people have implicit confidence.”<sup>188</sup> Mr. Will Hopper, one issue indicated, “Was the efficient local policeman who looks after the protection of our village both as to life and as to property. He has a vigilant eye and a cool nerve, and the lawless fear him.”<sup>189</sup> Such advertisements attracted a multitude of families. Clifton was indeed advertised as an exemplary place to work and live.

Running and regulating a mill town was not by any means a simple feat. Although Converse focused heavily on improving the good will of his operatives and other members of the community, he was, above all else, running a business, which entitled him to make decisions that, at times, were not the most beneficial for the well being of the workers. Converse worked hard to listen to the pleas of his employees to better work and community life. However, at times, government

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<sup>187</sup> *The Clifton Review*, October 1945.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*

intervention was needed to see community member's advocacies become realities. Nonetheless, whatever the issue may have been, Converse did what he could for the betterment of his community.

For former white farmers giving up their autonomy presented challenges to Clifton's leaders that at times threatened the work and town environment. Company leaders were regularly confronted by hardships respecting industry and society. Heavy working assignment for women and children contributed to negative employer-employee relations, causing operatives to cause uproar in the villages. Also, with new socioeconomic shifts, the distribution of wages caused mill parents to focus on everyone's contribution to the "family wage."<sup>190</sup>

In 1904, the South Carolina General Assembly passed a bill that made the minimum age for employment ten years of age. It also set the minimum age for working a night shift to twelve.<sup>191</sup> It was common for mill parents to try to obtain exemptions from these provisions despite the changes of age restrictions. The Clifton mills reportedly employed seventy-two boys and sixty-nine girls under the age of twelve in 1910.<sup>192</sup> This was one of the highest numbers in the state. Exemptions at times were made if mill parents testified that the child's employment was an economic necessity for the family. Such exemptions were allowed despite the statute stating that a child had to attend school for at least four months during the year and could both read and write.

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<sup>190</sup> Teter, ed., *Textile Town: Spartanburg County, South Carolina*, 96-104.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, 96-104.

<sup>192</sup> *The Clifton Review*, October 1945.

Education was not initially a highly prized commodity for mill families.<sup>193</sup> Many mill workers were opposed to compulsory schooling.<sup>194</sup> Parents believed that their children were better off beginning to earn money in order to contribute to the family income as opposed to attending school. Moreover, many parents contended they needed their children in the mills as soon as they were old enough to work. It was common for a father's mill wage not to be enough to support his family and thus it was not by the greed of parents demanding their children to work to help provide for their families, but the necessity that they contribute to the family coffer to manage living expenses.<sup>195</sup> The total amount of money that the family members brought home was more than they could have made from farming. From 1880 to 1900, the total amount of money brought in by the father alone at the mill amounted to the sum of the income brought in by an entire farm family.<sup>196</sup> The oldest and most experienced male employees, usually those who worked as weavers, earned the highest wages.<sup>197</sup> Their earnings averaged from \$1.10 to \$2.00 dollars a day, but not without working to extremes to earn that income. Poems and songs of the period reflect well their sentiment about their work.

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<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

<sup>194</sup> Carlton, David L. *Mill and Town in South Carolina, 1880-1920*. Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1982.

<sup>195</sup> Teter, ed., *Textile Town: Spartanburg County, South Carolina*, 89-99.

<sup>196</sup> Kohn, August. *The Cotton Mills of South Carolina, 1907: Letters Written to the News and Courier*.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

*Your shoulders are humped and your head is bent; your  
dull dead eyes are spiritless and your mouth is just  
a hard straight line in a yellow face under the  
blue lights in the mill.*

*You are diseased and unhealthy looking, standing there  
in your faded overalls, with one suspender loose.  
your voice is cracked and your throat and lungs  
are lined with cotton.*

*Every night the whistle blows and you plod home to  
swallow your bread and beans, comb the cotton  
from your straggly grey hair, wash your wrinkled  
face, and then lie down on your hard, unclean  
mattress until the whistle blast calls you back to  
your machine in the mill.*

*Listen, lint-head – you are just another poor, illiterate  
cotton mill worker. You stand with a thousand  
others just like you for five days a week, eight  
hours a day, running and watching and nursing  
and tending a power loom, all for forty cents an  
hour.<sup>198</sup>*

Parents working at the mill often had a different perspective on matters than their management. They were afraid that their children would despise them if they were wrongfully influenced by their “city” teachers and were wary of too much schooling. They also believed that additional schooling would not provide a significant difference in their lives or open up new opportunities that could take

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<sup>198</sup> Teter, ed., *Textile Town: Spartanburg County, South Carolina*, 202-203.

Sentiments of mill hands such as those expressed in this poem were not seen, for the most part, in the Clifton Mills during the time of Converse’s or Twitchell’s presidencies. Riots and protests were seen in these communities more commonly after the economic hardships shifted the company’s moral after World War I. If mill hands complained during Converse’s time as president, he pursued ways in which he could fix matters before they escalated into riots, partly to maintain a favorable reputation.

them out of the mill village in which they were born and raised.<sup>199</sup> Overall, mill parents concluded that compulsory schooling was not worth the money they would lose by their children not working.<sup>200</sup>

While education might flare up as a worker-company issue, a much more important one occurred. A natural disaster threatened the life of the company and the future of its inhabitants. The perseverance and high morale of its leaders, as well as its workers, made for survival throughout Clifton's unexpected transitions. Devastation struck the Clifton mills when a calamitous flood hit Spartanburg County on June 6, 1903.<sup>201</sup> It came to be known as the Pacolet flood because of the heavy losses it caused in terms of lives, to people's properties, and serious damage to the mills along this river. This event became the worst calamity ever befall the Clifton mills. It did not take long for angst to spread all over upper South Carolina. On that memorable Saturday morning, there was "a cloudburst from the skies, and the breaking of dams above on the river converted this peaceful Pacolet stream into a roaring, rushing torrent which now carried devastation and horror in its path...in its swollen state it demanded many human lives and millions of dollars in mill property."<sup>202</sup> Five days of constant rain had preceded the heavy rainfall burst, worsening conditions at the mills. The river had previously caused some property

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<sup>199</sup> Ibid., 68-70.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid., 68-70.

<sup>201</sup> *A History of Spartanburg County*, 201.

<sup>202</sup> *The Clifton Review*, October 1945.



loss and had claimed a few lives, but there was nothing comperable to this particular event.

Clifton No. 3 took the heaviest dollar loss.<sup>203</sup> The extreme torrents swept away the greater part of the mill.<sup>204</sup> The only remaining parts were the cloth room, slasher room, and supply house. What had once a magnificent structure became a “scene of wrecked spinning frames and twisted looms.”<sup>205</sup> Only a portion of the mill’s structure was washed away at Clifton No. 1. Despite the loss of some dwellings, all of the occupants managed to remain safe. The long footbridge that connected the mill to those who lived on the opposite side of the river and used by employees to save hundreds of steps was completely washed away. The wheelhouse was also destroyed by the torrents. The cable that ran across the river that was used for the operation of a gristmill and cotton gin was also left in ruin. There was also damage to the mill villages. The entire No. 1 village within a hundred feet of the riverbank was wiped out.<sup>206</sup> Clifton No. 2 likewise suffered significant losses, having part of the mill also washed away. The storm demolished half of the four-story mill. At least forty homes were destroyed as well as the Company Store. Rail lines also suffered a heavy loss because of the flood. For a mile on the right bank of the Pacolet River, the roadbed of the twenty-one mile electric South Carolina Light & Power

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<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid.

<sup>206</sup> Teter, ed. *Textile Town: Spartanburg County, South Carolina*, 77-80.

Company was completely carried away by the water.<sup>207</sup> This part of the trolley line along side of the river was never rebuilt.<sup>208</sup>

Loss of life occurred because many of the operatives were resistant to leaving their homes, even though everyone was advised to evacuate as the storm worsened. Many, however, refused to heed the warning even as the water spread over the valley and rose at an alarming rate. A number of people were able to escape the disaster by floating down on debris or taking refuge in the trees.<sup>209</sup> Mill workers had worked hard to obtain their homes and possessions, and having to let them go was not an easy decision to make. After the flood, reporters from both in state and out of state descended on the scene. The plight of the Clifton facilities became well known. Fortunately, the perseverance and high morale of the mill's leaders and the loyalty of its workers enabled Clifton Mills to pull through this disaster.

Dexter Converse and Albert Twitchell indelibly stamped their character and their influence in Spartanburg County.<sup>210</sup> The significant role that Converse played before, during, and after the Civil War was responsible for the important development of the mill communities in Spartanburg. Converse's term as president ended in 1898, just a few months before his death.<sup>211</sup> In his term as president of the

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<sup>207</sup> *The Clifton Review*, October 1945.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>209</sup> *A History of Spartanburg County*, 201-2.

<sup>210</sup> *The Clifton Review*, October 1945.

<sup>211</sup> Obituary of Doctor James Bivings, M.D., *Southern Christian Methodist Advocate*, 1869.

three Clifton Mills as well as his earlier contributions to Glendale Mills, he was able to start and maintain the production of 3, 768 looms and a total of 118,072 spindles. This achievement was an enormous contribution to the textile revolution in the South. Twitchell, his loyal brother-in-law, assumed the position as president, devoting just as much his time and effort as Converse did. For the next eighteen years, Twitchell proudly administered the communities and mills with the same enthusiasm and drive of his predecessor.

## Epilogue

Conditions at the Clifton mill, and at home, were sufficiently attractive to attract generations of workers.<sup>212</sup> This proved that this firm was no longer a pioneer operation. It thrived as a mill because people recognized that they had steady jobs and good opportunities by joining this company. It became a job security for men and their families, and thus helped to end the economic uncertainties of agricultural life.

Clifton's board of directors met in the city of Spartanburg six days after the disastrous Pacolet flood of June 1903.<sup>213</sup> Spartanburg's civic leaders urged Albert Twitchell to take immediate action to rebuild and put back into working order Clifton Nos. 1 and 2 in order for them to resume production as quickly as possible. On May 10, 1904, less than a year after the flood and an expenditure of \$400,000 dollars, operations resumed and the mill was running better than before.<sup>214</sup> Clifton No. 3 did not re-open its doors until 1905, as it had to be completely rebuilt, having suffered the most flood damages.

Complaints about the harsh toils of working long hours seemed to have ceased, at least temporarily, in part, because of a textile company that opened in the

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<sup>212</sup> Kohn, August. *The Cotton Mills of South Carolina, 1907: Letters Written to the News and Courier*. Charleston, SC: The Daggett Printing Company, 1907.

<sup>213</sup> Hembree, Michael, and David Moore. *A Place Called Clifton*. Clinton, SC: Jacobs Press, 1987, 95.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

Lowcountry, founded by John Montgomery and Seth Milliken. Their cotton mill was manned exclusively by African American operatives.<sup>215</sup> Since the mills at Clifton continued to hire people of color only for work outside the production rooms, primarily unloading and loading freight cars, this became a challenge to white workers as social tensions began to interfere with their attempts to improve their working conditions. All efforts to unionize were presented with the likely chance of losing employment to African Americans, something that white operatives were determined not to let happen.<sup>216</sup>

From 1900 to 1930, unionization made little headway in Spartanburg. Managers believed that unions bred disloyalty and radicalism, among other undesirable traits. Additionally, operatives feared losing their employment if they protested. Employers recognized that there was an abundant supply of ex-farmers desperate for a job, making firing rebellious workers an acceptable option. In 1929, there emerged an outbreak of strikes in South Carolina, protesting unsafe working conditions, long hours, and low wages. According to the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, South Carolina had the lowest textile wages in the country, paying as low as \$9.56 a week in comparison to \$11.73 in Georgia and \$12.23 in North Carolina.<sup>217</sup> Executives at Clifton continued to believe that happy employees resulted in positive operations. They were therefore determined to increase the well being and satisfaction among their employees.

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<sup>215</sup> Teter, ed., *Textile Town: Spartanburg County, South Carolina*, 54-60.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*, 54-60.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*, 116-118.

Notwithstanding these labor tensions, Clifton's mill villages retained a strong sense of community. Its residents commonly enjoyed unity, friendship, and satisfaction with the company and the mill village. Families, often for the first time, experienced the pleasures of a decent home, a friendly neighborhood, and an active social life. Social activities related to the mill remained an important enjoyment for mill families. Twitchell, Clifton's president at the time, focused on encouraging these structures and amenities provided by the mill to foster harmony and lessen any divide among community members. Twitchell, like Converse had previously advocated, dedicated himself to creating better citizens out of his operatives and their families.

The caring community life that Converse and Twitchell worked so hard to create shifted dramatically during World War I, however. Working conditions worsened, becoming increasingly unhealthy and dangerous.<sup>218</sup> Although Clifton Manufacturing managed to survive through both world wars, largely because of government orders, the push to stay afloat and bolster revenues prevented workers from escaping the constant roar of the machinery. But emphasizing education for both for men and women, improving the operatives' dwellings, providing better wages, and actively encouraging and supporting recreational activities all

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<sup>218</sup> Ibid., 290.

Mill workers increasingly suffered from breathing problems such as cotton fever, cotton cold, dust fever. It afflicted roughly a fourth to a third of employees in Spartanburg County, which, through 1980, continued to have more textile workers than any other county in the state. The Worker's Compensation Commission was designed to give faster relief to workers hurt through their employment than would be the case if workers sued in court.

contributed to stimulating a community spirit and maintaining cohesiveness. These changes allowed Clifton to retain the positive reputation it had long held.

Indeed, by the late 1920s, Clifton Manufacturing had become the largest company in Spartanburg County, containing 86,800 spindles and 2,650 looms.<sup>219</sup> It produced huge volumes of sheetings, prints, and drills and manufactured finer grades of cloth, further diversifying the industry by adding dyes and finishing plants. They also implemented significant improvements in hydroelectric power to run their machinery. All of this contributed in making the Clifton mills an industrial showplace marked by a progressive spirit.<sup>220</sup>

Clifton's subsequent decline resulted as it did for Southern textiles, in general, from competition from abroad. Globalization played a key role in the decline of textiles in South Carolina. Fierce, disruptive, competition came especially from Latin America and Asia. Clifton No. 2 operated in reduced capacity until 1983, maintaining limited production until the 1990s. In 1965, Clifton No. 3 was sold to Dan River Mills, and then closed its doors eight years later in 1973. Clifton No. 1, Converse's most prized accomplishment, ceased production in the 1970s, and permanently shuttered its doors, but preserving memories of what once was until its physical demolition in 2002. With that the story of Clifton Mills and of the remarkable work and vision of both Converse and Twitchell came to an end.

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<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

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