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Linheads, White Trash, and the Best People:
Gaston and Mecklenburg Mill Villagers' Complex Self Perceptions

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“Contrary to what a lot of people thought, it was a good life at the time... Your children had morals and values, they really did, although they lived in a mill village.”¹ By the early 1900s a booming textile industry had developed in the Gaston County and Charlotte-Mecklenburg area. Mill owners built villages to house their employees, which functioned as individual community entities. Having a shared work, home, and social environment caused mill villagers to possess a sense of shared identity, and their ways of perceiving themselves and the lives they lived present many common themes. Mill villagers viewed themselves as the poorest and lowest class of white society, and were acutely aware of their poverty. Despite these hardships, villagers felt fortunate to live alongside individuals whom they viewed as their economic, social, and moral equals. Although many piedmont farmers-turned-mill workers lamented leaving their farms, and clung to their rural heritage, mountain-to-mill migrants were often thankful to have escaped hard lives in the hills, and appreciated their steady, although meager, mill wages. There was a general perception among these “mill folk” that, although a bit rough around the edges, they were a hard working people of integrity, the “best people.” The memories and oral histories shared by these individuals, although at times susceptible to nostalgia, reveal the many complexities of their identities and self perceptions. In fact, many historians argue that memory and oral history actually “compensate chronological distance with a much closer personal involvement.”²

Despite the size and influence of the Gaston-Mecklenburg textile industry, most of the scholarship that has been written on the history of southern textiles has failed to address the identities and self-perceptions possessed by the individuals within this area’s mill village culture. Allen Tullos, in *Habits of Industry: White Culture and the Transformation of the Carolina Piedmont*, examines the textile industry and mill village culture. Tullos devotes great attention to

¹ Marlene White, in-person interview by author, August 10, 2012.

² Alessandro Portelli, “What Makes Oral History Different,” in *The Oral History Reader*, ed. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (London: Routledge, 2006), 37.

the inequality between white mill workers and black residents within communities.³ In Gaston and Mecklenburg mill communities, this inequality caused white millhands to enjoy superior status to blacks, influencing their self perceptions as white citizens. However, Tullos' primary focus related to mill villager identity is his assertion that their rural pasts and evangelical Protestant beliefs infused them with certain admirable "habits of industry" such as a strong work ethic, physical endurance, and efforts at self-sufficiency.⁴ Tullos compares the lifestyles of these millhands with the lives of their wealthy uptown neighbors, contrasting the mill workers' strain to "make ends meet" with the standard of living enjoyed by the upper classes.⁵ Although Tullos closely examines these issues of wealth and poverty in North Carolina mill villages, the mill villagers of Burlington and Greenville claim most of his attention. Tullos' discusses three mill owners from the Gaston-Mecklenburg area, but it is their business endeavors that receive the majority of his focus. Historic understanding of the class and racial divisions in North Carolina's textile centers would benefit greatly from analyzing the mill working classes of Gaston and Mecklenburg County, rather than focusing solely on their white-collar neighbors.

In *Linthead Stomp* Patrick Huber explores the contribution made by southern millhand musicians to the genre of country music. Huber examines the community and environmental influences that shaped three major musical figures. He explains that despite their meager wages, mill workers were enthusiastic participants in the evolving consumer culture that would have been beyond their grasp in their rural pasts.⁶ He focuses on Gaston and Mecklenburg mill village culture primarily as it relates to Gastonia millhand-musician Dave McCarn. Although an

³ Allen Tullos, *Habits of Industry: White Culture and the Transformation of the Carolina Piedmont*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 12.

⁴ Tullos, 13-15.

⁵ Tullos, 171.

⁶ Patrick Huber, *Linthead Stomp: The Creation of Country Music in the Piedmont South*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 39.

interesting and colorful character, McCarn's personality and lifestyle "repeatedly clashed" with the beliefs and values possessed by his fellow mill villagers.⁷ This study of McCarn does not represent the larger, shared identity and self-perceptions possessed by Gaston and Mecklenburg mill villagers.

Thomas Hanchett, in *Sorting Out the New South City: Race, Class, and Urban Development in Charlotte, 1875-1975*, explores Charlotte's larger class structure. He identifies the intense class tensions that existed between mill workers and upper class whites, and explains that the discrimination mill workers felt from white elites was "mild compared to what Charlotte's African American citizens experienced" at the bottom of this three tiered class ladder.⁸ Although Hanchett's work reveals a great deal about the class status of Charlotte mill villagers, it does not provide a full view of mill villager identity and self-perception.

While Hanchett focuses primarily on Charlotte, John A. Salmond, in *Gastonia, 1929: The Story of the Loray Mill Strike*, directs his attention squarely on Gastonia. Salmond's work is also centered almost entirely on the 1929 strike at Gastonia's Loray Mill. Salmond briefly describes Gastonia's mill culture to create context for discussing the strike. He describes Gastonia's residential districts as sharply divided by class. Salmond portrays Gastonia's mill villages as places of genuine poverty, yet also as possessing a "distinctive and sustaining culture" of friendship and mutuality.⁹ The article "Shaking all the corners of the sky: The global response to the Gastonia strike of 1929", written by Christina and William Baker, also focuses primarily on the Loray strike. Baker and Baker emphasize the working-class identity of the Loray strikers, portraying them as members of a worldwide working class. These two works, although briefly

⁷ Huber, 179.

⁸ Thomas W. Hanchett, *Sorting Out the New South City: Race, Class, and Urban Development in Charlotte, 1875-1975*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 14.

⁹ John A. Salmond, *Gastonia, 1929: The Story of the Loray Mill Strike*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 3.

describing the Loray workers, focus almost entirely on the strike itself.

The work addressing the issue of mill village culture and mill villager identity that has received the most recognition by historians and scholars is the book *Like a Family: The Making of a Southern Cotton Mill World* by Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, et. al. This book provides an in-depth study of mill workers' experiences in the Carolinas. Hall captures the larger picture of mill villager identity by addressing the experiences and factors that shaped the people, their lives, and their self-perceptions. The book incorporates a large collection of oral histories depicting the "workers' world."¹⁰ Hall describes Carolina mill villagers as having a "shared identity", which they derived from "kinship and a common culture."¹¹ Hall emphasizes poverty, rural heritage, family connections, and a strong sense of community and mutuality as important factors in this common culture. Despite her honest portrayal of the poverty mill workers experienced, Hall does not simply portray them as the victims of an oppressive economic system. Rather, she describes them as multi-faceted individuals, possessing complex attitudes toward their work, status in society, and standard of living. Although this book superbly explores mill villager identity, the scope of the study is large, including both North and South Carolina villages. The majority of individuals and examples discussed relating to North Carolina villages radiate around the textile centers of Bynum, Burlington, Charlotte, Durham, and Catawba.¹² Although numerous examples regarding Charlotte villages are included, many Gaston County mill villages are under-represented. Nonetheless, this source provides valuable information related to the "cotton mill world", and the interview base created for the study provides a priceless treasure trove of primary sources related to the experiences of Charlotte mill workers.

¹⁰ Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, *Like a Family: The Making of a Southern Cotton Mill World*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), xii.

¹¹ Hall, xviii.

¹² Hall, xiv.

Between 1885 and 1915 capitalists and business boosters across the American south raved of a “New South” vision that boasted an industrialized economy to promote southern states to an economic vitality comparable to their northern rivals. In North Carolina this New South vision translated to a race to build cotton mills, known as the “Cotton Mill Campaign.”¹³ During this period, the number of mills in North Carolina grew from a mere sixty to over three-hundred.¹⁴ This created a large demand for laborers, and the state’s mill working population increased more than fivefold.¹⁵ These mills clustered in certain piedmont regions, among which Gaston and Mecklenburg County were prominent.¹⁶ Mill owners built villages to house the workers required to operate their machines, and eagerly recruited hard-on-their-luck farmers and mountaineers.¹⁷ Farming conditions across North Carolina were extremely poor during this time due to “droughts and plummeting international cotton prices.”¹⁸ Desperate farmers saw little option but to move to the mill villages, as Mildred Barnwell observed. “Out of the rural districts, their poverty and squalor, they came by the hundreds...to live in the cottages of the cotton mill villages.”¹⁹ The houses in these villages were rented only to employees of their respective mills, therefore their residents shared a common place of employment. These villages became what Thomas Hanchett refers to as “homogenous single class neighborhoods”, and this led to rigid class divisions in Gaston County and Charlotte.²⁰ Cotton mill jobs and village housing were mostly denied to African Americans, rendering the villages wholly white neighborhoods. It was under these circumstances that a mill village culture was created and a sense of shared identity

¹³ Brent D. Glass, *The Textile Industry in North Carolina: A History*, (Raleigh: Division of Archives and History, North Carolina Dept. of Cultural Resources, 1992), 31.

¹⁴ Glass, 34.

¹⁵ Glass, 35.

¹⁶ Hanchett, 91-92.

¹⁷ Tullos, 9.

¹⁸ Hanchett, 95.

¹⁹ Mildred Gwin Barnwell, *Faces We See*, (Gastonia, N.C.: Southern combed yarn spinners Association, 1939), 9.

²⁰ Hanchett, 53.

formed. From the moment these individuals left their small farms and rural abodes, they began to take on the identity and self perceptions of “mill folk.”

For many farmers-turned-mill workers, traditional farming lifestyles served as a source of identity and pride; therefore, abandoning their farms for the industrial routine of the mills was a painful, although necessary, sacrifice. Changing fence laws, increased taxation, and the crop lien system landed small farmers in an unending cycle of debt, driving many to seek employment in Gaston and Mecklenburg textile mills.²¹ This feeling of regret and sacrifice is strongly evident in oral histories. According to Allesandro Portelli, oral histories often bring light to the meaning individuals place upon events and experiences they have lived. This approach is useful in examining how individuals perceived their lives.²² Davis Andrew Rhyne’s father owned a small farm on the outskirts of Dallas in the 1930s and 40s. Rhyne’s father was strongly attached to farming, and regretted having to turn to mill work to support his family. “He’d have rather farmed than worked in the mill, but he just couldn’t make a good livin’ at it.”²³ Similarly, George Elmore lamented his family’s move from their farm in 1917 to Grove’s Mill of Gastonia. Although the Elmore preferred farming, their move was not a matter of choice, but of survival. “When you lose three crops in a row what are you going to do?”²⁴ Elmore felt that working the land provided a greater sense of pride and personal satisfaction than could be derived from mill work. Therefore, moving to the mill meant forfeiting a portion of his dignity. “We had to swallow our pride when we lost three crops; we moved in...It was a failure in a way.”²⁵

This sense of regret led to the evolution of mill village customs that reflected, paid

²¹ Hall, 3.

²² Portelli, 36.

²³ Davis Andrew Rhyne, in-person interview by author, August 12, 2012.

²⁴ George R. Elmore, interviewed by Brent Glass, Documenting the American South, University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, March 11, 1976.

²⁵ George R. Elmore, interviewed by Brent Glass, Documenting the American South, University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, March 11, 1976.

homage to, and, most of all preserved the rural identities so cherished by these farmers-turned-mill workers. Indeed, as Hall discovered, “When country people moved to the village, they did not leave behind old habits and customs.”²⁶ Yvonne Clark Hill’s father exemplified this tendency after moving his family to the Eagle Mill in Belmont, NC in 1926.²⁷ Hill’s father was passionately attached to his “first love”, farming, and Hill explains that even when living in the Eagle village “he never got away from it.”²⁸ John Henry Clark brought many of his cows, pigs, and mules with him to the Eagle Mill village, which he kept in “a large barn at the back of the house”.²⁹ Many houses in the Gaston and Mecklenburg villages had small barns, chicken coups, hog pens, and large gardens to allow mill workers to stay connected to their rural roots. Lois Moore Yandle, resident of Charlotte’s Highland Park Mill #3 village, documented this trend in her village in both writing and photography. “Many people who came in the early years had been farmers, and animals were an essential part of living for them.”³⁰ She explained that the mill village had been designed to accommodate them, with “back yards large enough for a garden or barnyard animals.” Yandle recalls that her family and many of her neighbors owned farm animals as late as 1945. In her book, *The Spirit of a Proud People*, Yandle includes a photo of the Moore family posing in front of their small barn in Highland Park Mill village, which she describes as “a typical barn for their neighborhood.”³¹

Some mill workers refused to sacrifice the most iconic symbol of their rural identities, their farms, and instead, commuted daily to the mills, effectively merging farm and factory. Hall

²⁶ Hall, 114.

²⁷ Yvonne Clark Hill, “The John Henry Clark Family” in *From This Red Clay Hillside: The Eagle 1924-1950*, ed. Betty M. Hinson (Belmont: Spindle Books, 1997), 16.

²⁸ Clark Hill, 16.

²⁹ Clark Hill, 16.

³⁰ Mary Lois Moore Yandle, *The Spirit of a Proud People: Pictures and Stories of Highland Park Manufacturing Mill #3 and the People in the Village of North Charlotte*, (Charlotte, N.C.: L.M. Yandle), 1997, 150.

³¹ Lois Moore Yandle, “Madeline, Evelyn, Lois, Howard, and Joe Moore Seated Behind Their Barn”, circa 1928, in *The Spirit of a Proud People: Pictures and Stories of Highland Park Manufacturing Mill #3 and the People in the Village of North Charlotte*, (Charlotte, N.C.: L.M. Yandle, 1997), 150.

concludes that, for these farm families, “the choice was not between farm or factory” but rather, “how to combine the two, how to incorporate one into the other.”³² Davis Andrew Rhyne’s father was one of these fortunate, and innovative, few. Rhyne recalled that this merger was necessary, for his father “had to supplement his income some way or another to live.”³³ Erastus McAlpine’s children worked in numerous Charlotte mills between 1915 and 1922, and although McAlpine occasionally worked in the mills himself, farming and gardening remained his primary employment. His large garden fed his family and supplemented the wages earned by his adolescent children. McAlpine’s diary entries provide detailed records of his gardening work, which supplied his family’s nutritional subsistence. On March 17th, 1915, his children received their weekly pay from the mills, and just two days later McAlpine recorded his own contribution to the family’s survival. “Planted beans, cucumber seed, and okra seeds.”³⁴ Mildred Gwinn Barnwell’s photographs, in her 1939 publication of *Faces We See*, provide evidence that Rhyne and McAlpine were not the only mill workers to straddle this occupational fence. Barnwell included a photo of commuting farmers’ cars parked in front of a Gastonia mill, and another photo of a turkey coop belonging to one such farmer. Barnwell’s caption informs the reader that “Some southern textile employees own their little farms and commute to the mill in their own automobiles...Raising turkeys, for instance, is a lucrative hobby.”³⁵

Although mill work provided greater cash income and low cost housing, most villagers perceived themselves as precariously poor, in a constant struggle to merely scrape by. Allen

³² Hall, 33.

³³ Davis Andrew Rhyne, in-person interview by author, August 12, 2012.

³⁴ McAlpine, April 19th, 1915.

³⁵ Mildred Gwin Barnwell, “Some Southern Textile Workers Own Their Little Farms and Commute to the Mills in Their Automobiles”, circa 1939, mill identity and address not specified, in *Faces We See*. (Gastonia, N.C.: Southern Combed Yarn Spinners Association, 1939), 24; Mildred Gwin Barnwell, “Raising Turkeys is a Lucrative Hobby”, circa 1939, Gaston County farm, in *Faces We See*. (Gastonia, N.C.: Southern Combed Yarn Spinners Association, 1939), 24.

Tullos affirms the validity of this perception, acknowledging the harsh reality of mill worker's financial circumstances. "Laboring in the mills for fifty or sixty hours a week at wages pegged just above a farmers subsistence, they strained to make ends meet."³⁶ Mildred Gwinn Barnwell examined many textile mills and mill workers in Gastonia for her 1939 publication, and found that the mill houses rented for an average of twenty-five cents per room, per week, and that water, sewage, and electricity were provided free of charge.³⁷ This seemed surprisingly inexpensive to Barnwell, who also surmised that the mill operatives were well paid, stating as fact that Gaston County mill workers made a minimum wage of twelve to fifteen dollars per week in 1939.³⁸ However, Lola Belcher's December 28th, 1940 payroll envelope from the Eagle Mill indicates that she earned only ten dollars and forty five cents for the week.³⁹ On February 10th, 1934 Belcher was paid only eight dollars and forty cents. One dollar and fifty cents of this paycheck was deducted for charges incurred at the company store, leaving Belcher only six dollars and ninety cents. When considering the supposedly "low" cost of rent, it is important to consider Barnwell's "only a dollar and a half per week for a six room house" in proportion to the light pay envelopes brought home by Lola Belcher.⁴⁰

Lola Belcher was not the only mill worker to bring home light pay envelopes during this period, nor was she the only employee to have their wages partially spent prior to their receiving them. Lois MacDonald's 1928 study of mill villages in the southern piedmont, *Southern Mill Hills, A Study of Social and Economic Forces in Certain Textile Mill Villages*, established the fact that "All charges for rent and coal and other items which the company holds against the

³⁶ Tullos, 15.

³⁷ Barnwell, 92.

³⁸ Barnwell, 16.

³⁹ Betty M. Hinson, *From This Red Clay Hillside: The Eagle 1924-1950* (Belmont: Spindle Books, 1997), appendix "Payroll Envelopes 1934-1940."

⁴⁰ Barnwell, 16.

operative are deducted from the pay at the end of the week.”⁴¹ Jean O’Daniel Mayes, born in 1929, grew up on the Acme Mill village of Belmont. Mayes recalled that the rent and coal costs were deducted from her father’s check each week, regardless of whether he could afford the deduction. “One week there was only fifty-cents left in his pay envelope.”⁴² On such meager weekly funds it was often difficult for mill village families to purchase enough food to sustain themselves. Bob Yount grew up on Belmont’s Majestic Mill village during the 1940s and recalled that mill villagers had to resort to running up a weekly charge account at the village grocery store to obtain their weekly provisions. “You paid for last week’s groceries and charged this week’s, always a week behind.”⁴³ The G.W. Howe Company was a grocery store located in Yount’s home town of Belmont. G.W. Howe’s sales records for 1944 show that most of the store’s business operated on the weekly charge system. Between November 27th and 30th, the store recorded that customers charged \$539.56 worth of goods.⁴⁴ During that time, the store’s customers paid a total of \$815.51 toward previous charges. Contrastingly, only \$276.55 worth of goods were paid for with cash at the time of purchase. Clearly, G.W. Howe’s largely mill working customer base relied heavily on the charge system, which left them perpetually in debt.

Mill villagers’ need to charge even the most basic necessities, such as food, meant that purchasing more frivolous items was an uncommon luxury, and, for many families, out of the question. Davis Andrew Rhyne’s family “didn’t have no money to buy anything from the

⁴¹ Lois MacDonald, *Southern Mill Hills, A Study of Social and Economic Forces in Certain Textile Mill Villages* (New York, N.Y.: A.L. Hillman, 1928), 27.

⁴² Jean O’Daniel Mayes, “Fifty Cents in the Pay Envelope” in *The Mill Village and the Miracle Bicycle and other Gaston County Tales*, compiled by Bob Lasley and Sallie Holt (Hickory: Hometown Memories Publishing Company, 2001), 19.

⁴³ Bob Brown and Charlie Baxter Yount, *“The Village, the Town, the People”: Belmont, North Carolina, with Some Poems, Plus a Few Other Odds & Ends ; “Nice Things to Remember”, from the 1940’s, 50’s, and 60’s & Sometimes Later*, (Belmont, N.C., B. Brown, 2001) , 3.

⁴⁴ G.W. Howe Company records, 1915 – 1965. Invoices, Receipts, and Sales Records, 1920-1936, (J. Murrey Atkins Library University of North Carolina at Charlotte, Special Collections, 2010), 192/20:12

store.”⁴⁵ Rhyne’s father resoled his sons’ shoes when the soles wore out, but, until his father had time to do so, the Rhyne boys simply made do with what they had. “Of course, ‘til he got time to do it we’d put pasteboard in our shoes.” For most mill families, patched and repaired attire was an everyday reality; Ernest Cagle’s clothes were no exception. “Well, clothes I wore looked like they had been quilted.”⁴⁶ Such patchwork repairs can be seen in Mildred Gwinn Barnwell’s photo of a man clad in visibly patched overalls operating a long chain quiller.⁴⁷

Ernest Cagle explained that although overalls and shoes cost very little at that time, it was extremely difficult for families to scrounge up the extra money for their children’s attire. “There wadn’t no money to get no clothes with. You could get overalls for forty cents a pair and shoes for a dollar, but where wuz you goin to get the dollar to get them with?”⁴⁸ Some families resorted to making their children’s clothes from materials they could acquire at little or no cost. Jo Ann Sigmon’s parents worked for American Yarn Processing Company in Mount Holly, and she recalled their innovative way of meeting their children’s clothing needs. “Our mother made most of our clothing ...Our clothes were made from feed bags. Daddy would buy several bags of feed with the same print so I would have enough material for a dress and Don a shirt.”⁴⁹ Such hard scrabble innovations were common in the poverty stricken mill villages of the 1930s. Although stylish clothing seems a trivial concern in the face of possible hunger, for many mill villagers clothing served as a physical reminder of their impoverishment, and greatly shaped how they

⁴⁵ Davis Andrew Rhyne, in-person interview by author, August 12, 2012.

⁴⁶ Ernest Cagle, interviewed by Ben F. Bulla, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, September 11, 1981.

⁴⁷ Mildred Gwin Barnwell, “A Long Chain Quiller”, circa 1939, Gaston County mill, in *Faces We See*. Gastonia, (N.C.: Southern Combed Yarn Spinners Association, 1939), 84.

⁴⁸ Ernest Cagle, interviewed by Ben F. Bulla, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, September 11, 1981.

⁴⁹ Jo Ann Sigmon Rick, ““Kings and Queens on Stilts” in *The Mill Village and the Miracle Bicycle and other Gaston County Tales*, compiled by Bob Lasley and Sallie Holt (Hickory: Hometown Memories Publishing Company, 2001), 26.

perceived themselves. Jacqueline Dowd Hall acknowledges that such “childhood stories reveal something of the emotional burdens of a life lived close to the bone...”⁵⁰

Despite their impoverished circumstances, most Gaston and Mecklenburg mill villagers viewed themselves as fortunate to be profitably employed, and to reside in close knit neighborhoods among individuals they viewed as equal and similar to themselves. Perhaps no mill villager expressed this appreciation more adamantly than Firestone Mill village resident Jim Guffey. “There’s nothin’ that I would take for one day on the Firestone mill village.”⁵¹ The Firestone Mill village community, he asserted, was made up of individuals who wanted essentially similar things in life, and were grateful to Firestone for providing them. “It was just a community of people coming together and everybody wanted the same thing, everybody wanted to provide for their families, and Firestone offered them that opportunity.”⁵² This notion of all villagers being “equal” in socioeconomic status was essential to their sense of unity. Hanchett argues that there were advantages in this socioeconomic segregation for impoverished, blue-collar families that might have suffered class discrimination in a more integrated living arrangement.⁵³ Edna Hargett attributed the “closeness” of the Highland Park mill village community to “knowing we was all equal...because one didn’t think he was any better than the other one; we was just all one big family.”⁵⁴

The opportunity to earn a regular income to support their families was a crucial factor in Gaston and Mecklenburg mill villagers’ perception of themselves as fortunate. Betty M. Hinson spent her childhood on Belmont’s Eagle Mill village, and recalled how fortunate her father felt to

⁵⁰ Hall, 150.

⁵¹ Jim Guffey, in-person interview by author. August 14, 2012.

⁵² Jim Guffey, in-person interview by author. August 14, 2012.

⁵³ Hanchett, 112.

⁵⁴ Edna Hargett, interviewed by Jim Leloudis, Documenting the American South, University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, July 19, 1979.

have a steady paycheck after years of reaping the unpredictable rewards of farming. “Daddy was a hard working man. He had been used to working in the fields, and he felt very secure having a weekly paycheck from the mill.”⁵⁵ Another Eagle Mill village resident, Lewis Clark, expressed a deep sense of thankfulness towards the mill for having provided for his family’s survival and well being. Clark claimed to have “a warm and tender spot...for the mill that nurtured us and gave us sustenance...”⁵⁶

Mill villagers’ dual perception of themselves as impoverished yet fortunate was largely centered on the belief that their poverty was somehow compensated by the “good life” that their isolated mill villages offered. Mary Thompson of the Highland Park mill village recalled that despite her family’s poverty, she and her siblings were quite content and enjoyed their mill village childhoods. “We had a happy childhood. We didn’t have much, but we didn’t know we was poor, so we were happy.”⁵⁷ John Salmond, author of *Gastonia, 1929: The Story of the Loray Mill Strike*, describes Gaston County mill villages as possessing “a distinctive and sustaining culture” despite the poverty and “squalor” that existed within them. Jim Guffey explained this complexity identified by Salmond, citing his own life experience. “If you want to call it a second rate class of living you’re welcome to ...but seriously it was the people that made the community and... the mill village provided an awful lot for the person.” Sterling village resident Marlene White echoed Guffey’s sentiment, insisting that despite society’s perception of mill villagers as impoverished and deprived, her family felt fortunate to be part of a happy and supportive community. “Contrary to what a lot of people think, it was a good time...all the people were

⁵⁵ Hinson, 43.

⁵⁶ Carl Lewis Clark, “The Eagle” in *This Red Clay Hillside: The Eagle 1924-1950*, ed. Betty M. Hinson, (Belmont: Spindle Books, 1997), 125.

⁵⁷ Carl and Mary Thompson, interviewed by Jim Leloudis, Documenting the American South, University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, July 19, 1979.

good to everybody, like a happy family.”⁵⁸ Many Gaston and Mecklenburg villagers shared White’s belief that they were indeed fortunate to partake in the mill village lifestyle.

For some mill villagers, the poverty and hardship of the village lifestyle seemed like a life of relative ease and prosperity compared to the hard lives they had left behind. These “hill people, who had been fighting a losing game trying to cultivate corn and tobacco on the rocky hillsides” often perceived mill work as their saving grace.⁵⁹ Marlene White reflected back on the squalor and lack of prospects these migrants had previously known, stating with great concern that “without the mills” she was uncertain what “those people” would have done to support themselves.⁶⁰ A fellow Belmont resident, Yvonne Clark, described her family’s 1926 migration to the Eagle Mill village as a matter of necessity. “My family came from Mt. Sterling, near Waynesville...it was almost impossible to make a living in the mountains. With a large family, a weekly paycheck was needed to support everyone.”⁶¹

This notion of struggling to survive in the harsh mountain landscape and finding refuge in the Gaston and Mecklenburg mills was also firmly lodged into society’s perception of mill workers. This is a popular theme in Mildred Gwinn Barnwell’s 1939 portrayal of Gaston County’s mill working class, as evident in her inclusion of what are essentially “before and after photos” of the mountain to mill migration. The before photo depicts a log cabin, complete with roaming pig and barbed wire fence.⁶² Barnwell used this “mountain hovel” to represent the mountain poverty mill workers left behind. Barnwell narrated this photo with the caption “Out of the rural districts, their poverty and squalor, they came by the hundreds...” Barnwell juxtaposed

⁵⁸ Marlene White, in-person interview by author, August 10, 2012.

⁵⁹ Lois MacDonald, *Southern Mill Hills, A Study of Social and Economic Forces in Certain Textile Mill Villages*, (New York, N.Y.: A.L. Hillman, 1928), 19.

⁶⁰ Marlene White, in-person interview by author, August 10, 2012.

⁶¹ Clark Hill, 16.

⁶² Mildred Gwin Barnwell, “Rural District Mountain Hovels”, circa 1939, location not specified, in *Faces We See*. (Gastonia, N.C.: Southern Combed Yarn Spinners Association, 1939), 8.

this beside a photo representing the “cottages” of Gaston County’s mill villages. This cottage has a brick foundation, a large front porch with pillars and railings, and even a landscaped yard.⁶³

This home was actually a far cry from the average mill village home, a fact which even Barnwell felt the need to acknowledge in a small, parenthetical note beneath the photo’s caption.

Barnwell recounts a poignant conversation with a Gastonia gas station attendant, dramatizing the book’s mountain to mill theme. The attendant told Barnwell the story of his own family’s migration, and how the labor recruiter’s promise of fifteen dollar monthly wages convinced his father to leave the squalor and poverty of their mountain “hovel” for the Gaston County mill.⁶⁴ “Pa went to the little chimney cubby and took out six silver dollars and shook ‘em in his hand. I never will forget it. He said he was savin’ a dollar every year where he was, but money was mighty hard to ‘cumulate.” Although Barnwell’s gas station attendant character may have been fictional, his story provides a concrete example of the perceived destitution mill workers left behind them in the mountains. As with the attendant’s father, money was the supreme motivator for leaving mountain abodes. Lois MacDonald, in her 1928 study of southern mill villages, found that many such migrants felt the meager wages they earned through mill work were far superior to the living made on mountain farms. “The chance to work a twelve or fourteen hour day for a mere pittance seemed to them a good exchange for the struggle of trying to wrest a living from the soil.”⁶⁵ Mill villagers often perceived their lives in the mill villages not in comparison to the luxurious lives of the uptown middle class, but in comparison to the hard lives they had left behind. In this light, they perceived themselves to be fortunate indeed.

Having come from hard lives, Gaston and Mecklenburg mill villagers considered

⁶³ Mildred Gwin Barnwell, “The Cottages of the Cotton Mill Villages”, circa 1909, Gaston County mill village, in *Faces We See*. (Gastonia, N.C.: Southern Combed Yarn Spinners Association, 1939), 9.

⁶⁴ Barnwell, 13.

⁶⁵ MacDonald, 19.

themselves members of a class of people who, if they had nothing else to boast of, could rightly take pride in their superior work ethic and tenacity. Allen Tullos asserts that the strenuous labor of farming “inured generations of Piedmont farmers to long hours and hard labor”, and he concludes that when these farmers transitioned to mill work “they continued to work with all their might at whatever their hands found to do.” Angela M. Riddle admired her family members for displaying such work habits in Gastonia’s Firestone Mill. “The family was full of hard workers. They took great pride in their jobs. A lot of our sweat, blood, and tears were spilled on the floors of that mill.” Clearly, Riddle viewed her family as possessing a strong work ethic.⁶⁶ Riddle remembered her great-grandmother as especially gritty, stubbornly resolved to remain in her home in Firestone village throughout her old age, even after the mill closed and the neighborhood fell into decline. “She told me that there had been a number of times that people would come up on the porch. According to her, you got one request to get off the porch. After that, she would shoot through the door and run them off. Up until the day she died she was a very independent lady and she wasn’t afraid of anyone.” Mareda Sigmon Cobb displayed a similarly tenacious determination, a willingness to “fight” for her pay. Cobb explained that when paid on a piecework basis, workers truly had to push themselves if they desired decent wages. “You have to fight it...I’d go in there and fight that eight hours.”⁶⁷

Mill workers took pride not only in their ability to work hard, but also in the quality of work they performed. In many cases, mill hands did not perceive themselves as unskilled

⁶⁶ Angela M. Riddle, “Hard Times, Childhood Snuff, Circuses and a Fearless Lady”, in *The Mill Village and the Miracle Bicycle and other Gaston County Tales*, compiled by Bob Lasley and Sallie Holt (Hickory: Hometown Memories Publishing Company, 2001), 58.

⁶⁷ Mareda Sigmon Cobb, Carrie Sigmon Yelton, and Alvin Yelton, interviewed by Patty Dilley and Jacqueline Hall, Documenting the American South, University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, June 16 and 18, 1979.

machine operatives, but as skilled workers, enriched by years of experience. Individuals who were able to work their way up to positions of prestige had an even greater tendency to feel this way. Edna Hargett became a skilled “smash hand” and took great pride in her work at the Highland Park mill. “See, I took a bad place of cloth and fixed it up to where it was perfect; why, that was a good feeling for me to know that I done my job right.”⁶⁸ Many “fixers” also felt pride in their ability to perform complex and necessary tasks effectively. Ralph Austin was able to work up to the status of fixer in 1933, and claimed that he “always took pride in my work.”⁶⁹ Fixers were given respect in the mill because broken machines delayed productivity. Fixers were one of the highest paid groups in the mills, aside from managers, as seen in the Southern Combed Yarn Spinner’s Association wage report for 1936-1938.⁷⁰ These elevated wages were also a source of pride, as they enabled fixers to better provide for their families.

Gaston and Mecklenburg mill workers placed a great deal of value on the family unit. Therefore, working hard to take care of one’s family was perceived as the noblest endeavor, and respect was bestowed heavily on those who exerted maximum effort in this area. This respect can be seen in Sarah Crumby’s description of her grandfather, Lawrence Crumby. “Grampa helped with many of the chores in the home, ran his full time job in the mill, and still did light farming. He was always considered a good hand in the mill. He rarely lost a day’s work because of illness.” Davis Andrew Rhyne described his father in a similar light, and recalled his father frequently working back to back shifts when his family was struggling and needed the extra income. When his shift at the mill ended each day, Rhyne’s father hurried home to labor over his

⁶⁸ Edna Hargett, interviewed by Jim Leloudis, Documenting the American South, University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, July 19, 1979.

⁶⁹ Ralph Charles Austin, interviewed by Jim Leloudis, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, June 14, 1979.

⁷⁰ Barnwell, 107.

crops. “He worked in the mill twenty-eight years, and farmed on the side too.”⁷¹

This notion of the noble mill worker, working to provide for his or her family, was an essential component of mill villagers' perception of themselves as a class of people. This notion of group identity also included the belief that mill people were “the best people”, who evinced high moral character and a generous spirit. Alice P. Evitt lived in a Gastonia mill village during the 1920s and 1930s, and was very complimentary of her fellow mill workers, asserting that “People in the mill were the best people.”⁷² Quentin Rhinehart’s perception of his fellow North Belmont mill villagers echoes this “best people” theme, and he described them as “simple people who had the character of being honest, hard working, and appreciative.”⁷³ Jim Guffey of Firestone village was grateful that he and his playmates had strong role models in their parents and family members. Guffey attributed his elders’ admirable character and integrity to their having endured and persevered through hard times. Guffey said reminiscently, “kids my age had good mamas and daddies; they had come through the Depression and come through World War II.”⁷⁴

Mill village children frequently perceived their parents as possessing an almost saintly morality, displaying great care and generosity despite their personal poverty. June Abernethy of Bessemer City recalled that her own mother’s desire to help others often caused her to behave as though oblivious of her own family’s need, especially when she felt others were worse off. When Bessemer City hosted a six week “nutrition camp” during the Depression to combat childhood hunger, Abernethy’s mother sent her, thinking “she was helping the camp meet its quota.” Abernethy was one of the camp’s most malnourished children, and after being fed three full

⁷¹ Davis Andrew Rhyne, in-person interview by author, August 12, 2012.

⁷² Alice P. Evitt, interviewed by Jim Leloudis, Documenting the American South, University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, July 18, 1979.

⁷³ Rhinehart, 14.

⁷⁴ Jim Guffey, in-person interview by author, August 14, 2012.

meals daily, for six weeks, won “first prize for most weight gained.” However, Abernethy’s mother was still concerned about those less fortunate, and insisted Abernethy “give the prize to a needier girl.” Looking back on the situation, Abernethy adamantly insisted that she was indeed a needy girl. “This was 1936 thinking, but I promise, *I* needed that dress!”⁷⁵

Mill workers realized that their hard lives of poverty and rough rural backgrounds not only instilled in them a strong work ethic and excellent morals, but also a tendency to be a bit rougher around the edges than their white collar, middle class neighbors. These somewhat unrefined tendencies were not, however, viewed as detracting from mill folks’ perceptions of themselves as the “best people.” Charlie Yount described his neighbors on the Majestic mill village as both “good Christian families with strong church ties” and also “real hard-living, hard drinking” individuals.⁷⁶ Yount’s impression captures the great complexity of mill workers’ perceptions of their communities, as containing both saints and sinners. June Abernethy remembered her father embodying such a duality. During the Depression, many men who rode the rails hoping to find work stopped by her family’s back door to ask for food. Although their family had little to spare, her father would not turn the men away empty handed. However, his style of generosity reveals the complex moral code upheld by many mill village men. “They came to our back door and were given food, such as we had, and, I am sure, a sip of home brew my father made with pride.”⁷⁷ For most mill villagers, making “home brew” and giving food to the hungry were not morally at odds. In both actions, Abernethy’s father did his best to provide for his family and help the needy, as fitting with the complex code of ethics many mill families adhered to.

⁷⁵ June Abernethy, “Winning First Prize with a Potato Blossom” in *The Mill Village and the Miracle Bicycle and other Gaston County Tale*, comp. by Bob Lasley and Sallie Holt, (Hickory: Hometown Memories Publishing Company, 2001), 28.

⁷⁶ Yount, 4.

⁷⁷ Abernethy, 28.

Despite their perception of themselves as a people of high morality, mill workers possessed a surprisingly complex moral code, which accommodated and allowed for the rougher tendencies that were undeniably part of the village environment. Hall identifies drunken fights as a result of the “rough life” that often “permeated the village streets.” She explains that the influence of alcohol frequently caused villagers to wage fights “that might not have happened or lasted long except that the participants were too drunk to realize how badly they hurt each other.”⁷⁸ Marlene White recalled an occasion when her own family suffered from the intoxicated actions of a village neighbor. On a visit to her uncle’s house, her father inadvertently walked between a drunken father and his son having “an altercation.” Mistaking White’s father for his son, the man shot her father in the leg.⁷⁹ White’s father suffered the long term affects of the wound, which developed gangrene and was nearly amputated. Fortunately, he survived the infection with his leg intact. However, as White recalled, “he was sick for a long time”, and his inability to work during his illness, along with the medical care required, posed a terrible burden for White’s family. Although accepted as an inevitable part of the village lifestyle, such tragedies were difficult for villagers to accept, even in light of their complex moral code.

Just as mill workers acknowledged their impoverished circumstances and rougher tendencies, they were also aware that they occupied a markedly inferior, and separate, position to the middle and upper classes, commonly referred to as “uptown folks.” While most mill workers lived in villages surrounding the mills, most white collar workers lived “uptown”. Such residential segregation, according to Dr. John Harrison Cook’s 1928 study, “tends toward class cleavage.”⁸⁰ Quentin Rhinehart, who lived in North Belmont’s Majestic Mill village, had no real

⁷⁸ Hall, 250-251.

⁷⁹ Marlene White, in-person interview by author, August 10, 2012.

⁸⁰ John Harrison Cook, *A Study of the Mill Schools of North Carolina*, (New York city: Teachers college, Columbia University, 1925), 50.

connection to the town's wealthy, upper class citizens. "There were the wealthy families that existed but we only knew them seeing them in a car or hearing others talk about them."⁸¹

Rhinehart explained woefully that there was a definite "social order that existed in Belmont", which "cotton mill people" were near the bottom of.⁸² Ada Mae Wilson recalled a similar class cleavage in Charlotte, and explained that mill villagers were looked down on by the white-collar class, viewed as inferior, and even referred to as "white trash."⁸³ Thomas Hanchett confirms this condescension perceived by the mill working class, explaining that "Indeed, laborers had every right to feel touchy about matters of respect. Prosperous citizens betrayed open disdain for millhands and their families."⁸⁴ George Shue reiterated this notion of being looked down upon by Charlotte's wealthy classes in the 1920s. "Back in them days you know, the cotton mill people was about the lowest class people there were. They called 'em lintheads."⁸⁵

Being identified as a "linthead" was injurious to the minds and hearts of Gaston and Mecklenburg mill folk. Although they did not consider themselves inferior, their self-esteem and self-perceptions were greatly impacted by society's discrimination against them. Ralph Austin recalled that this discrimination "didn't make you feel good at all."⁸⁶ Hoyle McCorkle also admitted that there was a damaging social stigma associated with mill work, and recalled one especially upsetting incident when he was treated like he was "from the wrong side of the tracks."⁸⁷ One evening, when McCorkle's middle-class friend invited him to his home, the

⁸¹ Rhinehart, 14.

⁸² Rhinehart, 14.

⁸³ Ada Mae Wilson, interviewed by Allen Tullos, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, February 1, 1980.

⁸⁴ Hanchett, 96.

⁸⁵ George and Mamie Shue, interviewed by James Leloudis, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, June 20, 1979.

⁸⁶ Ralph Charles Austin, interviewed by Jim Leloudis, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, June 14, 1979.

⁸⁷ Hoyle and Mamie McCorkle, interviewed by Jim Leloudis, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, July 11, 1979.

friendship quickly turned sour. On their way to the boy's house in an affluent neighborhood, he instructed McCorkle on how to behave around his well-to-do parents. "Don't tell them your parents works [sic] in a mill village." This insult angered and hurt young McCorkle, who "never did play with him anymore."⁸⁸ Marjorie Whitesides was similarly wounded by a childhood incident. As a child, she longed to have a pair of rain boots which, in her Gaston County mill village, would certainly have been a luxury. She hoped that the treasured boots "would be my status symbol." In her childhood excitement, she wore the boots on a day that began overcast but quickly turned warm and sunny. She painfully recalled how her condescending teacher seized the opportunity to embarrass her. "She announced for the entire class to hear: Marjorie wore overshoes today. She must have thought it was going to rain." Whiteside's teacher, representing the "professional types" of the middle class, viewed her mill village students as inferior. This teacher's cruelty left Whitesides feeling belittled and demeaned. "The pleasure I had awaited so long was snatched away in one short recess. The teacher valued a poor mill child so little that she stole from me even that small experience of pride."⁸⁹

While mill workers such as George Shue perceived themselves as "about the lowest class people there were", they were actually spared this disgrace by the existence of a people even more downtrodden, impoverished, and oppressed than they.⁹⁰ Thomas Hanchett surmises that although white mill workers did indeed suffer condescension at the hands of their middle and upper class superiors, this "sense of hurt" was relatively mild compared to the discrimination

⁸⁸ Hoyle and Mamie McCorkle, interviewed by Jim Leloudis, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, July 11, 1979.

⁸⁹ Marjorie Whitesides, "Rainy Days, Old Maids, and Wind Bubbles in the Floor" in *The Mill Village and the Miracle Bicycle and other Gaston County Tales*, comp. by Bob Lasley and Sallie Holt, (Hickory: Hometown Memories Publishing Company, 2001), 67.

⁹⁰ George and Mamie Shue, interviewed by James Leloudis, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, June 20, 1979.

experienced by the Charlotte area's African American population.⁹¹ White mill workers held a significantly higher social status than their black counterparts, and this superior position kept them from being forced to the bottom rung of society's class ladder. This white superiority was reinforced by the inferior treatment black mill workers endured. Hall describes their plight as one of limited opportunity and excessive discrimination, explaining that only the most menial, dangerous, and dirty mill jobs were offered to black men, and that black women were most always denied mill employment.⁹²

The white mill working class of Gaston and Mecklenburg was sufficiently aware of the inferior treatment of black mill workers. George Shue described the limited job opportunities available to these workers, and said they were only given jobs "that white men wouldn't do." Likewise, Blaine Wofford recalled watching his black coworkers labor in the opening room and bale waste at the Rex Mill of Ranlo during the 1930s. Wofford acknowledged, regretfully, that these were dangerous jobs in which lost fingers were common.⁹³ Clyde Eddleman Barker described the opening room at Gastonia's Gray Mill as a terribly dangerous place to work due to the high number of fires that originated there.⁹⁴ Supplied with no fire extinguishers, and only buckets of water, these black workers were constantly in danger of being trapped in a fire. These highly dangerous jobs were also the lowest paying in most mills. Between 1936 and 1938 the lowest paying jobs in North Carolina's combed yarn mills were the jobs of waste baler, yard laborer, cotton opener, and scrubber.⁹⁵ These positions were almost always filled by black male workers, and each paid approximately twenty-five cents per hour, a scant amount in comparison

⁹¹ Hanchett, 14.

⁹² Hall, 66.

⁹³ Blaine Wofford, interviewed by Allen Tullos, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, February 1, 1980.

⁹⁴ Clyde Eddleman Barker, *Another Ride with Clyde*, (Gastonia, N.C., Clyde E. Barker, 2004), 6.

⁹⁵ Barnwell, 107.

to the thirty-two to forty-four cents per hour made by most white workers.

Although many white mill workers lamented the harsh treatment of African American men in the mills, their feelings of white superiority were often revealed through their treatment of African American women employed in their homes. Hall explains that black women were often denied any opportunity for employment in the mills.⁹⁶ These women frequently accepted employment as domestic servants for white mill families who were relatively impoverished themselves. White mill villagers' willingness to hire black women for a mere pittance reveals their perceptions of themselves, and their own labor, as far superior. Mary Thompson, like many white, mill working mothers, chose to "hire colored people for two dollars a week to come every day" and take care of her children.⁹⁷ Thompson found these black domestic employees through the local welfare office, and explained that if the women failed to "work out" she could report them. According to Hall, if these black women did not successfully maintain employment, the welfare support they so desperately needed could be withdrawn.⁹⁸ All too often, black women's livelihoods depended on the whims of white mill villagers. Erastus McAlpine's September 6th, 1917 diary entry reveals the unequal power relationship that existed between white mill workers and their black domestic help. Although McAlpine had on the previous day described Cora Greyer as a "splendid washer", he and his wife were infuriated by the transgression Greyer committed while ironing for them on September 6th. "This is the last washing or ironing she will do for us, as Ma found two of her shirt waists in Cora's coat pockets that she had stolen from the clothes closet. I hate the doings of a rogue."⁹⁹ Although many mill villagers described their black

⁹⁶ Hall, 67.

⁹⁷ Carl and Mary Thompson, interviewed by Jim Leloudis, Documenting the American South, University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, July 19, 1979.

⁹⁸ Hall, 157.

⁹⁹ McAlpine, September 6th, 1917

domestic servants as “just like one of the family”¹⁰⁰, they clearly enjoyed the greater economic and social power that accompanied their superior status as whites.

Mill villagers were painfully aware that their lot in life was a hard one, filled with hard work, hard circumstances, and regretfully hard childhood experiences. However, Gaston and Mecklenburg mill workers did not view themselves as the victims of an unfair or intolerable life, nor did they accept the upper class’ allegation that they were an inferior people. Mill workers perceived themselves as being blessed with supportive communities and the opportunity to earn steady cash wages, regardless of how minimal. Individuals recalled their lives in the mills and villages with both nostalgia and sober realism, revealing the dual complexity, of blessing amidst poverty, which was ever present in mill villagers’ shared self perceptions. They considered themselves a people possessing strong work ethics, good morals, and generous spirits; in general, as the “best people.” Yet, they were also aware of, and honest about, their rough and gritty personalities, and made few qualms about the morally questionable habits of their neighbors, such as home brewing and drunken shooting matches. Although mill villagers possessed a sense of resentment for being shunned by, and segregated from, the “uptown” folks, they benefitted greatly from the superior status they held over their black coworkers. Mill villagers’ self perceptions were complex indeed, but they were also shared and collective, a unifying attribute for the “cotton mill people.”

¹⁰⁰Ada Mae Wilson, interviewed by Allen Tullos, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, February 1, 1980.

Annotated Bibliography of Primary and Secondary Sources

Primary Sources

Oral Histories

Austin, Ralph Charles .Interviewed by Jim Leloudis. Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, June 14, 1979

Ralph Austin began work part-time in a cotton mill at twelve years old out of family necessity, as he recalls many children doing. He began working full-time at fourteen. In the course of the interview Austin shares memories of Christmas mornings as a mill village child, recalls charging groceries each week and paying his tab off on Saturday, and tells of an instance when he and the other doffers walked out of the mill because a superintendent had mistreated him. Austin also explains his reasons, a wife and hungry children, for refusing to participate in a later strike. He also recalls being “slurred” and called a linthead by non-millworkers around town and at the baseball games. This interview provides information on many facets of mill village relations and identity, primarily class tensions and family dynamics.

Cagle, Ernest .Interviewed by Ben F. Bulla. Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, September 11, 1981.

Ernest Cagle began working in a Ranlo mill at an early age, and therefore being unable to attend school, because he had eight siblings and his father was sick and unable to work. He later describes working at the Loray Textile Mill in 1933, and later returning to work there when it was the Firestone Mill. He takes pride in the fact that he worked in textiles for fifty-eight years and claims he was never fired “off a job.” He recalls wearing clothes that had been patched so many times they “looked like they had been quilted.” He is thankful that he and his family always had something to eat, but remembers many times when all they had was biscuits and gravy. Austin was frequently hired by mills to play on their baseball teams as catcher and explains that the players were often not required to run a job in the mill, but were paid their wages and room and board simply for playing ball well. Austin also made and sold moonshine on Crowder’s Mountain for fifteen years while also working in the mills. This interview provides a colorful and complex example of mill villager identity because Austin’s life story is told from the point of view from a poor child deprived of an education, a worker who was shown severe partiality by the mill owners because of his baseball skills, and as an observer of the pain and suffering that often accompanied textile mill strikes.

Cobb, Mareda Sigmon, Carrie Sigmon Yelton, and Alvin Yelton. Interviewed by Patty Dilley and Jacqueline Hall. Documenting the American South, University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, June 16 and 18, 1979.

Although Carrie Sigmon Yelton’s experiences were primarily in Hickory hosiery mills, she makes valuable comparisons between the conditions in southern cotton mills and those in the South’s hosiery industry. Yelton also had two children out of wedlock and her reflections on the community’s reactions provide a valuable example of the way textile communities reacted to such deviations from the moral norm. Mareda Sigmon Cobb came to Gastonia with two friends

in 1924 to find work in textiles. She adamantly explains that she was able to find higher paying jobs in Gastonia than were available in Hickory. She describes meeting her husband while working in a mill, and how they were married the next year despite his previous engagement to another woman. Cobb's late husband was active in union organization at many of the mills he worked at, yet despite her husband's passion for labor organization, she remained skeptical and had little faith in their potential to make any long term changes. Cobb was injured while working at a Ranlo mill in 1963, and was permanently disabled as a result. Cobb and Yelton both recall how workers had to "fight" to "make anything on piecework." This source provides valuable examples of workers' attitudes toward unionization, workplace injury, working conditions they had to endure, and the fast pace that production work required them to work at. These attitudes are vital aspects of textile worker identity.

Elmore, George R. Interviewed by Brent Glass. Documenting the American South, University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, March 11, 1976.

George Elmore describes his mother moving him and his siblings back and forth between the farm and Gastonia and Cramerton textile mills. He discusses the differences between farming and working in the mills, and the amount of dignity that accompanied each. He spent a portion of his teenage years living on their farm and commuting two and a half miles to work in the mill each day. He later explains that workers perceived by management as "riff-raff" or part of the "lower element" were given houses in less desirable sections of the mill village. He recalls an even smaller and less desirable section of the Cramerton mill village that was reserved for black mill workers and their families. Elmore remembers being teased for his homemade clothes by the son of a mill owner, and explains that although they were friendly acquaintances as adults "... there was always that remark." This interview is valuable because it reveals the emotions and sentiments of many mill workers regarding their perceived status in society, specifically when comparing themselves to farmers and the elite of textile society.

Evitt, Alice P. Interviewed by Jim Leloudis. Documenting the American South, University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, July 18, 1979.

Interviewee describes life in a mill village in Charlotte in 1920s and 1930s. Explains that she wanted to quit school and go to work at a young age and her father wanted her to stay in school. She recalls him saying, when he finally agreed to let her, "Well, if you quit school, you've got to go to work." Alice Evitt married a young man who lived in the house across from her family's home in the mill village. Later in life she found herself working long hours in the mill to support her sick husband, elderly father, and her six nieces and nephews. She explains that she was left with the burden of her sister's children because her sister's husband was "a drunk." When asked about the stretch-out and her coworkers' reactions she states that people "just had to take it." Recalls attending the trial of the workers charged with the murder of Chief Aderholt during the Loray Strike of 1929. Expresses the anger and defensiveness she felt as she heard the prosecutors describe the mill workers as having poor character and being "lintheads." Evitt took pride in being a mill worker because in her opinion "The people in the mill seemed like the best people there was." This interview represents a rich example of female mill-villager identity. Evitt's life story showcases the rugged character traits of hard work, loyalty, and pride which so many mill workers have used to describe themselves and others like themselves.

Guffey, Jim. Interviewed by author. August 14, 2012.

This interview with Jim Guffey explores his childhood growing up on Firestone Mill Village. Guffey has extremely fond memories of his time there. Guffey also describes the deep appreciation and respect he had for his hard working mother, aunts, and grandmother who labored their hours in the mill to support him and his cousin. Guffey also describes how his family came to Gastonia from the North Carolina Mountains, and how he felt they had found a better quality of life than was available to them there.

Hargett, Edna .Interviewed by Jim Leloudis. Documenting the American South, University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, July 19, 1979.

Edna Hargett began working as a weaver in a North Charlotte Mill at sixteen. She explains in the interview that she saw very few black workers in the mill and that those she does recall were given lower positions such as scrubbers and bathroom janitors. Hargett also remembers that the white residents of the mill villages referred to their black neighbors and coworkers as “uncles” and “aunts” rather than using formal titles such as Mr. or Mrs. Hargett’s memory of her childhood is one full of chores and very little play. She explains that she and her siblings did not have the “conveniences” that children living outside the mill village enjoyed. This, along with her painful memories of being called derogatory names such as linthead and “nappy head” provide a prime example of mill villagers’ awareness of their relative poverty in comparison to their non-mill working peers. Hargett mentions hiring a black maid after she was married and had a child so she could continue working in the mill. Perhaps the most unique piece of information provided by Hargett’s remembrances is the treatment that unwed mothers received from their fellow mill-villagers. These women bearing children out of wedlock were looked down upon and “She was just simply an outcast.” This interview is a useful source because it provides many diverse examples of how white mill villagers interacted with other groups such as African Americans, mid to upper class whites, and their fellow mill-villagers who were seen as having strayed from the accepted moral code.

McCorkle, Hoyle and Mamie .Interviewed by Jim Leloudis. Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, July 11, 1979.

Hoyle McCorkle and his mother Mamie worked together in Charlotte area mills, along with his late father, during the 1930s through the 1950s. He describes the treatment they received from their managers, as well as an attempt by workers to unionize in 1936. He mentions the recreational facilities a favored mill owner/operator offered in the village. Mamie explains that when she finally quit textile work at sixty-five she never wanted to go back. Both Hoyle and Mamie were second generation mill workers, showing that the cotton mill lifestyle was often passed down. Although Hoyle recalls mill life more fondly than his mother, both Hoyle and Mamie acknowledge that it was a hard life and that “financially we didn’t have as much.” Hoyle recalls being looked down upon and called a linthead by outsiders. Hoyle also remembers being discriminated against by other children at his school because he lived in a mill village. He claims that even nearby black residents looked down on the mill villagers as “white trash.” Lastly, Mamie explains that cotton mill workers felt they were somewhat lower than hosiery mill workers because cotton mill work was much dirtier and paid significantly less. However, the mill

villagers were able to regain a portion of their pride by producing baseball teams that were superior to those produced by the hosiery mills. This interview provides rich examples of race and class relations in Charlotte mill villages, as well as a deeper understanding of how mill villagers viewed their relatively impoverished lifestyles.

Rhyne, Davis Andrew. Interviewed by author. August 12, 2012.

Davis Andrew Rhyne grew up on a farm in Dallas, NC. His father commuted each day to work in a Gastonia textile mill for twenty eight years as a fixer. He describes how exhausted his father was after work, and remembers how even in his exhaustion he scrounged up the energy to work several hours each evening on their family's small farm. Rhyne recalls his father taking him with him to work on a Saturday, and the impression it left with him.

Shue, George and Mamie .Interviewed by James Leloudis. Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, June 20, 1979.

George describes moving to a Highland Park Mill village at the age of five, and going to work in the mill at fourteen. George wanted to continue his education, but the mill village school only went through the sixth grade and you had to pay to attend Charlotte High School. He explains that, making only fifteen dollars a week, his father simply could not afford to send him. He explains that at that time cotton mill workers were "about the lowest class people there were." He also recalls how he worked his way up the mill ladder until he "finally got to be the big boss of the whole thing." This provides useful information about how many mill workers perceived their class status, as well as the opportunity for upward mobility in the mills. Mamie describes meeting George while he was playing baseball for the mill, and how she married him at seventeen. Mamie also describes the "White collars" up town, and how they would not venture into the mill villages where the "lintheads" like she and George lived. She also explains that black workers and residents would not venture into the white sections of the mill villages, and that in the mill they were given the jobs "that white men wouldn't do." George and Mamie describe their experiences during the General Textile Strike of 1934 when they braved walking through the picket lines each day to go to their jobs because they had a family to support and could not afford not working. This interview provides information on many facets of mill villager identity including attitudes toward leaving one's education at a young age to begin work, relations to outsiders and black workers, as well as attitudes toward their fellow workers' attempts to improve working conditions through unionization.

Thompson, Carl and Mary .Interviewed by Jim Leloudis. Documenting the American South, University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, July 19, 1979.

Mary describes her family being quite poor when she was a child, but explains that she and her siblings had such happy childhoods they did not realize they were poor. Mary wanted to quit school and go to work and her father allowed her to make the decision herself so she began work very young. She married the first time when she was in her teens like many mill village teenagers did. She had her first child and hired a black maid to "live in" during the week to care for her child so she could continue working in the mill. She explains that at that time "You could usually pick up right good colored people" for approximately two dollars a week. She recalls

going down to the welfare office to request a black maid and how if the maid did not perform her duties satisfactorily she could go back to the welfare office and notify them of her poor performance. She explains that if they could not successfully maintain employment their welfare was revoked. Mary also recalls how the mill management monitored behavior and would often force people who were too rough to leave the village. Carl describes quitting after he was asked to run cards in the Parkdale Mill because running cards frightened him. He then hitchhiked to Charlotte and got a third shift job at another mill. He began staying at Shue's boarding house where he later met his wife at the age of 42. This interview provides examples of a happy mill village childhood and the choices made during adolescence, such as choosing to quit school and marry at a very young age. The interview also contains intriguing evidence of the inequality in the ways white and black residents in the area treated and perceived one another. Carl provides a unique example of a mill worker because unlike many of his peers he married later in life and lived as a single man in a boarding house for quite some time, giving further complexity to the group identity of mill workers.

White, Marlene. Interviewed by author. August 10, 2012.

This interview with Marlene White reveals a great deal about life in the Majestic Mill Village, located in Belmont, NC. Marlene lived on the village in the late 1930s and early 1940s. She discusses at length the games she remembers playing, the type of living her parents were able to make working in the mill, and how she felt about their life and their community.

Wilson, Ada Mae. Interviewed by Allen Tullos. Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, February 1, 1980.

Ada Mae Wilson talks about living in the Highland Park mill village, where her father and mother worked. Wilson recalls going over to the mill to watch her parents work and sit in the grass with them during their lunch breaks. She also recalls the mill blowing a whistle at five every morning to wake workers up to be at the mill by six. She says the whistle was so loud "you could hear it all over Charlotte." She quit school at thirteen to go to work in the mill and explains that "people didn't have to go to school like they do now. They'd go maybe a year or two, and they'd quit and go to work." This source provides valuable information on how the mill structured mill villagers' time through whistles and shifts. She recalls that during that time women in the mill village could hire a black maid to "come in and keep the house for you for five dollars a week." This allowed women with children to continue working in the mill. She explains that she also hired a black maid to care for her children, cook, and clean so she could continue working. Wilson explains that class differences were determined by what part of Charlotte a person lived in and what type of work they did. "White trash" worked in textile mills, whereas the middle class had "white collar" jobs in banks and stores. This interview is teeming with rich examples of identity and self perception, namely the way white mill workers viewed themselves in comparison to and interacted with black and "white collar" workers.

Wofford, Blaine. Interviewed by Allen Tullos. Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, February 1, 1980.

Blaine Wofford went to work at fourteen at Rex Mill, and at sixteen he began working as a sweeper at Johnston Mill. He explains that the sweeper jobs have previously been reserved for black workers, but by the time he was sixteen the mill management had begun hiring white sweepers. The only other jobs available to black workers in the mills were in the opening room and baling waste. He explains that these were terribly dirty jobs in which it was easy to lose fingers. He recalls that the Rex Mill Village had a specially designated section for black workers and their families. He acknowledges that working in textiles was not an easy life and that “A lot of mill people weren’t in the mill because they wanted to be, it was because they had to be.” This interview provides information about the jobs and housing made available to black workers, and how their presence was perceived by their white coworkers. In this interview Wofford is able to concisely verbalize the sense of being “trapped” in mill work that many other interviewees mentioned.

Books

Abernethy, June . “Winning First Prize with a Potato Blossom” in *The Mill Village and the Miracle Bicycle and other Gaston County Tales*. Compiled by Bob Lasley and Sallie Holt. Hickory: Hometown Memories Publishing Company, 2001.

Abernethy wrote this excerpt for inclusion in this anthology to share memories of growing up during the Great Depression in Bessemer City.

Barker, Clyde Eddleman. *Another Ride with Clyde*. Gastonia, N.C., Clyde E. Barker, 2004.

This memoir is a sequel to Edlleman’s first memoir *Clyde’s Reflections*. This book also includes valuable accounts of what life was like in the Belmont mill villages. The accounts are primarily from Barker’s childhood and are related to childhood leisure activities and family life.

Barnwell, Mildred Gwin. *Faces We See*. Gastonia, N.C.: Southern Combed Yarn Spinners Association, 1939.

This book was published in 1939 primarily for the purpose of advertising the high standard of living in Gaston County and Charlotte area mill villages. The book includes numerous photos of families living in comfortable mill provided homes, as well as happy workers in the mills. The publication was sponsored by the area mills. Although very much a promotional piece, this source provides extraordinary evidence of the mills’ perceptions of what employees were provided as well as the impression they sought to give the public of the conditions and amenities in their villages.

Barnwell, Mildred Gwin. "Long Chain Quiller", circa 1939, Gaston County mill, in *Faces We See*. Gastonia, N.C.: Southern Combed Yarn Spinners Association, 1939.

Barnwell includes this photo in her 1939 publication. The worker's clothing provides evidence of mill villagers' lack of material wealth. Patched, repaired, and improvised clothing was a regular occurrence in mill working classes of Gaston and Mecklenburg.

Barnwell, Mildred Gwin. "Raising Turkeys is a Lucrative Hobby", circa 1939, Gaston County farm, in *Faces We See*. Gastonia, N.C.: Southern Combed Yarn Spinners Association, 1939.

Barnwell includes this photo to establish the fact that many mill workers supplement their mill wages by operating small farms. Barnwell also indicates that many mill workers' commuted from their small farms each day.

Barnwell, Mildred Gwin. "Rural District Mountain Hovels", circa 1939, location not specified, in *Faces We See*. Gastonia, N.C.: Southern Combed Yarn Spinners Association, 1939.

This photo, taken by Barnwell for her 1939 publication, is used to represent the poor living conditions farmers and mountain residents left behind them when they migrated to the Gaston County mill villages.

Barnwell, Mildred Gwin. "Some Southern Textile Workers Own Their Little Farms and Commute to the Mills in Their Automobiles", circa 1939, mill identity and address not specified, in *Faces We See*. Gastonia, N.C.: Southern Combed Yarn Spinners Association, 1939.

Barnwell explains that many farmers commuted to their jobs in the mills each day, and uses this photo of said farmers' cars parked in front of a Gastonia textile mill as evidence. Barnwell juxtaposes this photo with a photo of mill-working-farmers' turkey roosts.

Barnwell, Mildred Gwin. "The Cottages of the Cotton Mill Villages", circa 1909, Gaston County mill village, in *Faces We See*. Gastonia, N.C.: Southern Combed Yarn Spinners Association, 1939.

This photo, taken by Barnwell for her 1939 publication, is used to represent the idealized notion of a better life in the Gaston County mill villages which farmers and mountain residents left their rural homes to enjoy.

Brown, Bob, and Charlie Baxter Yount. *"The Village, the Town, the People": Belmont, North Carolina, with Some Poems, Plus a Few Other Odds & Ends ; "Nice Things to Remember", from the 1940's, 50's, and 60's & Sometimes Later*. Belmont, N.C., B. Brown, 2001.

The photos from the 1940s included in this book will add further support to the collection of photos in *Behalt North Belmont*. In addition to the photos, the poems from this time period

will serve to document the emotions, experiences, and memories of individuals living in Belmont mill villages; conveying emotions and sentiments that can often be lost in oral histories and photographs. The photographs will also provide a backdrop for the information located in the G. W. Howe collection.

Clark, Carl Lewis . “The Eagle” in *This Red Clay Hillside: The Eagle 1924-1950*. Edited by Betty M. Hinson. Belmont: Spindle Books, 1997.

Clark wrote this excerpt for this anthology to share his memories from Eagle Mill in the 1940s. Clark describes in detail the location of his home in the village as well as his appreciation for the mill village lifestyle.

Cook, John Harrison. *A Study of the Mill Schools of North Carolina*. New York city: Teachers college, Columbia University, 1925.

This source analyzes the type and quality of education offered in mill village schools up until 1925. The types of mill village schools offered in the North Charlotte, Gastonia, McAdenville, Bessemer City, and Belmont are discussed in this work, and the specific characteristics and offerings of each are emphasized (such as whether schooling was offered after the seventh grade). This information is essential in understanding how and why so many adolescents quit school at fourteen and fifteen to work in the mill. The quality of education offered to the children of mill workers is also important for understanding the mobility between generations.

Hill, Yvonne Clark. “The John Henry Clark Family” in *From This Red Clay Hillside: The Eagle 1924-1950*. Edited by Betty M. Hinson. Belmont: Spindle Books, 1997.

This is an entry included in the anthology titled *From This Red Clay Hillside: The Eagle 1924-1950*. Hill grew up on Eagle Mill village, which her family moved to in 1926.

Hinson, Betty M. *From This Red Clay Hillside: The Eagle 1924-1950*. Belmont: Spindle Books, 1997.

This book is a collection of memories and memoir style excerpts written by Eagle Mill village residents regarding their lives, childhoods, and recollections of life on the Eagle village.

MacDonald, Lois. *Southern Mill Hills, A Study of Social and Economic Forces in Certain Textile Mill Villages*. New York, N.Y.: A.L. Hillman, 1928.

This study of the conditions in mill villages is particularly valuable because it looks at not only the physical and economic conditions in villages but also the social conditions. The study looks at the presence and absence of welfare programs in different villages, social opportunities and events offered by mill owners or desired by the workers, and the amenities that workers felt their villages should offer. The book discusses welfare programs and amenities offered in Gastonia mill villages. One thing I found interesting was the fact that many mothers felt their villages should provide playgrounds where their children could go while they are at work. I have found evidence that in the very early 1940s playgrounds were present at most

Belmont mill villages, and I am curious to find if these became commonplace in the twelve to fifteen years following this study due to working mothers' complaints. This offers greater insight into the plight of mothers who found it necessary that they work in the mills while their children were at home, such as Ella Mae Wiggins described in her song "Mill Mother's Lament."

Mayes, Jean O'Daniel . "Fifty Cents in the Pay Envelope" in *The Mill Village and the Miracle Bicycle and other Gaston County Tales*. Compiled by Bob Lasley and Sallie Holt. Hickory: Hometown Memories Publishing Company, 2001.

Mayes wrote this entry for this anthology collection describing her life growing up on Belmont's Acme Mill village. It sheds light to the poverty present in mill village living.

Rick, Jo Ann Sigmon . "Kings and Queens on Stilts" in *The Mill Village and the Miracle Bicycle and other Gaston County Tale*, Compiled by Bob Lasley and Sallie Holt. Hickory: Hometown Memories Publishing Company, 2001.

Rick wrote this excerpt for this anthology to share her childhood memories on the American Yarn and Processing Mill village in Mount Holly, NC.

Riddle, Angela M. "Hard Times, Childhood Snuff, Circuses and a Fearless Lady" in *The Mill Village and the Miracle Bicycle and other Gaston County Tales*. Compiled by Bob Lasley and Sallie Holt. Hickory: Hometown Memories Publishing Company, 2001.

In this entry written for this collection, Riddle describes the hard working characters in her family, as well as her colorfully gritty great grandmother who lived on the Firestone Mill village.

Rhinehart, Quentin. *Behalt North Belmont: A Book of a Mill Village's Memories*. Gastonia, N.C., Q.M. Rhinehart, 2005.

This is a collection of photographs from Belmont mill villages during the early twentieth century. This source will help provide visual evidence to support or counter the oral histories of individuals who lived in Belmont mill villages at some point during their lives, as well as to consider when examining the records kept by the G. W. Howe Company, a store located in Belmont's mill town area.

Whitesides, Marjorie. "Rainy Days, Old Maids, and Wind Bubbles in the Floor" in *The Mill Village and the Miracle Bicycle and other Gaston County Tales*. Compiled by Bob Lasley and Sallie Holt. Hickory: Hometown Memories Publishing Company, 2001.

In this selection Whitesides describes a particularly painful childhood memory involving a new pair of rain boots and a condescending teacher. This story provides an excellent example of how mill villagers were frequently belittled and demeaned by the middle and upper classes.

Yandle, Mary Lois Moore. "Madeline, Evelyn, Lois, Howard, and Joe Moore Seated Behind Their Barn", circa 1928, in *The Spirit of a Proud People: Pictures and Stories of Highland Park Manufacturing Mill #3 and the People in the Village of North Charlotte*. Charlotte, N.C.: L.M. Yandle. 1997.

Yandle explains that in her Highland Park mill village neighborhood, many homes had small farms which they used to house livestock. Yandle explains that rural farming influences were extremely prevalent in her village throughout the 1940s.

Yandle, Mary Lois Moore. *The Spirit of a Proud People: Pictures and Stories of Highland Park Manufacturing Mill #3 and the People in the Village of North Charlotte*. Charlotte, N.C.: L.M. Yandle. 1997.

Although primarily a compilation of photos and a summary of the history of the Charlotte area during the textile boom, this book also contains a brief memoir written by the author. Lois Moore Yandle grew up in Highland Park Mill village and in this memoir section she discusses her childhood in the village. This source is valuable because it provides further evidence of how children experienced mill village life, as well as how adults who grew up in the villages remember their mill village childhoods.

Manuscript Collections

Erastus C. McAlpine Diaries, 1915-1921. Box 1, Folders 1-3. J. Murrey Atkins Library University of North Carolina at Charlotte, Special Collections, 2006.

Erastus McAlpine worked in the Louise cotton Mill in Charlotte. While working there, he kept two diaries between 1915 and 1921. These diaries carefully document the daily life of McAlpine. McAlpine spend most of his time farming while his children worked in the Chadwick Hoskins, Highland Park, and Louise Mills. However, at one point McAlpine works in the mills himself. This source provides an excellent example of one family's life living near and working in the mills of North Charlotte.

G.W. Howe Company records, 1915 – 1965. Invoices, Receipts, and Sales Records, 1920-1936. J. Murrey Atkins Library University of North Carolina at Charlotte, Special Collections, 2010.

This collection is a compilation of records and documents kept by the G. W. Howe Company, which was a grocery and supply store located in Belmont. The owner of the store kept very careful invoices, and the owner had many customers who were area mill workers. These records serve as a crucial source because they show what types of groceries and supplies the mill workers could afford to purchase, as well as how they paid for the goods. The records include customer accounts listing credits and debts, showing evidence to mill workers' ability, or lack thereof, to purchase what they needed. This source provides a unique look at the workers' standard of living as well as their financial situations.

Secondary Sources

Baker, Christina. "Shaking all the Corners of the Sky: The Global Response to the Gastonia Strike of 1929." *Canadian Review Of American Studies* 3 (Winter 1990): 321.

This article explains the public and press attention given to the Loray Mill strike of 1929, and its effects on the local and national conscience. This information provides additional context for Fred Beal's account of the events, and establishes the political climate of Gaston and Charlotte area mills leading up to the strike of 1934.

Glass, Brent D. *The Textile Industry in North Carolina: A History*. Raleigh: Division of Archives and History, North Carolina Dept. of Cultural Resources, 1992.

This source explains how Gaston County textile mills frequently merged to form larger corporations and associations, such as the world's largest combed yarn spinners association. This information is essential in understanding how publications such as *Faces We See* were funded and promoted by large associations that had the interests of multiple mills in mind. This is also important in understanding the amount or lack of competition between mills in the county.

Hall, Jacquelyn Dowd. *Like a Family: The Making of a Southern Cotton Mill World*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987.

This book provides an incredible reference and guide to understanding the family, community, and overall social structure of textile mills and villages during the 1920s and 1930s. Specific to my geographic focus, the book examines studies that show the percentage of mill workers in Gaston County in 1927 whose parents had not been millworkers. This provides concrete evidence of the generational phenomenon in which individuals left the occupation their families had traditionally held (most farming) and abandoned this lifestyle for the cotton mills. This is an incredibly important source for my research because it addresses many issues related to mill village society and will serve as a reference against which I can check other sources.

Hanchett, Thomas W. *Sorting Out the New South City: Race, Class, and Urban Development in Charlotte, 1875-1975*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998.

This source provides information of the lifestyle and social structure created in Charlotte mill villages. This source provides specific examples of how mill villages preserved the "general conditions of rural life." I have found similar information for Gaston County mill villages and this will provide context for the many oral histories I have found from Charlotte area mill workers.

Huber, Patrick. *Linthead Stomp: The Creation of Country Music in the Piedmont South*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008.

This source describes the experiences that musicians such as Dave McCarn and Claude Morris had working in Gaston County and Charlotte textile mills. Understanding how these experiences inspired their music and lyrics will provide evidence of the emotions workers felt

towards their lives in the mill villages. This source also provides context for the recordings on the album *Gastonia Gallop*.

Portelli, Alessandro. "What Makes Oral History Different." In *The Oral History Reader*, edited by Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson. London: Routledge, 2006.

In this essay, Portelli explains the unique attributes of oral history and how these attributes can and should be utilized. He explains that although what an individual says may not be factually accurate, it reveals the fact that they believe a specific thing or interpreted an event in a specific way, revealing a great deal about how events and periods in history affected the people witnessing them. When dealing with perceptions and opinions of mill villagers this essay will provide a great deal of guidance..

Salmond, John A. *Gastonia, 1929: The Story of the Loray Mill Strike*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995.

This book describes chronologically the events and issues that led up to the 1929 strike at the Loray Mill in Gastonia, N.C. The book acknowledges the roles played by key individuals such as Fred Beal and Ella Mae Wiggins. This book will be helpful in identifying the opinions and sentiments held by mill workers in Gastonia at the time, and will also provide context for the songs written by Ella Mae Wiggins and the account written by Fred Beal.

Tullos, Allen. *Habits of Industry: White Culture and the Transformation of the Carolina Piedmont*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989.

This source provides a careful tracing of the creation of Gaston County's textile industry, along with the textile industries of many other counties. This account of what families purchased mills, how they were connected, and the amount of political and legal power they held will provide a deeper understanding of the role mill ownership played in mill towns.