

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC

Rocky Mount Mills

AND/OR COMMON

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

Along NC 43-48 (Falls Road), south of the Tar River, north and east of River Road, in northwest Rocky Mount.

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Rocky Mount

VICINITY OF

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT
Second

STATE

North Carolina

CODE

037

COUNTY

Nash

CODE

127

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE <input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL <input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL <input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	PUBLIC ACQUISITION	ACCESSIBLE	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT <input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Rocky Mount Mills - Mr. Thomas Battle, President

STREET & NUMBER

Post Office 1240

1151 Falls Road

CITY, TOWN

Rocky Mount,

VICINITY OF

STATE
North Carolina 27801

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Nash County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Nashville

STATE
North Carolina

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

Historic American Engineering Record (HAER), Incorporated Survey

DATE

1975

FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

Division of Archives and History

CITY, TOWN

Raleigh

STATE
North Carolina 27611

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Rocky Mount Mills was first constructed in 1818, burned by Union troops in 1863, rebuilt in 1865, burned again in 1869, and rebuilt in 1870 on 20.26 acres straddling Falls Road south of the Tar River. The main mill buildings are two-story brick structures with three-story brick towers and a three-story brick bell tower. Remnants of the original building remain. Other significant features of the mill complex include a two and one-half story brick boiler room and a two-story Greek Revival frame building erected in 1835 for Colonel Benjamin D. Battle as a residence and now used as a company office.

The present complex (see sketch map) comprises buildings from antebellum, postwar, and twentieth century development. Originally the mill complex included 136 housing units, which were part of a 129.19 acre site. Today less than 50 of the frame structures are left scattered along River Road and Falls Road. Among them is a one and one-half story structure (a) east of Falls Road near the southern edge of the fenced compound which comprises most of Rocky Mount Mills' present mill site. This building has been used as the company's personnel office since 1946. Formerly a superintendent's residence, the building is marked by a porch on three sides and a five window dormer on the west, overlooking Falls Road.

North of the personnel office and facing Falls Road is the company office (b) a handsome two-story Greek Revival house built in 1835 for Battle. This white rectangular frame building, four bays long by five bays wide, has a gabled tin roof, nine-over-nine windows, four outside end chimneys with corbeled caps, and a four pillared front portico with railed balcony above. The carefully finished interior survives as well. This too was once a superintendent's home.

Directly to the east, or behind the office, is a one-story shipping office (c) on a site where cotton warehouses once stood, according to Sanborn maps. Set on brick piers, the rectangular wood structure has a gabled tin roof and brick parapets. A smaller board and batten storage shed with brick foundation, tin roof, and open east end stands beside the shipping office on the south, immediately to the rear of the personnel office across a paved drive.

North and somewhat east of the company office is the boiler house (d) once used as the receiving department and still marked by a sign designating it as such. A rectangular building extending on an east-west axis, it has parapets at either end of its medium gable-tin roof. Like the rest of the building, the parapets are brick. The windows on the south have been bricked in. Two semi-elliptically arched entrances appear on the south side and one on the west. The boiler house, now used for other purposes, including administrative offices, was built in the early 1890s.

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The boiler house is connected to the main mill buildings by a two-story brick structure with wood purlins exposed under its sloping tin roof. At the end nearest the mill, this former engine room and machine shop has a three-story bell tower (e) rising from its northwest corner. The bell tower, also of brick, has round arches in its third story where the bell is exposed to view from all four sides. Behind the bell tower are several recent brick additions.

Although vestiges of the original antebellum mill building can be seen on the river side in the foundations as well as the mill race, dam, and shaft opening, the main mill buildings which now occupy the site were built after the fire of 1869.

Immediately north of the bell tower is Mill Number 3 (f) built in 1892. It is contiguous with Mill Number 1 (g) built in 1870 and enlarged in 1871, on the east, and with Mill Number 2 (h) built in 1889, on the west. Mill Number 1 is a rectangular structure on a north-south axis; the other two mill buildings run parallel to the river, that is east-west. At approximately equidistant intervals east and west of the bell tower, perhaps 250 feet apart, rise 50 foot high towers with hip roofs, between which vestiges of the 18th century structure may be seen,

The main mill buildings are of the same brown, common bond brick construction. They have wooden eaves three boards wide, with exposed, curved wooden purlins, and slightly gabled composition roofs. All windows are bricked in on the mill buildings. All three main mill buildings are two stories high and of typical mill construction, and all are rectangular.

Mill Number 1, the smallest of the three nineteenth century mill buildings, has been incorporated into a much larger, newer structure extending approximately 200 feet east of the eastern tower where Mill Number 1 intersects with Mill Number 3. This 1960s-vintage brick finishing building rises about four feet higher than Mill Number 3, extending south to the southern edge of the shipping, building, then east, then north, approaching the mill run in an irregular, steplike progression.

The machine shop and wheel house, including governors and water wheels dating back to 1924, are found on the river side (north) of Mill Number 3 near where it joins Number 2. This equipment is still used to furnish Rocky Mount Mills with some of its electricity.

Beyond the western tower which rises midway on the south side of Mill Number 2 is another addition extending to the river on the north and near Falls Road on the west. Added prior to World War II, this picker room is a two story brick structure with parapet at the east and west ends. As with other recent additions, it is distinguished by its red brick, as opposed to the brown brick employed in earlier structures.

To the south of Mill Number 2, and west of the western tower, a 1 1/2 story air conditioning building stands on a site once occupied by a company office. This

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structure has wide eaves and a steeply gabled tin roof. Cooling towers rise west and east of the rectangular structure.

South of the air conditioning structure, and west of the present office and the boiler house, is a one story polyester building (i) set where a waste house once stood. The one story building was improved and extended in the early 1970s.

Across Falls Road from the mill compound (to the west) are brick warehouses (j) with tin roofs that slope to the south. The one story warehouses are separated by five parapets and extend approximately 250 feet in a diagonal moving away from Falls Road. Loading platforms are located on the east, or Falls Road side, of the warehouses.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1818, 1870, 1890, 1895, etc. BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Rocky Mount Mills stands on approximately twenty acres at the falls of the Tar River. Originally established in 1818, it was the second cotton mill constructed in North Carolina and is the oldest in continuous operation in the state. Three present mill buildings, constructed in 1870, 1890, and 1895, are three story brick structures with three story towers and a two story bell tower. In the foundations of these buildings, as well as in the mill race, dam, and shaft opening, can be seen vestiges of earlier buildings. The Benjamin D. Battle House, a ca. 1835 Greek Revival building, is used as the company office. Associated with the Battle family, several of whom were prominent in the state's history, the mill operated with slave labor until 1852. Because of its contribution to the Confederate war effort, the mill was the target of a Union attack in 1863 and was in fact burned to the ground. It was rebuilt during the emergence of the "New South" and faced many of the Reconstruction woes common to southern businesses during that period. Since Reconstruction it has grown as one of North Carolina's major manufacturers, bridging the gap in a state which has evolved from a one-crop agricultural economy to one of rapidly expanding industrialization.

Criteria Assessment:

- A. Representative of North Carolina's growth from an agricultural economy to a state of increasing industrialization; of the role of New England textile operators in the establishment of southern mills; the antebellum roots of postwar industrial development; and of the transition from slave labor to the growth of a working class.
- B. Associated with the Battle family, several of whom were important and prominent in state's history. These include State Supreme Court Justice William H. Battle; William S. Battle, a member of the Constitutional Convention of 1861 which voted for secession; and James S. Battle, who was instrumental in the landmark case of State vs. Will which determined that a slave had a right to defend himself against attack.
- C. Representative of mill architecture in the state in the latter part of the nineteenth century.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Battle, Herbert Bemerton and Yelverton, Lois. The Battle Book: A Genealogy of the Battle Family In America.
Montgomery: Paragon Press, 1930.

Edgecombe County Records, Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina
(Subgroups: Wills, Estates, Deeds, Census).

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 20.26 acres

UTM REFERENCES

NE A	1,8	24,74,0,0	3,98,29,7,0	SW B	1,8	24,70,5,0	3,98,27,6,0
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
SE C	1,8	24,74,0,0	3,98,27,6,0	NW D	1,8	24,70,5,0	3,98,29,7,0

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Beginning at a point on the north side of River Drive, proceed 255.63 feet northeast to the east side of Falls Road, turning southeast for 271.28 feet before turning northeast, parallel to East Elm Street, for 144.6 feet. Then turn southeast for 68.7 feet toward East Elm Street before again proceeding northeast, parallel to East Elm Street, for 285.59 feet. Then proceed 135.54 feet northwest, turning more toward due north and proceeding toward the Tar River to its south bank for 476.11 feet. The mill property then follows the south bank of the Tar River west

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Description: Barry Jacobs, Consultant Significance : Joe Mobley, Researcher

ORGANIZATION	Department of Cultural Resources Division of Archives and History	DATE	November 1, 1979
STREET & NUMBER	109 E. Jones Street	TELEPHONE	733-6545
CITY OR TOWN	Raleigh, North Carolina	STATE	NC 27611

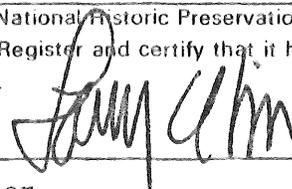
12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL ___ STATE X LOCAL ___

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE



TITLE State Historic Preservation Officer

DATE November 1, 1979

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

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In 1816 Joel Battle, who lived at the plantation Shell Bank on the Tar River, a few miles below what is now Rocky Mount, bought land around the Great Falls on Tar River at the Edgecombe and Nash County border. Here, along with his brother-in-law Peter Evans he began efforts to build a cotton mill which could utilize the available water power provided by the falls. To successfully plan and run their mill, they joined with Henry Donaldson, who had come from Rhode Island to North Carolina in hopes of establishing a mill and had experience in textile manufacturing.¹

Sometime in 1816 or 1817 Battle, Evans, and Donaldson completed the construction of a stone building in which their first cotton mill was housed. Around this time the community of Rocky Mount was established and named for the rocky mounds and ledges near the falls. Manufacturing began in 1818 and in the following year the building was enlarged. At that time the building was 76 feet long and 30 feet wide and had four floors. Donaldson purchased the machinery in Rhode Island and taught slaves how to operate it.²

The three partners began their operation at a choice time, for the demand for cotton products was great. The invention of the cotton gin in 1793 and the development of upland cotton made the staple more easily grown and cheaply produced. As a result cotton fabric became the "poor man's cloth" and the market for it grew at a remarkable rate in the antebellum period. Initially the Great Falls Mill, as it was called, served local areas. Planters primarily brought their cotton to the mill to be spun into yarn and then woven into cloth at home. But some coarse cloth, intended for slave clothing, was manufactured. A gristmill which ground corn for planters and farmers was also a part of the enterprise.³

The Great Falls Mill was probably the second cotton mill established in North Carolina. The first was the Schenck Warlick Mill established in Lincoln County in 1815.⁴ It is gone. In 1820 Rocky Mount's plant processed 18,000 bales of cotton, and produced \$7,500 worth of yarn. It employed 5 men, 3 women, and 12 children and paid them a total of \$2,300 annually. Machinery consisted of 288 spindles "with the necessary cards, roper drawing, etc."⁵

Apparently in 1821 a disagreement arose between Battle, Evans, and Donaldson bought out Evans's interest in the mill in that year, and four years later he sold his part of the mill property at Great Falls to Joel Battle for \$15,000.⁶

Joel Battle continued to operate the mill with slave labor. During the 1820s the mill sold most of its yarn locally, and throughout the decade the factory produced a daily allotment of twelve to fifteen pounds of yarn in five pound skeins for the local market.⁷ In the late 1820s, however, the plant managed to expand its markets beyond the region and the state. In 1828 the Tarboro Free Press noted the expansion and reported that the Battle enterprise had recently shipped twenty bales of yarn to New York.⁸ Other markets at that time included Philadelphia and Boston. As the demand for cotton products remained large and the cotton economy flourished, the Battle Mill thrived and prospered.

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In fact, the success of the mill so inspired magazine editor Hezekiah Niles in 1828 that he hailed the factory's accomplishments and urged the rest of the South to "join in the scuffle" with the north in the domestic cotton market.⁹

Joel Battle died in 1829, and his estate was divided among his children. The mill became the property of "Battle and Bros." headed by the oldest son, William H. Battle, who later became a justice of North Carolina Supreme Court.¹⁰

By 1833 the plant enjoyed a further surge in growth and the Battles boasted that "after struggling for fifteen years against the most adverse circumstances, the cotton factory at the Falls of the Tar River is in a state of successful operation" and asked the state's citizens to support what the owners considered "the oldest Cotton Factory in North Carolina." The increasing success was due partly to the hiring in 1830 of a trained cotton mill superintendent from Massachusetts, John Parker, whom the Battles also made a partner. The new superintendent brought new machinery with him and trained the slaves to operate it. In 1833 the Battles bought out his interest in the mill.

Two years later one of the Joel Battle heirs, Benjamin D. Battle, built a house near the mill. The house survived the Civil War and serves as the general office of the company.

In 1838 the North Carolina Legislature granted a charter to the mill company and the owners attempted to sell stock and form a corporation. The Battles sold the family turpentine holdings on the coast for funds to invest in the plant and convinced several planters to help them recapitalize the mill for \$500,000. But in 1839 the price of cotton went up two cents per pound, and the planters elected to put their funds in cotton lands and slaves instead of the mill.¹¹

In a time when the South was economically tied to a one-crop agricultural existence, the mill at Rocky Mount represented one of the few efforts made by North Carolina citizens and other antebellum southerners to free the state and section from economic dependence upon the northern states and Europe for manufactured goods. In 1841 the Raleigh Register called for the need for "domestic manufacture" and cited the Battle factory as an example of possible future diversification and economic independence:

Battle and Brothers, the enterprising proprietors of the Cotton Factory at Tar River, have sent us a very handsome specimen of Cotton Twine manufactured at their establishment. The machinery, also, used in its preparation, was made by a North Carolinian; which imparts additional value to the article in our estimation. We were also shown a very neat specimen of Sewing Thread made at the same place. Why should our Merchants and Dealers obtain from distant markets those articles which experience has demonstrated we can manufacture as well and as cheaply at home? It is time that this unpatriotic habit should be discontinued, and our own Manufactures be encouraged.¹²

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In 1843 three brothers, William H., Benjamin D., and C. C. Battle, purchased the mill shares belonging to the other heirs of Joel Battle. These three continued to run the operation until 1847 when they sold it to their cousin James S. Battle and his son William S. Battle.¹³

James S. Battle and his son were two of the wealthiest planters in North Carolina. In Edgecombe County in the last decade of the antebellum period James Battle owned \$120,000 worth of real estate and 60 slaves; and William had land worth \$24,000 and 90 slaves.¹⁴ James Battle is particularly remembered in North Carolina history for his association with the State Supreme Court case of State vs. Will which involved the killing of an overseer on the Battle plantation by a slave named Will. Believing the slave justified in committing the homicide, Battle employed attorneys to defend him, and, having lost the case in local court, appealed to the North Carolina Supreme Court. There in 1834 Justice William Gaston acquitted Will of murder but found him guilty of "felonius slaying and killing" of the overseer. Within the case, however, Gaston rendered the then landmark and liberal decision that a slave had the right to defend himself against the unlawful attempt of a master to kill him.¹⁵

Throughout most of the antebellum period slaves and a few free blacks provided the labor for running the mills at Rocky Mount. In 1851, however, whites replaced the black workers. The testimony of an antebellum manager of the mills concerning the labor transition has survived. He recalled:

I took charge of the Rocky Mount mill in 1849. We worked at that time only negroes--nearly all of them slaves. There were two or three free negroes. I introduced white labor in 1851. The whites seemed to think it humiliating to work in a cotton mill and I had much difficulty in getting them to go in. The mill was still making coarse yarns, 4's to 12's, put up in five pound bundles for the country trade--this was woven by country women on hand looms. I found the negroes to do pretty well on these coarse products, but the owners of the slaves began to object to their working in the mill and I substituted whites as soon as I could.¹⁶

James S. Battle died in 1854, and his son William S. Battle became the owner of the mill property three years later. He served as a member of the North Carolina Constitutional Convention of 1861 which voted for the secession of North Carolina from the Union.¹⁷ He also continued to run his father's large plantation and in 1860 he constructed for his residence the magnificent villa in Tarboro. (The house is on the National Register of Historic Places). On the eve of the Civil War the Battle Mills were producing yarn valued at \$55,200 annually, using 1716 spindles and 28 men and 22 women workers. The operation also included a cotton gin, a gristmill, and a sawmill.¹⁸

During the Civil War the Great Falls mill played an important role in providing the state and the Confederacy with war supplies of cotton products. As the Union blockadetightened and the flow of outside supplies diminished, its products became

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increasingly more important.

Because of the plant's vital role as a Confederate wartime industry, the commander of the Union forces which held New Bern in July, 1863, dispatched a raiding party of cavalry to move on Rocky Mount and destroy the mill. The raiders burned the cotton mill, along with the gin, the grist and saw mills, and store houses. But the superintendent, named Crowder and himself a northerner, persuaded the troops not to burn the Battle house.

Following the war in 1865, William S. Battle constructed a new brick mill on the site of the burned one. The new facility contained 28 looms, 1600 spindles, and other machinery. When operating at full capacity it could process about 1,200 yards of shirting and 500 pounds of cotton yarn. About 50 workers were employed there.

In 1869 the cotton factory once again burned. According to local tradition a disgruntled employee was responsible for setting it afire. Battle rebuilt the plant again, and in 1871 increased the number of spindles to 3,000 and the looms to 100. During the lean years of Reconstruction, however, the mill failed to gain a strong financial footing. Battle was forced to use much of the plant's capital in order to meet his debts resulting, in part, from his large loss of slaves as a result of the war.¹⁹

He attempted to strengthen the mill operation by incorporation and selling stock to investors. In 1874 the State Legislature granted the firm a charter and Battle and his two sons were incorporators. The legislature reenacted the company's charter in 1876 and two years later William S. Battle was elected president of the corporation. He owned all the capital stock except the qualifying shares given to his two sons. The mills, however, did not revive and Battle went bankrupt.

Investors failed to furnish the mill with the necessary new capital and in 1883 the financially embarrassed Battle assigned his stock in the company to his trustees and thereby relinquished control of the mill. The property left the hands of the Battle family for the first time in sixty years.²⁰

Like many areas in the agricultural South, however, North Carolina was to experience a new industrial growth in the last two decades of the nineteenth century. This regional metamorphosis has been called the industrial birth of the "New South" and the growth of the Rocky Mount cotton mill in the period reflected the effects of the new movement.²¹

In 1885 the trustees of the company met and reorganized the company under the name Rocky Mount Mills. Although the Battle family was no longer the controlling interest in the enterprise, Thomas H. Battle, a lawyer and great grandson of Joel Battle, worked out an operating plan that was acceptable to the company's creditors. According to the plan these creditors were given stock in the company in settlement of their claims. Thomas H. Battle was elected secretary of the corporation.

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A year later the company hired James H. Ruffin, an experienced mill man from Lowell, Massachusetts, as superintendent, and his efforts were invaluable in restoring productivity to the factory. The largest stockholder at this time was Paul C. Cameron, a leading antebellum planter and postwar industrialist, whose son Benehan Cameron, was later president of Rocky Mount Mills in 1891. The wealthy Cameron and other stockholders used their influence to obtain loans to bolster the mill's capital.²²

By 1887 the mill was in full operation, running twelve hours a day, and it began implementing a six percent depreciation reserve to cover wear and tear on machinery. In the following year the number of spindles was increased from 3,500 to 6,000 and there were 200 looms. Thomas H. Battle was elected company president. In 1889 a second mill building was added, the number of spindles grew to 10,000, the ginning of cotton and grinding of corn were discontinued, and automatic sprinklers and electric lights were installed. A school was also started by the company for the children of employees, and a spur line was completed connecting the mill with the Wilmington and Weldon Railroad, thereby greatly facilitating shipping for the firm.

In 1892 the company bought additional equipment and increased the number of spindles to 25,000 and added 7,000 twister spindles but abandoned its looms in order to concentrate upon spinning yarn. In April of that year the corporation paid its first dividend since its reorganization. The mill owners could also boast of a new auxiliary steam plant to supplement the factory's water power. In 1893 the growing mill village where employees were housed was incorporated as the town of Rocky Mount Mills. A third mill building was added the following year.²³

These employees suffered a number of hardships as cotton factory workers including long hours and small wages. Many of them were victims of malaria which was common in the low country around the mill. James Ruffin frequently referred to the loss of production due to malaria among the workers and observed that they often lacked "snap and vigor. Sanitary conditions in the village also were poor and led to bad health. In 1896, however, health conditions improved when running water was installed in the village and the mill, and a company doctor was hired. Automatic humidifiers installed three years later helped somewhat in checking the floating lint which the workers breathed into their lungs.

In 1898 James Ruffin retired from Rocky Mount Mills and Thomas Battle was elected treasurer. R. H. Ricks became president.

After the turn of the century there was a significant improvement in conditions for the mill workers. In 1902 the management abolished the company store and credit system which kept many of the mill hands in debt to the company. "When the credit system comes up," declared Thomas H. Battle, "the store is a source of endless demoralization and the Mills will be better off even though the store has made a good profit." In 1902 the mill reduced its work week from 72 to 66 hours. (It was reduced further to 60 hours in 1912.) In 1911 all tenement houses were rescreened and indoor plumbing installed and two years

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later they were equipped with electric lights and gas.²⁴

World War I made greater demands on the mill for cotton products for use by the armed forces. In 1927 the town of Rocky Mount Mills and the City of Rocky Mount merged.² Conditions improved even more for workers at the plant in the 1920s and 1930s. Work week hours were cut further to 55 hours in 1929 and 48 hours in 1933. The Great Depression brought a degree of hardship to both capital and labor; nevertheless, the owners of Rocky Mount Mills supported the Federal Wage and Hour Act in 1935. Four years later an increase in the minimum wage for the cotton textile industry was proposed by the Federal government, and Hyman L. Battle, treasurer and manager of Rocky Mount Mills, appeared before a hearing held by the Wage and Hour Administration and argued in favor of the proposed 32 1/2¢ per hour minimum wage. At that time he proclaimed that he "wanted to correct the idea that all Southern textile men are against the recommended rate." Employee benefits including health insurance, a mutual welfare association, and canteen fund were created in the 1930s-1940s.

Industrial production increased drastically during World War II, and the Rocky Mount Mills devoted ninety-five percent of its output to supplying yarn to be used in the production of war supplies including everything from caps to pistol belts. The Battle family remained active in the running of the plant throughout the war, and Kemp D. Battle served as vice president of the company.²⁶

Since the conclusion of World War II the Rocky Mount Mills have grown and expanded their facilities and now produce a variety of textile products. But still standing amid the new buildings are the three structures of 1870, 1889, and 1894. From the riverside of the mill, the stone foundations of an antebellum mill are also visible as well as the early mill race, dam, and shaft opening. The 1835 house of Benjamin D. Battle continues to house the company's main office.

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FOOTNOTES

1. Diffee W. Standard and Richard W. Griffin, "The Cotton Textile Industry in Antebellum North Carolina," North Carolina Historic Review, XXXIV (January, 1967), 24.
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3. Rocky Mount Mills, p.12.
4. Hugh Talmage Lefler and Albert Ray Newsome, North Carolina: The History of a Southern State (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1973), p. 318.
5. Fourth Census of the United States, 1820: Edgecombe County, Manufacturing Schedule.
6. Rocky Mount Mills, p. 14.
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10. Edgecombe County Estate Records, Joel Battle, 1829, Archives, N. C. Division of Archives and History.
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12. Raleigh Register as quoted in Rocky Mount Mills, p. 17.
13. Tarboro Free Press, November 16, 1844; Edgecombe County Deed Books 24:544; 25: 48, 49, 50; 26:48, Archives (microfilm) N. C. Division of Archives and History, Raleigh.
14. Seventh Census of the United States, 1850: Edgecombe County, Population Schedule, 10, 21; Slave schedule, pp. 221-223, 225-227.
15. State vs. Negro Will, Slave of James S. Battle, 121 N. C. (1834).
16. Holland Thompson, From the Cotton Field to the Cotton Mill (New York: McMillan Company, 1905), p. 251.
17. Edgecombe County Wills, James S. Battle, 1854, Archives, N. C. Division of Archives and History, Raleigh.

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19. Herbert Bemerton Battle and Lois Yelverton, The Battle Book: A Genealogy of the Battle Family in America (Montgomery Paragon Press, 1930), pp. 180-181.
20. Private Laws of North Carolina, 1874, c. 115; Rocky Mount Mills, pp. 22-23.
21. Lefler, North Carolina, p. 506.
22. Rocky Mount Mills, pp. 25-26.
23. Ibid., pp. 27-29, 33; Private Laws of North Carolina, 1893, c. 37.
24. Rocky Mount Mills, pp. 29-35.
25. Private Laws of North Carolina, 1927, c. 222.
26. Rocky Mount Mills, pp. 36-37, 40-41.

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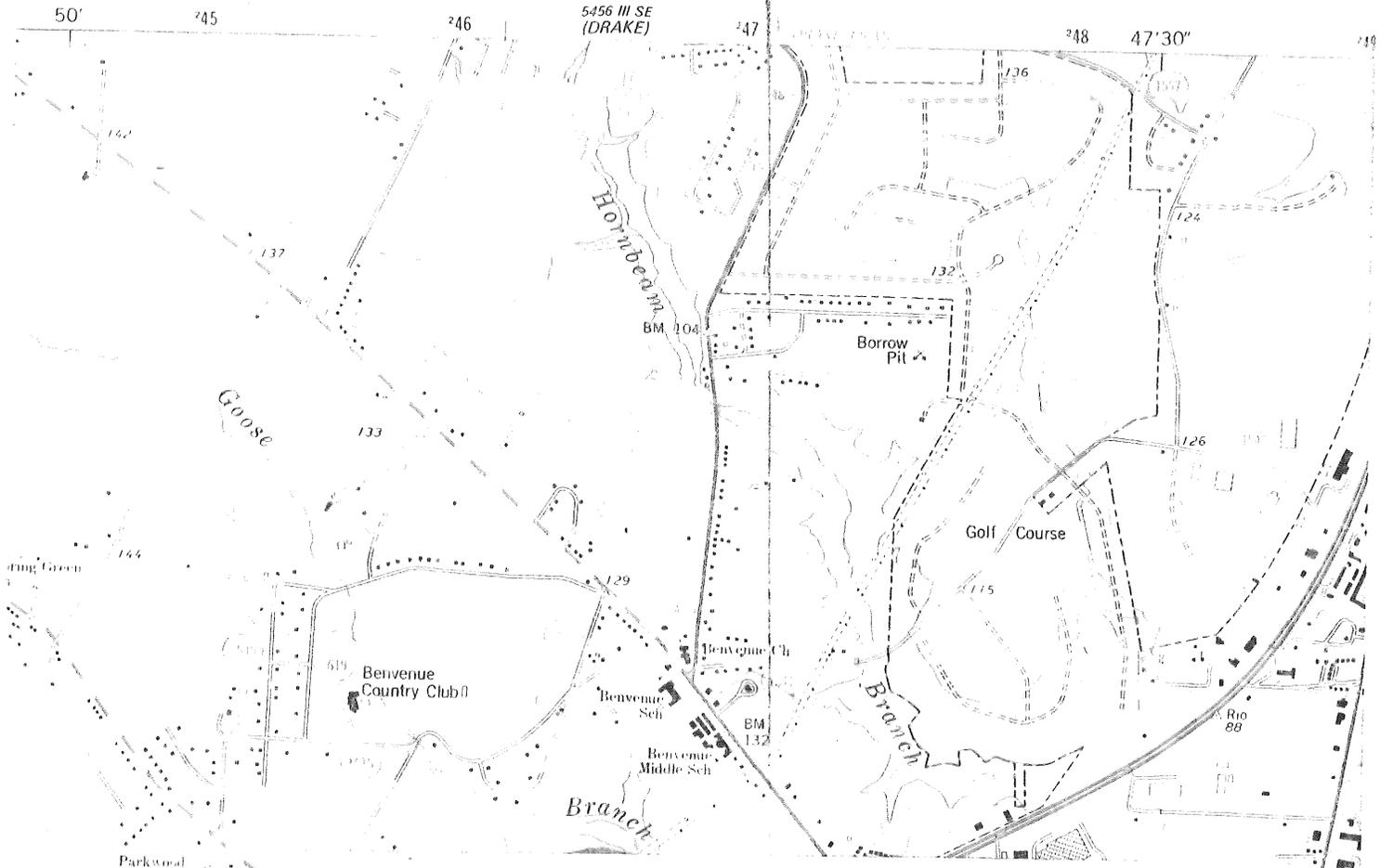
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across Falls, Road, curving south past Falls Road back toward River Drive to a point southwest of the warehouses, proceeding 591.11 feet from an iron stake by the east bank of the Tar River to another iron stake on the north side of River Drive to the southeast.



Rocky Mount Mills
Nash County

Along NC 43-48 (Falls Road), south of the
Tar River, north and east of River Road,
in northwest Rocky Mount.

Approximately 20.26 acres

NE 18/247400/3982970 SW 18/247050/3982760
SE 18/247400/3982760 NW 18/247050/3982970

