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# The Bleachery Way: a Study of the Rock Hill Printing and Finishing Company, 1960-2017

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December, 2017

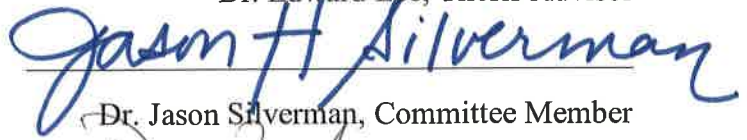
To the Dean of the Graduate School:

We are submitting a thesis written by Alexander Keith Windham entitled *The Bleachery Way: A Study of The Rock Hill Printing and Finishing Company 1960-2017*.

We recommend acceptance in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of the Arts in History.



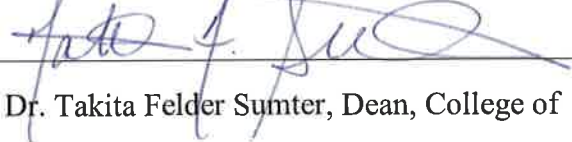
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THE BLEACHERY WAY:  
A STUDY OF THE ROCK HILL PRINTING AND FINISHING COMPANY

1960-2017

A Thesis

Presented to the Faculty

Of the

College of Arts and Sciences

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the

Requirements for the Degree

Of

Master of Arts

In History

Winthrop University

December, 2017

By

Alexander Keith Windham

### Abstract:

The Rock Hill Printing and Finishing Company has been a staple in the development of the city of Rock Hill, South Carolina. The textile factory has not been extensively written on apart from newspaper articles and therefore the purpose of this thesis is to identify just how impactful the factory was on the development and people of Rock Hill. From 1929 to 1998 the plant was in full operation and employed countless citizens of the city. The Rock Hill Printing and Finishing Company has been neglected despite its lasting history in the city. The concepts of labor relations regarding race, paternalism, community involvement, and other aspects helped to shape the development of not only the city but also the company. Through the use of interviews with workers and other primary sources the level of impact will be gauged. The use of secondary sources will be important as it will compare Rock Hill to other locations in both the north and the south and delineate if there are similarities and differences in experience. Also the thesis will look to how the differing decades from 1960 to 1998 impacted the workers and their relationships with the community and their work at the factory. The perspective of these factory workers has not been adequately addressed, leaving a gap in our understanding of this critical component in the history and development of Rock Hill, its citizens, and the Rock Hill Printing and Finishing Company as a textile entity.

### Acknowledgements

The effort put into this thesis would not have been possible without the assistance of the many people involved. Primarily, special thanks go to everyone interviewed for this work: Donald Parrish, Donald Hardin, Samuel Williams, Thomas “Pookie” Williams, Leoda Starnes, Bob and Jerri Allen, Stephen Turner, Bob Thompson, Gary Williams, Emile Russett, Thomas Roach III, Willie George Hall, Bill Easley, James Covington, Michael Gordon, Vivian Zeiders, Earl Honeycutt, and Betty Jo Rhea. Secondly, thank you to the Faculty and Staff of Winthrop University who assisted in the development of the work: Dr. Edward Lee, Dr. Jason Silverman, and Dr. Gregory Crider. A very special thanks to both Gina Price White of the Louise Pettus Archives and Special Collections of Winthrop University due to her helping establish that no one had ever written on the Bleachery in this degree, and Dr. John Holder who greatly assisted me by posting about my thesis on Facebook helping me to get into contact with several of my interviewees. Finally, I would like to acknowledge my family for their support and assistance during the months of writing and research: Keith Windham, Anne Price, and Tammy Windham.

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## Introduction to *The Bleachery Way*

The Rock Hill Printing and Finishing Company was a longstanding and far-reaching business for the community of Rock Hill, South Carolina. It hired thousands over its history and as a result the generations currently residing in the city of Rock Hill, have a lasting memory, either through working there themselves or having relatives who worked there. This introduction will assist in understanding the history of the plant from its inception until the beginning of the 1960s where the true analysis of the plant begins.

Beginning in 1928, Rock Hill Printing and Finishing Company has a rich history as a means to revitalize the economy of Rock Hill. The town of Rock Hill was relatively small and had almost reached its full potential as an urban area. The initial importance of the company to the development of Rock Hill was the proposed water expansion project.

“The Bleachery,” as it is called by locals, was a means to expand and assist in building the town of Rock Hill into a larger urban area. The expansion of the town’s water supply, led to the potential to also expand the other commercial and residential portions of the area, effectively laying the foundations for the city of Rock Hill that exists today. City leaders met with M. Lowenstein & Sons Company representative, Archie Joslin. Joslin, who was traveling south to look for a potential location for Lowenstein to expand its textile holdings, was over the area in a personal aircraft when he saw the Catawba River, and the surrounding area of Rock Hill. Water was the most important element in building a textile finishing plant.

According to Archie's nephew, Michael Joslin Gordon, his uncle told the pilot to land the plane so that he could talk to the local leaders.<sup>1</sup> The subsequent meeting resulted in the decision for Rock Hill's leadership to secure public for expanding the water systems of the town. An agreement was struck that the M. Lowenstein & Sons Company would build their new finishing plant in Rock Hill, if the town got the necessary water systems to handle the massive amounts of water used by the plant in daily operations. The leaders of Rock Hill had to convince the residents they should pay taxes on a bond referendum, and in the process bring in a new business that would eventually employ many people.<sup>2</sup> Due to this decision, Rock Hill was convinced and the Lowenstein Company met the leaders. As a result of this agreement, by December of 1929, the Rock Hill Printing and Finishing Company was born.

The Great Depression rocked the United States in the same year, but the Bleachery was able to employ many citizens of Rock Hill during the worst economic debacle in United States history. While the Depression loomed over the nation, the Bleachery continued to flourish. However, as with many businesses in the United States at the time, it faced its own issues. With the rise of unionization in American textile manufacturing, a strike occurred, aptly dubbed, the textile strike of 1934. In this strike an important event occurred, the demise of powerful paternalistic practices across the textile manufacturing regions in the United States. As unions gained power and essentially

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Gordon, interviewed by author, Rock Hill, May 18, 2017.

<sup>2</sup> "Voters approve bond issue for water system." Section 368. Winthrop College Manuscripts, Scrapbook. Rock Hill Printing and Finishing Company Records. Box F16 1-8. 1928. Louise Pettus Archives and Special Collections. July 29, 2017.



replaced the benevolence of textile manufacturers, many changes occurred across the nation. The Bleachery was different from many other textile plants across the nation, because it was built after the 1800s. Textile manufacturers in the 1800s established paternalistic controls. However, the Bleachery was a unionized plant from its inception. Therefore, 1934 textile strike only made the union more prevalent in the Bleachery. Even though the Lowenstein family had not been major paternalists compared to men like those who controlled Cannon Mills and Amoskeag Mills they did seek to encourage their workers' production.

The approach that was very effective at the Bleachery in reaching the workers stemmed from the family aspects that are a common trend in most textile plants across the United States, the influence of family. The extended family-like atmosphere of textile mills was very important to the operation and success of the mills. The year 1932 introduced the Bleachery Christmas party, which was a special treat for youngsters whose parents worked or were associated with the Bleachery.<sup>3</sup> Archie Joslin, who was made the General Manager of the plant in its early years, sought to connect with his workers and to bring the Bleachery. This paternalism sought to bring the families together and bond the Lowenstein & Sons Company with Rock Hill.

The tradition of the Bleachery Christmas was created as an outreach program. The Great Depression coupled with the low pay of textile workers often caused Christmas to be bleak at best for the children of the workers. Joslin gave children of his

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<sup>3</sup> RHPF Christmas Party on 22<sup>nd</sup>. Accession 567. William H. Grier Scrapbook #2. Dec. 20, 1937. Louise Pettus Archives and Special Collections. July 27, 2017.

workers the chance to have a Christmas by bringing in supervisors dressed as Santa Claus, who gave each child a shopping bag filled with toys. Betty Jo Rhea, former mayor of Rock Hill and longtime resident, fondly remembers the Bleachery Christmases. Her father worked as a local physician and the Bleachery would send workers who got hurt on the job to her father's office. As a result of his involvement, even though he did not actually work in the plant full time as an employee, Betty and her siblings were given tickets to attend the Christmas parties. She described the parties as always having a massive Christmas tree and rows of gifts to be distributed by both the child's gender and age.<sup>4</sup> The paternalism of Lowenstein was present by having the upper management of the plant attend the parties. Also in the use of supervisors as Santa Clauses who personally handed out the presents to the children. Over time the numbers of children continued to grow.

The character of the Bleachery and also Rock Hill was evidenced in 1935's Christmas party. According to the local newspaper, *The Evening Herald*, after the Christmas Party a policeman who was present at the event and had been able to take home presents in his own bag, noticed a young girl who was standing outside the gates of the Bleachery. The little girl did not have parents who worked at the Bleachery and had watched the entire party as it was going on, she saw other children of Rock Hill getting new presents and toys for Christmas. The officer assumed she probably would have gotten a miniscule Christmas because of the difficult times of the Great Depression, and

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<sup>4</sup> Betty Jo Rhea, interviewed by author, Rock Hill, July 17, 2017.

so the policeman shared his gifts with her and gave her a Christmas.<sup>5</sup> Archie Joslin, who organized the events and created them surely would have been elated, but no records exist that say if he responded to the article.

Based on his short essay that was published in *Textile Leaders of the South*, in 1963, told about his views of the Bleachery Christmas parties and why he created it. His pride and elation from this kindness extended to others can be inferred. Joslin's own words concerning the foundation of what he called "The out of doors Christmas Tree Party," his purpose was to establish a stronger relationship with employees through their children. "The entire program helps us to understand each other away from our daily work, eliminating the identity of the position of office we have, being really our own and getting together in remembering Christ's birthday."<sup>6</sup>

The 1930s were a time of change because Archie Joslin turned over leadership of the plant to Walter T. Jenkins. Joslin went on in 1937 to become president of the Lowenstein & Sons Company. Jenkins sought to continue the traditions and make the plant more successful throughout his time as General Manager. During the managerial campaign of Jenkins, according to *The Charlotte Observer*, in November 1938 on the tenth year of business, the plant bought homes that ran parallel to the plant and had them demolished so that the plant could expand. At this time, the plant employed 1,600 people

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<sup>5</sup> RHPF Christmas Party. *Evening Herald*. Accession 567. William H. Grier, Sr., Papers. Rock Hill Printing and Finishing Company Memorabilia Scrapbook #2. Dec. 23, 1937. Louise Pettus Archives and Special Collections. July 27, 2017.

<sup>6</sup> Marjorie W. Young, ed., *Textile Leaders of the South (Columbia, South Carolina: R.L. Bryan Company, 1963), 538-539.*

and with the new addition it would add another 200 jobs.<sup>7</sup> The *Evening Herald* of Rock Hill, reported that the Bleachery would be buying and closing three city blocks placing the plants new exterior location across the street from Laurelwood Cemetery on White Street.<sup>8</sup>

Jenkins communicated primarily through memoranda with the employees and it is through this medium that he sought to express the need for supporting the troops during World War II. Following December 7, 1941, the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii, Jenkins passed on a memorandum to the workers urging all employees to cut down on waste. This was already a company policy to limit wasting materials, but in response to President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's address to the nation, Jenkins reasserted the policy to bring about the individual's part to support the American cause by donating and conserving needed products for the war effort. Jenkins said that "It is not only just a company policy but now it is imperative by the country."<sup>9</sup>

Transitioning in 1942, Jenkins reasserted the need to cut back on waste in memorandum to the mechanics, electricians, and the foremen to conserve and not waste the needed supplies. He went on to urge the foremen to repost the memorandum to all

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<sup>7</sup> Rock Hill Bleachery Will Enlarge its Plant Buys Property for Expansion. *Charlotte Observer*. Accession 567. William H. Grier, Sr., Papers. Rock Hill Printing and Finishing Company Memorabilia Scrapbook #2. Nov. 1938. Louise Pettus Archives and Special Collections. July 27, 2017.

<sup>8</sup> Bleachery Buys Three Blocks to Make an Addition. *Evening Herald*. Accession 567. William H. Grier, Sr., Papers. Rock Hill Printing and Finishing Company Memorabilia Scrapbook #2. Nov. 29, 1938. Louise Pettus Archives and Special Collections. July 27, 2017.

<sup>9</sup> Walter T. Jenkins, Memo to all employees "conservation of all materials" William H. Grier, Sr., Papers. Rock Hill Printing and Finishing Company Memorabilia Scrapbook #4 December 10, 1941. Louise Pettus Archives and Special Collections. July 27, 2017.

their message boards within their own departments.<sup>10</sup> Later in 1942, Jenkins wrote another memorandum to the employees telling them that 50 percent of the Bleachery's work was government contracts for World War II related fabric supplies. The Bleachery designed and printed camouflage material for uniforms, tent covers, and other equipment, and also made raincoats for the soldiers. Jenkins reminded the workers were doing an excellent job supporting the war effort.

He did, however, have goals as mentioned in the memorandum, he hoped to increase government contracts to 100 percent to further help in the war effort.<sup>11</sup> As the War progressed, Jenkins led the Bleachery with a patriotic zeal, and as a leader in his position, he urged the workers to give as much as they could to support the war effort. This included the buying of war bonds and stamps in order to give funds to the military.<sup>12</sup> Jenkins republished a memorandum concerning the Man War Power Commission in the year 1943. He informed the workers that their hard work would help to lead to an overall victory for the Allies, but that to make this happen they had to remain steadfast in their efforts. He made sure that his workers knew that Bleachery-produced goods were sent overseas to troops in China, Africa, and Australia. He wanted to make sure that his workers, "think it over," before they decided not to come to work or not to do their best.

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<sup>10</sup> Walter T. Jenkins, "Wasteful Practices throughout the Plant." William H. Grier, Sr., Papers. Rock Hill Printing and Finishing Company Memorabilia Scrapbook #4 February 17, 1942. Louise Pettus Archives and Special Collections. July 27, 2017.

<sup>11</sup> Walter T. Jenkins. William H. Grier, Sr., Papers. Rock Hill Printing and Finishing Company Memorabilia Scrapbook #4 September 29, 1942. Louise Pettus Archives and Special Collections. July 27, 2017.

<sup>12</sup> Walter T. Jenkins. William H. Grier, Sr., Papers. Rock Hill Printing and Finishing Company Memorabilia Scrapbook #4 February 6, 1943. Louise Pettus Archives and Special Collections. July 27, 2017.

That could have meant a drop in production and it could have impacted the soldiers on the warfront.<sup>13</sup> Jenkins furthered his initiative by mentioning the American Red Cross Drives to build funds for the war effort, and he urged his workers to donate a portion of their paychecks to these initiatives and support the troops.<sup>14</sup>

Jenkins also had to run a business and in 1945, he announced in a memorandum new leaders within the plant. He said the upper management supported the tradition of hiring its supervisors from within the ranks of the hourly workers, and in the January 22, 1945 memorandum he urged the other workers to support the new supervisors as the supervisors supported the needs and best interests of their former coworkers.<sup>15</sup> Jenkins was obviously a very patriotic and involved General Manager based on his attitudes in his various company-wide memoranda, and during the war years he led the Bleachery diligently.

According to Bill Easley, the son of Joseph Easley, who was Mr. Jenkins' second in command of the Bleachery as his Assistant General Manager, Walter T. Jenkins was unfortunately killed in an automobile accident in 1947. Bill's father was offered the position as General Manager of the plant. He said his father refused this position because he did not want to constantly travel back and forth to the Lowenstein & Sons Company

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<sup>13</sup> Walter T. Jenkins. William H. Grier, Sr., Papers. Rock Hill Printing and Finishing Company Memorabilia Scrapbook #4 February 19, 1943. Louise Pettus Archives and Special Collections. July 27, 2017.

<sup>14</sup> Walter T. Jenkins. "Red Cross Drive.". William H. Grier, Sr., Papers. Rock Hill Printing and Finishing Company Memorabilia Scrapbook #4 March 10, 1943. Louise Pettus Archives and Special Collections. July 27, 2017.

<sup>15</sup> Walter T. Jenkins. William H. Grier, Sr., Papers. Rock Hill Printing and Finishing Company Memorabilia Scrapbook #6 January 22, 1945. Louise Pettus Archives and Special Collections. July 27, 2017.

headquarters in New York City. As a result, William “Bill” Grier took over as the General Manager and Joe Easley became his Assistant General Manager. Grier would maintain the position of General Manager until 1972.<sup>16</sup>

During his time as General Manager, Grier navigated a number of strikes. A major event that occurred in the 1950s was the 1955 union strike. This strike was very tense and many people who crossed the picket lines faced issues with those who manned the lines. Jack Bolin, who began working at the Bleachery in 1951 crossed the picket lines and went to work. This was because he was not in the main union that was on strike. He said the strike was very tumultuous, especially on one particular occasion in which he was involved. Bolin was visiting with his mother who had been keeping his young son while he was at work. She lived on Wilson Street near the union hall. On that particular day, he was confronted by a union member who had a reputation for being violent and in his past had been a boxer. This union member threatened to give Jack and his son the beating of their lives because they were both “scabs.” Bolin said his cousin happened to show up at his mother’s and produced a crowbar and told the man to back down or he was going to “break him in half with the hooked end of the crowbar.” Bolin said the man decided to turn around and return to the union hall and the crisis was averted. Bolin said after this incident he was no longer threatened with violence by the strikers. He said the strike ended quickly and that the amazing thing was the Bleachery returned to normal and people went back to work and it became a peaceful place again.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Bill Easley, interviewed by author, Rock Hill, July 7, 2017.

<sup>17</sup> Jack Bolin, interviewed by author, Rock Hill, July 22, 2017.

His case was a common one for individuals who crossed the picket lines, but according to an interview with Vivian Zeiders, who worked in the mid-1970s to the early 1980s in the Finishing department, one man she worked with was ridiculed by his coworkers twenty years after the strike ended for being a scab. She was told by other coworkers to avoid too much contact with him because he had been a scab and could not be trusted. She said her department was filled with men who had been at the Bleachery for a long time and had lasting memories that led to their dislike and resentment of this man.<sup>18</sup>

According to interviews with Betty Jo Rhea, Jack Bolin, and Bill Easley, Rock Hill was a small town that was relatively safe in the 1950s. Easley especially emphasized, “The crime rate was very low and that kids could play outside unattended until suppertime.” Both Jack Bolin and Betty Jo Rhea also supported this claim in their interviews. The previous events set the stage for the focus of this thesis following the year 1960 until the year 2017. The early background history of the Bleachery showed that as the Bleachery grew it had a symbiotic relationship with the city of Rock Hill and its inhabitants.<sup>19</sup> This thesis will focus on continuing the discussion of the Bleachery allowing the perspectives of the individuals who worked there to give insight into the history and events that shaped and continue to shape the city of Rock Hill, South Carolina.

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<sup>18</sup> Vivian Zeiders, interviewed by author, Rock Hill, June 6, 2017.

<sup>19</sup> Jack Bolin interview; Betty Jo Rhea interview.



## Chapter One: Historiography

The American textile industry established a lasting impact on communities and the people who lived within them. From the antebellum South to the American Civil War and beyond, the means of production and a way of life were born. The American textile industry developed in stages and the people involved in its many successes and failures shaped generations and towns throughout the South. Historians have argued and analyzed the impact of the textile industry throughout the years of its infancy to its eventual decline in the late 1900s. The influences of paternalism, race, gender, and community interactions are just a few of the multifaceted aspects of the impact that the textile industry had on the South and its people.

Broadus Mitchell, in his work, *The Rise of Cotton Mills in the South*, argued that cotton mills were the only option following the aftermath of the Civil War for the destitute South. Cotton mills were in turn created to benefit the people who remained and since the system had been established in the North, the investors from the northern states could implement their systems of control in the South. He argued that the means and methods of cotton mill owners were purely altruistic in nature and completely meant to benefit the South and ensure the well-being of the employees. This, he argues, established and maintained a system of paternalism by the benevolent owners to their helpless employees, who essentially needed guidance after a harsh and brutal treatment following the American Civil War. Mitchell's argument expounded the necessity of the South to reorganize after the Civil War. The people who were present at the time felt it their

obligation to fix their predicament especially the merchants who were sentimental.<sup>20</sup> This concept of the need of a “helping hand” would influence others to deal out paternalistic practices. Mitchell’s work contributed to the historiography by attempting to explain the rise of the textile industry during the postbellum period, and his arguing that the benevolent wealthy leaders were motivated by their need to better the poor and downtrodden. This idea would of course be challenged once other historians actually spoke to the workers.

Mitchell’s thesis of benevolent owners became contentious when social historians changed the focus of the discussion away from the owners, to interactions and treatment of the people and their response to paternalism. Social historians changed the understanding of the textile industry and challenged Mitchell by utilizing the technique of oral histories and interviews with the people who experienced paternalism each day living and working in the textile towns. Mitchell’s argument that the owners were not there to make a profit but instead present to help a defeated South after the American Civil War, which was disproven once social historians began utilizing oral histories and interviewed workers. Tamera K. Hareven, and Randolph Langenbach, authors of *Amoskeag*, utilized the power of oral history interviews, which opened the historiography to new potential means of understanding the people. This social history gave a voice to the workers and expressed their perspective. As evidenced in their work, the workers of Manchester, New Hampshire were essentially well taken care of by the textile factory

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<sup>20</sup> Mitchell, Broadus. *The Rise of Cotton Mills in the South*: (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1921.), 106-107.

owners who provided them with services and gave them jobs. Though this is not focused in the South, the information that the authors were able to obtain greatly impacted the views about benevolent mill owners.

After the impact of unions and the rise of strikes against the paternalism that was present during the years of the Great Depression, Amoskeag Mills began to falter and liquidate their industry. The oral interviews gathered by the authors of *Amoskeag*, delved into the emotions of the first generation mill workers and how they were treated. The workers were immigrants and instances are mentioned later that they were paid little but in turn made the mill owners massive profits. The second generation and their children's "eyes were opened," and throughout the study, there are cases of destitution and a resentment to the paternalistic practices of the owners. The study shows the eventual collapse of paternalism and how Manchester, New Hampshire changed as the mills shut down.

The lasting impact is expressed in the "Eulogy" as they interviewed a worker in the last mill open in Manchester. The interviewee expressed that during this time there was a mix of confusion and fear as the mills were in their final days. This is a pertinent point because through this confusion and fear, it also shows how the people became dependent on the mills. The interviewer asked her, "If you were given \$1000 or for the mills to open right back up which would you prefer?" Her response was "That at least with the mills open I would have stability and a future."<sup>21</sup> The study is vitally important

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<sup>21</sup> Hareven, Tamara K. and Randolph Langenbach. *Amoskeag: Life and work in an American Factory-City*: (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978.), 388.

to the historiography because it is an example of the power of paternalism and its gradual downfall. *Amoskeag* can be and has been compared to the South concerning the degradation of paternalistic controls. The advent of social history impacted the understanding of the people and delved into their attitudes and emotions enabling a deeper understanding of events. The techniques of Social historians, especially the oral history interview, have greatly added to the history of textiles in both the North and the South.

A pivotal addition to the literature is the product and culmination of the work of Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, James Leloudis, Robert Korstad, Mary Murphy, Lu Ann Jones, and Christopher B. Daly, in *Like A Family: The Making of a Southern Cotton Mill World*. This work is similar to *Amoskeag*, in that it sought to give the people a voice, and is viewed as a challenge to the view of a benevolent paternalistic mill owner. It followed the example of *Amoskeag* by compiling the perspectives of mill workers and showed the impact of paternalism on the mill people. It is an important work as it explains the industry from the early development of cotton mills. Through the Appalachian culture which was transplanted into the mills from the stock of workers from this mountainous region, the ethics of hard work and grit are shown in Southern textile mills. Workers shared their stories throughout the study and expressed their emotions and it created a powerful message as the title suggests the people would work together as a family to buffer the paternalism of textile executives and their underlings.

*Like a Family*, also focused on the changes that led to the general textile strike in 1934. The individual strain of the Great Depression and the promises of civic controls put

in place by the NRA to help deal with the inadequacies of the textile industry being uniform, led to issues that in the text, letters were written to Franklin Delano Roosevelt expressing grievances. The workers noted that the owners and management would take advantage of the system of the “stretch-out,” and gouge out as much work from individuals as they possibly could at time making a single worker run the machines that five people would have normally run. This was a tactic to cut back on production costs by the upper management and to maximize profits. Unions rose in response to defend the workers’ rights and as a result they decided to go on strike.

In some places the strike was successful and in others it failed to combat the system of strict paternalism.<sup>22</sup> However, as mentioned in its preface, *Like a Family* showed the unraveling of the paternalistic and overtly controlling textile world and the subsequent change associated with this as the workers gained a better perspective of their world. This helped to set the stage for other historians to further expand and emphasize the need to delve into the impact that the power of paternalism had on the textile industry following the strike of 1934. This study is important to the historiography due to its message as it uses the perspectives of the people who were active participants in the textile industry. It was groundbreaking as it expanded the understanding of the emotions and power of letting history literally speak for itself, meaning many subsequent authors began after this book to take the social aspect more seriously in regards to interviews and focusing on the workers.

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<sup>22</sup> Hall, Jacquelyn Dowd. *Like a Family: The Making of a Southern Cotton Mill World*: (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987.) 300-330.

The example of paternalism in the textile town of Kannapolis, North Carolina is the main argument in the thesis of Timothy Warren Vanderburg, *Cannon Mills: A Case study in Southern Industrialization*. He argues that paternalism under the Cannon family bred both committed workers and also resentment. He exemplifies the desire of the Cannon family to be an ever-present entity within the town of Kannapolis and giving the people who resided there a sense that the bosses were there on their side, for their benefit. He mentioned that Kannapolis was relatively self-sufficient and that the mill there was the central focal point of the community. This was established using the technique of the mill village, where the textile company and its owners, in this instance the Cannon family, essentially owned the town, resulting in the mill owners controlling most aspects of the lives of the people and the Cannon family influenced them accordingly.

Vanderburg showed in his thesis that the persistent paternalism from the controlling Cannon family impacted the people of Kannapolis. The Cannons' were strictly antiunion and fought the development of unions within their mill system. The workers went on strike several times to combat this, and they were influenced by a growing unionization presence to bring down the system of paternalism, but the Cannons effectively fought off the union, until the death of the controlling Cannon who passed the proverbial torch of leadership onto a nonfamily member who sought to end the outdated systems of paternalism.<sup>23</sup> According to Vanderburg, the changing of the controlling interest of the company from the Cannon family to outside members of the company,

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<sup>23</sup> Vanderburg, Timothy Warren. *Cannon Mills: A Case Study in Southern Industrialization*: 2001. 351.

mixed with racial changes in the sixties and the seventies brought in the unions, which effectively and gradually defeated the strong paternalism that was present.

Vanderburg's follow up from his doctoral thesis also contributed to the understanding of Cannon Mills in Kannapolis, North Carolina. He, with time, became more organized in his writing and in his book, *Cannon Mills and Kannapolis: Persistent Paternalism in a Textile Town*, he outlined, especially in his conclusion, the power of the Cannon family and the influence they held over their workers. The ever-commanding figure of James Cannon was a dominate fixture in the community because of the fact that he was not like many of the other textile giants who tended to be absentee owners. He was able to achieve respect from his workers as he lived near and interacted with them regularly. When he instituted his paternalistic approach, and of course his son followed the same actions, it established a sense of control that was an effective combatant to the rise of unions. The workers developed a sense of pride for being employees of the Cannon Mills.

However, the powers of paternalism and the Cannons were an imposing and often frightening deterrent to organizing against the combined might of the Cannons. The fear of losing their benefits or job if they organized, prevented much of the organized system of developing unions within the mill. Also, coupled with the stringent controls of the Cannon family organization proved difficult. Cannon control stemmed from their control of the houses and community that the workers lived in and because they were able to maintain control of the housing for so long, they held a massive influence over their workers. This power and influence, according to Vanderburg, took a Civil Rights

movement and the death of Charles Cannon to eventually end the paternalism. The tradition followed for three successive leaders after Cannon, but when David Murdock bought the company, he ended the paternalism that he saw as a detractor of the money making enterprise.<sup>24</sup>

According to the writings of Harold Roberts concerning his hometown of Lockhart, South Carolina paternalism was prevalent in Southern textiles, especially in the early industry. His reminiscences showed that the mill towns were controlled by the mill owners and a tactic that was often used was to provide entertainment and leisure activities, such as mill league baseball, which instituted morale and support in the community. This was a system that was used to build a culture in the mill villages and with the development of mill league baseball, the people would rally behind the specific team that was connected to the mill they worked and in turn it increased the morale and support by the workers in the mill in relationship to the mill. This caused a community connection that would bring the people together and support the efforts of the mills. Roberts did not work in the mill, but was a paperboy during the 1940s and 1950s and his outside perspective showed the impact of paternalism on his town. He mentioned that a method of control rested on the fact that mill work did not require much education and to that extent undereducated people were able to work and function.

While paternalism was a positive good to an extent by employing an entire generation of people from Appalachia. It also had its detractions because mill owners

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<sup>24</sup> Vanderburg, Timothy W. *Cannon Mills and Kannapolis: Persistent Paternalism in a Textile Town*. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2013.), 213-216.



essentially could control their workers as the ever-present threat that other opportunity did not exist outside the mill in the early days.<sup>25</sup> Change occurred in the mills and elsewhere especially after World War Two, because the United States experienced an economic upturn. Roberts mentioned that the major impact was that the younger generations gained more opportunities to get out of the mill towns as money was more prevalent. Attitudes changed also because getting an education became more important. This was possible for the next generation because education became more affordable as their parents were making more money and moved into the middle class, making it possible to send their children to school for much longer than they were able to attend ever before.

Also, because the work in textiles tended to increased social class, as the purchasing power of the textile worker increased. This increase in spending power coupled with more money led to many families' acquisition of the automobile allowing the next generation to physically move out, and work in places other than Lockhart effectively expanding their horizons. This contributed to expanded work opportunities outside of the textile mills and this would help to lead to the decline of textile mills. "The fifties turned the village "inside out," meaning if a person worked in a cotton mill in Lockhart, his neighbor could be employed thirty miles away.<sup>26</sup>" Though Roberts' thesis was short, it has contributed to the historiography as he showed that once he got out, his town changed, and he mentioned that the people who stayed, worked until the mills

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<sup>25</sup> Roberts, Harold. *Life in a Cotton Mill Village: Lockhart, South Carolina*: Winthrop University, 2002. 17.

<sup>26</sup> Roberts, 25

closed in the early 1990s. His interview with Lockhart's mayor expressed the concept that many individual towns that were formally dependent on mills and their paternalism exist across the South. Through the interview a discussion with Roberts about the future of Lockhart following the demise of textiles occurred. The mayor's perspective is shown as positive when Roberts asked about the town's future. The mayor's reply was "this town is not dead it is resting before being revived." This seems to be a prevailing hope that is common throughout the former textile South.<sup>27</sup> His contributions to the history of textiles will influence future writings to get the peoples' stories out into the public and attempt to explain and expand the understanding of the impact that mills had in shaping communities.

Racial tensions are a common theme that shapes and contributes to all areas of history, because they contribute to the overall narrative and influence events of the progression of time, and the textile industry is definitely not disassociated with this concept. A particularly important discussion was written, *Hiring the Black Worker: the Racial Integration of the Southern Textile Industry, 1960-1980*, by Timothy Minchin concerning racial issues in Southern textile mills. This book is important because it shows the motivations of the textile firms to prevent the advancement of the African American. Racial tensions had been a problem throughout the history of textiles and following the antebellum period.

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 26.

The racist idea that African American workers were inferior to white workers caused the mill owners to only hire African American males for menial labor. These workers were used primarily as hard labor and were not permitted to work in skilled jobs dominated by whites. The information presented in Minchin's work expresses the changes that came when the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was passed. He derives his sources from the development of court cases, which helped with time, gain African Americans the right to work in skilled labor jobs. He mentioned that there was resistance by mill owners and it unfortunately took the mandates of the federal government, and its eventual intervention in order to cause necessary change to gain the equal employment opportunities for African Americans. Minchin's review of court cases and personal interviews with both African American and white workers gave insight into the tensions and attitudes of the period. He showed the different levels of resistance throughout the Southern textile industry.

His interest in the Rock Hill Printing and Finishing Company surrounding grievances of the Ellison case, gave the reader a portal into the 1970s and showed that the positions that the workers eventually gained were hard fought for against much resistance. The power of litigation became an important tool to combat anti-African American sentiment in the mills.<sup>28</sup> He expressed the attitudes from both sides and showed that the racist stereotypes began to evaporate as the black workers gained their skilled jobs and proved that race was not a factor in the ability for a human being to be

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<sup>28</sup> Minchin, Timothy J. *Hiring the black worker: the racial integration of the Southern textile industry, 1960-1980*: (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999.), 55.

productive, and his records at times showed that the senior black workers tended to be hard working individuals and, when given the chance, became important members of the working community. His work is very influential and has expanded the historiography by adding new societal aspects to be considered by further research and by seeking out the black voices that were participants in the eventual integration of the Southern textile industry. His contribution will greatly influence future studies as it addresses a neglected part of the history of the textile industry.

Another contribution to the history of African Americans workers was the sociological study of Kent, also known and identified as York, South Carolina. The Kent research established an understanding of the upcountry in regards to racial relationships in a Southern textile town and gives a comparison to the attitudes and actions that surrounded the local African American community near Rock Hill, South Carolina. *Blackways of Kent* showed that there was a clear delineation from whites and African Americans and that the minority culture was influenced by the majority culture. Racial relationships in the study were mainly peaceful, given that the study was conducted in the 1940s and prior to the expansion of black rights and the Civil Rights Movement, the study showed that the African Americans developed their own culture apart from the mainstream white culture, but in turn, it created a community that contributed to the values of the period.

The African American community was influenced by its ability to work beside whites. Many African Americans were employed in the forties in subservient positions to whites. Hylan Lewis, the sociologist who wrote the study, claimed that the African

American community established its own culture and it often surrounded the homes where the people would socialize when they were not working. Work was often dictated by what he called “the cotton complex.” Lewis explained that cotton was very influential to the African American as it was the main means of employment in Kent. The work with cotton varied from working in one of Kent’s five cotton mills, growing cotton on a farm, or working as a maid or servant to the white cotton mill owners.<sup>29</sup>

Another concept discussed is the social control of the black subculture. He focused on three main functionaries; the church, the fraternal groups, and gossip. The church was influential to the culture as it instituted moral aspects to the black person. In the past, he mentioned that the power of the church to influence was great, especially if a threat of immoral behavior could have resulted in removal from the church, which would have cut the said immoral person from their spiritual connection and community, but he notated that the subcultural climate had changed by the time of the study to an extent and the church was not as powerful. The fraternal groups, in this case men’s clubs such as the Elks and the Masons, influenced the black male more than any other as they often held “trials” and punished for actions that deviated from the rules. It instituted a sense of pride in the community to be a member of one of the fraternal clubs. Finally, gossip tended to prevent ostentatious behavior among the community as both African Americans and whites would tend to talk about those who overstepped the social niceties and this would

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<sup>29</sup> Lewis, Hylan. *Blackways of Kent*: Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1955. 52.

lead to criticism and ridicule which in and of itself often acted as a deterrent and prevented too much deviation from the societal and cultural norms.<sup>30</sup>

He also sought to categorize individuals in two groups, respectable and unrespectable, each held weight in the community in terms of social organization. Respectable individuals tended to hold jobs and were not frequent delinquents who contributed to society. Examples of these individuals would be those such as preachers, teachers, and businessmen. The undesirables were the unsavory individuals who were not working or had criminal pasts.<sup>31</sup> This analysis of the African Americans of the region is instrumental into understand a general idea of how relationships were seen along racial lines in the mid-1900s. This is an influential work and allows for a better understanding of the social make-up of the Southern society.

The issue of gender relations in history essentially extends from the beginning of time. Social constructs of gender, especially in the western world before the changes in the mid to late 1900s, type casted genders into specific roles. Men tended to do the difficult work that required strength and intelligence and this left other work for the women, which often led to them doing unskilled menial tasks that did not require strength. The view that women were inferior in skill and in strength to men would shape culture for many generations. With these actions and attitudes in place, the characteristic stereotypical relationship between man and woman carried over into occupations.

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<sup>30</sup> Lewis, 190-191.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 240-250.

The textile industry is a prime example of how gender stereotypes have evolved. Initially, women were seen as the typically weak in the view of a patriarchal male dominated society. According to Gay L. Gullickson's chapter *Technology, Gender and Rural Culture: Normandy and the Piedmont*, within the edited work *Hanging by a Thread: Social Change in Southern Textiles*, gender issues were prevalent throughout the industry as women were not paid for what they were able to do, and also the gender roles tended to overshadow the actual ability of both males and females. Men in western culture tended to be viewed as being authoritative, mechanical, and easily trained, whereas women were seen as submissive, non-mechanical, and most acceptable at doing work that required repetitive tasks. With this stigma placed over genders, the culture of the textile industry was very discriminatory, especially to minorities, in this instance women and African Americans.<sup>32</sup> The work of men was not fit for women and vice versa, and as a result the role of women in the textile field was viewed for a long period of time as minuscule. Gullickson does note that many of the women were at times more than capable of doing work just as well, if not better, than their male counterparts, but they tended to be ignored. The prevailing attitude that skills were associated with the sex of the person and this long standing tradition of this belief prevented women from gaining ground in the early textile years.<sup>33</sup> For this reason, it is imperative that in the discussions of many analyses on the subject, gender tends to be neglected.

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<sup>32</sup> Leiter, Jeffery. Gay L. Gullickson *Hanging by a Thread: Social Change in Southern Textiles, Technology, Gender and Rural Culture: Normandy and the Piedmont*: (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1991.), 55

<sup>33</sup> Gullickson, 53.

In *Like a Family*, gender is addressed especially during the discussion on the Great Depression and Roosevelt's call for grievances. Hall and company note that women sought to write in to Roosevelt and expressed their grievances in high numbers and this was the important time that women began to step up and become members of their community, even though they still struggled with a patriarchal society in the form of the mill managers and workers who viewed them as temporary hires. Their avid listening to the radio and keeping up with events, especially during the late twenties and early thirties and their participation in the NRA increased their presence within the mills and made them more active in the political scene. It is mentioned that women communicated with each other in the mill villages and expressed their emotions in a different way from men and this gave them an influential power as they sought to better their lives.<sup>34</sup> The contradictory aspect to this can be seen throughout the World War Two era, when the women were required to step up and work in the factories in the place of the men, and they were able to maintain the same standard of work that men had done in the same jobs. It is mentioned also that during the early 1900s that relationships of payment for both men and women tended to be unequal, white men were the highest paid and then white women followed. The payment focused on the amount produced and they tended to look down on women.<sup>35</sup> The need to further delve into the concept of gender relations within the historiography of the textile industry is very important because women were major

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<sup>34</sup> Hall, 309.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 77-78.



contributors to the successes of the industry and their stories need to be appropriately told in order to consistently gain a fuller understanding of the overall impact on history.

Community interactions were seen in the textile industry whether it was through close-knit family ties or acts of paternalism, communities arose and so did the textile culture. Within this culture were forms of entertainment that characterized the origins of the textile workers in the South. These origins are from rural landscapes such as farms and mountain folk. The analysis of the music scene that developed in and around the textile towns of the Carolinas are expressed in *Linthead Stomp*, written by Patrick Huber. He showed that the cultures of the mountains and music helped to explain the culture of mill villages in the Carolinas. The introduction of “hillbilly music,” began in mill hills and expressed the culture and backgrounds of the people who lived there. This form of expression through music gave the mill people, or “lintheads” as they are called, a sense of identity and this is important because it showed they had a culture of their very own and through expression of music, some were able to escape the rigors of working in textiles. Though he does note that the phenomenon did not last past World War Two, it did give rise to modern country music and towns like Rock Hill contributed to the expansion of mill culture.<sup>36</sup> This is important to the historiography of the region and helped to give better understanding to the events that would shape the textile world in the post-World War Two era.

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<sup>36</sup> Huber, Patrick. *Linthead Stomp: The Creation of Country Music in the Piedmont South*: (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 275-281.

Another source that shows the influence of community interaction is the varied work inclusive in *Textile Town*, referring to Spartanburg County, South Carolina, which had an extensive system of mills. This book is an eclectic collection of Spartanburg textile culture and includes articles which will be very influential in comparison to the focus of this thesis. The book contains songs, poems and testimonials from the beginning of textiles in the area to the all-encompassing decline that occurred in the 1990s.<sup>37</sup>

The events that culminate and bring an understanding of the textile industry is a comparative analysis by countless historians. Areas of contention exist in the historiography that through time have been better understood. Paternalism was a common thread in the development of textiles as well as the constant battle between higher management and the union. This contention has influenced strikes and turmoil in the industry. Figures throughout the region have impacted the development of the paternalistic approach to leadership. With time and changes to the culture of textiles and the shaping changes of the people an eventual decline of paternalism was obvious.

Other factors such as race have also shaped the textile industry into what it is today and how the reactions of hiring minorities has created the current relationships between the races. The impact of social movement such as the push for civil rights greatly impacted the framework of the textile mills as well as the impact of foreign entities who challenged the survival of the industry. An attempt to associate the issues of gender have also changed the history of textiles as more historians decide to analyze the

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<sup>37</sup> Teter, Betsy Wakefield. *Textile Town: Spartanburg County, SC: Spartanburg, S.C.:* Hub City Writers Project, 2002.

minority groups such as women and their pace in the workforce of the textile industry. This is an important factor in order to have a full understanding of the history.

Finally, the most important contribution to the historiography was the advent of social historians and the power of the interview, as it placed the history not strictly in the interpretive hands of a historian who speculated based on charts and statistics, and instead what it was truly like to be a member of the textile industry. This brought about a human component and it gave personality to the story as the people who actively participated in the industry were given a voice. This voice gave better understanding of the events and actions and emotions that were expressed throughout the history. While there have been great contributions to the history of textiles in the South, there is still much to be discussed for posterity for locations such as Rock Hill, South Carolina have not been thoroughly analyzed enough.

The purpose of this thesis is to discuss the impact that Rock Hill and namely the Rock Hill Printing and Finishing Company had on the textile industry. Through comparison with other locations, this discussion will make sure that the history and impact of the people who were a part of the history of the area are included in the extensive historiography. The discussion will focus on the Rock Hill Printing and Finishing Company and how it dealt with its workers and its relationship in helping Rock Hill become the city that it is today. Taking from the previously discussed sources along with others, the Rock Hill Printing and Finishing Company will be placed into a historical context through the use of interviews of workers. By allowing the remaining workers to give their insight into work at the Bleachery, as it is known by locals, the

potential for further writings on the subject will add to the understanding of the textile industry. Their stories will be similar and at the same time different to other locations in the South and the North. This thesis may become an important part of the historiography that future historians can build upon and improve the understanding of the Bleachery and its impact on not only the workers, but the people who were associated with the town and then city of Rock Hill.

The rise and fall of the Bleachery spans eighty years and its interactions with the community will be an excellent addition to the discussion of the textiles of the Carolinas and the Southern history of textiles. The thesis will encompass the years 1960 to the end of the Bleachery's existence in 1998. In this time period the remaining voices of the mill will be able to express their insight into how their time there changed the way that they lived. Similarly to Roberts' thesis about Lockhart, the discussion will pass on to the current times and what the city of Rock Hill, South Carolina is doing with the remaining Bleachery and also its legacy of being a textile town. In order to place Rock Hill, South Carolina into the historiography of the Southern textile industry and textile studies in general the background of its foundation up until the topics discussed in this thesis must be presented. By understanding where the Bleachery came from will assist in showing how it continued to influence and change the city of Rock Hill into what it is today.

The Rock Hill Printing and Finishing Company was a long standing and far reaching business for the community of Rock Hill, South Carolina. It hired thousands over its history and as a result the generations of the present time that currently reside in the city of Rock Hill, have a lasting memory, either through working there themselves or

having relatives who worked there. Rock Hill Printing and Finishing Company has a long history beginning in the year 1928 as a means to revitalize the economy of Rock Hill.

The town of Rock Hill was relatively small and had almost reached its full potential as an urban area. The beginning importance of the company coming to the town was the proposed water expansion project required to maintain the influx of water to support the bleaching and dying process of finishing cloth products.

## Chapter Two: The 1960s

The 1960s were a time of drastic change in the United States. The changing political scene and the push of more progressive and liberal thoughts helped to usher in a fresh and new understanding in regards to both racial issues and gender issues. The city of Rock Hill, according to residents and Bleachery employees alike, was very tense. As the “norm” changed and segregation was challenged in not only the work place, but also in the public sphere, tensions arose. The 1960s brought positive change to the city and also to the Bleachery. Intervention of activists during this time period as well as the Federal Government brought about changes. Once these were implemented Rock Hill was a better place to live and, especially in the case of African American workers in the Bleachery, a better place to work.

The Bleachery was a place to work and in this respect both races respected the workplace. According to Donald Parrish who began working in 1957, when segregation was still in effect in the plant, there were white jobs, often on the machines, and there were African American jobs, which were often on the heavy labor side of the spectrum. The African Americans also worked as cleaners in custodian positions. His experience with African Americans showed that Rock Hill was ethnically mixed. He said that “Southern people was raised up with the African Americans,” so in this respect he never saw any real issues. He worked as a golf caddy before he worked at the Bleachery and he had worked with African Americana while there, that were also golf caddies. His experiences with African Americans in his youth impacted his later relationships and attitudes at the plant. He argued that the stereotype of “the old Southern racist,” was

wrong because many whites in the South worked and coexisted with the African Americans. They had a good rapport that was established by working alongside and living with them. He explained the stereotype came from people, especially those not from the South, looking from the outside in and from people who only saw the bad and ignored the good about racism in the South.

Parrish worked in the Color shop and during his time in this department there were five or six African Americans who worked in the shop. He said: after the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was created, and especially title seven, the equal employment opportunity clause, times changed in the Bleachery and African Americans were able to bid on jobs based on if they were qualified for them. He said that when African Americans came into the production level jobs they had the attitude of working hard and getting pay the to support their families. Integration, in his opinion, went smoothly despite a few holdouts, people he said were “true racists because there are always a few,” but that these negative people did not deter the work in the Bleachery. He mentioned working with a black man named Willie George Hall, and he and Willie who he called “George,” worked together from the 1970s until the Bleachery closed its doors in 1998.<sup>38</sup>

Donald Parrish was able to convince Willie George Hall to do an interview and he came with a surprise guest. Willie brought with him, to the interview, his relative Thomas Roach III. Thomas worked from 1954 until roughly 1973 in the Bleachery, and Willie George Hall worked from 1966 to 1998. With these two African American perspectives

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<sup>38</sup> Donald Parrish interviewed by author, Rock Hill, May 20, 2017.

regarding race relations, the story of the 1960s can begin to be accurately conveyed. Thomas Roach III worked in the Packing department as a forklift operator. He said that the Packing department was mostly male until the 1970s. The reason that he was able to get a job at the Bleachery was because he had family members who worked there, and the bosses asked around the department if any of the workers had sons or nephews who were good hard workers and, of course, his family members put in a good word for him. When asked how he was treated due to his race he said it was a complex answer. At the time, in the 1950s into the 1960s, segregation existed in the plant and there were divisions in regards to jobs that black men were allowed to work.<sup>39</sup>

When asked if he was active during the Civil Rights Movement, Thomas Roach III said that he was a member of the Leroy Ellison Lawsuit and he provided paperwork showing his involvement in the case. The Ellison case, according to Thomas, was meant to give the African American workers in the Bleachery fair and equal employment and gain equal pay to whites, who were doing the same jobs. Another goal of the case was according to Thomas in the interview, "...was getting to certain jobs, it wasn't a racial issue, it was a job thing. If you qualified for a job, you should have a right to get it and that's what the main objective was."<sup>40</sup> According to his paperwork from the actual lawsuit, an investigation was conducted and it was confirmed that the Bleachery was paying discriminatory wages to black workers. Thomas and his sixteen fellow plaintiffs made drastic changes occur in the Bleachery.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Thomas Roach III interviewed by author, Rock Hill, June 6, 2017.

<sup>40</sup> Thomas Roach III interview, June 6, 2017.

<sup>41</sup> Ellison vs. Rock Hill Printing and Finishing Company YAT9-247 (1968)



One of the many issues that Timothy Minchin brought up in his book, *Hiring the Black Worker*, was the Ellison case. Minchin's work was groundbreaking because it was the first of its kind. He analyzed the black worker in Southern textiles and showed their hardships in gaining acceptance and equality in a white dominated society. His contribution to our understanding of the segregation issues that African Americans faced in the workplace is very important, especially to this study, as he mentioned the Rock Hill Printing and Finish Company. His perspective, along with the oral history interviews that he conducted, have been helpful in analyzing the changes that occurred during the 1960s in Rock Hill and how the Bleachery was impacted by the Civil Rights Movement.

Minchin essentially called the Bleachery inherently racist. While this is to an extent true because the Bleachery had white jobs and African American jobs and segregation was instituted, he is refuted by Thomas Roach III, who was a member of the case. He did not interview Thomas, because Thomas had left the Bleachery behind him. His work is important to understanding the issues of the time period, especially his information regarding racism and difficulties at both the Cannon Mills and Dan River Mills. His work is essential in understanding how the Bleachery was initially similar to these locations, but at the same time how the process and response to change was different. By this the Bleachery can be set in its own individual framework.

According to Minchin, the Bleachery had racist tendencies in regards to hiring its African American workers and like other locations in the textile South and would not give African Americans the chance to work in production level jobs. Minchin gives several reasons behind this, but the most common theme was a fear of what white

workers would do if African Americans were given the jobs. He talks about the executives' fear that white workers would walk off the job site or that it would lead to violence in the plants.<sup>42</sup> He also made the point that seems to be a common attitude amongst the textile executives which was a resistance to the integration in South and North Carolina and that several executives were against the integration of their plants, however in this he does not specifically name the Rock Hill Printing and Finishing Company.<sup>43</sup>

He mentioned Cannon Mills, when it was still ran by "old man Cannon," referring to Charles Cannon. Cannon did not like the idea of integrating his plant in Kannapolis, North Carolina and he ignored Cromwell Russell, one of the first black workers to be integrated into a production level job. He did this by not allowing Russell to work for many years inside of the actual plant. Essentially Cannon Mills was appeasing the Federal Government but this did not happen until the 1970s.<sup>44</sup> The Bleachery is different from other locations regarding racial relations because unlike other plants the Bleachery was not as reticent to change and integration. The issues that the Bleachery faced were soon alleviated and most of the workers were quickly accepted into the departments. Minchin's study sought to delve into the hiring process and how it was a struggle at first to gain employment in specialized jobs. However, this study is more concerned with the impact of the plant on Rock Hill. While his information is important

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<sup>42</sup> Minchin, Timothy J. *Hiring the black worker: the racial integration of the Southern textile industry, 1960-1980* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999.), 80-81

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 78-79.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.* 81.

to the view of how the Bleachery was similar to other locations, in having racist hiring techniques, the issues here are drastically different.

The Bleachery was different because once it was brought to the attention of the workers and the lawsuit was filed, the problems of race stopped and integration transitioned smoothly, according to both Willie George Hall and Thomas Roach III.<sup>45</sup> Minchin does however make a very valid point in his writings because he used oral history interviews as a medium as well as analyzing the actual court documents. His point being that it took government intervention to make these mills, the Bleachery included, comply with the law that was created and ratified when the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was created.<sup>46</sup> He also argued that some of the workers actually connected with their white coworkers once they were given the chance to work side by side with them. It shows that the Bleachery was not racist as a whole. Since Leroy Ellison has passed away, his perspective could not be gained for this study. Based on what Minchin gained from an oral history interview with him, it is apparent that because Leroy's name was in the title of the lawsuit, he was viewed as the ringleader and acted as a catalyst which brought about the changes. Therefore, Ellison was targeted by some whites in the plant and had issues.<sup>47</sup>

The issue raised by Minchin helps to further assert Donald Parrish's claim that, yes there were racists at the Bleachery, but progress did not halt and the Bleachery survived the Civil Rights era relatively peacefully. Many African Americans were able

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<sup>45</sup> Thomas Roach III interview, June 6, 2017.

<sup>46</sup> Minchin, 269.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. 113.

to take on higher positions in production level jobs as a result of the Bleachery complying with the laws.<sup>48</sup> According to Thomas Roach III, Willie George Hall, and Donald Parrish there was some racism in the plant, but after the Ellison Case, unlike in other mills, the Bleachery turned into a place that the union could help African Americans get their jobs. The other plants, especially Cannon Mills, did not have the strong union presence and so as a means to continue to control the workers, the Cannons kept out the union and drug out its issues with racial discrimination.

According to Malcolm Cross, in his research on Dan River Mills, the situation at the Bleachery was not nearly as bad in comparison. From his work, it is evident that tensions were much higher in Danville, Virginia and as a result from protestors and media attention, the issues surrounding race relations exploded onto the main stage of the politically and socially charged environment of the 1960s. Demonstrators in Danville wanted fair treatment in restaurants, hotels, medical facilities, school integration, and for African Americans to get hired on the police force, along with other skilled jobs. Textiles were thrown into the issues when black protestors were arrested in Danville, and charged with breaking the laws of the city and of the state of Virginia. Someone decided to target the mill because “The city of Danville is literally run by Dan River Mills.” Cross further stresses this point when he mentions protestors laid in front of the gates of the mill and picketed the outside of the mill.

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<sup>48</sup> Donald Parrish interview, May 20, 2017.

Danville differed from Rock Hill, protest never actually ended up directed at the Bleachery. More resistance occurred in Danville than ever occurred in Rock Hill. Cross said, eventually all of the issues died down but they brought lawsuits to Danville and included the mill to get what they wanted.<sup>49</sup> All they had to do at the Bleachery following the Ellison case, according to Thomas Roach III, was file a grievance of mistreatment. If it was found that they were being mistreated due to their race, then they would be given the option to bid on the jobs as long as they had the proper training and understanding of the job. This tended to be a recurring sentiment that Thomas made throughout the interview. He did not feel entitled to be given a higher job because of his race, but he did feel discrimination, because he was not being paid the same wages that a white person was who was doing the exact same job as him. He asserted that African Americans wanted things to be fair and have the chance if they wanted a different better paying job to be able to try for it.<sup>50</sup> It is obvious from his attitudes and tone of voice that he did not believe that any African American or white should have been given a higher job unless they had “qualified” for it. When he said “qualified,” he meant that the worker, whether they were white or black, had to know how to do the job and this was done by lots of informal, on the job training. Often at the Bleachery, individuals who showed interest in moving to a more sophisticated job within their department would watch others do their job and learn from the worker how it was done. If they had this training and the correct

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<sup>49</sup> Cross, Malcolm A. *Dan River Runs Deep: an informal history of a major textile company 1950-1981*. (New York, New York: Total Book, 1982.), 94-95.

<sup>50</sup> Thomas Roach III interview, June 6, 2017.

amount of seniority in the department, when a job was open, they could bid for the position.

Thomas also said in the interview “No, the Bleachery was a good place to work, it’s just that it was not only the Bleachery, which was just the way that it was in South Carolina. You can’t blame the Bleachery. At the time, that’s just the way that life was.”<sup>51</sup> This is important to note that he had achieved this level of respect for the Bleachery and his views today reflect years of long thought on the subject. He was not overtly disgruntled. He was just stating the facts. It is unfortunate that things happened the way they did, but in the interview he mentioned that “time changes everything,” he and his fellow plaintiffs in the case made great strides in Civil Rights and they were able to cause change in not only Rock Hill, but across the South in other textile mills. It is a shame that they are not talked about more and hopefully by mentioning their importance they will gain more recognition and future generations will learn about the Ellison case and the importance of these men to the Civil Rights Movement.

Thomas Roach III also made a point that could explain why Leroy Ellison was targeted when he was placed in an all-white department in which he was replacing a white man. He said, “Naturally you going to have people have a certain feeling when he gets bumped off his job. That’s human nature. You might have to take a lesser paying job if somebody bump you off of your job, but it’s just there wasn’t fighting or any falling out about it.”<sup>52</sup> Willie George Hall, who stayed around much longer than both Ellison and

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

Roach, said that he did not see any animosity between the races and that the Bleachery was a good place to work.<sup>53</sup> Willie George Hall was a product of the later 1960s in the Bleachery and he benefited from the quota system that the Bleachery had set in place to hire African American workers. He was hired in 1966 in the Calendar department, which at the time was an all-white department. He was the very first African American to be hired in this department and he said while he was there, until 1972, he was one of three hired for the department. His responsibilities in the department were as a back tender and he would assist the machine operator in the processing of the cloth. Before he left the department he would also become a machine operator.

Willie George mentioned, while Thomas was talking about the Ellison case, that an important factor that was included in the case was that after it was over, it opened up the chance for African American workers to move into jobs within different departments and he felt that this was partly the reason he was able to move departments from the Calendar department to the Mechanics' shop. He thought this showed the new flexibility of the Bleachery to allow African Americans upward mobility in expanded job prospects. Willie George was qualified to move to the Mechanic shop because he had expertise working with machines. He attended Bloomfield Technical College in New Jersey, and while he was living in Rock Hill, he attended York Technical College. His college training and experience along with his seniority at the plant made his transition to a different department very easy.<sup>54</sup> Thomas said, the Bleachery was very fair when it came

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<sup>53</sup> Willie George Hall interviewed by author, Rock Hill, June 6, 2017.

<sup>54</sup> Willie George Hall interview, June 6, 2017.

to this, especially after the Ellison case brought attention to the inequalities and after the case it made it so that if the person was qualified they got a chance to show it and could compete with others for the job.<sup>55</sup> Their experiences in the 1960s reaffirm that the Bleachery had a way of surviving difficult times as it had in the Great Depression and times of strike. It was a place that people went to work and the outside world tended to transition and move on.

Donald Hardin, another black worker at the Bleachery, began his career in the Laundry department in 1968 and he worked in this position for six months. His responsibilities in the department was to wash all of the rags used to clean the different departments around the Bleachery. This was a custodial job but due to the changing times and impact from the Ellison case, Donald was able to get a job as a back tender in the Printing department shortly after starting his job at the Bleachery. He did not have to have seniority to get the job as a back tender, and he started in the Printing department without any issues regarding his race. According to him his initial treatment by his white coworkers was “kind of tight, they didn’t allow us in the front of the machines, and they showed a little prejudice but after working together for a while, we got together and played ball together, drank beer together...” He said that Rock Hill was a prejudiced place and he experienced discrimination in the five and dime store on Main Street. He argued that the present times are actually more difficult for African Americans because they did not kill each other like they do today. He said the Bleachery was initially

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<sup>55</sup> Thomas Roach III interview, June 6, 2017.



prejudiced, but with time once the whites understood he was there to work, the situation improved and they got along well.<sup>56</sup>

Samuel Williams made very important points when he was interviewed. He was a farm boy with a family history at the Bleachery as many of his relatives worked there. He began his career in the plant in the year 1962 as a cleaner. His coworkers contributed to his enjoyment and love for the Bleachery. Both whites and African Americans helped him out while he was working and as a result he stayed on the job. His coworkers were very helpful and he described the Bleachery as a family that he was accepted into. He said the treatment of all the workers was fairly equal and was balanced between the races and the genders. His first recollection of African Americans becoming more prominent and most importantly disproving the idea that because of their race they were dumb and inferior in the mid-1960s. He said he did not see people, white or African American refusing help, they all tended to help one another.<sup>57</sup> Mr. Williams did not believe that African Americans were dumb and inferior and working with them and coexisting shows that he was genuine. This was a common occurrence in the Bleachery and African Americans were readily accepted by most because they were a facet of the Southern culture.

Leoda Starnes was another individual who worked for decades at the Bleachery and her perspective on African Americans, especially the women, was very positive. Leoda began working for the Bleachery in 1946 on the print swing line. Her

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<sup>56</sup> Donald Hardin interviewed by author, Rock Hill, August 3, 2017.

<sup>57</sup> Samuel Williams interviewed by author, York, May 16, 2017.

responsibility was to cut out sections of cloth periodically and check them to make sure that the pattern was correct. This was on the top floor of the Printing department, and she would drop the patch of cloth down to the printers on the first floor so that they could also check to make sure that the printer was running correctly. She mentioned that the working conditions in the 1940s were somewhat bad because the Printing department had no air conditioning and the building would get extremely hot. She was laid off as soon as the men returned from the service because the Bleachery promised all the servicemen who were formally employed by the Bleachery their jobs once they returned from World War II. She said that in the 1940s, the Bleachery was very good to its workers, especially to servicemen, because they allowed them to return to work after the war and restore some form of normalcy to their lives.

Leoda spent the intervening years of the 1950s as a housewife and had three sons. All three of her sons would eventually work in the Bleachery for a period of time while they were in high school. She herself returned to the Bleachery in 1956 and started, again, in the Packing department. This is significant because she used to have a highly sought after job in the war years in the Printing department, but this job was taken from her and given back to a man as soon as they were able to return from their time as service members. The men who took back their jobs in the Printing department were some of the highest paid workers in the plant, and by this time there were hardly any, if there were any at all, women in the Printing department. This was common in the industries and especially in the war years that women proved they could do the exact same work as a man, but gender stereotypes prevented them from keeping their positions after the war.

Leoda said in the 1940s when she worked in the Printing department that the gender stereotypes were highly prevalent, but when she returned in the 1950s, the atmosphere had changed somewhat and the stereotypes were not as bad. This is probably because the Packing department had many more women working in it than what she would have worked with in the Printing department. She said once she returned to the Bleachery she and the other employees she was hired alongside were trained for five weeks. During this five week period, they were taught every job in the Packing department, so they would be “a well-rounded worker,” and could do every job in the department if needed. Her job in the 1950s was a cloth inspector and she would determine if the cloth that was being packed was one of three different qualities. First quality was the best, then second and third was not of much use and so they turned this cloth into rags they would clean up with.

The African Americans in the 1950s were in custodian jobs and she said in the Packing department that she remembers two working with her. They were a married couple and she said everyone she worked with treated them well and were not harsh to them because they were African American. She did not see any animosity directed at the couple. In the 1960s they began to hire more African Americans in the Packing department and she said this integration period was not very difficult and no big issues occurred. As the African American women were hired, she and her fellow white women who had been in the department welcomed them and treated them as their “sisters.” The Bleachery was just like that, and they treated everybody equal and fair. The reason that

they did not have many issues was because the Bleachery was a place to work and in order to keep a job you had to coexist and work together.<sup>58</sup>

Jerri Allen worked for the Bleachery off and on for nineteen years and was present for most of the 1960s. Her perspective shows some problems in gender equality, but also offers further evidence that the Bleachery was not an overtly racist place to work. Jerri worked in the Lowenstein Building in the Open Stock office. Her responsibilities in this position positioned her as a liaison for the main Lowenstein office of New York. She was tasked with communicating orders to the different departments including any changes to customers' orders and with reporting progress back to the New York office. Due to this job, she was able to see a broad swath of the Bleachery, across many of the departments, and she mentioned how well both white and African American workers got along at the Bleachery.

She mentioned her personal experience with an African American custodian she called "Budget." She and this man got along very well and worked together until he passed away. She and her coworkers, including her supervisors, attended Budget's funeral, where the officiator asked the office manager to speak about Budget, and Jerri remembered the comments were very positive, acknowledging Budget as a hard worker.

Jerri moved from open Stock to the Print shop office, where she replaced a man. She enjoyed working in this office. However, the pay discrepancy for her as a woman was too great and so she had to leave in 1971. She reflected on her time at the Bleachery

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<sup>58</sup> Leoda Starnes interviewed by author, Rock Hill, May 16, 2017.

and said; “It was a good experience. When I and Bob look back where we’ve been, we can see where God used us, and got us ready for the work at hand.” She and her husband Bob would go on to work in missions for her church and also run a youth camp at North Myrtle Beach until the early 2000s.<sup>59</sup>

Jack Bolin’s interview also helped to establish a unique the unique profile of the Bleachery. Rock Hill was thrown into a tumult during the Civil Rights Movement, and conflict and racial tensions abounded in the city. Bolin, in his interview, pointed out that the life in Rock Hill was relatively peaceful and he attributes this to the fact that from the 1940s into the 1960s were not like today’s time. Where he sees the media constantly barraging the airwaves and scrutinizing events at such an intensive caliber, which he believes is a contributing factor leading to division. While he was growing up, his mother worked in textiles and was associated with the Aragon Mills in Rock Hill, and because she worked third shift his mother hired a live-in maid. This maid was an African American lady, which was a common practice in these years, and he said she treated him and his siblings like they were her own children. He did not really know segregation because he grew up with and interacted with an African American lady and played with African American children. His mother also sold Avon products and she had both white and African American customers. She did not discriminate. He said if they were not able to pay her, she would accept payment in food, often times biscuits.

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<sup>59</sup> Bob and Jerri Allen interviewed by author, Rock Hill, July 17, 2017.

Due to this upbringing and the way that Rock Hill had a mostly peaceful and cordial relationship between the races, Jack said that he did not know of any major issues in Rock Hill until the influx of Civil Rights activists. He mentioned that he felt Martin Luther King Jr.'s influence could have caused the issues. He explained that even though Rock Hill residents of different races got along, he felt, that if it was pushed, especially into desegregation in the public sphere that issues would occur. However his older brother convinced him that he should not feel that way and so when Civil Rights activism occurred in the city he tended to avoid the locations, which often were areas of strained emotions and tensions because he detests violence.

Bolin stated that, even though racial violence occurred in the city none occurred in the Bleachery. He also asserted that there was not much of an audience for politics in the Bleachery, so the small talk that happened around the plant tended to avoid issues which occurred in the city. He thinks that there was not much racial issue brought up in the Bleachery because it was essentially an unwritten rule that if you caused trouble it was very likely that the person who did would be fired. This trouble meant anything that affected production such as a protest or argument within the plant. He mentioned that he was able to listen to coverage of the John F. Kennedy assassination, on the radio. Bolin and his coworkers in the Engraving department, which he began working with in 1957, were in a part of the plant that was separately closed off from the main production floor and this allowed certain amenities. These amenities consisted of being allowed to listen to a radio while working. He said the trade off to this was that the Engraving department was in a room without much light and it had no windows.

The Bleachery tended to be a place meant for work and as a result outside issues such as racial and society were often ignored to prevent the development of interior complications and leading to a drop in production of cloth and finished fabric products. Bolin's example of his supervisor ignoring outside politics, and that they often fell on a deaf ear at the Bleachery, was when John F. Kennedy was killed in 1963, because once he heard it on the radio, he said he rushed down to tell his supervisor that the President had been killed. The supervisor's responded, "So what? Get back to work Bolin." Jack tried to tell him that he had heard that the President had been killed and the supervisor did not care.<sup>60</sup> Jack's perspective is important because it reflected many of the others interviewed who felt that racial tensions did not appear much in the Bleachery because it was a place to work, not a public square. Work ethic in this respect is a valid explanation for the attitudes toward race and politics as well as keeping a job to provide for families and to survive. The pay was not great, but several made the point that, it was at least subsistent. This attitude that a strong work ethic and the ability to coexist with coworkers regardless of race helps to assert that the Bleachery was important to the people of Rock Hill as it employed countless thousands during its many years of operation. The people coexisted and made enough money to survive and allow their families to grow and contribute to overall growth and development of the community of Rock Hill.

Betty Jo Rhea mentioned in her interview that when she was raising her children, who were teenagers, during the Civil Rights Movement that the city of Rock Hill had a palpable tension and she often worried about her children as they were in and around the

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<sup>60</sup> Jack Bolin interview, July 22, 2017.

city. For her to say something like that about Rock Hill shows that the city, which she said was very safe in the 1950s, had drastically changed. Although she did not work at the Bleachery, she said she never heard of any major racial outbreaks or tensions there. She did say that she thought the reason that the Bleachery did not have major issues was because African Americans were not being entirely denied the right to work there. She did think that if African Americans had been prevented from working in the Bleachery, that the Bleachery would have had big problems.<sup>61</sup> Fortunately for the Bleachery, and its workers, both black and white, when the individuals involved in the Ellison Case filed their lawsuit, the Bleachery management and Lowenstein & Sons Company complied with the laws after the ruling of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Michael Joslin Gordon, the nephew of Archie Joslin, the first General Manager and eventual president of the Lowenstein & Sons Company, also interjected his opinions and experiences of working in the Bleachery in the 1960s. He was from a family that was not prejudiced and this contributed to an upbringing with more open attitudes. He went to St. Anne's Catholic School in Rock Hill, one of the very first of the fully integrated schools in South Carolina, and he was in the first class that completed first through the eighth grade. He had in that respect grown up with black children and so when he began working as a summer job while he was attending Clemson University, he was able to gain a perspective on racial relations in the plant. He said that he did not see any animosity in the plant while he worked there, "not one bit."

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<sup>61</sup> Betty Jo Rhea interview, July 17, 2017.



He made a comment about his father, Howard Gordon, who like his uncle Archie, was also in upper management at the Bleachery. Gordon said, that around his father people did not try to ask prying questions of how the Bleachery was run. His father was very connected to and proud of the Bleachery and so he did not like it when people questioned how it functioned. Nevertheless, Michael said he wondered why integration did not occur sooner at the plant, but did not dare ask his father about it for fear of an angry reprisal. He mentioned that once he got a job in the sales sector of M. Lowenstein & Sons Company and had to travel around the country, that when he was in Rock Hill, he would stop by the Bleachery and he never saw or heard of any racial issues. He said the prevailing family aspect of the Bleachery was in place and so all of the workers coexisted regardless of racial backgrounds. This was an attitude that prevailed from upper management all the way to the hourly workers, and the family all got along well.<sup>62</sup>

Thomas “Pookie” Williams worked in the Bleachery for many years and he was able to meet and work with many different people. Due to his college education from Clemson University, where he majored in textile chemistry, he was able to start out in the Bleachery’s Laboratory, where he worked as a shade matcher matching colors from customers’ orders and appropriately mixing the chemicals and dyes to make the color. He worked in this position until 1961. Pookie then was moved over to the Rayon department where he worked in a supervisor’s role because he was knowledgeable about the different colors and mixing formulas. His position allowed him to hire and fire workers. He said that in his career he was able to work with both whites and African Americans and during

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<sup>62</sup> Michael Gordon interview, May 18, 2017.

the 1960s, to his knowledge, he did not see any racial issues in the Bleachery. As with others, he first noticed that African Americans began in the custodian jobs and cleaned up around the plant when he first got there in 1959. He said that when the Bleachery decided to integrate, the transition went smoothly.

In order to get a job, a worker had to have enough seniority and had to be qualified for the job. Qualification generally came from working as a pseudo-apprentice and from watching the other person do their job until the more experienced worker was confident that the apprentice had the skills to do the job. Pookie had to decide if the person was qualified and he said if the person could do the job, regardless of race. Also, if the person did not have enough seniority it was his responsibility as a supervisor to tell them. He said the African Americans who worked with him in custodian jobs were good workers and if no one else had applied for the jobs, he would hire them for the position and train them to do the job.<sup>63</sup> Pookie's attitude towards his workers show that he was fair and that he did not care what their race was as long as they worked hard and did their job. He also mentioned that he noticed the influx of black women into his department around the late 1960s and in this time period white women entered the department as well. He, to his knowledge, did not know of any issues with hiring black workers. He claims that when he hired Willian Wilkes, he had hired the very first black woman to work in the office, and she was an excellent worker.

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<sup>63</sup> Thomas "Pookie" Williams interviewed by author, Rock Hill, June 5, 2017.

Another important worker interviewed for this thesis was James Covington.

James worked most of his career at the Bleachery in the Roller Print Machine shop. He was a productive printer and was eventually made supervisor in 1974. During his time in the print shop, he interacted and gained the trust of his fellow coworkers. He said, since he was hired from within as a supervisor, he was better able to understand the perspectives of his workers. He mentioned that this helped him immensely to gain their trust and cooperation. He said when his wife passed away that many African Americans showed up to her funeral. A lady, approached his wife's home healthcare nurse, at the funeral and asked her why so many African Americans were at this white woman's funeral. Her response was "James was a supervisor at the Bleachery and he was a man of the people and he treated everybody the same regardless of race."<sup>64</sup> From interviewing James and learning that he still is associated with some of his former black employees he exemplifies a very rare quality for people who were laid off from the Bleachery, many of those interviewed for this thesis did not keep in contact with their fellow coworkers.

Earl Honeycutt was an international representative and strong member of the union at the Bleachery. While Honeycutt was there in the 1960s, the Bleachery was bringing in both African American and white workers. He said that it was a mix of good and bad workers. Honeycutt was being honest. He expressed, there were hard workers, both white and African Americans, but there were also some from both races who were not good workers. He said there were not any issues between the races and as a member of the union and a shop steward, he had to go to different departments and during his

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<sup>64</sup> James Covington interviewed by author, Rock Hill, July 10, 2017.

entire time at the Bleachery from 1955 to 1977, he did not remember a single bout of violence between whites and African Americans. Violence could have could have happened, but he did not have recollections of it occurring.<sup>65</sup>

While progress in race relations was occurring, in the plant and also in the Rock Hill community, women were also gaining ground in the workplace. Leoda Starnes, faced gender stereotypes when she was in the Printing department in the 1940s, but she noted over time this changed.<sup>66</sup> The men were all positive in relationship to women and it is seen that over time, especially as the Bleachery began to decline, that “men’s jobs” and “women’s jobs” just became jobs because a big factor in the job regardless of race or of gender was the power of having seniority. It would become possible for women to step into jobs that had previously been male dominated.

According to Samuel Williams, when he worked in the Bleachery, a main reason that he decided to stay was because he had received help from his coworkers, namely his female coworkers. They took him under their supervision and helped him learn how to do his job. Many who were allowed to work at the Bleachery were hard workers and had good attitudes. A pivotal moment in Samuel’s Bleachery career was when his coworkers embraced him and taught him his job, and by doing this helped him and it made him feel welcome and so when other workers entered the job place, he said he returned this favor to the new workers that he experienced when he first started working for the Bleachery.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Earl Honeycutt interviewed by author, Rock Hill, May 26, 2017.

<sup>66</sup> Leoda Starnes interview, May 16, 2017.

<sup>67</sup> Samuel Williams interview, May 16, 2017.

Jack Bolin mentioned in his interview that women held important jobs while he worked in the Packing department. Bolin got his start in this department in 1951, and from this time until 1957, the women who worked with him were very good workers. He said he was on the first shift and it was very labor intensive. He did not delve into the roles the women had in the department, but he mentioned that they were active members of the shift.

Pookie Williams spoke very positively about his women employees and their work at the Bleachery. He said he never had a woman as supervisor, but they were given the opportunity to bid on jobs, and if the men they bid against were not as qualified and did not have seniority the women would take the positions and work them. If the women did not have the qualifications they could also be taught to do the job, this generally only happened if there was no man interested in the job, but it showed that women did have chances to succeed in the workplace. Pookie said that when he started working in the Rayon department, there were two women who had been there for at least twenty years because they had kept their jobs since World War II. While in the Rayon department, he had no qualms against hiring a woman and ended up having a lot of women who worked under him. His experience as a supervisor exhibited that women were more prompt workers and were less often absent when compared to their male counterparts. He believed this resulted from the women's commitment of caring for their families and, with this in mind, they came to work and worked diligently. He claimed that only the Packing and Shipping departments had more women than his Rayon department. He also remembers hiring African American women who also were very good workers. He said

this influx of African American women being hired happened around the same time that white women began coming in greater numbers in the mid to late 1960s.<sup>68</sup>

Overall, the Bleachery was greatly changed during the 1960s and as a result of women and integration the Bleachery became a more diverse and productive work place. The events of the 1960s in Rock Hill, despite the tumultuous activities happening in the city, the Rock Hill Printing and Finish Company was relatively peaceful and the workers of both races got along very well. The great impact of the Leroy Ellison case on the company was that it created equality and brought many driven and hardworking individuals into production level jobs. It allowed families to grow and expanded Rock Hill. Without the Civil Rights Movement and Federal Government intervention, Timothy Minchin was correct in his statement, things would have taken a lot longer for the Bleachery to develop into the plant it was meant to be. The Bleachery stood apart from other locations in the 1960s because even though it had some racist undertones in its hiring process for black workers, it was quick to alleviate these issues and move on into the future. The Bleachery became a fair and understanding place in the 1960s and its impact would continue into the future and impact the next three decades.

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<sup>68</sup> Thomas "Pookie" Williams interview, June 5, 2017.

## Chapter Three: The 1970s

The Rock Hill Printing and Finishing Company experienced changes in the 1970s that were characteristic of many textile firms in the United States, changes that reflected the beginning of a steady decline of the textile industry as a whole. The Bleachery workers and executives showed mixed emotions during the 1970s because of the decline. Many of the workers were confused and worried about the future of the plant and also their own personal employment futures. In the 1970s the Bleachery was filled with uncertainty as many layoffs occurred and many of Rock Hill citizens lost an important pillar of stability.

Samuel Williams described the 1970s as a time when the Bleachery began its downward turn. He worked at the Bleachery until 1983, and he witnessed the stresses and changes that occurred at the plant. He said, the 1970s were years of change in the work ethic of some in the Bleachery, especially the younger generations.<sup>69</sup> Attitudes changed in the United States following the 1950s especially in what people deemed important to having a successful life. In the earlier days of the Bleachery, education was not seen as overly important. However, following World War II and the ensuing 1950s economic boom in the United States, opportunities in cities and towns across America increased. Rock Hill is not an exception to this trend as workers at the Bleachery held steady jobs. As a result after years of dedicated hard work, the workers were able to provide a better future for their children, and thus allowing for better educational opportunities. This

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<sup>69</sup> Samuel Williams interview, May 16, 2017.

caused a change in the dynamic of the textile worker as many of the children of Bleachery employees chose not to work their entire working careers in the Bleachery.

In the town of Lockhart, South Carolina, where Harold Roberts grew up things were very similar. He explained that following WWII, many of the individuals in Lockhart had more purchasing power, than the prewar generation, and this led to the development of other skills and in turn options. Roberts never worked in the mill in Lockhart as a result of the changing times. His outside perspective is important because he noticed that, once people could purchase consumer goods such as the automobile, that mobility and chances to leave Lockhart occurred. Once they left Lockhart the workforce was able to pursue other avenues of work other than Lockhart's textile mill. According to Roberts, Lockhart was also different from the Bleachery because it had a mill village that contributed to substantial paternalistic control over the workers. This paternalism, he believed, declined as the company sold off the mill houses in 1954. It also led to the gradual dropping of production and workers in the mill.<sup>70</sup>

Samuel Williams noticed the changing dynamic, of workers leaving the plant for other opportunities, in the Grey department where he was a supervisor in the 1970s. His recollections of working at the Bleachery, state that the Bleachery was a relatively secure job and more often than not, prior to the 1970s, it was difficult to be fired or laid off. The changing generation he noted did not have as much of a work ethic and he felt that this contributed to the decline of the textile industry. He felt this way because they tended to

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<sup>70</sup> Roberts, Harold. 25.



not be as focused on their work.<sup>71</sup> This can possibly be attributed to the younger generation using the Bleachery as a first job, instead of as career commitment as had previous generations. Samuel felt this contributed to the decline that began in the 1970s because the younger generation wanted “something for nothing and this was both whites and African Americans.” The younger generation had changed their attitudes towards working and this had a heavy impact according to him. He did qualify this statement, however, by saying that most of his workers worked hard and maintained a good level of production. The family aspect of the Bleachery, despite the changing times, remained constant and everyone got along. His bosses in regards to paternalistic controls and trying to motivate him as a supervisor came in the form of a general understanding. “They’d tell you what to do and you’d best go do it because if you didn’t they was coming out there to find out why.”<sup>72</sup> So with this motivation in his mind Samuel often got the most out of his workers and dealt with issues in his department as best as he could.

However, he did show that there were tensions in the department when he mentioned two different incidents, where a supervisor was overbearing and was physically struck by two different workers. In these situations, Samuel said, the supervisor entered into a losing situation because both men who hit him were aggravated with the job, or were not having a good day. These situations led to Samuel saying “you can’t treat people like animals,” and he meant the supervisor needed to be more respectful to his workers. This supervisor was “strictly boss,” so he had his issues,

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<sup>71</sup> Samuel Williams interview, May 16, 2017.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

because he tended to enter into situations that he should not.<sup>73</sup> Samuel however, understood how best to treat his workers, showing them respect and treating them fairly. He was never struck by an employee because he understood their issues since he had been in their position years before. He said his biggest issue was the increased use of “dope” in the department, and he dealt with this by calmly speaking to his workers and told them they would get fired if they continued to smoke on company property.<sup>74</sup>

His first inclination that the Bleachery was in decline came when the Bleachery closed the Grier Division in 1974. This moment, along with the discontinuation of the Outdoors Christmas Party, held annually for the Bleachery employees and their children, marked the Bleachery’s decline. The decision to end the Christmas party impacted attitudes, and he felt that the Bleachery management stopped caring as much for the workers and their families.<sup>75</sup> He was a union member, and he said during this time that the union stepped up and made the situation better for the workers. The union gave the workers the choice to join and he said there was a noticeable change in the demeanor of the upper management, especially when the union went before them. Meetings between the supervisors and upper management, showed this attitude change and he, as a supervisor, had to relay their goals back to the workers. He said this “finally just washed out the whole plant.<sup>76</sup>” The changing times and layoffs that occurred in the 1970s impacted Samuel, and they moved him to the Bleach department in a supervisor’s role.

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

He held this position until he was moved again in the early 1980s into the White department.

Another perspective on the changes in the 1970s, and how they impacted the Bleachery and its workers comes from Donald Parrish. Donald worked in the Grier Division from 1957 to 1974 when it was closed. He, unlike some others, was able to transition to another department. The layoffs in the Grier Division impacted the Bleachery because many of these men and women tried to transfer back to the main plant with many being unable to regain employment. He was able to become one of the Bleachery's mechanics, and this allowed him to stay on at the plant until it closed its doors in 1998.<sup>77</sup> His responsibility was maintenance of the machines, and he said the mechanical department in the early 1970s was not integrated, but once it was required, the Bleachery moved in African Americans. Willie George Hall became one of Donald's coworkers and they bonded over many years of working together. This was a response of the final conclusion of the Leroy Ellison court case and allowed for African Americans to enter the more skilled jobs with higher pay.

The union's interaction during this time was effective according to Donald because the Bleachery did not have an overbearing union such as the larger unions in the north, which he said tried to get too much for retirement programs and actually bankrupted the companies. He said the union was helpful during this time as it stepped up and assisted the workers from an overbearing supervisor and gave other protections. He

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<sup>77</sup> Donald Parrish interview, May 20, 2017.

said the union and the company got along well and it was fairly balanced.<sup>78</sup> He mentioned the changes in technology in the plant and the transition from the roller print machines to the screen print machines. The changes led to further automation of the printing process and this eventually cut out the roller print machines because they were outdated. The attitudes throughout the plant as the technology changed and brought about a cutback and layoffs of jobs was seen by Donald, especially from those who were low on the seniority roster at the plant and many he said in the Mechanic department who had fewer years began to look for other jobs and some left to become mechanics for the Celanese plant and the Bowater plant.<sup>79</sup>

Donald Hardin began as full time printer in the Printing department in 1973. He was the second black printer to ever hold the position at the Bleachery. His experiences in the plant explain the issues that African Americans faced in the late 1960s and early 1970s. He said the most difficult aspect of discrimination he faced was the pay inequality between whites and African Americans . He attributes the Ellison Case to gaining equality in the plant, because a black printer did not make as much initially as a white printer. After the case was filed, the conditions got better and over time when he worked in the Printing department all forms of racism and prejudice were eradicated. “The Bleachery was a nice place to work, they fed a lot of black families.” As time progressed the relationships between white and black improved and the “family” aspect of the

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid.

Bleachery crossed racial boundaries. He was able to eat dinner at white coworkers' homes and got to know their families, namely James Covington, who was his supervisor.

Layoffs were unheard of in the 1970s at the Bleachery, but during this time as the plant began its cutbacks many people in the plant were worried about their futures. He said changes in technology was a major factor in the layoffs in the Printing department because the plant began transitioning from roller printing to screen printing. Simultaneously, the main reason for the decline was outsourcing to overseas countries by American consumers, which drastically withdrew demand for American made products.<sup>80</sup> His experiences in the 1970s exemplify the issues that workers faced in the Bleachery, and also why so many in the plant remember it fondly.

Jack Bolin, as mentioned before, worked in the Engraving department from 1957 until 1971. He was impacted by the changes in the 1970s, because he was laid off from the Engraving department in 1971 as jobs began to change in the Bleachery in regards to a less need for roller print machines. He said when the Bleachery brought in its first screen print machine that it was just a matter of time because the screen print meant death to the roller print machines, which were the major contributor to the development of the Bleachery.<sup>81</sup> He and others knew what happened in the Lyman, South Carolina plant as the screen print machines replaced the roller print machines and cost many in Lyman their jobs. He said every day from the point when the first screen print machine came in that the Bleachery was going downhill.

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<sup>80</sup> Donald Hardin interview, August 3, 2017.

<sup>81</sup> Jack Bolin interview, July 22, 2017.

According to Jack there was a mix of fear and anxiety, because he felt those emotions when he was terminated in the 1980s. He said that rumor spread about the end of the Bleachery and caused many to leave the Bleachery for the other mills. According to Jack, a common thing with people who left the Bleachery was they went on and moved on with their lives and found something new either through retirement or through other occupations.<sup>82</sup> This change in the focus of the market away from roller print machines directly affected the engravers because they etched the patterns into the rollers. Jack mentioned that he enjoyed working in the department and he needed the work.

When he was laid off in 1971, he told one of the supervisors after being out of work for two weeks that he needed to be rehired in the Sign department, and as a result of his artistic abilities, he was rehired at the Bleachery.<sup>83</sup> Jack was tasked with painting different things around the plant including instruction signs, and he also created advertisements and logos for Lowenstein. His supervisor wanted him to help out with the *Bleachery Beacon* and he worked as a cameraman. He was able to see a majority of the plant and he took pictures for the *Beacon*. He posted notices on the message boards across the plants giving interdepartmental information to the different workers in the Bleachery this included news and other important changes to the Bleachery.<sup>84</sup>

When Jack began work in the Sign department he came up with a program called Operation IQ, short for Operation Improve Quality. He designed the logo while working in the Sign department. He felt that it was needed to fix issues in the Bleachery as far as

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

improvements. He gathered these improvements by talking to workers who were his friends that came into the Sign department and talked to him, and he also communicated with his supervisor and created a list of improvements for the Bleachery. When Bill Grier Jr. heard about the program, and what Jack had created, he supported its development and had Jack spread the information through a series of classes in which he instructed supervisors on how to improve their departments. The upper executives of M. Lowenstein & Sons were told about the plan and they told Grier to pursue the idea and get Jack to formalize his idea. This led to him teaching classes for about a month in the Bleachery to all of the Bleachery's supervisors and executives. These ideas were gained because he was tasked with going and talking to additional people in the different departments and gaining their perspectives on how the quality of work could be improved in the plant. Using these ideas, he placed them in a pamphlet for teaching purposes. He said the supervisors had to implement the strategies that were discussed in the classes, and the supervisors responded positively to a person of the Bleachery's rank and file working class, telling those ways that they could improve their respective departments.<sup>85</sup>

Jack became known as a resourceful worker and as a result his responsibilities extended to other important things within the Bleachery. The upper management of the plant obtained overstocked materials, such as fabric and other cloth goods, from the Lyman plant and this was stored in a warehouse at the Bleachery. A common thing that was done with this overstock was to hold sales of the merchandise for wholesalers and because Jack proved himself as a good organizer and salesman he was placed in charge

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

of these sales during the 1970s and early 1980s. He claimed that he increased the profits of the sales roughly six times the average of five thousand dollars on his very first sale. Jack said that with time these sales became open to the employees of the Bleachery and then the public. However, as production began slowing in the Lyman plant, the overstock ceased to come to the Bleachery and the sales stopped altogether.<sup>86</sup>

Jack said the issue of foreign competition and intervention led to the death of the textile industry, and as the United States could not compete with the cheaper labor and production of outside textile firms, it killed the Bleachery. This did not happen overnight, but it became an inevitability.<sup>87</sup> Another instance in the textile world occurred in Spartanburg, South Carolina as they also competed with foreign goods. The country they site as being the main contributor to the decline was Japan. Northern interests gained control of the mills in Spartanburg through stock buyouts and hired college educated individuals to become the managers and supervisors of their plants, and as a result attempt to restructure the plants making them more efficient. Roger Milliken ushered in the power of research to deal with the Japanese and other Asian countries threats and tailoring consumer needs to the products produced in Spartanburg's mills. The mill owners in Spartanburg attempted to deal with the issue of foreign intervention by specializing their goods. They also faced the same issues that Rock Hill did concerning layoffs.<sup>88</sup> The layoffs that began at the Bleachery in the 1970s created a waiting game

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Teter, Betsy Wakefield. *Textile Town: Spartanburg County, SC* (Spartanburg, SC: Hub City Writers Project, 2002.), 211-213.



essentially counting down the demise of the textile industry and Jack said “there was only one way to go for the Bleachery at that time and that was down.”

The workers of the Bleachery realized the decline and as Jack mentioned many felt confused and concerned for their future. He said the workers talked amongst themselves about their future employment and the declining state of textiles in the United States.<sup>89</sup> The Bleachery was beginning to transition into a desperate situation that plagued much of the existing United States manufacturing businesses of the time period. Jack’s perspective on the 1970s exemplify the changes occurring and how attitudes existed concerning the decline.

Decline in the Bleachery was prevalent across many of the departments, and the Finishing department was not spared from this tumultuous change over time. Vivian Zeiders, who began working at the Bleachery in 1976, detailed the stresses of working during the decline of textiles. Vivian came to the Bleachery following time spent at the Celanese plant, and her perspective as a woman in a male dominated department illuminates the changing times and attitudes of the Bleachery during the 1970s. Vivian’s family worked heavily in textiles, and she was influenced by them to go to work at the Bleachery. She said this was a major incentive for many to work at the Bleachery and as a result the bonds established among employees were family-like. Vivian and two other young women in their twenties were hired to work in the Finishing department, and she said that a majority of the men were very cordial and helpful when they first began

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<sup>89</sup> Jack Bolin interview, July 22, 2017.

working there. However, she mentioned that several of the older men were somewhat crass and difficult. They did not like having to change their daily routine and accommodate women in their department.

Despite their initial issues, Vivian and her fellow female coworkers were able to make peace with their male counterparts and she said that the time she spent at the Bleachery was great.<sup>90</sup> Her initial responsibilities within the Finishing department were to constantly maintain the mixture of chemicals used for finishing the fabrics, and she also made softener for the fabrics. The machines she had to work with at the time were not automated and as a result it was a continuous job to maintain the right amount and quantity of chemicals in the machines in order for the Finishing department to properly function. An important change that occurred during the 1970s as Vivian and her fellow female workers are prime evidence, was a change in gender roles and stereotypes in the workplace.

She gained experience and more importantly some seniority, as was needed, throughout her time in the Bleachery relief jobs. She was able to expand her expertise in the Finishing department periodically as her male and female coworkers needed breaks. Evidence, other than women working in previously male only departments, was that while working relief jobs for others on break Vivian was able to learn how to drive a forklift.<sup>91</sup> This feat is vital to understanding the change in gender stereotypes and the elimination of a “man’s work versus woman’s work.” Without the increased stress of the

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<sup>90</sup> Vivian Zeiders interview, June 6, 2017.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

1970s and changing perceptions in the workplace, Vivian and other women could not have made great leaps and bounds in the textile industry workplace.

When Vivian was learning to operate the forklift, traditionally a job held by males, she said she was “cat-called and picked at initially,” but with time and experience she said the men in her department gave her “all thumbs up.” She reasoned that the men in her department were middle aged and many of them were old enough to be her father. These men had children Vivian’s age and she said they supported her because the woman working in the department could just as easily have been their own daughters and she said they respected her for trying to earn a living.<sup>92</sup>

Vivian enjoyed her time at the Bleachery and mentioned its importance to the city of Rock Hill. According to her, when she was growing up in Rock Hill, the Bleachery had such an impact on families in Rock Hill that at least one person from every family in Rock Hill had a job at the Bleachery. She reiterated that this made the plant special because several generations of families worked in the Bleachery.<sup>93</sup> She would eventually work for three different textile companies; Celanese, Rock Hill Printing and Finishing, and Springs’ Catherine Mill in Chester. She said that of the three, Rock Hill Printing and Finishing was the best place to work. She said it was the family aspect of the plant and that all people in the plant were very courteous and treated their fellow workers, if they were not actual family, like an extended family. She said she did not know if the reason that the Bleachery was so impactful was due to it being a unionized plant, but she noticed

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

drastic differences between Springs' Catherine Mill, which was not unionized, and the union plants of Celanese and the Bleachery. In the Springs mill she said the worker did not have many rights, and could easily be fired, whereas in the Bleachery the union protected the workers through an established negotiated contract with Lowenstein. Therefore, she felt that the union and of course the family aspect impacted the success of the Bleachery being a welcoming and enjoyable place to work.<sup>94</sup>

Vivian's negative views on the Bleachery reside with the decline of the textile industry. She was a new hire in 1976 in the early days of the decline of the plant, and because she had not built up the ever important seniority, she was often subject to layoffs in the Finishing department. The Bleachery management wanted to keep its most senior and experienced workers on the job and because Vivian did not have as much time this impacted her, along with countless others, during this time period. She was laid off several times and called back by her supervisor in the Finishing department. She had to file for unemployment every time.

Vivian felt that the decline of the Bleachery was impacted by several issues. Primarily, she said it had to do with a changing economy where consumers wanted goods and services for cheaper prices, and as a result, foreigners were able to capitalize on these changing preferences.<sup>95</sup> The workers outside of the United States made it difficult to compete in textiles as they worked for cheaper and thus importations of foreign made goods increasingly outstripped demand for American made goods. She mentioned that

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

when she was growing up, her father, who was a union member, stressed that products in their home had to have the union marked “Made in America,” logo or he would make them send it back.<sup>96</sup> This dedication only created a short term solution to the growing competition of cheaper products from outside nations.

Finally, she felt that a change in the American worker also impacted the textile industry as evidenced by her training period at the Springs Catherine Mill where she worked as a weaver. She recollected that in the training period she worked with a group of fifteen potential new hires and by the end of the training sessions only two remained and she said this was because the work was long and difficult. She noticed this change in her generation and how they decided to go do other things and abandon textiles. Eventually she lost the will to continue with the stress of hoping that her supervisor would call her back and in 1982, she left the Bleachery for another job at Chester’s Catherine Mill.<sup>97</sup> Vivian’s story is a vital example of how the 1970s impacted the people who lived in Rock Hill and worked in the Bleachery as the major employer of several generations of Rock Hill citizens was entering its final years of decline.

Thomas “Pookie” Williams worked as a supervisor during the decline of the Bleachery and he agreed with many of the others that the Bleachery decline was noticeable especially when the roller print machines were taken away. Pookie supervised the Rayon department during the 1970s and on into the 1980s and he watched as technology and the needs of the consumer changed. He was a departmental manager and

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

he stressed when hiring the newer generations post 1970 in the interview process that they had to do two major things that would keep peace amongst the Bleachery workers and employers as defined by the union contract. First, the workers had to contact him if they were not coming to work and secondly, if they were going to be late to work. So, as an employer, he disagreed that the younger generations did not work as well or had motivation to work hard. He said he found out if the interviewees were going to be good workers during the mandatory probation period in a worker's first eight weeks of employment. If the workers made it through this time constraint without getting fired from the Bleachery it became difficult to get fired and he said he would claim them as "his." They would essentially become part of the Bleachery family.<sup>98</sup>

He also detailed the importance of hiring supervisors. In this process, Pookie made sure in his interviews with potential employees that they understood the expectations of their job. He only had to fire a few of his supervisors because he said once most of them understood the rules they did not get into disputes or trouble.<sup>99</sup> Another driving factor influencing Pookie stressing the rules was the union. While he himself was not in the union due to his position in management, he still had respect for the union. He had a similar interpretation on union methods and as a result he agreed with their stance on contract negotiations. This he sought to impress on his supervisors and the concept of being flexible with union members helped him to keep peace amongst the workers. The union had protections for the workers and to prevent union disputes he

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<sup>98</sup> Thomas "Pookie" Williams interview, June 5, 2017.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

made sure that his supervisors abided by the contract. In order to have a cohesive work environment that was conducive for work, he believed that there had to be a balance and in this realm the union and the company had to compromise and find common ground.<sup>100</sup> His time as a supervisor during the 1970s showed that the Bleachery had issues which would only get worse as time progressed and despite this, the spirit of the workers persisted and even though some were beginning to lose their jobs, many remained optimistic.

James Covington worked as a supervisor for the Printing department from 1974 until 1988 and his perspective on the decline is vital to understanding the changes that occurred in the plant. Due to his position as supervisor, he knew things about the work being tasked to the Bleachery. He noticed that the Bleachery was beginning to decline its production because work was being sent to other plants. The year 1974 marked the closing of the Grier Division and according to James the decline of the Bleachery because many of the workers who were in the Grier Division could not get jobs in the main plant and were fired. James viewed this decline initially as a political issue and said that a trend he noticed had to do with which political party held the Presidency of the United States. He saw that when Republicans held power that the print machines drastically slowed production versus when the Democrats held power.

He thought that this was the case at the Bleachery, but he soon learned otherwise. He made mention of Emile Russett, the General Manager of the plant, and how he had

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

heard a rumor amongst the printers that Emile had been hired to end the roller printing at the Bleachery, because he had been at the Lyman plant and he shut it down too.<sup>101</sup> He qualified this statement by saying that he did not know if this was why Emile was hired. This negativity about management was a common feeling, especially in the 1980s among the workers. The roller print machines had been the major method and lifeblood of the plant and many workers were hired in the plant. Beginning in the 1970s, the changes in taste of consumers, who did not want thousands of yards of the same pattern, called for change and this began to cost many their jobs. James' perspective on the decline will be further discussed in the next chapter and how important the transition to a new owner of the Bleachery impacted him and the other workers of the Bleachery.

Emile Russett held an important position in textiles for many years as he gained experience from working in different textile mills in both the north and the South. As mentioned by Covington, Emile worked for ten years at the plant in Lyman, South Carolina before he became the Assistant Plant Manager at the Rock Hill Printing and Finishing Company in 1977. When he first arrived at the Bleachery, he brought his experience from working in other mills and sought to make the Bleachery a better and more productive business. His initial thoughts on the state of operation of the Bleachery consisted of both positive and negative views. He saw that the Bleachery had a lot of very good things it was doing, but it also had a lot of old ways that they had not changed. He did not know why the Bleachery had not changed its ways, but he said the Bleachery was “inbred,” in which he meant that all of the supervisors had been hired from within the

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<sup>101</sup> James Covington interview, July 10, 2017.



stock of rank and file workers. This was not good because it led to traditional ways of doing things that were archaic and new perspectives and ideas were not being taken into consideration.<sup>102</sup> He focused on the issues that came from the union, and he learned quickly that there was a tenuous relationship between upper management and the union. He felt coming into the plant that the union should be a helper and not a hindrance and his actions from 1977 until the plant closed in 1998 reflect this view of cooperation.<sup>103</sup>

There was a strong mistrust of upper management from leaders of the union at the Bleachery, and he said that often when upper management told the union about the issues of the changing market and also the foreign competition and that the Bleachery needed to change with the times, resulted in backlash and resistance from the union. The union held the belief that the Bleachery had survived the Great Depression, World War Two, and many strikes which could have shut down the operations of the plant, and because of this the Bleachery would continue to survive and live on forever. The strikes which happened throughout the Bleachery's history influenced the union and affected their trust in the upper management of the plant. Emile feels the issues the Bleachery faced stemmed from this mistrust, and every time that the union was approached by upper management wanting to change operational rules to better compete in the changing world textile market, they were rebuffed because they feared the upper management wanted to take away the rights of the workers.<sup>104</sup> His goal as time progressed was to bring about a positive change to the Bleachery and bring the workers into reality and understand the

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<sup>102</sup> Emile Russett interviewed by author, Rock Hill, June 28, 2017.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

true issues that the plant was facing and that the Bleachery was in a dire situation of decline. However, he said he faced the union for most of his career and while they got along it was difficult to work with them at times.<sup>105</sup>

Emile knew the times were changing and he said that the Bleachery at its height employed around four thousand people, but when he started at the Bleachery, this number had dwindled to around one thousand. The initial height of roller printing at the Bleachery reached its zenith with a total of forty-six machines between the ten in the Grier Division and thirty-six in the main plant.<sup>106</sup> A demand for changing technology and as mentioned before a need to accommodate for the ever-changing preferences of customers led to the introduction of rotary screen print machines. Emile explained because customers' orders changed in quantity and were not as huge as was needed when fabrics such as flannel were in high demand and called for massive orders of the same pattern. Which would have made roller printing conducive, but orders shrank in size dramatically and often there was a need to constantly change out the patterns for different orders.<sup>107</sup>

The issues of the plant using roller print machines were that the massive rollers which contained the patterns for the cloth weighed too much, and as a result forklifts had to be used to place them into the machines. This process took a long time, whereas screens used in screen printing were light and could be moved by a single person and quickly changed out. The roller print machines employed roughly 480 people because

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

each of the thirty-two machines required five people to operate them. According to Emile, rotary screen print required three and this cost many their jobs as the new technology slowly began to phase out the old roller print machines.<sup>108</sup> Emile showed that the times were difficult for him and in the 1980s and 1990s the Bleachery would continue to face issues of decline.

The Rock Hill Printing and Finishing Company experienced challenges to its existence in the 1970s. The challenges of foreign intervention into the global textile market greatly impacted the American textile industry. These foreign entities began to present potential customers with a cheaper alternative to American made goods and as a result the textile industry in the United States began its steady decline. The Bleachery was not spared from this unfortunate reality and the attitudes of the workers showed that some were fearful of the future. The workers trusted the Bleachery to last as it had been a pillar in Rock Hill and the surrounding communities for employment and the livelihood for generations. Many were confused and searched for the cause of the downturn, and the attitudes ranged from complete denial to fear. The 1970s brought about the demise of the Grier Division and many people who worked there their jobs. This event in the history of the Bleachery can be seen as a marked instance of the Bleachery's decline as during this time layoffs began and would continue periodically until the plant closed its doors in 1998. The introduction of new technology greatly impacted the future of the plant with a

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

shift in focus from roller print machines to rotary screen printing, and the subsequent loss of jobs from the 1970s onward.

## Chapter Four: The 1980s

The Bleachery went through further tumultuous years in the 1980s as it experienced increased decline and layoffs. The 1980s are important to the history of the Bleachery and the people who worked there because they brought about a regime change. The changing of ownership from Lowenstein & Sons to the Springs Corporation brought many new dynamics to the Bleachery. With these changing dynamics and the perspectives of both Springs and Lowenstein employees created an emotional turmoil which would greatly impact the Bleachery and Rock Hill. The early 1980s consisted of a continuation of what began in the 1970s and that was the downsizing of the plant. This was done by gradually phasing out the major department of roller printing machines to be replaced with a more advanced and versatile form of printing that came from using rotary screen printing machines. As several have said in this study this was a major part of the Bleachery's decline because roller printing had been the supplier of work for the Bleachery. Changing times and consumer tastes also influenced the shift to rotary screen printing. The ability to diversify and quickly change to accommodate for the needs of the customers would be a challenge faced in the 1980s.

The resulting changes that occurred in the Bleachery cost many workers their jobs. Jack Bolin who had been working diligently throughout the 1970s after his first lay off, was impacted when his job was no longer deemed necessary and he was laid off again in 1981. His views on the Bleachery assist in understanding attitudes of workers. He expressed that as changes and decline increased in the plant and departments began to downsize many in the plant became fearful of their futures. He said that during this time

many people began searching for other jobs and during the 1980s many people left the Bleachery for both the Bowater and Celanese plant. Jack fortunately had a second career as an artist. He said when he was laid off for the final time, he thanked his supervisor because being laid off allowed him to expand his creative ability and gave him time to become a respected local artist in the Rock Hill area.<sup>109</sup>

His views on the 1980s and the decline of the Bleachery were optimistic because he was able to move on like many others who would lose their jobs from the 1980s onward. A common theme occurs in the manufacturing sector that despite hardship the workers were able to persevere against difficult odds. Many, Jack included, gained a strong work ethic from working at the Bleachery. This work ethic would help them to find new jobs and would influence their careers and life. This is a main reason that the Bleachery had a lasting impact on the workers and Rock Hill's development as a strong work ethic was instilled in generations of Rock Hill citizens. The textile industry's traditions of dedication and hard work spread through their experiences to future generations of Rock Hill.

Vivian Zeiders who began work for the Bleachery in the 1970s experienced a similar issue to Bolin. She did not have as much experience or seniority as Jack however, and as a result her time at the Bleachery in the beginning of its decline was plagued with continual layoffs. She was able to come back to work several times in the Finishing department but as Jack noticed, and she supported with her statements, that she too began

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<sup>109</sup> Jack Bolin interview, July 22, 2017.

looking for other work. Her coworkers were much older than she was and had been working in the Bleachery for well over twenty years when she started in 1976, and she said the layoffs were especially tough on them because they had focused their lives at a textile mill and had few marketable skills, and so many of them worried about finding jobs.<sup>110</sup>

The Bleachery was important to these people because it was a source of their livelihood and their children's livelihood. Losing this pillar that had supported them for their entire working career was extremely difficult. Vivian would eventually leave the Bleachery in 1982 as a result of a layoff and a feeling that she would not be called back like she had several times before, so therefore she moved onto the Catherine Mill owned by Springs in Chester, South Carolina. Her reasoning was she did not want to live on unemployment, again the strong work ethic instilled in her from her family, who worked at the Bleachery, and also through her own experiences working at the Bleachery proved too strong to allow her to do this. She felt compelled to work because she had learned that hard work and dedication led to a prosperous life. She worked at the Bleachery eight to ten hour long shifts and if overtime was presented to her she would also work this as well. Vivian understood and was dedicated to working, and she said the time spent at the Bleachery helped her to progress in her job at the Catherine Mill. She mentioned others who went through training at the Catherine Mill with her, and that of the fifteen she and another person were the only two that made it through the training.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Vivian Zeiders interview, June 6, 2017.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

There was a changing dynamic of the new working aged individuals. Many of her fellow trainees during training at the Catherine Mill fell into this category of the changing mindset and point of view because she said they did not have the dedication or desire to stand for several hours and work at a textile weaving machine. Vivian took her experience from working in the Bleachery and this conditioned her to be able and willing to stand long hours at the weaving machines, and as a result she was able to keep the job at the Catherine Mill until 1987. Vivian upon reflection of her time at the Bleachery said it was a good place to work and she enjoyed her time there other than the issues she faced with layoffs several times in her career.<sup>112</sup> Vivian's work ethic was a product of her upbringing and her time spent at the Bleachery fostered the attitude that prevails in the city of Rock Hill which is heavily influenced by its textile past that of hard work dedication and family.

Samuel Williams experienced the difficulties of the 1980s in his final years at the Bleachery. He held a supervisor's position and as a result of his seniority and productivity he was moved into different departments in the 1970s. He felt he was a cordial supervisor and he treated all his workers equal, both white and black, and held a high regard of respect for his employees. His experiences at the Bleachery were marked with a family atmosphere and all the workers tended to get along well with one another by constantly helping each other when needed. He had moved in the 1970s from the Grey department into the Bleach department, and finally in the late 1970s he transitioned into the White department where he would work until he was laid off. He said he was

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid.



responsible for making sure that his workers produced enough white cloth to be used in the Printing department. During this time he noticed the new technology of rotary screen printing and he marveled at the speed the machines produced printed cloth. He mentioned that his job became more difficult when he had to keep up with the printers and their new machines.<sup>113</sup>

However while he was working in this department many of the other workers were losing their jobs and being laid off and this became a common occurrence in the Bleachery. He faced the brunt of this himself in 1983 when he was laid off after working for nineteen years at the Bleachery. He felt the company lost interest in its workers and as a result to this trend many were laid off from their jobs. He said when he was laid off that roughly one thousand workers were laid off along with him. He like others who were laid off were forced to move on and find other occupations.<sup>114</sup> Like Jack Bolin he had another career, that of an automotive mechanic. His dedication to work and supporting his family is easily shown because he simultaneously worked two jobs one in textiles and the other as a car mechanic. He was approached while at the Bleachery by a manager of Rock Hill's branch of the South Carolina Department of Transportation and proved that he had knowledge and expertise in working with engine parts. He would transition from the Bleachery to the Department of Transportation where he would work as an automobile mechanic for twenty more years until his retirement in the early 2000s. He expressed that this was not an easy transition however because he had grown accustomed to the pay of

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<sup>113</sup> Samuel Williams interview, May 16, 2017.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

the Bleachery, and had budgeted his finances accordingly. This change in pay affected him and his family as they did not have the same income for a long time and he had to readjust his spending which negatively impacted his life.

Fortunately for Samuel, after some time of adjustment and increased pay he was able to lead a productive career outside of the textile industry. The Bleachery was like this for many families in Rock Hill and the surrounding area. They had to, according to Samuel, restart their working careers when they were laid off as the principle income for their family no longer existed. Some found the transition easy due their advanced age and the ability to draw retirement benefits. While others who were younger, had a more difficult time finding work that was compatible to their skills. He said many of his coworkers did not struggle because they were older women, but the situation was still very sad because they had dedicated so much of their lives to the plant.<sup>115</sup> The experience of Samuel Williams conveys the point the 1980s were a time of dynamic change at the Bleachery and were heavily impactful to the lives of former workers of the plant.

Donald Parrish recollected the 1980s as a period of decline. He said the 1980s was scary for many workers at the Bleachery because job security was uncertain, and many were laid off or went to look for other jobs. His attitudes blamed technology, especially the rotary screen printing machines. Technology was a limiting factor on the job roster according to Donald because as technology increased it required less workers as the machines became more automated. He held a very negative opinion of the Springs

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

Corporation and he blames their buyout of the Bleachery for the plant's decline and eventual demise. Springs bought the Bleachery in 1985 and with it Donald felt they came with an attitude. He felt the deal was negative for Springs because they did not want the Bleachery. He was a union man, and he knew of the Springs Corporation being antiunion. The Bleachery was actually Springs' very first union plant, Colonel Springs was a man who was very against unions. The tradition of Springs not having a union presence in their plants was the reason Donald understood this connection between Colonel and his company and he has a lasting impact even after his death.

Donald felt this attitude impacted the views of the executives of Springs. "They wanted to shut the Bleachery down but they couldn't find a reason it was a productive plant," Donald felt this way and he mistrusted the changes that occurred at the Bleachery after Springs bought the plant. Donald said "They went against the Bleachery way," and he meant Springs sought to bring in operational changes for the Bleachery's day to day functions. Donald felt the transition of Lowenstein to hire supervisors from within the stock of workers in the plant was a strong tradition and that it should have been continued when Springs acquired the plant. However this tradition was phased out as the 1980s progressed. He said changing this procedure was negatively impactful to the plant because morale was affected. He mentioned some of the new supervisors brought in by Springs were overbearing and wanted to change too much too fast. When this happened

he mentioned changes in the different departments which he was able to witness because he was a mechanic.<sup>116</sup>

One instance of this change during the transition years occurred in the Finishing department, where the new supervisor who had learned from his previous employment to place cloth on the screen print machines from wide to narrow, and according to Donald by doing this it was completely backward and would not work. He said the cloth was not meant to be stretched and then condensed and the workers in the department tried to tell the new supervisor this would not work. However this man would not listen to the workers in the department.

This was another complaint he had with the new leadership in the Bleachery, and that was they did not communicate and listen to the workers after Springs bought out the plant. This lack of communication between Lowenstein era Bleachery, and the newer Springs era Bleachery caused tensions in the plant which Donald said hurt the plant. The lack of communication was evident to Donald as in the Lowenstein era of the plant that upper management had a presence in the plant that was noticeable, he mentioned that General Manager William Grier walked the plant and had conversations with the workers. Donald claimed that he rarely saw the upper management walk the plant if at all.<sup>117</sup>

Another issue which assists in exemplifying changes in the Bleachery in the 1980s was the consolidation of the Mechanic's shop. Donald explained the Bleachery had

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<sup>116</sup> Donald Parrish interview, May 20, 2017.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

specialized mechanics who essentially took up residence in a specific department and this allowed them to be the expert on the machines within the department. Some of these workers were in these departments for decades. When Springs came into the plant, Donald said there was an issue in the Rayon department and the mechanic specific to the department needed extra help. The changing staff of management brought in a new head engineer for the plant and he did not know how things operated in the plant because he was from another location. So he called for another mechanic to come from the Packing department and he refused due to his sole training on the machines in the Packing department and also because he was union member and felt that it would violate his union protections if he left his department.

The upper management realized this problem and they wanted to diversify the Bleachery and have mechanics that could go from department to department fixing things without having to deal with the resistance from longtime mechanics. Due to this they chose to consolidate the Mechanic's shop and created a taskforce designed to fix machines across the plant.<sup>118</sup> This in theory seemed to be a very sound and intelligent idea, however as Donald mentioned each machine was different and a mechanic who had been in the Packing department for forty years and had never learned how to work on other machines in the other departments would run into a machine that he had never worked on before. This generally led to the mechanic who was supposed to be in the department as tradition dictated being called in to help the other mechanic. "Textile machines can be as complex as a car engine," and like a car engine according to Donald,

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

“each one is different and has its own special issues that time and experience working with them leads to a degree of expertise to be developed for that specific machine.” The problem with the idea was that this expertise had never been established on different machines and departments at the Bleachery traditionally, and therefore he said the management phased out this practice in the late 1980s and put the mechanics back into their respective departments of expertise.<sup>119</sup>

Donald’s experiences in the 1980s delineate the changes he as a mechanic experienced with layoffs and also the major dynamic change of new plant ownership. He expressed emotions of resistance to change as many of the longtime workers at the Bleachery felt also, and when Springs sought to change the operation of the Bleachery the transition experienced a drop in morale especially in the Mechanic’s shop as the Bleachery’s traditions were challenged. The “Bleachery way,” was a rich and deep entrenched system of operations and actions which were very difficult to change. Unfortunately time which was needed to effectively transition from Lowenstein to Springs and to effectively implement their new ideas that they had for operation, was not a commodity that was readily available due to the decline of the plant and the outside American textile industry as a whole. Donald’s perspective and negative attitudes towards Springs are a product of this stress and the decline of the Bleachery.

The Printing department was not left unscathed during the 1980s and the second shift supervisor who was present during these years gives a testimony to how the decline

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

of the Bleachery and the rise of rotary screen printing greatly impacted the workers of the Printing department. James Covington was this second shift supervisor from 1974 to 1988 and his attitudes were similar to Donald Parrish especially in regards to Springs. Springs buying the plant according to James had been a hope answered by many in the plant because the layoffs were intensifying and job security had greatly diminished at the Bleachery. Many people, James said felt that Springs buying the plant would resurge the production levels and keep the plant going for many more years. James disagreed with this because he was a supervisor and observant and realized early that Springs was focused on rotary screen printing. As a result of the buyout Springs obtained several other Lowenstein plants along with the Bleachery. James said because the Bleachery was traditionally a roller printing plant and these other plants had made the transition to more screen printing machines that this impacted the work that workers hoped to get with Springs when it was sent elsewhere and production continued to slow.

The plants in both Carlisle and Santee, South Carolina took a majority of the printing jobs away from the Bleachery and this greatly impacted the workers and their production levels. James felt that many in the Bleachery had been misled with the hope that Springs would revitalize production and that is why it was such a shock to many during this time when the plant continued to decline. He felt that Springs had no intention to keep the Bleachery open after it was bought because he said “They weren’t going to pay someone to do their work if they were planning on running it, they were keeping these plants’ workloads up and they started phasing the Bleachery out.” James took issue with the upper management of the Bleachery because one of the most difficult things he

had to do as a supervisor was inform his workers that they were being laid off and fired. He worked with these employees for many years and he felt it was wrong of the management to pass the responsibility of firing the workers to supervisors instead of firing the workers themselves.<sup>120</sup>

In his final months at the Bleachery James dealt with the difficult task of telling his workers it was their last day. He himself was given the option to transition over to the Screen Printing department but his departmental supervisor said to him on his last day in roller printing “James you can either work today or you can go home its whatever you want to do, but when you leave take your stuff with you because this is it.” He chose not to take a job in the Screen Printing department because he had issue with the supervisor of the department and did not want to deal with the issues as close as he was at fifty five to his retirement age. He said there were several in the department that were close to his age but there were also a lot of younger workers. He felt that because many of the workers were able to get jobs with General Tire after they were laid off from the Printing department that in the long term they ended up with better jobs. He decided not to go to work for General Tire because he had heard of the strenuous assembly line that they used and he felt he would not have been able to keep up with the flow of work every day.

James was the last print line supervisor to leave the Bleachery that was a true printer, because after he left the Shaders who shaded the cloth, became supervisors over the Printing department. The number of roller print machines was drastically cut back

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<sup>120</sup> James Covington interview, July 10, 2017.



when James worked in the Print shop and when he was laid off there were only two roller printing machines left in operation. James was able to get retirement benefits from Springs six months after being laid off from the Bleachery, and then he went on to work for Chesapeake Paper Company in Charlotte, North Carolina.<sup>121</sup> He was able to get roughly the same pay from Chesapeake that he had at the Bleachery and worked there until 1990 maintaining the waste paper from the *Charlotte Observer*. His experience from the Bleachery working in and around the printing machines helped him at Chesapeake because the Bleachery developed his mechanical mind and he was able to in turn fix the machines when they malfunctioned at Chesapeake.

James' perspective showed how the attitudes of many people in the plant were initially positive for the Springs buy out but with time and as the layoffs continued this attitude of hope changed back to despair. He was able to show the resiliency of the common Bleachery employee where they were able to continuing to work throughout the years after being laid off from the plant. General Tire became another source of work for former textile workers and helped to alleviate the stress of finding money to support their families. This perspective also adds to the argument that the dynamic changes of the 1980s brought about much change in not only the Bleachery but also its workers' lives. The Bleachery employed many people throughout the years and when the impact of the decline hit the plant hard in the 1980s and many lost their jobs a character of hard work and dedication to family which were both tantamount to the success of the Bleachery

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

assisted in the future of its workers and the future of Rock Hill as the city transitioned from textiles.

Donald Hardin experienced these issues as well in his time in the Printing department. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Donald became a full printer in 1973. He would enter the 1980s and be laid off. He said this was very difficult for him and his family as he was raising three children in the 1970s. When it came through that he would be laid off in 1980, his sons and daughter were very young and he experienced stress and confusion about his future. Fortunately, his wife was able to get a job at the Bowater plant, and so while he was laid off her income, combined with his unemployment benefits, allowed them to survive temporarily until he was able along with three former white coworkers to get jobs in Carlisle, South Carolina at Cone Mills. Donald said he loved textiles and would have continued until retirement in textiles if they had lasted into the 2000s.

He felt that management was better at Carlisle compared to the Bleachery, and where the Bleachery had dropped its paternalistic functions such as the Christmas parties, as Samuel Williams argued in his interview, Carlisle maintained these and communication with upper management was very common. He mentioned that Carlisle did more for the workers, but he said “I don’t have nothing bad to say about the Bleachery, they treated me nice, other than the pay inequality at the beginning.” Donald was laid off from Carlisle and had the opportunity to return to the Bleachery and he worked from 1987 to 1988. He said there was not a noticeable difference between Lowenstein and Springs when he returned in 1987. His stay at the Bleachery was very

short and he returned to Carlisle when he was given the chance. Donald took the opportunity in 1989 to work weekends at General Tire, and this would prove to be a lasting future job when the textile industry went out in the 1990s.<sup>122</sup> He experienced the hardship of the 1980s and like many others in the study, he was able to survive and move on proving the resiliency instilled through hard work at the Bleachery. Though he stayed in textiles, he too would have to adjust to the changing times.

The 1980s were a time of change for the Bleachery, and also Rock Hill. Leoda Starnes was impacted both positively and negatively during the 1980s while she worked in the Packing department. Being female at the Bleachery in earlier years proved to be detrimental however with the stresses and layoffs of the 1970s and 1980s women who had gained seniority were able to supersede the once stereotypical jobs referred to as women's work, and step into roles once entirely dominated by their male counterparts. Leoda said that because of the layoffs and her many years in the department, allowed her to learn to drive a forklift.<sup>123</sup> If it had not been for the downsizing of the Packing department combined with her years of experience she may not have had the opportunity to branch out into jobs such as forklift operation. This is a prime example of how the 1980s led to dynamic change at the Bleachery. She was in this respect dynamic as she was able to prove that women could do the work of a man if given the chance.

This change also reveals that the pressures of the decline of the Bleachery were very impactful as Leoda mentioned in the earlier years that hiring at the plant was very

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<sup>122</sup> Donald Hardin interview, August 3, 2017.

<sup>123</sup> Leoda Starnes interview, May 16, 2017.

common and happened regularly. She was allowed to bid on the job for forklift because the plant was no longer hiring new workers in the Packing department and so those with experience took on newer responsibilities. She said the decline was evident at the Bleachery because the supervisor of the Packing department would call meetings and tell the workers that “Things did not look good, but to keep it going.” She expressed the attitude if they kept up a positive and hardworking attitude the longer the plant could produce its cloth goods and therefore stay in operation longer.<sup>124</sup> She worked as both a forklift operator and as a cloth checker on the second floor of the Packing department and when it was time to shut down her floor she and her fellow coworkers were laid off at the same time. Leoda was sad when she was laid off because she had worked at the Bleachery for thirty five years.

Leoda was a product of Rock Hill and to assert the concept of hardworking dedicated citizens of Rock Hill, despite her age of sixty four years old at her time of layoff she would have continued to work in the department if she was allowed. Leoda was finally laid off from the Bleachery due to the downsizing and lack of high production in 1989. Leoda stressed that despite being laid off that the Bleachery was a great place to work and it was very family oriented. She said she enjoyed her fellow coworkers and she said that the Bleachery was fair. She was not as heavily impacted by the layoff because she was retirement age and she had already at this point paid off her home. She did say that others who were younger than her were negatively impacted.<sup>125</sup> Leoda is an

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

important source for the female perspective and the dramatic changes both positive and negative that occurred in the Bleachery for women. Her experiences at the Bleachery demonstrate the importance of the Bleachery for not only women but also Rock Hill as those laid off had to find new jobs.

Leoda's experiences following her Bleachery career illustrate that those who were retirement age and were able to get retirement from Springs lived comfortable lives after the Bleachery. Being employed for many years at the Bleachery assisted in her "survival," in which she and her husband lived within their budget and raised their children who would go on to do things other than textiles and lead successful lives. The work ethic they learned from their parents who toiled in the Bleachery transcended the walls of the Bleachery and many children of Bleachery employees perpetuated the essence of what the Bleachery stood for as a pillar of the community. In fact Leoda said she has never "officially retired," as she keeps herself busy with different things such as gardening, and church functions.<sup>126</sup> The outlook of Bleachery workers following their layoff of continuing onward and working in some form is also expressed in Leoda's actions as she herself never stopped working.

Thomas "Pookie" Williams was a departmental supervisor during the height of the Bleachery's decline, and he was present for the buyout of the plant by Springs until its eventual closing in 1998. Pookie said the textile industry was in decline in the United States and he contributed it to United States companies and customers choosing to

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

outsource their work overseas especially to Southeast Asian countries. This hurt American manufacturing because the goods produced in Asia were cheaper than American made goods. He said he was not heavily involved with the higher level operations of Springs but they did have contacts overseas. When Springs bought Lowenstein's hold on textiles he did not notice much of a change in the managerial style of the plant in the 1980s other than when a supervisor was fired or retired from the old stock of Lowenstein workers that Springs replaced this person with one of their own from another plant.<sup>127</sup> This gradually replaced many of the supervisors in the plant and furthered the transitions into Springs control.

Pookie stressed that while the Bleachery was in decline it was not the only place to be impacted by the foreign competition as Springs' Lancaster, South Carolina plant was also in stages of decline and downsizing simultaneously while the Bleachery was being impacted. Pookie was part of the higher level management in the plant and he was aware of the talking that occurred in the plant about the future of the industry, and he said to his knowledge the supervisors tended to talk about the foreigners more than the rank and file workers. He said despite this talk the workers on all levels saw that the decline was happening and in response, often it depended on both their age and also their finances, some looked for other jobs and others chose to wait out the Bleachery's decline transitioning into retirement age.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Thomas "Pookie" Williams interview, June 5, 2017.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

The choice of Springs not hiring new departmental supervisors is a strong testament to the power of the decline, and as a result of his leadership abilities and his seniority in the plant Pookie was not laid off in the 1980s but instead he gradually began moving around the plant taking over more and more departments and the Bleachery consolidated its leadership into the hands of a few departmental supervisors. The 1980s for Pookie exemplify the issues that plagued many workers involved in the American textile industry, because he was in a higher position than rank and file and also most supervisors, he was not laid off. His attitudes show that the decline was difficult for some as they had to find new careers. For others who neared retirement or were already retirement age when they were laid off the Bleachery had provided a life for them and they survived.

The perspectives of the Lowenstein workers are important to understanding the attitudes of the 1980s from the Bleachery's rank and file and supervisors but to gain a full perspective on the impact of the decline of the Bleachery the perspectives of Springs must be presented. Emile Russett as mentioned in the previous chapter became the Assistant Plant Manager of the Bleachery in 1977. His responsibilities were to learn and maintain an understanding of the issues that abounded in the Bleachery. His job in the years between 1977 and 1984 prepared him for his final role in the story of the Rock Hill Printing and Finishing Company. Emile was appointed to the top job as the Bleachery's last General Plant Manager in 1984 and his mission was to prevent the plant from

shutting down and attempt to defend the plant from failing against the foreign onslaught of cheaper labor.<sup>129</sup>

Emile took over a year prior to the Springs buyout of Lowenstein and he was present and partially responsible for the dynamic changes that happened in the Bleachery during the decade. In his years as Assistant Plant Manager Emile gained insight into the issues that surrounded the Bleachery. He felt the Bleachery had many good things it was doing in its daily operation, but a glaring issue he saw was stagnation caused from hiring supervisors from within the ranks of the existing Bleachery employees. He traveled the world in his years as plant manager attempting to better understand the niche that the Bleachery would fit into in the overarching textile world. His travels sent him to Asia, Europe, and Scandinavia where he eventually learned that the Bleachery had to specialize its products.<sup>130</sup> This specialization proved to be a short term solution as the world was dramatically changing.

When Springs bought the plant and conversations occurred amongst the higher ups of Springs of potentially modernizing the plant and after studies Emile said it was determined that the Bleachery would prove impossible to modernize. The original design of the plant was unfortunately built in the 1920s and in that time period construction was much more substantial, and the walls were built thickly and very strong. It was determined that in order to modernize the plant it was going to be too expensive, so from the mid-1980s onward the countdown for the closing date of the Bleachery began. Even

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<sup>129</sup> Emile Russett interview, June 28, 2017.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.



though the closing of the plant was an inevitability Emile sought to lead his workers into a new ownership and ease the transition from Lowenstein to Springs.

His goal was to reestablish trust in the upper management of the plant which had been lost over the previous years of the plant. His actions in the 1980s onward dictated the direction of the Bleachery as he began several programs to open communication channels. Emile's first step in the process of establishing a cooperative working relationship with the workers and also the union began with "Coffee with the General Manager." He held an informal meeting every month in a conference room within the plant, where he and the director of Human Resources made themselves available for questioning by workers who chose to come and ask questions on all three shifts. In these discussions Emile would talk to workers about the status of the plant, and listen to their concerns, he began this campaign in 1986.<sup>131</sup>

Another method that Emile employed to regain trust in upper management was to make the workers feel more equal and appreciated in a comparable way too supervisors. He began this in the parking lot, traditionally the supervisors held reserved parking spaces and regardless of what time they got there they always had a space in the front closest to the buildings. Emile believed that every worker held an important part in the overall production and he chose to eliminate the reserved spaces in the parking lot so all the workers were treated equal. This made the parking lot an equal ground and blurred the lines between worker and supervisor. After all, Emile felt "A parking lot is a parking

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

lot and whoever gets there first gets the best spot,” Emile also said it was important to get rid of the reserved parking because the workers from rank and file all the way up to the General Manager were “all in this together they just had different jobs.” He sought to spread this idea that no one in the plant was more important than anyone else they had to work together for the process and production to run efficiently.<sup>132</sup>

Blurring the lines and eliminating differences in the plant was important to Emile because he wanted to keep up worker morale, and so another stark contrast that existed in the plant that distinguished the supervisors and upper management from rank and file workers were two things, neckties and time clocks. Supervisors and management were required to wear neckties to work and this created a physical marker of difference. Emile commented on the neckties when he questioned “Did it make them special? The hourly guy’s job is just as important.” So, Emile disbanded the policy of neckties and he and his supervisors never wore them in the plant again.<sup>133</sup> A major issue of trust concerned the time clock, rank and file workers were required to clock in at time clocks when they came into work and when they left work. Emile saw an issue with this because supervisors and managers were not required to clock in and out. He felt this created a deeper fissure with the rank and file because it implied that they were not trusted to come into work on time and had to be monitored, so Emile did away with time clocks and trusted his workers to get to work.

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

Emile's attempts at reestablishing trust in the management of the plant was met with positive attitudes from most of the workers. The unions in the Bleachery massively persuaded the workers to their cause and held them under a locus of control. As mentioned in Chapter Three, Emile faced issues with the union telling the workers to not believe the talk of the upper management. Emile experienced one of his first issues with the unions when he attempted to bring in new rotary screen print machines. Each rotary screen print machine cost around one million dollars and it was proposed by the upper management to have the rank and file workers, work extra Saturday shifts. This came into direct conflict with a union contract that limited the number of Saturdays worked in the plant each month. The clause in the contract prevented extending the number of Saturdays and Emile said the first attempt to implement this plan failed miserably. Emile realized why he got so much backlash from the union over rotary screen print and that was because it would have meant the death of roller printing.<sup>134</sup>

As several of the workers interviewed mentioned, rotary screen printing marked the beginning of the decline of the Bleachery because it cost many their jobs and this led to a resentment by some of Emile Russett and of course of Springs. With this issue in mind, the process of negotiations between the company and the unions was prolonged and drug out but eventually agreement was met and gradually over the 1980s and 1990s eight rotary screen print machines were added to the Bleachery. As rotary screen printing rose to prominence in the customers' tastes and preferences the fear of many, James Covington and the printers included, came to pass the "death of roller printing," Emile

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

took into consideration the importance of roller printing to the foundation and development of the Bleachery and it was proposed to keep four roller print machines as they were needed to do specialty jobs that were impossible for the rotary screen print machines.<sup>135</sup> This negotiation would eventually be the end of roller printing as they did not come to a timely agreement with the unions.

Emile said the union became very defensive at this time because a large portion of the plant, almost everyone who worked there, were in the union and as the cutbacks occurred the union lost many members to layoffs and was weakened. Emile challenged the claims of several of the workers of this study when he said he walked the plant twice a day, when first shift came in and again when second shift was coming into work. He used this as a litmus test for the morale of the plant. While several of the employees interviewed claimed that they did not see much of Emile or any upper management. Potentially those interviewed and Emile did not cross paths coincidentally and that is why they said they never saw much of upper management post-Springs buyout. Emile described the makeup of the plant as being very similar to American political parties. He said there are moderates and those who are staunch either one way or the other. According to him the plant had union members who would not listen to anything the upper management said and listened only to the union. The opposing side who were not in the union listened to the upper management, and then in the middle were the moderates who were either in the union or not in the union but would listen to both sides.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

In 1986 Betty Jo Rhea became Mayor of Rock Hill and in her years as mayor she would strive to transform Rock Hill from a city reliant on textiles to a city with a more diversified economy. Her main goal as mayor was to redevelop Rock Hill's direction as she realized as her time as a city councilwoman that the textile industry was in its final years. She and other city leaders decided to begin an initiative called "Empowering the Vision," or ETV and this brought together the City of Rock Hill, York County government, the Rock Hill School District, Winthrop University and the Chamber of Commerce, who all sought to decide the change of direction for Rock Hill's future. Betty Jo saw herself more as "a cheerleader than a visionary," and she supported the different people involved in the plans for Rock Hill.<sup>137</sup>

During the late 1980s, the visionaries that Betty Jo was cheering and urging onward established ETV and also established the Rock Hill Economic Development Corporation (RHEDC). This organization developed plans for future changes to the city of Rock Hill. With the assistance of Joe Lanford, the City of Rock Hill's first professionally trained planning director, ETV launched the minds of civic leaders and also citizens to define the meaning of Rock Hill and the identity of the city. They focused on several points within the arts, business and culture and established a general direction to be expanded upon in the future of Rock Hill.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Betty Jo Rhea interview, July 17, 2017.

<sup>138</sup> Willoughby, Lynn. *The "Good Town" Does Well: Rock Hill, S.C., 1852-2002*. (Orangeburg, SC.: Written in Stone, 2002.), 233; 251-254.

Bill Easley held an important part in the story of the Bleachery in its final years because he rose in power in the Springs Corporation. When Springs bought out Lowenstein in 1985, Bill was the Vice President of Human Resources for Springs, and his task was to assist in the transition of power from Lowenstein to Springs and to create a melding of the two very different cultures of the textile giants. In the buyout, Springs acquired Lowenstein property, brands, and employees. He said there was anxiety on both sides as Lowenstein executives transferred into positions of power in Springs, and Springs executives and managers transitioned into old Lowenstein positions. The main goals of Springs in buying Lowenstein were to combine with Lowenstein and make both companies stronger together, and also the most important thing was acquiring the Wamsutta name brand that Lowenstein held. Wamsutta is a high-end fabric brand and is more famous than Springs' Springmaid brand. There was trading that occurred in the buyout and the Rock Hill Printing and Finishing Company became part of the deal.<sup>139</sup>

From 1987 to 1989 Bill went to the Bleachery around fifteen times where he primarily worked with upper management. He also went into the plant and talked to the hourly workers, where he learned the attitudes in the Bleachery were of concern and he was asked if Springs was going to shut down the plant. He only was asked this question a limited number of times and he felt that the workers did not talk to him as candidly as they would have if had known him better. He said as of 1986 there had been no plan to phase out the Bleachery. Bill left the position of Vice President of Human Resources in

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<sup>139</sup> Bill Easley interview, July 7, 2017.

1989 and became head of Manufacturing Apparel Fabrics. The Bleachery was encompassed in this focused umbrella of Apparel Fabrics.

Bill established a relationship with Emile Russett as Vice President of Human Resources, and he worked alongside Emile as head of the Apparel Fabrics. In his interactions with Emile, Bill said Emile held the interest of the Bleachery and his workers at heart and wanted to perpetuate the existence of work at the plant. Bill stressed in his interview that Springs did not want to drastically change the Bleachery.<sup>140</sup> Bill's testimony of the Bleachery in the 1980s shows that Springs had high hopes that by combining Lowenstein and Springs would save both companies. It is easy to understand why James Covington would say that many in the Bleachery felt this way too as being absorbed by another competitor who had a long history of success just like Lowenstein would make a sound investment and be a good fit for the future. Bill also mentioned that the Emile was a good manager and that he held the workers before his own self-interests.<sup>141</sup> Unfortunately the times changed dramatically in the 1980s and the Bleachery was doomed.

Bob Thompson a Vice President of Public Affairs for Springs is a vitally important perspective into understanding the changes and increased decline the Bleachery experienced in the 1980s. Bob was Springs' liaison to the public, the government and the workers. He agreed with Easley for the motivation to obtain Wamsutta was the goal of getting Lowenstein. He said at the time in 1985 Lowenstein was purchased by Springs for

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

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*

280 million dollars. He listed the reasons as community and union reasons for wanting to keep the Bleachery open. The plant was successful and productive, however by 1988 Springs realized a major issue in the Bleachery's future, modernization. He said the plant had been constructed in a time when buildings were built to last, and the walls were too thick to be moved, and also the plant had several deep pits for fabric to drop down into, and also it was narrow. The reason that being narrow was a problem from an engineering standpoint was because in order to effectively install rotary screen printing machines they needed wider spaces than roller printing machines.<sup>142</sup>

Unfortunately, for the Bleachery Springs owned two of the largest finishing plants in the world in Lyman and Lancaster, South Carolina. Both of these plants had modern technology in the form of rotary screen printing machines. Bob said that Springs soon realized the Bleachery was too expensive to modernize and they would lose money, so they tried for several years to sell the plant. However when they would bring in potential buyers they came to the same conclusion that the Bleachery was a long term bad investment because it would be costly to modernize.<sup>143</sup> Bob gave an honest non-biased opinion of the Bleachery and how Springs wanted to keep the plant in operation but the price of renovating proved to be too much for them and so as the 1990s loomed on the horizon the Bleachery faced its final years of operation.

The 1980s were a dynamic and tumultuous time for both the Rock Hill Printing and Finishing Company and the city of Rock Hill. The textile industry was dying out as

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<sup>142</sup> Bob Thompson interviewed by author, Rock Hill, June 29, 2017.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.



foreign competition proved to be very strong. The employees of the Bleachery were forced to adapt to their times as many were laid off in the 1980s and had to find new means of supporting their families. The workers proved that they were resilient and the time spent in the Bleachery impacted their work ethic. This is evidenced in their ability to move on and transition into other professions, and spreading the spirit of the Bleachery to future generations expressing that hard work and determination developed Rock Hill as a city rooted in its textile past. The buyout of Lowenstein by Springs marked a climax in the Bleachery's future. With the perspectives of the workers and upper management the story of the 1980s and the increased decline of the Bleachery is told. Springs and Lowenstein were both optimistic for the future of the companies after they combined, and for a few years the Bleachery had hope of lasting for many years. Once studies were done and it was found by Springs that they could not make money off the plant they sent work to other plants across the state and the Bleachery suffered in this wake of change. The 1990s proved too be too much for the Bleachery as will be told in the next chapter.

## Chapter Five: The 1990s

The Rock Hill Printing and Finishing Company experienced major challenges in the 1990s which would lead to the final decline and shutdown of the plant. The dynamic changes of the 1980s and the changing world led to an increase in the decline and is characterized by a drop in production and continued layoffs. The end of an era of Rock Hill's history was brought about in 1998 as the plant closed its doors.

Springs bought out Lowenstein in 1985, and as evidenced in the previous chapter caused dynamic change in the Bleachery. The perspective of Springs showed that they wanted to keep the plant open as long as it remained a profitable investment. After several attempts to modernize the plant it became obvious to Springs that the Bleachery was going to lose them money. Bill Easley first noticed Springs' plants becoming less profitable in the year 1990.<sup>144</sup> He was the President of Grey Manufacturing, and he was placed over all of Springs' grey manufacturing plants. Despite the Bleachery being a finishing plant, he noticed that it along with other older plants were not profitable in the long term. He explained because the Bleachery was built in the 1920s in what is still considered by him to be the early days of apparel fabrics led to the Bleachery being an unprofitable investment. Springs wanted fabric produced in fifty to sixty inch wide sheets, and because the earlier days did not produce fabric in that wide measurement, the Bleachery did not have the technology, machinery, or actual space to do what Springs required. He took the news that Springs was planning to close down the Bleachery rather

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<sup>144</sup> Bill Easley interview, July 7, 2017.

hard, because of his connection to the plant. He grew up around the Bleachery and even though his father Joseph Easley, Assistant Plant Manager, would not let him work in the plant for fear of issues with nepotism, he still held an emotional connection to the Bleachery.

He said when the time came for the Bleachery to close he hated to see a place that had been so instrumental to his childhood, and also to the development of Rock Hill, his hometown. He had hoped that in some way the Bleachery could have been saved. He felt that the biggest reason the Bleachery was shutdown was because the American textile industry could not compete with the increased presence of foreign countries' cheap labor. He argued against the newer generation contributing to the downfall of the plant, as he noted when it was found out the plant was going to close the workers both new and old banded together and worked their hardest in hopes of saving the plant.<sup>145</sup> Bill's expression of emotion about the Bleachery is evidence to its impact on the workers and people of Rock Hill, because he did not work there personally and was very upset to see the plant close down.

Bob Thompson's work for the final years of the Bleachery on behalf of Springs exemplify the issues and impact the Bleachery had on its workers and the community surrounding the plant. His role as the Director of Public Affairs for Springs put him into direct interactions with the community of Rock Hill, the Bleachery workers, and the government in order to explain to everyone involved why Springs was closing the

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

Bleachery. According to Bob from roughly 1988 onward Springs attempted for nine years to sell the plant because they had chosen to go a different path in the apparel fabrics industry.<sup>146</sup> As mentioned in the previous chapter, the other companies who looked into investing in and buying the Bleachery from Springs declined to do so because they found it would be difficult to modernize the structures. After many layoffs across several decades of decline by 1998 the Bleachery's employees had dropped to an all-time low with only five hundred employed. This is a stark contrast considering when the Bleachery was at its top employment it had four thousand employees. Springs came to the conclusion that since no one else would buy the plant from them they had to cut their losses and shut down the plant. Springs as a company was motivated to work with the product with the longest life, and this meant branded home furnishing which includes towels, sheets, pillowcases, bedspreads, and all the things that are not fabric components such as things that were primarily produced in the Bleachery. Bob also mentioned the attitudes of the workers in the Bleachery, especially those in the unions. He explained that by the closing of the plant many of the workers had accepted the end of the plant. The union did not like that the plant was closing but they understood the demise and the changing world that was moving away from American textiles.

Bob said the public posture of the Textile Workers Union was characteristic of the union's attitude as they deplored the closing of the plant. The union worked hard according to Bob to try to negotiate and keep the plant open and preserve jobs and their contract. Despite Springs being an antiunion company, Bob asserted they were not on a

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<sup>146</sup> Bob Thompson.

warpath to shut down the plant primarily because it was a union controlled plant. Bob's time associated with the Bleachery establishes the Springs perspective and their views on the closing of the plant.<sup>147</sup> Evidence suggests that Springs was not intentionally trying to shut down the plant but in fact the decline which began in the 1970s greatly impacted the textile industry and led to the demise of a crucial catalyst for the development of Rock Hill and its people.

Thomas "Pookie" Williams was present in the final days of the Bleachery. He had been moved around the plant and as he described they would place him over a department during the phasing out period instead of hiring another departmental supervisor. Before the end of the plant Pookie would hold a supervisory position in almost every part of the plant except for the Packing department and the Shipping department. His movement and absorption of other supervisory positions is an exhibition of how significant the decline of the Bleachery was in the 1990s. The view turned to keeping only the most experienced and senior workers which included Pookie because he had been a supervisor since the 1960s in various departments and had become a trusted worker through his hard work and dedication to the job. Pookie explained that when the decline was evident to all of the workers in the Bleachery several different things happened. Many of the workers according to him were fearful of their future, but many sought out other options of employment before they were laid off. Others as in those in Pookie's age bracket, who were nearing or at retirement age, "sat back and relaxed."<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Thomas "Pookie" Williams interview, June 5, 2017.

These individuals worked for many years at the Bleachery and were able to get retirement and social security benefits.

He said when the time came for the plant to close and he was laid off that he did not remember emotions because he had accepted the inevitability of the plant's demise. This became a common circumstance and view in the Bleachery beginning when plant first started to decline, that there was nothing the workers could do to save the plant and it turned into a waiting game from that point onward. Pookie stated that the closing of the Bleachery was not overly difficult for his age group, but heavily affected those younger than him as their livelihoods would be challenged and the manner in which they had received their income to support their families was no longer a viable option.<sup>149</sup> Pookie was able to move on and exemplified the determination characteristic of the dedicated workers of the Bleachery. He would transition from textiles to a farmer's lifestyle. He had a connection and past with the Poe family of Rock Hill who own A.B. Poe Farmer's Exchange. He held a lifelong friendship with Alvis Poe and he worked with him upon urging that Pookie needed a job after the Bleachery closed. Pookie mentioned that he and Alvis worked together until Alvis passed away, and during his final days Pookie was there by his side as true friend. Pookie was a frequent customer of Farmer's Exchange prior to the closing of the Bleachery and he was offered a job where he could make his own hours and through this enjoy a semi-retirement.

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

Upon reflection of his time at the Bleachery, Pookie said he enjoyed everything about working there even though there were some critical situations. However despite these issues including the decline of the plant, Pookie said he would not have changed his decision to work at the Bleachery. He knew he was going to work at the plant and that this would be his career for the entirety of his working life. He asserted this by stating there were commonalities between the workers and he enjoyed working with these people because all had similar backgrounds.<sup>150</sup> Pookie's experiences at the Bleachery illustrate not only the strains of the decline of the textile industry but also the many benefits of the culture that was the Bleachery. He worked with people, and that's what the Bleachery was as it was an identity for thousands of Rock Hill's citizens a pseudo city within the city of Rock Hill. It was because of these people that Rock Hill became the city that it is today, and why Pookie stated that he could not imagine anything that would have compared to the Bleachery as far as a job was concerned.

The perspectives of the final days of the Bleachery cannot be accurately portrayed without the voices of the Mechanic's shop. Both Donald Parrish, and Willie George Hall were present for the demise of the plant. These men had experienced the decline of the plant and the transition from Lowenstein to Springs. As the decline enveloped the different departments of the plant, the Mechanic's shop had a high level of job security. This is because the plant needed its mechanics to maintain the machinery. Due to this Donald and Willie George were able to stay until the plant shut its doors. They noticed changes in the plant as Springs slowly transitioned out supervisors who were hired in the

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<sup>150</sup> *ibid.*

“Bleachery way,” from within the stock of workers. They agreed that overall the plant still remained fairly cordial but there was a particular supervisor over them that came from elsewhere and sought to give Donald and Willie issues.<sup>151</sup> This individual impacted their morale and according to Willie George, he made working in an otherwise enjoyable work environment very difficult because he held a different view to what existed at the Bleachery. He tried to “trip up,” Willie George and Donald by giving them what he conceived was a difficult job repairing a water seal on a machine. Their experience on the job proved efficient and the difficult job he had for them was relatively simple.

The supervisor was very demanding and domineering in his actions and his direction. They attributed his negative attitude and people skills in regards to talking to his workers in this way, because he was a product of a different plant and had not learned to respect the workers of the Bleachery. This was important to the function of the Bleachery because it had been a tradition that supervisors were hired from the working stock of the plant. In doing this Lowenstein established a system of respect where the supervisors had an ability to empathize with their workers because they themselves had been in their worker’s positions previously.<sup>152</sup> Willie George and Donald Parrish had worked as mechanics for decades and were used to the established traditions of the Bleachery. They were flexible but this man was not considerate and a good listener, so he massively impacted their attitudes.

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<sup>151</sup> Donald Parrish interview, May 20, 2017.

<sup>152</sup> Willie George Hall interview, June 6, 2017.



The negative attitudes of this supervisor, as well as the decline of the plant were so great, that when the announcement was made in 1998 that the plant would be shut down in May, Donald had already become so frustrated that he had planned to leave the plant in February 1998. Willie George convinced him to stay until the doors were padlocked so that they were both able to get their retirement.<sup>153</sup> Their final days at the Bleachery were very sad, and slow as production gradually slowed to a crawl. Donald held a very disconcerted view of the final day as he expressed the management was not very gracious of the workers in its actions in regards to how the remaining employees were treated on their last day. He said “I didn’t hear no sorry,” about the plant closing and the whole experience to him seemed to lack compassion on part of the management of the plant.<sup>154</sup> They expressed that the Bleachery was filled with proud hardworking individuals, and in this respect it can be understood why Donald felt slighted on his final day because it was uncharacteristic of the Bleachery to not be overtly compassionate.

The Bleachery was family oriented and employed workers who cared about one another, apparently the decline impacted this attitude and led to hard feelings. Despite these issues of watching the plant close its doors behind them, Willie George Hall and Donald Parrish have led eventful and enjoyable retirement. They both felt the Bleachery was a great place to work and they enjoyed working there. Willie George said it was great up until the last six or eight months when the supervisor began to be overbearing.<sup>155</sup> Donald felt it was important to the people of Rock Hill because it was a steady paycheck,

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Donald Parrish interview, May 20, 2017.

<sup>155</sup> Willie George Hall interview June 6, 2017.

the workers were not going to get rich but according to Donald they made enough to support their families and survive. They were influenced by the Bleachery because they used the money made there to build their families and create a good environment for children and grandchildren.<sup>156</sup> Both Willie George Hall and Donald Parrish remain in contact with one another and meet to chat to this day because the work at the Bleachery made them like family. They are examples of the experiences of the Bleachery closing and through them the attitudes and emotions of the workers are evident.

Vivian Zeiders was greatly impacted by the Bleachery closing, despite leaving the plant in the 1980s. In the 1990s, Vivian was employed by Mack Truck and was working on their assembly line, her time at the Bleachery helped to condition her to the strenuous work of the line. She is a member of a large family that worked in textiles, and her experiences seeing the plant decline and shut down made her sad. Most of her family worked in the Bleachery and due to this she was upset. The Bleachery in her eyes was very important to Rock Hill and its people because it employed generations of families. The closing of the Bleachery marked an end of an era of Rock Hill's history, and she noticed that it brought about the end of textiles in Rock Hill and was soon followed by another major employer in Celanese.<sup>157</sup> Her views on the Bleachery show the issues that both employees who worked until the end and those who had been laid off had with its closing.

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<sup>156</sup> Donald Parrish interview May 20, 2017.

<sup>157</sup> Vivian Zeiders interview, June 6, 2017.

Bob and Jerri Allen had issues with the closing of the plant and shared a similar view. Despite being in North Myrtle Beach and being away from the Bleachery since the early 1970s, they were sad to hear the closing of the plant. They made sure to assert that the Bleachery impacted their lives regardless. As they left to work with youth ministries at Camp Christos, Jerri said the experience of working in the office in the Lowenstein Building influenced her ability to do the paperwork for the camp. Bob felt that the Bleachery assisted in his work ethic and also set him on the path to working as a paper printer. Their experiences and connection as former workers of the plant gave them emotions and a voice in this discussion.<sup>158</sup>

The 1990s were important to the Bleachery and impacted Emile Russett who had to deal with countless issues surrounding the demise of his plant. He said the policy for layoffs was difficult for him because he did not bring hourly workers into his office to personally lay them off. This proved difficult for him but he did mention that he personally spoke to the supervisors when it was time for their laying off. In referencing why he did not personally fire the hourly workers he said there were just too many of them to fire individually. He expressed concern for his workers and what their futures held and after he was told how Donald Parrish felt in his interview, he self-reflects and said “I could have been more sympathetic.” He also sought to point out hourly workers tend to forget that they were not the only ones to be laid off, that it was equally difficult for supervisors who were also being laid off. As the decline continued he faced further

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<sup>158</sup> Bob and Jerri Allen interview, July 17, 2017.

issues as a General Manager of a dying textile plant.<sup>159</sup> Emile became attached to the Bleachery over his time as General Manager, and as referenced by several Springs officials he was attempting to give his workers the best chance and outcome as the plant declined.

Emile understood that many of his workers especially those who had worked for decades at the Bleachery and had not established other job skills apart from working in textiles, were scared and worried about getting future jobs after they were laid off. They, according to Emile, had seen the long history of the Bleachery and its resiliency as it survived the Great Depression, and World War II, and the Civil Rights Movement, all of which were very dramatic times in the history of the United States. This coupled with a strong union presence in the plant, telling the people that the upper management were only saying the plant was closing because they wanted to gain an advantage over the union in operational regulations and rules, led the workers of the Bleachery to believe the Bleachery was invincible.<sup>160</sup>

This made the years of final decline and the closing of the plant difficult for not only the workers but also for Emile. He had been working at the plant since 1977, and he had grown attached to the Bleachery, “his family,” because beginning in the 1970s he started a practice of walking the plant during first and second shifts and talking to his workers gauging their morale until the very end of the plant. He was an executive, and with that many in the plant looked to him during the decline and he was constantly asked

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<sup>159</sup> Emile Russett interview, June 28, 2017.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

“when is the plant closing?” When he finally learned the exact date that Springs was going to shut down the plant, which was several months before, he was instructed to not tell the workers. Due to the aforementioned questions he received while walking the plant he had an emotional conundrum because he was attached to the workers and did not want to see the plant closed, while simultaneously being responsible for maintaining a work environment that could fill and finish the work that Springs tasked the Bleachery. He said if he had told the workers in the plant when he knew the plant was going to shut down that many of the workers “would have bailed out,” and the orders that Springs expected the Bleachery to fulfill would have never gotten finished. The upper management offered incentives for employees to continue working once the announcement was made the plant would be shutting down. Emile said the most senior employees with the longest work experience were kept and were given a bonus half a day extra pay per day they remained on the job.<sup>161</sup>

The decline of the American textile industry is associated with the increased competition from foreign countries and failed attempts to protect the American manufacturing sector from cheap labor elsewhere. Emile Russett does not buy into the idea that this was going to happen by the explanation some have made concerning a shift in the development the United States’ service sector economy and it becoming the focus of the United States overshadowing the manufacturing sector. His reasoning against this idea and being more slanted to the outsourcing of jobs leading to the demise of most manufacturing in the United States, was that it was impossible because in order for a

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

country to trade and be productive in the overall global economy it has to make goods. He said services are not enough, he explained that he was brought up in manufacturing and made a career out of it.

The strength of manufacturing in post-World War Two America and on into the 1980s and 1990s established the American middle class and allowed children who grew up during this time an opportunity they may have not otherwise had, attending college. He said that this is important in the present times because these children who are attempting to enter the workforce are struggling because there are no great manufacturing jobs. He spoke on the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) of the 1990s and the impact it had on the textile industry. NAFTA in theory according to Emile in regards to the American textile industry would create an easier production on American workers. The idea would be that the United States would handle the printing and finishing jobs while the more labor intensive jobs such as weaving and creating the products to be printed and finished would be done in Mexico. He blames NAFTA for a major cut to the American textile industry because the Mexicans and others in South America quickly realized that they could buy the machines needed to do the printing and finishing and thus produce all of the portions and methods of production effectively cutting out the American worker completely. He also mentioned that the textile industry faced the serious threat of Chinese manufacturing capabilities. When he traveled to China on one of his various tours of foreign textile mills he saw the true depth of how the Chinese controlled their workers. He said in the mill he visited the workers were excluded from society by being in the countryside, and living in dorms, generally single men and women

not many families, behind the mill. He said they also worked long days and were not paid nearly as much as American textile workers and thus production was immensely cheaper and the United States could not compete.<sup>162</sup>

With these perspectives and the inevitability of the end of the Bleachery, Emile would stay on as General Manager until the end of manufacturing at the plant and then he retired. When Emile left the plant he showed similar attitudes to other workers at the Bleachery. Emile said he left the plant in the past and when he walked out the final day he forgot about it and moved on with his life and enjoyed retirement. Despite the stresses that the 1990s placed on Emile's shoulders he sought to make the most of what remained of his plant. By utilizing his resources he was able to maintain the production that Springs required of the Bleachery.<sup>163</sup> His interactions and perspective on the closing of the Bleachery detail the stresses of a changing world and how many in Rock Hill, Emile included had to adjust to the city essentially leaving textiles behind.

The 1990s shaped not only the Bleachery and its workers but also impacted the city of Rock Hill because civic leaders had to redefine the identity of the city in regards to both work and culture. This occurred during the mayoral administration of Betty Jo Rhea. As mentioned in the previous chapter during her years as mayor, the foundation of Empowering The Vision was established to direct the future actions and endeavors of Rock Hill. Betty Jo was connected to the Bleachery because it was so important to the development of Rock Hill. The closing of the plant and the changing direction of the

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<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

focus of the economic future of Rock Hill should have caused some issues with Betty Jo as being mayor during this time, however she said this was not the case. She attributes this issue not being raised because of her gender, in regards that many of the men who were part of the textile world were traditionalists and they were not used to a woman having a seat of political power and so she thought they did not say anything negative. Instead they did not vote for her in the election. She said as time passed she saw an increase in her election totals and she felt that the reason this occurred was because the previously mentioned individuals saw how her administration and their ideas were positive and they understood the changes were for the best.<sup>164</sup>

Betty Jo was sad to see the plant close, but simultaneously she was looking for its transcendence and how Rock Hill could have a viable existence without the textile industry. The work of the citizens involved in the late 1980s resulted in the foundation of a series of business parks for the city of Rock Hill. The main goal of these parks was to establish a new economic investment source for the citizens as an alternative to the failing textile industry.<sup>165</sup> According to Lynn Willoughby, five business parks were constructed and each had its own personal expertise and defining characteristics. The business parks include Airport Industrial, TechPark, Southland Industrial, Waterford Park and Antrim Park. The business park initiative is set to be the future of Rock Hill.<sup>166</sup>

Betty Jo commented the closing of the Bleachery was tough, but she respects the work of Springs Creative. Springs Creative was founded by Derrick Close, the grandson

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<sup>164</sup> Betty Jo Rhea interview, July 17, 2017.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> Willoughby, 249.



of Colonel Springs. She said she is proud of the work he does because he is a continuation of the Bleachery in a small capacity as he does screen printing on the site of the former Shipping department. Betty Jo's experiences and view of the final years of the Bleachery dictate just how vitally important the Bleachery was to the city of Rock Hill.<sup>167</sup> After the fall of textiles which held such a tremendous impact on the workers and families of Rock Hill, and Rock Hill, just like the workers, had to reinvent itself and move on. Without leaders like her, the city may have fallen by the wayside instead of surviving and moving on. The spirit of the Bleachery lives on in the people of Rock Hill and their grit and determination from many years of work assisted in the future of the city.

The 1990s were a time of great loss for the textile industry and the Rock Hill Printing and Finishing Company would "Sing its last song." The challenges of changing times as foreign countries and their cheaper labor greatly affected and caused the closing of the Bleachery. The workers from both Springs and Lowenstein respectively were impacted by the closing of the plant as it was a pillar of the city of Rock Hill. The Bleachery fed and sustained many families in the Rock Hill area over the many years it was open, and because of this it was an emotional time when the plant was shut down.

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<sup>167</sup> Betty Jo Rhea interview, July 17, 2017.

## Chapter Six: Tradition and Transcendence

The Rock Hill Printing and Finishing Company was a strong and impactful business to Rock Hill and the surrounding community. As time progressed from 1998, the plant slipped into decay. Now, thanks to efforts of civic and community leaders, the plant is getting a chance to transcend its closing and become a lasting part of Rock Hill's future. The Bleachery remains impactful as the people who worked there all testify and as time progresses, it will impact others who will work there in its redevelopment.

Rock Hill, South Carolina, exists today because of its textile past and the Rock Hill Printing and Finishing Company was by far the largest textile mill in the city. Stephen Turner, the director of the Rock Hill Economic Development Corporation (RHEDC) explained that despite the Bleachery being so successful, the City of Rock Hill wanted to diversify the future economic potential of the city apart from the influence of textiles. This initiative, according to Turner, was initiated in the 1980s in the height of the decline of the textile industry. His evidence was supported by his time and history in the RHEDC. The concept and plan of the RHEDC to replace the dependency of Rock Hill on textiles with the establishment of business parks greatly impacted the future of the city and its residents. Following the closing of the Bleachery around the year 2000, Turner mentioned the city leaders sought to develop a plan to redevelop and reinvest in the city's textile corridor adjacent to downtown Rock Hill. This consisted of three million square feet of unused space once occupied by the city's textile mills.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> Stephen Turner interviewed by author, Rock Hill, June 28, 2017.

Part of the initiative of Empowering the Vision was to redevelop and save historical places in Rock Hill, and as a result the Cotton Factory was purchased and saved by the City of Rock Hill. Other textile mills were procured and redeveloped by the City. According to Turner between the years 2002 and 2003 the City developed a plan for the Bleachery and the textile corridor. This was a positive thing because Turner pointed out the importance of the location of the Bleachery site. It is located between downtown Rock Hill and Winthrop University, both of which he referred to as “anchor points.” He saw this as a good place to connect Winthrop University to downtown, creating a flowing and cohesive environment for the future redevelopment and growth of Rock Hill. The year 2003 marked a potential moment in the future of the Bleachery as Lynn Stevenson and her investment group purchased the Bleachery site with plans to redevelop it into a residential area focused on active adult living.

However, between 2003 and 2010 both economic recession and multiple destructive fires stalled Stevenson and her redevelopment. The 2008 and 2009 recession greatly impacted the development and it was during this time that Stevenson’s health deteriorated and she passed away. Turner added that the City of Rock Hill waited eight years for the redevelopment to occur and had even implemented tax increment districts to assist in the development process, but the process never occurred. This coupled with three major fires and vandalism as the site sat vacant and unused led to the City having to “step up,” and reacquire the property. This acquisition and determination of the City of Rock Hill to revitalize the area contributed to the future of Rock Hill. As civic and

community leaders again collaborated, as they did in the ETV initiative, the development of Knowledge Park was created to revitalize Rock Hill's downtown area.<sup>169</sup>

Gary Williams of Williams & Fudge adds to this narrative of the future of the Bleachery. His investment in the textile corridor and Rock Hill's redevelopment began in 2006 when Mayor Doug Echols asked Gary to buy the Cotton Factory from the City of Rock Hill and bring his student loan broker business to Rock Hill proper. Gary had been a Rock Hill resident for several years at this time, and he went to look at the building and he was not impressed. He said it was "the ugliest thing downtown and it didn't look safe." His impression of the old mill was very negative and he did not see any potential in turning it into a new site for his business. After touring the Cotton Factory, he told Mayor Echols that he did not see any potential and that he could not make the move to the building. However, he mentioned that his mind was changed when he traveled to Durham, North Carolina to work with Duke University, one of his many clients in the student loan business. He said he expected to go to Duke and deal with the client on site at the school only to learn that they had moved their student loan department off campus.<sup>170</sup> The site that he would see drastically changed his outlook on the development of the Cotton Factory.

The Salem Cigarette factory in Durham was another product of a drop in production and was shut down much like the Bleachery. The City of Durham redeveloped the site of the old factory, turning it into office and retail space and were able to bring

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<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> Gary Williams interviewed by author, Rock Hill, June 24, 2017.

businesses back to the city and bring in jobs. Gary was influenced by seeing the usage of old industrial and factory space in Durham. In buying into this aesthetic, Gary returned to Rock Hill and asked Mayor Echols to revisit his company buying the Cotton Factory and they did in 2007. In the process of his redevelopment of the Cotton Factory, he was able to bring five hundred jobs to Rock Hill.

According to Gary, he fell in love with Rock Hill and embraced it as his home and he became very upset after watching the Bleachery sit and become stagnant in its stalled development. In response, he and his business partner, Harold P. “Skip” Tuttle, real estate agent of the Tuttle Company, were convinced due to the success of the Cotton Factory that they could also do this with the Lowenstein Office building on the Bleachery property. Gary and Skip brought their plans to the City of Rock Hill, after they had reacquired the Bleachery, for turning the Lowenstein Building into modernized office space. Despite their plans, the City wanted to bring in a developer that would redevelop the entire twenty three acre Bleachery property and not just the Lowenstein Building. The investment group chosen to implement the redevelopment is the Baltimore Maryland-based Sora-Phelps LLC. A stipulation that the City of Rock Hill placed on the developers was they had to engage local business interests and so Gary and Skip became further involved. They invested in the company and because Sora-Phelps is busy with multiple projects Gary and Skip became partners in the development and are the owner-operators

of the development site, and when needed seek advice from Sora-Phelps' executive overseers.<sup>171</sup>

Skip and Gary, along with City of Rock Hill officials, have created a master plan for the Bleachery property. These early plans contributed to the development of the Knowledge Park plan. The City of Rock Hill sent around seventy civic and business leaders to Durham, North Carolina to tour the old Salem Cigarette factory that Gary Williams saw and this showed the potential of the Bleachery site.<sup>172</sup>

The civic and business leaders sent to Durham became the Knowledge Park Leadership Group, and their expertise and ambition combined with their monetary investment developed the plan of Knowledge Park. The creation of Knowledge Park is centralized around a one square mile area in downtown Rock Hill, extending from Winthrop University on Cherry Road to Fountain Park on the opposite side of Main Street. This area includes the textile corridor with both Gary Williams' Cotton Factory and the Bleachery site, which the Knowledge Park Leadership Group renamed University Center at Knowledge Park. The RHEDC held its foundation in the establishment of business parks following the demise of Rock Hill's textile industry, and so Knowledge Park is meant to follow the same pattern as a business park. According to Stephen Turner, the Knowledge Park initiative was presented to the citizens and community of Rock Hill as a business park building on the established trust of the foundation of successful business parks across Rock Hill.

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

<sup>172</sup> Stephen Turner interview, June 28, 2017.

With the idea in mind that Knowledge Park would bring in new jobs and businesses and revitalize downtown Rock Hill the initiative was warmly accepted by the people. Turner explained the vision of Knowledge Park as the building of a twenty first century economy, where technology integrates and shapes the community for the future. The goal is to revitalize the city just as the textile industry and the Bleachery did before it. Knowledge Park is meant to turn Rock Hill from a relatively blue collar working class city into a white collar technology integrated workforce. The jobs will be more specialized and sophisticated and will attract local labor away from the metropolitan city of Charlotte, North Carolina. Turner mentioned that Rock Hill's workforce has transitioned to Charlotte where the technology and specialized jobs are and thus created a vacuum preventing Rock Hill from growing larger. Knowledge Park leaders aim to counter this phenomenon and bring back the Rock Hill and other local community workers to live and work in Rock Hill.<sup>173</sup>

Turner mentioned many of the local businesses have supported the development of Knowledge Park namely Comporium and Family Trust Federal Credit Union. Comporium, a local technology giant focusing in communications, and other integrated technologies has pledged to build an arts center and invest in hotels and businesses in and around Fountain Park to further the focus on a technologically advanced workforce of learners to be associated with Knowledge Park. Family Trust Federal Credit Union, has a long standing history with the Bleachery as it was the Credit Union for the workers of the Bleachery, and as part of their commitment to the redevelopment of the Bleachery, they

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<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

rebuilt and redesigned their Rock Hill headquarters across from the Bleachery in the future architectural style that will be present at University Center.<sup>174</sup> These commitments of local businesses best exemplify the perceived importance of the redevelopment of the Bleachery and its overall impact on the future of Rock Hill. The concept of continued development is to establish businesses in University Center first and after the businesses have been achieved their influence will further attract other commercial and residential developments to the Bleachery site.

Winthrop University is another important entity in the success of Knowledge Park, according to Gary Williams. He expressed concern that when Winthrop was built as an all-women's college a literal barrier was constructed around the campus in the form of a fence. The fence was meant to keep the women in and contained and thus keep the men and other outside influences out. He said as time progressed and the college transitioned into a coeducational school in 1973, much of the city had already been built and developed. His issue with this stems from the barrier initially and intentionally created by Winthrop's founders as it has limited the integration of the University into the local community. One of the major goals that the Knowledge Park Leadership Group hopes to achieve is to break down the barrier created many years ago and integrate Winthrop into the outside community and utilize its many potential students and assets to better strengthen the overall community. Dr. Dan Mahoney, current president of Winthrop University, has been a great supporter of the University Center development. Through Winthrop's involvement, the belief is that over time, University Center will become a

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<sup>174</sup> Ibid.



centralized hub and connect downtown to Winthrop and vice versa, allowing for a stronger connection influencing the culture and future of Rock Hill as a community.<sup>175</sup>

Stephen Turner emphasized the development of a business park and its success established from the history of the RHEDC's business parks. He outlined the plans of University Center and said to achieve the stated goals the development process will take around fifteen to twenty years. University Center, according to one of his PowerPoint presentations, will contain twelve different buildings, consisting of a total of 1.1 million square feet of construction space. Another thing that Turner was excited about is the 1,100 jobs that will exist when the entire development is finished. This business park will be the first in Rock Hill to be of mixed use, including residential areas, and after it is completed it will be set to handle around 850 residents. The different buildings will consist of the Lowenstein Building, which he called the job center as it will host businesses and a built in parking deck. The building will include the indoor athletic facility, which will bring in sports tourism to the area. Other locations include retail and residential, including a hotel, active adult apartments, Winthrop University student housing, the Market Pavilion, and finally the Power Plant, where they plan to have restaurants and a brewery.<sup>176</sup> The importance of this development is to bring a new focus to the downtown area and create new jobs that utilize technology. Also the plans of the City are to establish an urban sprawl and Turner expressed the underlying issue of Dave Lyle Boulevard. His views on Dave Lyle Boulevard are very similar to Gary Williams'

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<sup>175</sup> Gary Williams interview, June 24, 2017.

<sup>176</sup> Stephen Turner, "University Center." PowerPoint, City of Rock Hill, Rock Hill, August 29, 2013.

view on the fence surrounding Winthrop in that it created an “investment no-man’s land,” and the railroad that runs parallel to Dave Lyle has made a barrier and created “the wrong side of the tracks.” In this regard, he wants the plans for Knowledge Park and University Center to be successful, because he is invested in Rock Hill and is attached to the people and wants the downtown area to flourish and have a positive future.<sup>177</sup>

Sports tourism is an important aspect to the success of redeveloping the Bleachery. Gary Williams explained how the redevelopment of the Celanese property into the Riverwalk community expertly combined businesses, both professional and retail, and how the use of Sports tourism established a foothold and created the community. On the site of the old Celanese, property the developers of Riverwalk built the Velodrome which has brought attention to the City of Rock Hill as cyclists from around the world have relocated to the area to train in the Olympic quality cycling track. Also the development has a BMX track which has hosted several events and brought in tourists. A similar point was made about the indoor athletic facility by Gary Williams as it will contain eight full sized basketball courts, and a full sized competition court capable of hosting large events. His optimism about the athletic facility was further expressed when he explained the facility has been designed to be multifunctional and accommodate around fifty different sports. Gary and Skip are very excited about the future prospects of the sports facility and how it can shape the redevelopment by bringing in tourists and through their patronage, fuel further development of the Rock Hill downtown area.<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> Stephen Turner interview, June 28, 2017.

<sup>178</sup> Gary Williams interview, June 24, 2017.

The history of the Bleachery site is another important aspect to the University Center development and as a result the Bleachery Heritage Committee was created. The committee was established to create a remembrance of the history of the site and is staffed by former employees including Emile Russett and Pookie Williams. These men, along with other former employees and civic leaders such as Stephen Turner and Gary Williams, meet to implement Bleachery Heritage Park within the University Center development. Gary Williams mentioned the importance of remembering the history of the site, and how the Bleachery Heritage Committee was able to get a roller print machine from Carlisle, South Carolina. This machine is going to be used by local artists to create a statue which will commemorate the site's history. Emile Russett explained the reason a roller print machine was chosen to represent the Bleachery was due to the Bleachery heavily relying on roller printing machines.

Tony Vaughn, the last lead engineer at the Bleachery, is also a Bleachery Heritage Committee member and he worked at the Carlisle mill where the statue piece came from. Emile said that Vaughn intentionally left the machine in a field and saved it for future generations and when he called down to the land owner he found the machine was still in the field and when negotiations were dealt concerning acquiring the machine, the workers at Carlisle gave the machine to the City of Rock Hill with the condition that somewhere on the machine, once it is in place, will source the machine from Carlisle. He said "roller printing was the backbone of the Bleachery," and so the statue will accurately represent the development and history of the site. As a committee member, he pushed heavily for

the inclusion of the roller print machine in the display of Bleachery history.<sup>179</sup> Gary asserted that a study was done and instead of creating a museum showcasing the history of the site, that instead an outdoor walking path with graphics and artifacts was chosen as the ideal method of conveying the history of the Bleachery. The foundation of the committee as advisors to the developers is an important example of how impactful the Bleachery's history is on the citizens of Rock Hill. These men from the Heritage Committee have made sure to give the Bleachery its proper place of remembrance in the annals of Rock Hill history.

Former mayor and long-time Rock Hill resident Betty Jo Rhea has seen the rise and fall of the Bleachery during her lifetime. She stressed the importance of documenting the workers' perspectives and how they were impacted by working at the plant. She mentioned how special the Bleachery was to so many people in Rock Hill, whether it was through employment or through the generational transference of the work ethic and spirit of determination that was instilled in the workers and their families at the Bleachery. Her views on University Center and Knowledge Park express excitement, because during her mayoral administration she sought to assist Rock Hill's transition away from textiles, and through the redevelopment of the Bleachery, this endeavor is being fulfilled. Her connection to the Bleachery through her father and also as her time as mayor placed the plant in a special place in her memories and she is happy the plant will be used again for future generations of Rock Hill. Betty Jo Rhea impacted the outcome as she helped to found the RHEDC and set the mechanisms and people in motion that would develop

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<sup>179</sup> Emile Russett interview, June 28, 2017.

Knowledge Park.<sup>180</sup> Her attitude of excitement is evident as she truly cares about the community and her hometown.

Emile Russett also has deep feelings about the Bleachery as he held the top position throughout the decline of the plant and grew very emotionally attached to the workers and the plant itself. He mentioned the most difficult aspect of his post-Bleachery years was driving past the remnants of the plant and watching it sit vacant and slowly decay. He was upset by this and wanted someone to tear down the buildings. This is because he would have rather seen the plant be used in some way and not fall apart. The Bleachery he remembered was a “viable plant that served Rock Hill.” Emile was called in 2010 to become part of the Bleachery Heritage Committee and due to his involvement, the memory of the Bleachery will stand throughout the coming generations in the form of Carlisle’s roller print machine. He asserted that Knowledge Park and University Center will be positive once they are established and the drawing in of people to the Bleachery will once again impact the growth and development of Rock Hill. The plant will be used by future generations in a different scope, but he is happy the future generations will get to utilize the plant that was so important to Rock Hill.<sup>181</sup>

Vivian Zeiders spent a short time at the Bleachery, but through the years she was there she was greatly impacted. The family aspect of the plant both literally and figuratively influenced her work ethic and her future endeavors. She has a strong connection to the plant and was saddened when it closed and remained vacant for several

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<sup>180</sup> Betty Jo Rhea interview, July 17, 2017.

<sup>181</sup> Emile Russett interview, June 28, 2017.

years. However, she is excited to watch the redevelopment of the plant and is glad they are not tearing down the entire plant.<sup>182</sup>

Jack Bolin's perspective on the Bleachery reflects his rational side as he has been closely following the developments at the site. He is optimistic of the development, but he worries that if the developers do not quickly get people involved through restaurants and forms of entertainment, the development will not be as successful as the City of Rock Hill hopes. He expressed the importance of a transit system on site to move the people around and expressed the idea of using the old Rock Hill train depot as a midway point and an information center for those who were visiting to learn about the attractions and Rock Hill. Despite these apprehensions, Jack Bolin is happy the plant is going to be used for future generations.<sup>183</sup>

According to Leoda Starnes, the Bleachery was a great place to work and she is filled with pride concerning the redevelopment of the Bleachery. The obvious impact the Bleachery had on her life is expressed with the pride she feels from her workplace being used for the future of Rock Hill instead of being left to decay and fall apart. She wants the Bleachery to live on and has great hope that University Center and Knowledge Park will be successful.<sup>184</sup>

Stephen Turner has been a major catalyst leading to the development of University Center from his work as director of the RHEDC. He expressed that as the next

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<sup>182</sup> Vivian Zeiders interview, June 6, 2017.

<sup>183</sup> Jack Bolin interview, July 22, 2017.

<sup>184</sup> Leoda Starnes interview, May 16, 2017.

two decades progress, he will no longer be involved in the project and in his words he will “Pass the torch,” and essentially fulfill the goal of University Center and Knowledge Park by allowing the next generation to further establish the identity of Rock Hill and lead the way into the future. His involvement has greatly impacted the future of Rock Hill and its citizens and he is proud of the accomplishments and remains positive for the future of the city.

Pookie Williams spent many years working for the Bleachery and grew attached to the memory associated with the buildings. Through his years following the closing of the plant he worked in the immediate area and would constantly watch as the plant decayed and was sitting dormant. This upset him like many other former employees. He said “You can’t let land sit vacant like that,” and so he thinks the redevelopment of University Center is a positive thing for the plant. His time spent on the Bleachery Heritage Committee is important to the preservation of Rock Hill’s history and especially in the remembrance of its textile past which essentially built the foundations and future of the city.<sup>185</sup> Pookie’s attitudes are evident and his show of support for the city he lives in by investing in its future exemplify the spirit and hard work that came from working in the Bleachery and because of his and other’s effort this will continue for generations.

Bob and Jerri Allen are excited for the future of Rock Hill because of the redevelopment of the Bleachery. They, like countless other former employees, were impacted by working at the plant and only want to see the plant remain impactful to the

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<sup>185</sup> Thomas “Pookie” Williams interview, June 5, 2017.

city it helped to build. Jerri's excitement over the development was obvious as she said "I won't get to see it complete but I will get to see some of it!" They felt the Bleachery was good for Rock Hill and agreed it was important for it to be continued to be used for future generations, regardless if it is no longer a textile plant. They feel the Bleachery will continue to be important to Rock Hill's development as a place of jobs and progress.<sup>186</sup>

Bill Easley's views on both Knowledge Park and Springs Creative are a testament to the impact both have had on Rock Hill. He is positive about both developments and is especially proud of Derrick Close because he is still keeping a remnant of Rock Hill's manufacturing sector intact. He is happy there will finally be something done at the Bleachery site and that a point could be made to keep some of the original buildings as a foundation of the development instead of tearing them all down. He closed with hopes that the plans and projects at University Center come into fruition and that it survives to stand as a monument to Rock Hill Printing and Finishing Company.<sup>187</sup>

Donald Hardin expressed concern about the land sitting vacant for so long but he is happy the plant will be used for the future. His time as a printer at the Bleachery impacted his life as he learned of all the print machines being sold off after the closing of the plant, and when he learned the Carlisle plant donated a print machine to be made into a statue at University Center, he was very happy. He also expressed joy over the

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<sup>186</sup> Bob and Jerri Allen interview, July 17, 2017.

<sup>187</sup> Bill Easley interview, July 7, 2017.



continued manufacturing of Derrick Close and Springs Creative as they are a remnant of Rock Hill's textile past.<sup>188</sup>

Willie George Hall, Donald Parrish and Thomas Roach III all expressed a sense of pride about the development of University Center. Willie George Hall mentioned that the new development will be doing a lot for Rock Hill, and also how Winthrop will play a big part. Thomas Roach III mentioned the hotels and the remaining smokestacks and how they will be doing a lot for Rock Hill. He commented that the smokestacks were a standing memorial to the Bleachery and how they "might last forever." Donald Parrish was happy about the statue to remember the workers of the plant and the history of the site. All three men are excited for the future of the plant and the future of Rock Hill.

The years following the shutdown of the Bleachery exemplify the resiliency and work ethic of the plant. Despite it being vacant for several years the potential and influence of the plant remain. The redevelopment efforts of the City of Rock Hill to revitalize itself following the downfall of a major employer in the form of the textile industry came from the RHEDC and its business parks. The process and future of the Bleachery as University Center at Knowledge Park shows its impact as many of the former employees are happy knowing that the plant will continue to influence the development of Rock Hill as a community, and as the culture of the city changes with time, its history and memory of its past remain. The Rock Hill Printing and Finishing Company will live on in the people and future generations of Rock Hill and through this

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<sup>188</sup> Donald Hardin interview, August 3, 2017.

the city will grow. The tradition and transcendence of the Bleachery will shape and mold Rock Hill and remain a testament to the people who helped to build Rock Hill by their hard work and dedication to family that has blossomed from the Bleachery into the surrounding community.

*Conclusion to The Bleachery Way*

The Rock Hill Printing and Finishing Company had a long history filled with countless stories of the many people who it employed. The focus of this study followed eighteen different people connected to the Bleachery and how they were impacted by their years of service. As the study progressed, a standing monument to the people was created. The Bleachery was important to the development of the city of Rock Hill, South Carolina. Through the people its story has been told. The hard work and dedication of the workers brought about an identity to the plant. The plant employed thousands and, through the years, several generations, “the family,” shaped Rock Hill. The impact of the spirit of the Bleachery exists today in the actions and attitudes of the remaining living workers, and their families. This spirit identifies all Rock Hill’s citizens because regardless if an individual did not actually work at the Bleachery someone they have come in contact with gives them the shared connection of the monolith that was the Rock Hill Printing and Finishing Company.

The Bleachery was not perfect, as it had its issues over the many decades it was in operation. Everyone who was associated with the plant has fond memories in some shape or form. The Bleachery stood apart in some respects to the textile industry as it was different and handled the situations of the changing world.

The 1960s delineate the issues of race and as many in the discussion, both white and black dealt with the problems, it is evidenced through their testimonies that the Bleachery was a place to work and outside issues tended to not impact the purpose and productivity of the plant. The plant was resilient and though issues of gender and racial

stereotypes and discrimination occurred, these were eradicated as the “family” worked together. This comradery helped to sustain peace at the plant and provided a cordial and enjoyable work environment. The 1960s established a strong relationship as the plant functioned efficiently. The “Bleachery way,” consisted of working well together and coexisting, regardless of the turmoil of the outside world.

The 1970s provided an impactful and in some instances a fearful time for many of the plants employees. This decade was marked with decline and those outside influences that the Bleachery had been invulnerable to in the past began to impact the tranquility of the plant. With the rise of foreign countries’ cheap labor and changes in technology, the Lowenstein & Sons Company began to be impacted negatively along with other companies in the American textile industry. A lasting attitude on part of the workers and the labor unions in the Bleachery, was maintained in the 1970s that the Bleachery was invincible. Many in the plant had to unfortunately deal with the stark reality of the changing dynamics of the world. The layoffs that began in earnest in the 1970s show how many in Rock Hill and the surrounding community depended on the Bleachery. Despite many losing their jobs in the 1970s, the instilled work ethic from the Bleachery’s countless employees prevailed and many were able to continue on after being laid off to survive and be successful in life. The decline would prove very difficult for some but as the decades progressed it only got worse for the Bleachery and the entire textile industry.

The 1980s were characterized by a deepening decline at the plant. This decade led to high levels of layoffs, and also more dramatically, a union backlash to the times, especially after Springs bought out Lowenstein in the mid-1980s. This challenged the

Bleachery Way and the traditions and status quo of a long-standing plant steeped in history. The new entities in charge sought to transition and make the plant more successful. However, after research the determination was the plant would not be able to maintain its status as efficient because of the changes in competition, consumer tastes and preferences, and also technology. The death of roller printing marked the final issue that brought the plant into a death spiral. The workers noticed the change following the buyout and despite the efforts of high officials, the decline proved too much for the plant. It was during this difficult time that the City of Rock Hill made a conscious effort to combat the declining textile industry. It had to create new jobs and a new identity while simultaneously remembering its past. This exemplifies the impact and importance of the Bleachery to Rock Hill because it had become part of the overall identity of the city.

The 1990s proved to be the death of the production giant and one of Rock Hill's major employers. The people who worked until the end of the plant and also those who were laid off many years before were emotionally impacted, and to an extent Rock Hill was too, because it had to reinvent itself. As the Bleachery closed in 1998, the plant took with it a history of hard work and an identity of family. The remnants of this identity are in existence today and have led to the development of Knowledge Park and University Center. The citizens of Rock Hill are still to this day impacted by the Bleachery and will continue to be as the Rock Hill Printing and Finishing Company is still going to be a prominent, albeit a newly envisioned, part of Rock Hill. Throughout the future what remains of the Bleachery will impact and develop Rock Hill leading future generations onward.

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