

# **THE STORY OF THE BYNUM COTTON MILL AS TOLD BY THE WORKERS THEMSELVES**

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## **Introduction**

In the late 1970s, UNC's Southern Oral History Program, as part of a larger study of industrialization in the Piedmont, interviewed former employees of the Bynum cotton mill regarding their memories of the mill. These interviews are available online in both audio and transcript form, and constitute a rich resource documenting a life at a particular time and place in Chatham County.<sup>1</sup>

I have both read and listened to these interviews with the goal of organizing excerpts around topics which appeared frequently in the texts addressing what life was like for the Bynum mill workers.<sup>2</sup> In doing this, I hope to make the story of these mill workers even more accessible to those who are interested but not inclined to listen to many hours of tapes or to wade through hundreds of pages of transcripts. Of course, I have necessarily left out many topics of interest and the choice of topics undoubtedly reflects my own interests and biases.

The excerpts from the various workers do not provide a smooth narrative; but collectively they tell a story of what life was like in the mill. "Story" is probably the best word to describe these recollections. We cannot know that events corresponded exactly as they were recollected or described. Nevertheless, describing mill life in the workers' own words is the probably the best method available of characterizing that life.

## **History of the Mill**

First, some background about the Bynum mill. In 1779, Luke Bynum purchased and settled on 84 acres where Pokeberry Creek entered the Haw River. In 1860, a dam and millrace were constructed across the Haw River near current Bynum to provide power for a cotton gin and a gristmill. In 1872, it also provided power to a newly built cotton mill. The dam was constructed of wood and reached 475 feet across the river at a height of three feet. It created a ten-acre pond that raised the stream and increased the fall to sixteen feet. Slightly upstream from the dam, the millrace channeled water down to the mill. It ran parallel to the river for 600 yards before returning to the river. At the head of the millrace a sluice controlled the water flow through the wheelhouse which turned a vertical shaft providing power to a series of gear-wheels, belts, and pulleys to operate the machines.<sup>3</sup>

The Bynum cotton mill was built by Luther and Carney Bynum (Luke's great-grandsons). With capital from neighboring farmers George Thompson and E. W.

Atwater, and from Pittsboro merchant William L. London, the Bynums incorporated the mill as the Bynum Manufacturing Company. Carney Bynum sold the gristmill to the Bynum Manufacturing Company for \$1000 in stock in the same year. The mill was a long and narrow, three-story wooden structure with 1600 spindles capable of producing six hundred pounds of yarn thread every day.<sup>4</sup>

The mill owners were not experienced in the mill business and as a result the mill was not profitable. In 1886, John Milton Odell, a cotton manufacturer from Concord, N. C., purchased a majority interest in the mill company's stock and the mill became part of the J.M. Odell Manufacturing Company. The Bynums served as mill superintendents until 1902.



Odell Manufacturing Co. of Bynum. The original structure pictured above was built in 1872. From *Chatham County 1771-1971*, Chatham County Historical Association.

To accommodate workers, the Company began building a mill village in 1890 which eventually included a church and a company store. By 1900, the village housed 28 families, most of whom came from farms in Chatham County.

In the mill's beginning, the machinery created a demand for unskilled labor. And rather than hiring individual workers, the mill owner chose to hire entire families, primarily former local farm families. The negative label of "cropper" and its stereotype was replaced by that of "linthead." Relying on the family labor system meant that mill production was to a significant degree built on the labor of children, most operating mill machines, particularly spooling, spinning, and winding machines. Children were the cheapest form of labor for the mill; while at the same time, they were a major source of income for their families, particularly as all families had multiple children working. In

1880 and eight years after the formation of the mill, 65 people worked there not counting the owner (Luther Bynum), the bookkeeper (John Hicks), or the wagoner (Robert Abernathy). Mill females outnumbered males 52 to 13. Twenty-one mill workers were ages 20 or older, twenty-three were teenagers, and twenty-one were 12 or younger. Five workers lived in the farming area around Bynum--five females 18, 16, 12, and two 10-year-olds.<sup>5</sup> See Appendix 1 for names of mill workers in 1880.

The first North Carolina child labor law targeting cotton mill labor was passed in 1903. It prohibited such labor for children under the age of 12 though it's doubtful it was enforced. In 1913, a law was passed making school attendance (four months per year) compulsory for children 8 to 12. Three years later, a child labor law passed prohibiting labor for children under 13; but it had a loophole which allowed 12-year-olds to have "apprenticeships." In 1933, a new law was passed raising the age threshold another year for girls; but boys 12 to 14 could be given "special permission" to work. For the first time, work hours were addressed for those children under 16 by restricting daily work to no more than eight hours and weekly work to forty-eight hours.



Photo from the Chatham County Historical Association collection. Back of photo says: "1915 Bynum Cotton Mill" and lists the following names: Lillie Pendergraph Smith; Lillie Cooper; Olivia Clark; Walker Pendergraph, WWI Vet. Murded [sic] in Durham 1919 in poker game; man in derby 2<sup>nd</sup> boss man?

## In Their Own Words

In the following sections, I have organized the mill workers own words around a number of questions. End notes provide the detailed source information about all quotes. All quotes are from the Southern Oral History Program Collection Project: H.3. Piedmont

Industrialization, 1974-1980: Bynum, N.C, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

## What Was the Structure of The Mill?

Lawrence London recounted " . . . when Mr. J. M. Odell took it over in, around 1901, he asked my grandfather, who was named William Lord London to uh, become interested in it, and uh, he was made secretary and treasurer, because he lived in Pittsboro, the Odell family lived in Concord, that's over a hundred miles away. So uh, my grandfather really, uh, for all practical purposes, ran the mill . . . And so, he held that position until he died in 1916. He was already in the mercantile business in Pittsboro, had a large department store there, and uh, he did this business of the mill.as another form of business . . . And he would go over to the mill, uh, about once a week in a horse and buggy, which, you see, it's five miles from Pittsboro, that took a good hour's ride over there and back . . . And selling the yarns that were made was done through the office in Pittsboro . . . Then in 1916, my grandfather died, uh, in November. The next year my father [Arthur] became secretary and treasurer of the J. M. Odell Manufacturing Company . . . And uh, he held, remained secretary-treasurer of the Odell Manufacturing Company until about 1964, when he, uh, was made chairman of the board of directors, and uh, my brother John London became secretary-treasurer."<sup>6</sup>

London continued "In 1916, they, uh, I believe it was the summer of 1916, they had, the lightning struck the old mill and burnt it down . . . It was a hot day in the summertime, and I remember somebody dashed into Pittsboro on a horseback to tell my father that the mill had burned down, and it was a great tragedy, but I was quite small then . . ."<sup>7</sup> Louise Rigsbee Jones recalled "And there was a bad thunderstorm that Sunday afternoon, and the lighting and all . . . And it struck twice that Sunday evening in the tower and set it afire. And I looked down there, and the blaze was just going up, and I said, 'Lord have mercy.' I said, 'The mill's afire' . . . Well, they had the hose down there, just what they could use at the mill, but they didn't have the fire stations like they do now to come in and help. Of course, they knew it wasn't any good to put it on the mill, because it was wood, and there was so much oil and cotton and all in there, and that thing just went up right now."<sup>8</sup> Lewis Durham remembered "My oldest brother had been working in the mill some, and he was glad to see it burn. The boys at that age, you know, they knew it was lost anyhow, and they was out there throwing rocks at the windows, busting the window lights out that the heat hadn't already busted, you know, just to see them bust."<sup>9</sup>

London continued "Afterwards, yeah, the next day we drove over there, and just, just a wreck of a, the, it was, the building was completely wood, there was nothing left except, uh, melted iron, steel . . . But they immediately got together with the Odell family, and uh, put up the money and started rebuilding right away . . . My two older brothers, in 1916, when they started rebuilding the mill, they drove trucks, they were old enough to drive, they drove trucks from Pittsboro to Bynum, hauling bricks. See all the brick had to be hauled into Pittsboro by train, and then transferred to a truck and hauled to Bynum.

Not being on the railroad was a tremendous inconvenience."<sup>10</sup> Flossie Moore Durham recalled "[the burning] was a shock . . . Several of the families left here. . . And pretty quick they began to clean away from down there, getting ready for another one . . . So, it was just about twelve months that they had another mill ready to run."<sup>11</sup> The new mill had 10,000 spindles operating.

London continued "But they didn't use it [electricity] for, uh, to power the machinery until 19, uh, 1924 or '25. They finally persuaded the Carolina Power and Light Company to run a power line from uh, their station in Moncure, which is in the eastern part of the county, near a big dam, they have a power plant, that same plant, greatly expanded, is there now. They run that line from there to Bynum to give them standby power, so that when the water, the river, we had a bad drought, you know, wouldn't be enough water to turn the water wheel sometimes . . . [In 1940] the mill built a new power plant with more modern turbines and all that for developing electricity."<sup>12</sup>

## Where Did the Mill Workers Come From?

London recalls "See mostly in the old days, most of the people who worked in the mill were people who, natives of the county . . . And it weren't like your typical cotton mill workers. They were very independent and uh, proud people, and they, uh, worked hard and they, I think, were very satisfactory . . . Most, yeah, most of them had been on farms, and uh, they would, uh, move there and you see, in those days farm life was so hard, and it was so hard to make a living, they were glad to work in a mill where they could get some ready cash."<sup>13</sup>

When Flossie Moore Durham recalled, "We was on the farm all the time . . . Well, in the first place, there was a crowd of us. There were eight of the children . . . But anyway, we was on the farm till my father died, and after he died then we moved to Bynum began work at Bynum mill in 1894 at the age of 10."<sup>14</sup> "The smallest children worked as sweepers. The older children worked at spinning and winding."<sup>15</sup>

Mary Council was "about 21 [1920] when I started working at the mill while living about four miles in the country. I went back and forth with my brother. I moved to Bynum in 1929. [Her parents] were farmers and never worked at the mill. For about 49 years. I was a winder . . . But I want to work as long as I'm able to work. I've told him when I got so's I couldn't do an honest day's work, I wanted him to send me to the house [the county home?]"<sup>16</sup> In 1916, Ruth William's father, unable to make a living farming, moved his family to Bynum to work in the mill. With the burning of the mill, they moved to Carrboro (to work in the mill there?), only to return after 3-4 years. Her father returned to farming and Williams (age 14) and her mother working in the mill. Someone in the mill taught Ruth how to wind. Later, her father too worked in the mill, first in the card room, later as a watchman.<sup>17</sup> Carrie Lee Geringer recalls going to work at a Burlington mill at age 14 working as a spinner. "I liked to go to school, but I knowed there had to be a living made . . . Them educated ones, they think they're too good to take just an ordinary job, you know, like I would do. And anybody that ain't got too much education

has got sense enough to know he's going to have to do something . . . Education doesn't always give you sense, does it?" She married at 17 before the family moved to Bynum in 1923 or '4 in order for to find work at the Bynum mill where she worked in the winding room.<sup>18</sup>

In an agricultural depression following WWI, the price of crops fell dramatically causing many farmers to leave their farms in search of jobs in mills. The boll weevil infestation in the 1920s drove even more tenants into mill work. The increase in labor supply was of benefit to mill owners. John Wesley Snipes described the situation as farmers coming to the mill "in droves . . . all of them hunting jobs." He told the story of what a superintendent said to a desperate applicant, "No, we ain't got no job for you, not unless somebody dies." As the man walked away, "this fellow fell out of the window and got killed." So, he ran back and said, 'How about that man; can I have his job?' 'No,' replied the superintendent, 'the man pushed him out gets [job].' They told that as a joke, but it was rough, I'm telling you."<sup>19</sup>

J. Nathaniel Atwater started working in the mill at 16 and worked there 20 years. "It was during the depression and my daddy was out of work. You had to sweat it out. It was a lot of hard work . . . Most of us were just contented if we had a job and knew we had to keep it up. We didn't think about quitting . . . Unless we worked, we didn't have enough to live on . . . They used to cut cord wood and haul it down there . . . they fired the boiler with wood in the wintertime to heat the mill. They paid two dollars a cord of wood."<sup>20</sup>

Given the ups and downs of labor on both mill and farm, some families moved back and forth between the two residences. Mary Gattis, for example, recalled "I was born in Bynum, moved to a farm when I was four, then back to Bynum at age nine. My father continued to work in the mill while we were in the county, walking back and forth each day working in the mill during the winter." After returning to Bynum, Gattis' parents and all of her brothers worked in the mill---the two youngest after finishing 7<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grades as "Most [children] went until they were old enough to work . . . I graduated from high school . . . tried to get a job in Durham, but "I was in love . . . And my husband-to-be came over and brought me home [to Bynum] and began work in 1931 'cause I knew I had to work somewhere and there wasn't any place to work in Bynum besides the mill. Mother taught me [to spin]."<sup>21</sup>

## How Was the Mill Organized?

See Appendix 2 for a description of the mill's operation.

Flossie Moore Durham recalled, "[In 1894] I went to work [spinning] when I was ten years old . . . Monday morning they went to work at four o'clock, and they'd work till one in the day. The evening shift came in at one in the day, and they worked till one at night. And then the morning shift come in at one that night and work till one the next day, and they done that all week . . . But each shift worked twelve hours and kept the mill running

. . . They started up Monday morning, and they run till ten o'clock Saturday night. They'd stay up thirty minutes at breakfast and thirty minutes at supper . . . we'd go home and eat breakfast and go home and eat supper." Work shifts were marked by a bell or whistle which could be heard from the houses. She recalled "They'd usually ring the bell or something like that about ten minutes before changing time . . . And the mill run regular then, night and day, all the time."<sup>22</sup>

Flossie's son Lewis Durham recounted "But, you know, in those days they didn't even have electric lights. They had lamps in that mill . . . Somebody had a job every day to clean the globes in those lamps--you see, they'd kind of smoke up a little . . . They had buckets [of water] hanging on posts for a small fire or something. . . . I remember when I was a small child a big wooden water tank sat up there on the hill above the mill---a pretty steep hill, you know. And they pumped water out of res down here and put it in the tank. And of course, it'd leak some. Another thing that impressed me the most about it was the big icicles in the wintertime hanging down from it, you know."<sup>23</sup>

Lewis Durham describes the early mill and its operations. "Then in 1916 that old mill, that was a wood frame building; it had brick up about as high as this, about ten-foot high or something like that, the biggest part of it, and the rest of it was wood. It was a wood, a two story, big frame building...A bell tower right in the center . . . A big part of [cotton] was bought locally...Everybody was raising cotton for money, you see: the money crop was cotton. . . . Of course, it wasn't a large mill, you know. . . . It had a little railroad. They'd made a little railroad track out to the cotton house out there, and they had one of those things that you pump up and down the railroad, you know. And they'd haul bales of cotton out to the opening and lapper room there on that thing, and they'd haul the finished produce out there to another little warehouse and pack it up there. And then they hauled the produce to Pittsboro by mule and horses: big horses and wagon. They had four big horses and a tremendous big wagon that hauled the stuff."<sup>24</sup> "Three crates of yarn weighed 600 lbs. The driver of the horse and wagon was Charley Crutchfield who wouldn't let anyone touch his horses when he got drunk."<sup>25</sup> Louise Rigsbee Jones remembered that "He'd drink and he'd stay drunk two or three weeks at a time . . . He was a good kindly man. He had a mighty nice wife . . . and he was big, he was tall; he wasn't fat, but he was just a big man."<sup>26</sup> Then the finished product was shipped by rail from Pittsboro. "And he would uh, make uh, maybe two or three trips a day, hauling the yarn to the railroad station in Pittsboro, and picking up bales of cotton that were brought to Pittsboro for the mi-, use of the mill, and hauling them back . . . they bought a truck around 1914 or '15, that's when trucks began to be made and uh, began to be more common, I mean, in this area, and they bought one then, and uh, of course, enabled them to have much faster shipping."<sup>27</sup>

Frank Durham also recalls going to work at the mill in 1918. "I was twelve years old when I went to work. We had a six-months school, and you'd go to work in March and work until September. . . . When I was thirteen, the next year I couldn't work at all, not down there, because they passed the child labor law. You could go to work when you were fourteen, but you couldn't work but eight hours."<sup>28</sup> Frank's brother Lewis Durham

recalls going to work in 1923. "I went to work in the summertime, and went to school in the winter. I went to work the next day after school let out in the summer, and I worked all summer and back to school in the fall . . . Eleven hours a day: 6:30 to 6:30, an hour for dinner...I might have went to work when I was thirteen; I wouldn't be sure. Right along about then. But all of us did."<sup>29</sup>

Carrie Lee Geringer remembered "See, back then, when my young'uns was little [1935], they could come down there and stay with me as long as they wanted to, when they was ten or twelve years old. And that's where they learnt to wind. They didn't have to learn when they go ready to go to work. They already knowed how . . . They all got their ninth or tenth grade or something like that. They never finished high school, nary a one of them . . . I'd have loved for them to, but they didn't want to, and I wasn't going to make them. Because if you've got to make a young'un do something like that, he ain't going to learn nothing."<sup>30</sup>

And the workers were interdependent. If doffers removed less-than-full bobbins from the spinning frames and brought them to the winders, it hindered the winders' production rate. If the winders produced too large a cone of yarn, it hindered the packers. But Carrie Lee Geringer recalls that her winding production depended on "how much yarn you had, to come from the spinning room out there. Sometimes you'd have to wait on it, and that would knock you out an awful lot...If you complained, sometime they'd only get worse, you know . . . They had a few doffers that if they wanted to go home pretty early, they would doff them half full...I've known my husband to do it. I won't take up for him. I know a lot of times I've said a lot to him about it...But I've said so much to him, sometimes he'd get fretty, and he'd just cut them off just because I said something, so I just finally quit."<sup>31</sup> In the same situation, Louise Rigsbee Jones remembered "We worked all day then; we worked eleven hours a day. And we quit at six at night. And he [the doffer] didn't like for us to take off a doff, we called it, and lay it up on top of the winder for him to take off to weigh right at stopping time. He'd have to stay there, even if it was after six, and weigh that up and mark it to us before he could leave." Being mad at him on a particular occasion, she did exactly that.<sup>32</sup>

The mill had a machine shop to repair of the different kinds of machines involved in the production of yarn as well as the many shafts, gears, belts, and pulleys that operated these machines. Thomas Snipes was a "fixing hand" in the mill's spinning room before he went to the machine shop running a lathe. He became disabled and had to retire at age 60.<sup>33</sup> In the 1930s, James Hearne was a fixer in the mill before becoming one of the machinists. "I have worked 77 hours down there, and not stopped day and night."<sup>34</sup>

## Were Jobs Different for Males and Females?

Flossie Moore Durham recalled that "Men worked in the card room, mostly...and the boys done the doffing . . . The spinning was run mostly by women and girls. Didn't many women along then; the young girls would work . . . We just wore dresses. We didn't wear slacks like they do now."<sup>35</sup> Her son Frank began work "just cleaning up. Cleaning up



machinery . . . I did that first for a good while, and then they put me to learning to wind. I learned to wind, and I learned to spin, and I learned to doff . . . And then they put me in the other room, and I learned to run stuff in the card room, cards, lappers, drawings, frames, all that stuff."<sup>36</sup>

When Louise Harris worked in the mill during WWII, there were more women than men "because the women did the winding, and did the spinning. And the men usually worked in what they called the card room, upstairs on the third floor . . . There's a few women that work now in what they call the card room . . . But when my mother worked there I think there were two boys that would wind. I know one said my mother just worked him to death. He would try to beat her, and get more than she would."<sup>37</sup> Louise Rigsbee Jones summarized the situation stating "They just had the women's jobs and the men's jobs. The men's jobs were for a heavier or stronger person and all. That's the way it was divided up."<sup>38</sup>

## How Did Workers Feel about Work?

John Wesley Snipes expressed "I didn't like ne'er a day of it. I had too much ambition; I had too much ambition of work for somebody else." "Never had any use for a cotton mill, and still ain't got none for it . . . They's sort of a, a slum. I mean, it was people that couldn't do no better, didn't have any ambition to get out and make and build, you know, just some of this routine, sort of like running the frames, look at it run twelve hours a day, and same old thing in the morning, and same old thing the next morning. I, I, I didn't like it at all, but I had to do it. I had to get where I could make bread and butter." He also recalled that when he was called "lint-head", he "felt all the time just like the scum of the earth. I was too independent."<sup>39</sup>

Helen Howard went to work in the mill at 18 where she was a spinner. "Then I just got tired of working in the cotton mill. It was just doing the same thing over and over."<sup>40</sup> Louise Harris worked in the mill as a winder. She described her work there as "I just felt like I was doing the same thing over and over, and I couldn't see anything that I was accomplishing. I don't like production work, either. I'd rather work with people and, I like that better than doing machinery."<sup>41</sup>

Monotony was not the only complaint of the mill worker. Mozelle Riddle describes conditions in the mill's spinning room. "It used to be so hot before they put air-conditioning in there. You could walk into the frames and burn your legs, that's how hot the heat was. Them motors'd burn you, when you'd walk around them. But we just got used to it. Didn't think nothing about it...Work and sweat, yes sir."<sup>42</sup> Louise Harris recalled conditions in the card room where "There was one boy that lost his arm. And eventually he died from it, but I think it was the condition that he was in. Maybe once in a while one'll lose their finger or something like that."<sup>43</sup>

In the 1920s, Ruth Williams recalled "[We tried] not to work in that mill . . . we just tried to get out of there, because, you know it was so linty at that time, that it just about take

your breath. Now, I have walked in there and I couldn't hardly stand it, you know, it was so smothering or something . . . Cause lint was a-flying, you know, so bad."<sup>44</sup> Carrie Lee Geringer recalled "But she [her daughter] said you could see that dust in the card room up there, when she gets home, she can't hardly breathe...And they've all got a touch of emphysema or something."<sup>45</sup> John Wesley Snipes similarly remembered "You'd start up your machine. If it was running all right you would go to the window and lean out and get fresh air out of that dust---because, you see, so many cotton mill people die of brown lung, they call it . . . We was talking about two men died. I set here and seen them go across there coughing every breath. From here you could hear them 'til they got to the post office."<sup>46</sup>

During WWII, Louise Harris recalled "There's a lot of dust, and there's been a lot of talk about brown lung. And we've had many people that have had emphysema, but a lot of them smoked. And I feel like maybe the smoke aggravates it . . . I didn't like the dust at all...But I guess people that worked there a long time, you know, got used to it."<sup>47</sup> Beginning work in 1943, Jimmy Elgin reported "You know, there's still a little dust there, but there ain't as much as you'd think there'd be. The Federal Government's cut in behind that dust deal in every mill I know of. You take the last five years, I bet there ain't a mill around here a federal man ain't checked that dust in."<sup>48</sup> Louise Rigsbee Jones commented "now they have air-conditioning in there, and they've closed up all the windows and padded them. You can't see through the windows at all. . . . [In the past,] we could go to the window and look out whenever we wanted to

## What Were Hours and Wages Like?

Wages did little to compensate workers for negative working conditions. Flossie Moore Durham recalls that at age 10 she earned twenty-five cents for her first day in the mill in 1894. "That was for a day; that weren't an hour. That was a day . . . Monday morning [I] went to work at four o'clock...At one o'clock in the day the morning shift would go off, and the evening shift come on, and each one had to work twelve hours. Now I've worked on every one of them shifts when I was a girl...All the little ones, they put them to spinning, you see, or something like that."<sup>49</sup>

### *A Dollar and Twelve Hours A Day*

Louise Rigsbee Jones was born in Bynum in 1897 and she recounted "You know, the first mill had burnt down, and when they built this new mill back [1917], I went to work when it started . . . around eighteen or nineteen years old . . . I learned to wind there...When I worked they did have but one [shift]; we just worked all day...We'd go to work six in the morning, work till twelve and have an hour for dinner. Go back at one and work till six that night . . . I think [we were paid] somewhere around a dollar a day . . . If you got sick down there . . . we didn't get paid for it . . . so far as the medical expenses or hospitalization or anything, they never did have it on us." But after getting

married and having two children (one living only about a year) the mill put on two shifts and "I worked some at nighttime . . . They would let me work maybe six hours or something like that, extra, and when Paul [her husband also a mill worker] would be at home with Hetty I would go down there and work some, you know, at night to help out . . . He had to go to work at six, you know, at night to help out. And the Depression came, you know, in 1928 on."<sup>50</sup>

Ruth Williams recalled that working in 1920 as a winder she earned twenty dollars every two weeks. "We'd go in at sun settin' and come out when the sun was risin', 12 hours a day, at that time."<sup>51</sup> Frank Durham recalled that in the 1920s his father "was foreman, and they didn't make much . . . he was making \$1.25 a day. That's all. And I mean he had to work eleven hours a day."<sup>52</sup>

John Wesley Snipes recalled that [in 1929 at the age of 27] "I think they started me off at twelve and a half cents an hour . . . I was sweeping, twelve hours a day . . . Go to work at six o'clock every evening, come off at six the next morning. Take some time off, for thirty minutes sometimes. Sometimes we'd work straight through . . . We worked 'till Saturday at twelve o'clock . . . Well, then about the middle of the week they put my wife to work in learning to wind. She got paid about twelve cents an hour . . . They'd pay off every two weeks. And what we would do, if we had in sixty hours at twelve cents an hour, when Saturday dinner come we wouldn't have no money [for food]. I worked there from 1929 'til '46."<sup>53</sup> Bland Moore recounted "I worked in the mill about 1929 until about 1936. Farmed for about three years while I worked in the mill--working afternoon and early evening shifts . . . I worked in the shipping room, card room, did some spinning and winding . . . Wouldn't work during the busiest periods during Fall harvest time . . . I was making fifteen cents an hour. Worked ten hours a day, six days a week."<sup>54</sup> Vernon Durham began work in the mill when "I was sixteen . . . in the thirties. Twelve and a half cents. That's what I made . . . just as a spare hand . . . Then it was twenty-four cents an hour, top pay, for doffing."<sup>55</sup>

While Frank Durham was foreman, then supervisor, "The frame hands were paid on production. The drawing hands were paid on that, but the cards and the lapper hands were paid by the hour. Winders were paid by the pound. Spinners were paid by . . . how many side they run. Doffers was paid by the side . . . They work by the hour now . . . But it's not at, I don't believe . . . because, well, when I was down there we paid near everything on the incentive system . . . They tend to keep them running better."<sup>56</sup> Carrie Lee Gerringer recalled "They come and get your yarn off of your winder that you done wound. They'd weigh it, and if you made overproduction, they'd pay you for that. But if you didn't get nothing but production, you just get the minimum wage."<sup>57</sup> Louise Rigsbee Jones too remembered "They'd pay us so much a pound . . . you made so many pounds and that paid for the wages that you were supposed to get. And then all we made over that, we got extra pay for it

## *The Depression*

Lewis Durham recalled "And during the Depression I worked as a grown man ten cents an hour down there---and was glad to get anything to do, 'cause there was just millions and millions of people without any kind of work. Parents, breadwinners supposedly, they couldn't get a job. Ten cents an hour for eleven hours---let's make it ten hours then, I believe---it was a dollar a day . . . The mill never shut down during the Depression, even. Of course, as I say, it just run real short---just enough to keep the people living. And a lot of the time they didn't want to do it; it was unprofitable for them to do it. And they'd take orders that they couldn't make any money on just to keep the people living, to keep them there, hoping for a better day...If you made three dollars a week you could live on it. Fatback was five cents a pound, and sugar was five cents a pound. Foods was real cheap then."<sup>58</sup>

John Wesley Snipes recounted "me and a Mr. Suet had to split five days. He'd work three days one week and I'd work two, and then the next week I'd work three and he'd work two."<sup>59</sup> Eula Durham remembers " [During the depression] you had to scrimp and save, just eat anything you could get ahold of, that you could make a meal off of...I know one man...He said that weren't such a thing as milk gravy. He said he eat Hoover gravy . . . But he said he eat water gravy . . . he hope he'd live long enough to see Hoover eat water gravy . . . we'd go to work at six of a morning and work till six at night. Get an hour for dinner. And I was making twelve and a half cents an hour . . . We worked sixty hours a week."<sup>60</sup>

## *The New Deal*

Eula Durham continued "And President Roosevelt come in and he changed it, put it over on forty hours a week, thirty cents an hour. And all over forty hours paid time and a half...like you was on a vacation . . . Oh, they loved him. Boy, he pulled them out of the ditch. They loved him to death."<sup>61</sup> John Wesley Snipes recalled "We thought, well they was going to let us make eight hours and pay us thirty cents an hour. Well I just thought what in the would we do from three o'clock 'til evening? Go to work maybe seven o'clock and get out at three, and eight hours. And I'd think Well, then we've got from then 'till night and going to get \$2.40. I didn't have no idea what we'd do with all that money. It just weren't conceivable, hardly. Well, then things begin to move to take care of that \$2.40 [laughter}, and we didn't have no more then than when we was getting twelve or fifteen cents an hour."<sup>62</sup>

Lewis Durham remembers in great detail his efforts to get a raise "in the spring of 1935 . . . we went to the office . . . talked to John London about it. He was one of the biggest wheels then...See the London's owned a big part of the mill. And I done right smart of talking myself, arguing with him. He was trying to quote prices as to the different ones in the mill, comparing them, you know. And he told me what the different ones made, and I says, 'Well, I don't know about that. My sister is a winder, and I've picked up her check quite a few paydays to give to her, you know.' And I says, 'She makes as much as I do or more,' and I says, 'you can pick up winders anywhere and learn in a short spell. But it

takes a good long while for a doffer to learn how to doff and keep up his side. And,' I said, 'beyond that, he can't doff until he gets real old, 'cause the spindle will work real fast. You have to work real fast, you know, at doffing.' And I said, 'Doffers should make more than winders, and,' I said, 'we're not.'" Lewis was making "about thirty cents an hour...All us doffers had got together and said, 'If they don't grant this wage raise, we'll all quit.' And some of them were head of families . . . See in my position, I wasn't married and didn't have any dependents at all . . . Some of them said, 'Oh, we'll eat weeds and things like that before we'll work for the mill'; but every one of them went back to work but George and myself."<sup>63</sup>

In 1937, Helen Howard was 18 years old when she began work there where she was taught spinning by her mother. "I never did love to go to school . . . I just couldn't wait. I said, I begged her every day, let me quit school, I go to work, I'll do anything if you'll let me quit school. Wasn't that stupid? Well daddy said, well, you ain't a-learning nothing no how. So, he let me quit when I was 16." Went down and stayed with mother for a number of hours, wasn't paid until she was 18. Made \$15.00 her first week. "Oh, I thought I was rich."<sup>64</sup> Carrie Lee Gerringer remembers that with "six young-uns" she returned to work at the mill. "Well, you didn't make but fifteen dollars a week...But when I started getting social security . . . I think mine along was seventy-two dollars. That's all I got, and I had to go and keep a-working."<sup>65</sup> The company did not have a pension plan.

Paul Jones remembered when he was retired and on social security he would go down to the mill and work, even if it meant giving part of the money back to social security. He wished there was a pension plan. "We tried to get that through down there, kind of, pay a little you know, retirement, pay a little and that would help you. But he (Mr. Arthur London) wouldn't, he fought that thing, he fought it right on down till the very last. We didn't try to organize a union or nothing like that to try to get it. We just talked, and tried to go to, we went to the main office, you know, and consulted with him, and what have you, you know, kind of. But he didn't want no part of it."<sup>66</sup>

Jimmy Elgin came to Bynum December 1, 1943 "and I've been down in that cotton mill ever since then, working . . . I needed a job . . . Well, I just tell you, lady, when you ain't got nothing and you're hungry, you're going to take the first damn job you can get to make an honest living . . . was a sweeper and I've doffed and a little bit of everything in the spinning room since then . . . We're getting better paid now than we did then . . . The mills didn't pay nothing to amount to nothing back then . . . I could make in two hours at mill now what it took me all day to make when I went to work. Minimum wage is paid, but if you want to work up and get higher wages, you probably could, but it'd be a rough road to get them . . . Mill pays from minimum wage up to a little over \$4/hr. Eight-hour days. There's part of it running six days a week, and the rest of it's running five."<sup>67</sup>

Frank Durham recalls a different time during World War II. "And everything was on the boom...There was a lot of work going on in this country then, more than there's been in a long while. And a lot of the people moved out to other jobs besides the mill . . . [Other mills] come around the mill hunting help sometimes. Especially if they knew you had a good bunch of help, they'd come around there and try to hire them . . . I know people

from Siler City come up a time or two trying to hire people, and out of Carrboro . . . except that you could run them off company property, you know . . . They'd come up thisaway on the other side of the river and park, and we have known them to do that. And send for folks to come over and see them; sometimes they would, and sometimes they wouldn't."<sup>68</sup>

Thomas Snipes was rather philosophical about wages. "But a lot of the times, the one who makes the most money is not the happiest . . . It's not a person's needs that hurts a lot of people, it's their wants . . . I reckon we've been just about as happy as most any people." He joked that if someone broke into their home, "He'd probably leave us something instead of taking it."<sup>69</sup>

## Who Had Authority?

Frank Durham's version of the early period of the mill's operation was "A whole lot of children worked in the mill. And they were aggravating; you couldn't get much out of them; you couldn't do much with them. About the only way you could do it was fear, I reckon . . . I've heard it said, you know, that they'd send away for their daddy or send the person home and stuff like that, about like a schoolteacher, you know. If they couldn't get nothing out of him, they'd send him home. Then his daddy was liable to whip him and send him back."<sup>70</sup>

The mill itself was run by a superintendent. Frank Durham describes it as "He's responsible for the whole mill, all that's running, all the time . . . did all the hiring. [Then] there's a supervisor [or 'overseer'] for each shift and each operation: carding, spinning, and winding. There were three in three shifts."<sup>71</sup> Although supervisors were sometimes recruited from outside the area as "experts," mill workers would work their way up the chain of authority. Vernon Durham tells of his first job at 16. "Well, I'd go just as a spare hand . . . My daddy was boss man, and I'd go, just around in the mills cleaning up. Then I learned to doff...In a few years when I learned the machinery and everything, I got to be fixer and then got to be a foreman of the spinning room . . . My brother was superintendent. That helped some. Oh, then my uncle was superintendent."<sup>72</sup>

John Wesley Snipes recalled "Well, you were supposed to be there when the lights blinked. At six o'clock you were supposed to be on the job. And we were afraid we'd lose our job. I'd be there an hour sitting there and it dark, sitting there 'til it was time to start . . . If you stubbed your toe, they'd fire you . . . And if they'd get drunk and get into a fight or something down there, the superintendent would say maybe, 'Well, you can come back on your job, but you're going to have to straighten up there a little. You're going to have to be at church Sunday morning.'" His superintendent once told him following Snipe's attendance at a meeting regarding possible unionization "Did you know if I wanted to, I can fire you for not walking fast down that path. I don't have to have no excuse to fire you. I can fire you for not walking fast . . . Mr. Moore's brother run that Robert Moore store over there--and if you went out of town and bought groceries, why if he didn't like it, he could fire you."<sup>73</sup>

John Wesley Snipes also recounted "Well, when [the workers] got up to making twenty dollars a week, twenty-five dollars a week, they'd go to old Mr. Manley on Saturdays and say, 'I'm going to draw two full weeks next week, fifty dollars, but I want to sell you my time.' [He'd respond] 'Well, I'll give you forty dollars for your fifty-dollar due bill.' . . . Well, all the spinning room checks went in the hands of Mr. J. M. Durham [who was] responsible for the spinning room . . . And if I had pawned my fifty-dollar check to him for forty dollars cash, he took my check. He didn't give it to me, he put it in his pocket."<sup>74</sup> Ruth Williams confirmed this arrangement.<sup>75</sup>

Frank Durham recalls when a supervisor was disciplined "about 1919 or '20, along there. He got into trouble one time with a woman, the poor fellow. That's the reason he left here . . . and oh, women give you a lot of trouble if you don't watch them sometimes . . . They sort of make a play for you a little bit when you got a little authority and think you'll favor them or not. Oh, it just seems that way, used to be."<sup>76</sup>

Carrie Lee Gerringer recalls "he [John London] was good to us. You know, a lot of places you work, they're always after you or want to get more and get more and get more, but he wasn't. And Mr. Arthur London, his daddy, he use to walk through the mill and pat us on the back. They're all just as good as they can be, all the Londons."<sup>77</sup>

In 1971, the mill began to produce a synthetic blend of thread. At the same time, the advice of mill "experts" was sought as to how to maximize production. And new supervisory personnel were brought in from outside the area. Of course, Eula Durham had something to say about it. "Not until this company took over, and we didn't get along at all . . . 'Cause they didn't know nothing. And you couldn't tell them nothing. They learned theirs from books, and I learned mine by self-experience. And I told them one day, I said, 'That there traverse chain is broke' . . . He said, 'It ain't so.' I said, 'Well, I know good and well that it is.' So, after he went home...I went off in the basement and got me a chain and come back and put it on. Started the frame up and the frame run just as pretty as you ever seen. So, the next morning . . . he told this man 'Well I fixed that frame last night.' And I turned around to him and said, 'Who fixed it?' He said, 'I did.' I said, 'You know good and well that's a lie . . . You said there wasn't nothing the matter with that frame . . . I fixed it myself.'"<sup>78</sup>

## Could You Take Breaks from Work?

Many complaints were offset by the workers' belief that the mill was still a good place to work because the management did not push production. As long workers could keep the stock of spools and bobbins on their frame replenished, they could leave their machines running unattended and take a break talking with other workers or leave the mill for a short period.

Louise Rigsbee Jones remembered "[Her husband's] sister Martha, she worked in the alley; my side was here, and her side over there. We could talk to each other. When we'd pass each other, we could speak, or we could stop and talk. It just meant that

when your bobbin ran out and you needed another bobbin in there, you weren't making anything till you got your full bobbin and got it started."<sup>79</sup> Louise Jones said, "Maybe we'd just sit there and talk like that a little, one thing or another." She said they sometimes went to a store which was just outside the mill.<sup>80</sup>

Frank Durham described "One of them would watch one another's work...and they'd go out to smoke or go to the bathroom or go anywhere . . . they went on outside. Just smoked, that was all. We didn't have no drinks nor nothing. There weren't nothing down there except water . . . [Now there is] the break room. They've got all those machines in there, sandwich machines, Coca-Cola, and a money changer and everything in there."<sup>81</sup> Before the machines, Thomas Snipes ran a commissary for the mill for three years, selling "hot dogs and hamburgers and little knick-knacks."<sup>82</sup>

Mary Council stated, "Have a lot of friends. Well you know we're all just kind of one big family...In the department I do we all take a break at one time. We all go in the break room and sit around the table laugh and talk [and] eat."<sup>83</sup> Vernon Durham echoed this sentiment "Everybody was raised here, you know, and lived here all their life, and knowed everybody, and was just like big family. When one of them get in a hole or something, all the rest of them...they'd bunch in together and help them get out, catch up."<sup>84</sup>

In the summer, the water level behind the dam would get so low as to stop providing the power to run mill machines. Workers could take an hour or two break until the water level rose enough to reestablish the necessary power. The machinery made a hum shutting down. Eula Durham recalled "I'd be so glad to hear that old thing go 'hmmmmmm' . . . tickled you to death to see that cause we knowed then we was going down to the river fishing, or cook a chicken stew, and have a good time." . . . Later, she said, the conversion to electricity "tore up our playhouse."<sup>85</sup>

Taking the comparative perspective Frank Durham noted that "the mill here had some qualities the others didn't have, and they lacked some. They didn't pay as much as they did in mills in town, but it cost you a little more to live there with rents and things...They could get by here not paying much . . . And here they was allowed to go out and smoke, and if they'd catch up their work, go and talk around once and then come back. Well, that was worth a whole lot. It sure was. You could work for less money, and you took that into consideration when you was hunting a job or fixing to change jobs."<sup>86</sup> Louise Rigsbee Jones commented "But they were not so strict on them about the little things...like they were at other mills. You know, a lot of places they go it's wired in around, and they fasten that gate at a certain time, and you don't get in or out of that gate till time for you to quit work. But it's never been like that here."<sup>87</sup>

Carrie Lee Gerringer recalled that the new winding machinery that was installed in 1960 could not be left running unattended as had been the older machines. "But them new ones, they just went so fast, it just took all you could do to keep up with them...They was flying . . . Once in a while they'd send and ask me to come to work on my day off or something like that. But I quit that. I said, 'I'm not going to mess with it anymore. I'm getting too old to get in a hurry like that.'"<sup>88</sup>



Of course, Eula did her own thing. “[Now] you got a certain time to go eat, you got a certain time to take a break, you got a certain time to do anything—to smoke. They’ve got you timed...But I’m telling you, I took my break when I got ready. I told them I had been working in there and never had to call on nobody to help me. I kept my work up, and I had sense enough to know how long to stand, and how long to stay away from my work, and I’d go when I got ready.”<sup>89</sup>

## Were Pranks a Common Feature of Work?

A portion of work time was also devoted to pranks. Some involved the initiation of new workers. Frank Durham describes that workers sometimes welcomed “green hands.” “If some guy come in there to go to work and he’d come out of the country---most of the time they’d be young fellows---and they’d just play pranks on them. Had the left-handed monkey wrench and the key to the elevator and the bobbin-stretcher and all that stuff. Somebody that didn’t know there was no such thing . . . And I know one time---it was a grown man, too---and it was a card, and the card would weigh 3,000 or 4,000 pounds, and they told him he’d have to move it and sweep under it.”<sup>90</sup>

Durham’s interpretation was “Some dumb folks come to work, but they’d never been in a mill or nothing, you know. They’d play stuff like that. Oh, they enjoyed themselves by doing a thing like that. But they all did seem to have a good time. It was just a happy family almost . . . I tell you, a bunch of cotton mill folks, they used to say, is about the happiest people on earth, because the company looked out for them, shelter and everything. [But] I never had no drinking on the job in my life when I was in there. I was foreman there for twenty-five years and superintendent for seventeen, and that was a long time that I had the firing and hiring . . . And if a body got to drinking or anything, they know not to do that. I’ll tell you, you take a house and a job, and a job’s kind of hard to find, you respected that a little bit. You just wouldn’t go against it. Because if you got thrown out, why, you was out sometimes a long time.”<sup>91</sup>

Mary Gattis tells a story about a guy who came by the mill to see a girl one night: “And he was dressed up, had on a Panama straw hat and all that. And he, they [the men upstairs] poured a bucket of dirty water on him, come right down on his Panama hat and all over him, as he started in the door of the mill.”<sup>92</sup> Eula Durham explained, “Cause we warn’t nothing but just young-uns, warn’t nothing but young-uns, just thirteen and fourteen years old. And we just do anything in the world.”<sup>93</sup>

Jimmie Elgin tells two stories. “If they could get a bunch of co-cola crates...you’d pick the back end of a car up and just slide them under there. And you’d never notice them crates; it’d look like you was still sitting on the ground. Crank up. Sit there and laugh at them trying to drive off.”<sup>94</sup> “This fellow used to hang around there right smart on second shift. If you’d set your something to eat down and turn your back on it, he’d get it. So, this fellow brought him some chocolate pie one night to work with him. He had that thing doctored up with Ex-Lax. And that fellow eat the pie. I’ll tell you one thing, it was a day or two before that fellow came back to the mill. He was busy the next day, all right.”<sup>95</sup>

## What Were the Views Regarding Unions?

In 1933, a union was organized at the nearby Chatham Mills in Pittsboro. In January of the next year the employees of that mill struck unsuccessfully.<sup>96</sup> However union organizers from the mill arrived in Bynum and held a well-attended meeting in the schoolhouse. "I didn't go. Didn't want to give up my freedom for a union . . . They had the biggest rigamarole, that you could do this, and that you couldn't get fired, that the union would stand by you, and they'd do this---you ain't never heard such a meeting."<sup>97</sup> Lewis Durham observed "I thought Bynum Mills was too small for an effective union, and I thought people were too deep-rooted there to back it, you know. They had no alternative other than to stay there."<sup>98</sup> Shortly thereafter the Bynum millworkers staged a walkout, but it collapsed in the face of company pressure.

Attempts by workers to organize themselves in order to address their grievances during the depression and WWII failed. "I know one time, the spinning room went out there and wanted more money or something, and John London told them he'd shut down before he'd give anymore, and they went back to work . . . I know one woman she went out with that bunch of strikers down there on time. She come over to me, said, 'Come over here and help me---I ain't never seen such a mess as I'm in. Please help me some.' I said, 'I'll not do it. If you'd been in here like you ought to have been instead of out yonder striking,' I said, 'you wouldn't have got in a mess.'"<sup>99</sup> Elsewhere, even as close as Burlington, mill workers called strikes, walked off their jobs, created picket lines, and were confronted by national guard troops armed with automatic rifles and machine guns. During a strike in Gastonia, the police chief and a dominant leader, Ella May Wiggins, were killed.

## What Were the Feelings about Black Co-Workers?

Eula Durham recalled, "[In 1971] that new company took us over and they hired them colored people, hadn't none of them been nowhere but in a cotton field. And you talk about a mess, honey, I had to learn all of them. Lord have mercy! Some of them would learn it: you didn't have a bit of trouble in the world with them. And some of them you could stand there and show them till judgment day and wouldn't know a bit more what you said than he did when you started. There was one old big fat colored women down there. She'd been down there about four weeks and she never got to where she could put up ends. She told me one night, said, 'What's the matter with me?' I said, 'I don't know--me or you one is dumb, I don't know which one it is.' She left, never came back no more. But some of them made good hands, and they're still down there."<sup>100</sup> Jimmy Elgin remembered, "But I'll just tell you, you try to learn a nigger something about that machinery, near about impossible. You might get five out of a hundred make you a decent hand down there at that time mill."<sup>101</sup>

Louise Rigsbee Jones's view was, "You see, the hands here had always run cotton stuff here, and when they started hiring help, they'd lay off the older hands that had been here a long time and bring some more in, and a lot of them were niggers. And I hate to say it---maybe I shouldn't say it---but some people are more interested and learn it and want to do it right, what they're going to do, than others. You know that. The people that had always worked here, I think, would have tried much harder to learn what they wanted them to learn than the ones that they have brought in since then."<sup>102</sup>

Frank Durham recalled, "[In early 1970s] they began to hire them because the government wanted you to have a certain percentage of black, if you got government orders, do any government business. I expect they have fifty percent or more who are black now; I know they are, although I haven't been in the mill in a pretty good while. But the third shift's seventy-five percent black, I expect. But they're doing alright. If they don't, they would lay them off and get somebody else. Some of them's good help, real good."<sup>103</sup>

Eula Durham concluded, "Yeah, they done pretty good. Never did have no trouble with them at all, as I know of . . . They was nice, and all the whites treated them nice . . . that's a pretty good bunch of blacks ones that works down there. All of them. A pretty good bunch . . . [They live] around Pittsboro."<sup>104</sup>

## **The Mill's End**

The voices in the oral history tapes talk about a period from 1894 to 1978--all but 25 years of the 109-year life of the mill. In 1971, Tuscarora Yarns, Inc. began managing the mill to produce a synthetic blend yarn; and two years later it purchased the mill. The new company replaced much of the outdated equipment; but at the same time, it returned to using more water power as a supplement to the electric power. And employee pension benefits were expanded.<sup>105</sup> But by the late 70s foreign competition began to take its toll. Initially the decline was evidenced in the reduction in the number of shifts in the mill to one; but the mill was closed in 1981.

Appendix 1: Names of mill workers and household heads as indicated in the 1880 U. S. Federal Census, Bynum Cotton Mills

Summer, Joseph (foreman)	51	*Lockwood, Sarah C.	43
Daughter Margaret M.	20	Daughter Letha Ann	12
Daughter Ema A.	18	Son Jessie S.	10
Daughter Martha Ann	15	Abernathy, Bettie	16
		Abernathy, Lucy	11
Sparrow, W. L.	45		
Daughter Mary H.	20	*McLeod, Mary	44
Son William G.	18	Daughter Jeanette	13
Daughter Olivia	16	Daughter Christine Ann	11
Daughter Nanny	14	Son Cook, Elijah	19
Daughter George Anna	10	Daughter Cook, Annie J.	24
		Lemons, Martha J.	25
*Culberson, Ruthy J.	45		
Daughter Sarah W.	26	Crutchfield, Salina	48
Son William R.	24	Daughter Lou Anne	17
Son John W.	20	Daughter Mattie	10
Son Alvin M.	18	Daughter Addie	14
Daughter Julia A.	16	Daughter Emily	10
		Hathcock, Louisa	19
Gurley, Charles	24	Hathcock, Amanda	17
Wife (?) Elenore Lou	25		
*Andrews, Martha D.	45	*Gurley, Anne	63
Daughter Lorena S.	15	Daughter Sarah Jane	40
Daughter Martha C.	14	Daughter Caletha	26
Daughter Ema Jane	12	Daughter Mary Elizabeth	21
Daughter Eudora S.	9	Daughter Mary Jane	14
		Seymour, Lizzie	30
*Jarman, Mary E.	46		
Daughter Mary J.	23	*Seymour, Jane	45
Daughter Emeline	19	Daughter Charty	20
Son Franklin H.	17	Daughter Eugenia	12
Daughter Edy Ann	15	Daughter Sabina J.	20
Son Charles A.	9		
		Pounds, James M.	39
*Beal, Catherine	40	Daughter Nancy Lee	13
Daughter Mary L.	20	Son James L.	11
Son John	12		
Daughter Cathi A.	12	*Abernathy, Clayton	64
		Daughter Elizabeth	16
*Williamson, Wm. J.	61	Daughter Lucy	10
Daughter Nancy C.	24		
Daughter Lordy F.	18	*Dawson, Betsy	45
Daughter Martha Louise	12	Daughter Josephine	18
Daughter Eliz. Caroline	12		
Daughter Mimi Lucinda	9	*Gurley, Joseph D.	38
		Daughter Joanna	12
*Not a mill worker.		Daughter Lizzie	10

## Appendix 2: Description of a Cotton Mill's Operation

Cotton arrived at the mill's opening room in five-hundred-pound ginned bales which were opened and cleaned of dirt and debris by "openers" before a vacuum system carried the cotton to the picker room. In the picker or lapper room, machines operated by "pickers" beat the cotton against wire grids to sort out sand and twigs, and rolled sheets called "laps." Carding machines operated by "card hands" pulled the lap between revolving drums, where fine wire teeth stretched the fibers, removing lint and short fibers, and arranged the remaining fibers in parallel. The gauzy sheet which emerged was loosely compressed into an untwisted strand called a "sliver," or loosely compacted rope, that coiled into cans. Workers directed four or more slivers through a drawing frame (operated drawing hands) where they were combined into a single strand. To ensure the permanent union of the fibers, the strand was then subjected to initial twisting by a roving frame (operated by rovers), and to spinning frame (operated by spinners) where the fibers were twisted still further. The spinners job was to move quickly up and down a row of machines repairing breaks and snags. As bobbins on the spinning frame filled with thread, "doffers" replaced them with empty ones. "Spoolers" ran machines that combined thread from 10-15 bobbins. They too were faced with broken threads which were fixed by tying them together with a knot. Finally, the irregularly wound bobbins of thread were re-wound with regulated tension on the winding frames (operated by winders) preparing the yarn for sale or further processing in the mill. The role of workers was to maintain the smooth running of the process, and to transport material from one step to the next. Lappers, carders, spinners, winders, and others regulated the operation of their respective machines, adding new material as necessary and repairing broken fibers.

*Adapted from Jacquelyn Dowd Hall et.al, Like A Family, University of North Carolina Press, 1987, pp. 49-50.*

## End Notes

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<sup>1</sup><https://dc.lib.unc.edu/cdm/search/collection/sohp/searchterm/H.3.%20Piedmont%20Industrialization,%201974-1980:%20Bynum,%20N.C./field/projec/mode/exact/conn/and/order/title>

<sup>2</sup> In the quotations that follow, I have made some, mostly not critical, corrections and some additions to the quotations found in the transcripts. End notes reference the transcripts. All interviews are from the

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Southern Oral History Program Collection, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

<sup>3</sup> Jacquelyn Dowd Hall et.al, Like A Family, University of North Carolina Press, 1987, p. 47

<sup>4</sup> Hadley, Horton, Strowd, Chatham County 1771-1971, Chatham County Historical Assn., 1997, p.377

<sup>5</sup> 1880 Federal Census, Bynum Cotton Mill

<sup>6</sup> Lawrence London interview #H-92, pp.2, 6-7

<sup>7</sup> London interview #H-92, p. 10

<sup>8</sup> Louise Rigsbee Jones interview #H-85-1, pp. 48-9

<sup>9</sup> Lewis Durham interview #H-68, p. 48

<sup>10</sup> Lawrence London interview, #92, pp. 10-12, 14

<sup>11</sup> Flossie Moore Durham interview p.30

<sup>12</sup> Lawrence London interview, #92, p. 12

<sup>13</sup> Lawrence London interview, #92, p. 21

<sup>14</sup> Flossie Moore Durham interview #H-66, p.2

<sup>15</sup> Bland Moore interview #H-94, p. 1

<sup>16</sup> Mary Council interview #H-63, p.1-4

<sup>17</sup> Ruth Williams interview #H-105, p. 1

<sup>18</sup> Carrie Lee Gerringer interview #H-77, p. 1, 4, 8.

<sup>19</sup> John Wesley Snipes (interview, #98-2, p. 30

<sup>20</sup> J. Nathaniel Atwater interview #H-60, p.2-3

<sup>21</sup> Mary G. Gattis interview #H-76, p. 12-3

<sup>22</sup> Flossie Moore Durham interview #H-66, p.23-24

<sup>23</sup> Lewis Durham interview #H-68, pp. 9-10

<sup>24</sup> Lewis Durham interview #H-68, p. 8

<sup>25</sup> James Hearne interview p.5

<sup>26</sup> Louise Rigsbee Jones interview #H-85-2, p.29

<sup>27</sup> Lawrence London interview, #H-92, p.3

<sup>28</sup> Frank Durham interview #H-67, p.9

<sup>29</sup> Lewis Durham interview #H-68, p. 10

<sup>30</sup> Carrie Lee Gerringer interview #H-77, pp. 48-49

<sup>31</sup> Carrie Lee Gerringer interview #H-77, pp. 40-41

<sup>32</sup> Louise Rigsbee Jones interview #H-85-2, p.47-9

<sup>33</sup> Thomas Snipes interview #100, pp. 3-4

<sup>34</sup> James Hearne interview #H-81, pp. 1-3

<sup>35</sup> Flossie Moore Durham interview #H-66, p. 33-34

<sup>36</sup> Frank Durham interview #H-67, p.15-16

<sup>37</sup> Louise Harris interview #H-78, p. 5

<sup>38</sup> Louise Rigsbee Jones interview ##H-85-2, p. 54

<sup>39</sup> John Wesley Snipes interview #98-2, p.20; John Wesley Snipes interview #99, p. 1

<sup>40</sup> Helen Howard interview #H-83, p. 1

<sup>41</sup> Louise Harris interview #H-78, p. 2

<sup>42</sup> Mozelle Riddle interview #H-96-2, pp.18-19

<sup>43</sup> Louise Harris interview #H-78, p. 7

<sup>44</sup> Ruth Williams interview #H-105, p. 2

<sup>45</sup> Carrie Lee Gerringer interview #H-77, p. 48

<sup>46</sup> John Wesley Snipes interview #98-2, p.30

<sup>47</sup> Louise Harris interview #H-78, p. 7

<sup>48</sup> Jimmy Elgin interview #H-69-2, p. 9

<sup>49</sup> Flossie Moore Durham interview #H-66, p. 11-12

<sup>50</sup> Louise Rigsbee Jones interview #H-85-1, p. 46; interview #H-85-2, pp. 50, 52; interview #H-86, p. 4

<sup>51</sup> Ruth Williams interview #H-105, p. 4.

<sup>52</sup> Frank Durham interview #H-67, p. 11

<sup>53</sup> John Wesley Snipes interview #H-98-2, p. 18-19

<sup>54</sup> Bland Moore interview #H-94, pp. 2-3

<sup>55</sup> Eula and Vernon Durham interview #H-64, pp. 1-3

<sup>56</sup> Frank Durham interview #H-67, p.20

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- <sup>57</sup> Carrie Lee Gerring interview #H-23, p. 40  
<sup>58</sup> Lewis Durham interview pp. 33-35  
<sup>59</sup> John Wesley Snipes interview #H-98-2, p. 20  
<sup>60</sup> Eula and Vernon Durham interview #H-64, pp.27-30  
<sup>61</sup> Eula and Vernon Durham interview #H-64, pp.27-30  
<sup>62</sup> John Wesley Snipes interview #H-98-2, p. 18  
<sup>63</sup> Lewis Durham interview #H-68, pp. 36-37  
<sup>64</sup> Helen Howard interview #H-83, pp. 1-2  
<sup>65</sup> Carrie Lee Gerring interview#H-77, pp. 34-35  
<sup>66</sup> Paul and Louise Jones interview, #H-88, p. 5  
<sup>67</sup> Jimmy Elgin interview #H-69, pp.1-3  
<sup>68</sup> Frank Durham interview #H-67, p. 58-59  
<sup>69</sup> Thomas Snipes interview #100, p. 4-5  
<sup>70</sup> Frank Durham interview #H-67, p. 46  
<sup>71</sup> Frank Durham interview #H-67, p.7  
<sup>72</sup> Eula and Vernon Durham interview #H-64, pp.1-4  
<sup>73</sup> John Wesley Snipes interview #98-2, pp. 29-31, 36  
<sup>74</sup> John Wesley Snipes interview # 98-2, pp. 36-7  
<sup>75</sup> Ruth Williams interview #105, p. 3  
<sup>76</sup> Frank Durham interview #H-67, p. 48  
<sup>77</sup> Carrie Lee Gerring interview #H-77, pp. 29-30  
<sup>78</sup> Eula and Vernon Durham interview #H-64, p.11  
<sup>79</sup> Louise Rigsbee Jones interview #H-85-2, p. 43  
<sup>80</sup> Paul and Louise Jones interview #H-88, p. 3  
<sup>81</sup> Frank Durham interview #H-67, p. 18, 22  
<sup>82</sup> Thomas Snipes interview #H-100, 3  
<sup>83</sup> Mary Council interview #H-63, p.1  
<sup>84</sup> Eula and Vernon Durham interview #H-64, p.6  
<sup>85</sup> Eula and Vernon Durham interview #H-64, p. 58-59, 61  
<sup>86</sup> Frank Durham interview #H-67, p. 57-58  
<sup>87</sup> Louise Rigsbee Jones interview #H-85-2, p. 51  
<sup>88</sup> Carrie Lee Gerring interview #H-77, pp. 45-6  
<sup>89</sup> Eula and Vernon Durham interview #H-64, p. 12  
<sup>90</sup> Frank Durham interview #H-67, p. 26  
<sup>91</sup> Frank Durham interview pp. 27, 57  
<sup>92</sup> Mary Gattis interview #H-63, p. 3b  
<sup>93</sup> Eula Durham interview #H-65, p.3  
<sup>94</sup> Jimmie Elgin interview 2, H70, p. 2  
<sup>95</sup> Jimmie Elgin interview #H-70, p. 2  
<sup>96</sup> *Chatham Record*, 11 Jan 1934  
<sup>97</sup> Eula and Vernon Durham interview pp.20-21  
<sup>98</sup> Lewis Durham interview #H-68, p. 62  
<sup>99</sup> Eula and Vernon Durham interview #H-64, pp.24-25  
<sup>100</sup> Eula and Vernon Durham interview #H-64, p. 16  
<sup>101</sup> Jimmy Elgin interview #H-70, p. 4  
<sup>102</sup> Louise Rigsbee Jones interview #H-85-2, p. 62  
<sup>103</sup> Frank Durham interview #H-67, p. 37  
<sup>104</sup> Eula and Vernon Durham interview #H-64, pp. 17-18  
<sup>105</sup> *Durham Herald*, 17 December 1981