

OLYMPIA MILL AND VILLAGE

Upper Richland County, South Carolina
Historical and Architectural Inventory

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II. Introduction

In July 2001, the Richland County Conservation Commission and the South Carolina State Historic Preservation Office (SCSHPO) engaged Edwards-Pitman Environmental, Inc. to conduct an intensive architectural survey of upper Richland County and the Olympia Mill village. Because the Olympia Survey covers a specific area with a common history dating to a particular era, the Upper Richland survey report is under a separate cover. All information relating to the boundaries of the survey area, survey methodology and the number of properties documented that follows pertains specifically to the survey of the Olympia Mill Village.

An initial planning meeting was held in the Richland County Administrator's office on 25 July 25 2001. Among those in attendance were Andrew Pitman, Nicholas Theos and Jennifer Martin representing Edwards-Pitman Environmental, Inc.; Margaret DuBard, a member of the Richland County Conservation Commission; Daniel J. Vivian and Brad Sauls of the SCSHPO; T. Patrick Brennan, Executive Director of Historic Columbia Foundation; Leigh Edwards, a consultant for the Palmetto Conservation Foundation and Ash Miller, the project's local coordinator who also serves as the county's staff person for the Richland County Conservation Commission. On July 27, the contract for the survey was signed and work was underway. Fieldwork took place in October 2001. Data for each resource surveyed was entered into the Department of Archives and History Survey Database in the late fall and winter of 2001 and early 2002. In January and February of 2002, historians for Edwards-Pitman Environmental conducted further research on the history of the county and prepared this final report.

III. Project Summary

A. Name of Survey

Historic Resources Survey of Upper Richland County: Olympia Mill Village

B. Boundaries of Survey Area

Located just south of downtown Columbia, the survey area includes the original Olympia Mill property, based on plat maps from 1940. The area is bounded on the northeast by Bluff Road, by Granby Lane on the southeast, by the Vulcan Materials quarry property and a portion of Olympia Avenue on the southwest, and by Heyward Street on the north.

C. Number of Properties Surveyed

382

D. Number of Square Miles Surveyed

Approximately .35 square miles

E. Surveyors

Nicholas Theos, Jennifer F. Martin and Sarah A. Woodard
Edwards-Pitman Environmental, Inc.

F. Beginning and End Dates of Survey

October 22 – October 26, 2001

IV. Project Objectives

The survey of the Olympia Mill Village is a component of the Historic Resources Survey of Upper Richland County, a project funded through a matching grant program by the South Carolina Department of Archives and History and Richland County. This survey is part of the on-going statewide survey program administered by the State Historic Preservation Office, within the South Carolina Department of Archives and History. The state's survey program is intended to preserve and document South Carolina's history by collecting information about the state's historic architecture.

The survey of the Olympia Mill Village will allow the State Historic Preservation Office to evaluate the potential for including the village in the National Register of Historic Places, which is the nation's list of historic resources worth of preservation. Listing in the National Register of Historic Places is primarily honorary, but does provide the opportunity for some property owners to take advantage of tax incentives. The National Register also helps create awareness of the neighborhood's existence and importance when reviews of federally funded or licensed projects are slated to occur in the area.

The survey will also raise the village's historical value among the residents as well as provide a history of the mill and the village and a list or inventory of all the structures and buildings extant in the village. The survey will provide village residents with access to their history, inspiring future preservation efforts. Beyond the village, the survey will gather the information needed by local officials when they are asked to make sound planning decisions. Awareness of Olympia's history will also be raised among the broader population of Columbia and Richland County, which will, in turn, help citizens appreciate, understand, preserve, and remember its whole history.

V. Survey Methodology

The survey of Upper Richland County followed the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Identification and Evaluation (36 CFR 61.3 and 6 and 61.4[b]) and was devised in accordance with the "State Historic Preservation Office Survey Manual," revised 2001 edition, issued by the South Carolina Department of Archives and History.

A. Fieldwork and Research

The surveyors conducted the fieldwork between October 22 and October 26, 2001. Surveyors walked or drove every street within the area and for each pre-1952 building, they completed a reconnaissance level survey form, taking black and white photographs, and mapping each building, site, and structure within the survey area. All surveyed properties were mapped on a map provided by Richland County. In addition to surveyed properties, the consultants noted the locations of vacant lots and infill construction on the map.

Before, during and after the fieldwork phase of the project, the investigators gathered history concerning the mill village from current and former residents, the South Carolina Division of Archives and History, the South Caroliniana and the Thomas Cooper Library at the University of South Carolina, the Richland County Public Library, the Wilson Library at the University of North Carolina, and the North Carolina State University library.

B. Criteria for Evaluation

All resources more than fifty years in age were included in the survey, regardless of integrity. The surveyors attempted to err on the side of inclusion, occasionally surveying buildings less than fifty years old with indefinite construction dates or with construction dates close to the fifty-year cut-off.

Figure 1: Map of Olympia Village Survey Area

Olympia Mill and Village
Historical and Architectural Inventory

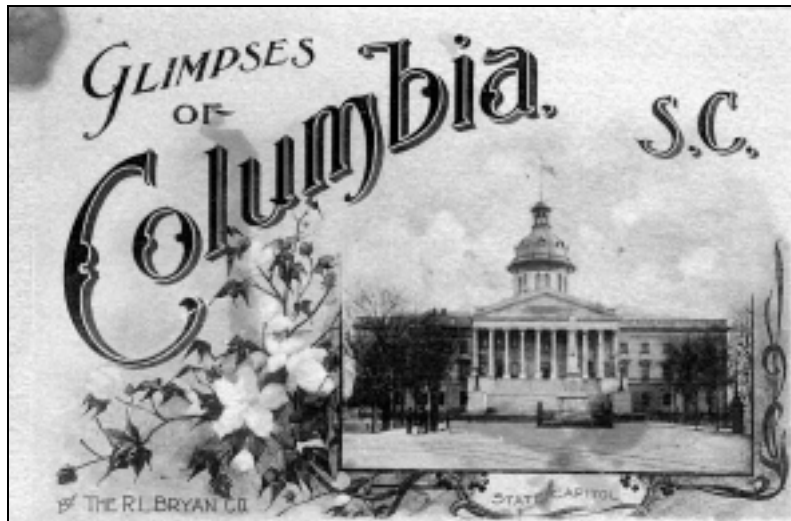


Plate 1: Image from Columbia souvenir booklet, ca. 1910

VI. Historical Overview

The Textile Industry in Columbia

Olympia Mill Village is situated just south of downtown Columbia, immediately outside the city limits. South Carolina's capital city sits on the eastern side of the confluence of the Saluda and Broad Rivers, which together form the Congaree River. The city is nearly in the center of the state and was officially established as the seat of state government following the American Revolution, although the area had been settled since the mid-1700s. Throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, Columbia's population grew as state government and commerce expanded. Following the Civil War, Columbia, like other southern cities and the rest of South Carolina, faced a period of slow recovery and adjustment as the region moved towards a New South economy fueled by railroads and industrialization.¹

The concept of a New South developed after the Civil War and reached its height in the 1890s and 1910s. The New South aimed at making the region less dependent on agriculture through economic progress, civic duty, and social changes. The movement's leaders wanted, in effect, to make the South more like the North. The main component in the creation of this reinvented region, particularly in the Piedmont regions of North and South Carolina, Georgia and Alabama, was the textile mill. In South Carolina, textile production dates from the mid-eighteenth century when yarn and cloth were produced in private homes and in small factories for very limited local consumption. Antebellum industrial pursuits were conducted only on a small scale and most antebellum South Carolinians grew cotton or produced other raw materials that would be manufactured elsewhere.

¹ Historic Preservation Consulting, Inc., "Granby Mill Village Historical Survey," survey report, 1990, 3-4.

There were, however, a few exceptions. One in particular was William Gregg who, in 1847, set up a large textile plant in South Carolina. Called the Graniteville Manufacturing Company, the factory was equipped with 9,245 spindles and 300 looms, making it the largest antebellum textile factory in the South, and one of the region's largest industrial plants.² Like New England manufacturers, Gregg established Graniteville in a rural area where he could take advantage of waterpower, and provided housing, stores, hotels, churches, and schools for workers and their families because the mill stood isolated from community services. By following the New England pattern, Gregg helped establish the method of mill development that the South followed fifty years later when it transformed itself into the post-Civil War, industrialized, New South.³

Thirteen years after Gregg founded his company, only eighteen cotton mills operated in South Carolina. These factories housed 26,000 spindles and employed 891 people. By comparison, Massachusetts' 271 mills had over one and a half million spindles and employed 38,451 operatives.⁴

The textile industry's slow growth ceased altogether with the outbreak of the Civil War. In February 1865, Union troops, apparently under the influence of alcohol rather than Sherman's command, set much of Columbia ablaze, destroying the business district, homes, and the old State House. The new capitol, still under construction, was damaged and railroad tracks were torn up. Although not completely devastated, Columbia was left battered and bruised.⁵ When the war ended, railroad companies repaired tracks and built new rail lines, and by the turn of the twentieth century, Columbia functioned as a regional rail hub with eleven separate rail lines bringing 144 trains to the city daily.⁶

Simultaneously, advances were being made in the creation and use of electricity while New South entrepreneurs were sounding the cry, "Bring the mills to the cotton." South Carolina and Columbia were key participants in the New South movement and in textile mill development. With the New South focus on civic responsibility and industrialization, South Carolina's business leaders worked to instill community pride through the use of slogans and expositions. Spartanburg tried several slogans, among them, "The City of Smokestacks and Education." Greenville became the "Pearl of the Piedmont."⁷ In 1901 and 1902, Charleston sponsored the less-than-successful South Carolina Interstate and West Indian Exposition, while in true New South fashion, Greenville hosted the wildly successful Southern Textile Exposition.⁸

By the late nineteenth century, steam power and electricity eliminated the necessity of locating mills near strong rivers, and thus, with the mill free from the

² Stephen Shapiro, "The Growth of the Cotton Textile Industry in South Carolina: 1919-1930" (Ph.D. diss., University of South Carolina, 1971), 5.

³ Shapiro, 6; Debra Miller Stayner, "Changing Geographic Patterns in Olympia Mill Village" (master's thesis, University of South Carolina, 1984), 33.

⁴ Shapiro, 2-3.

⁵ John Hammond Moore, *Columbia and Richland County: A South Carolina Community, 1740-1990* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1993), 202-204.

⁶ Walter Edgar, *South Carolina: A History* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1998), 454.

⁷ Edgar, 255.

⁸ Edgar, 255-256

constraints of waterpower, the desirability of providing worker housing faded in New England. In the South, too, manufacturers had flexibility when choosing the location of their mills, but they continued to use rural locations where mill villages were necessary. The mill village allowed manufacturers to exercise paternalistic control over their workers and lure workers with the provision of housing.

One of the leaders in the New South movement was Charlotte's D.A. Tompkins whose widely disseminated recommendations directed that a 10,000-spindle mill should have five to ten acres for the mill site and about forty acres for houses, providing each house with room for a garden.⁹ He advised mill investors to build "a factory one to four miles away from a city and let the company build and own the houses the employees live in."¹⁰ This strategy avoided local property taxes, local governmental jurisdiction, and allowed mill owners to maintain social and economic control over their workers.¹¹ Tompkins also noted that in a remote location, with no existing stores, "the benefit of mercantile features may be enjoyed by the mill company."¹² Furthermore, lawyers who may attempt to interfere with the mill's operations or sue over injuries that operatives may sustain would also be kept at bay.¹³ Tompkins believed downtown living would corrupt workers, as would indoor plumbing or housing more spacious than one room per operative and at the end of the day, employees in a rural setting would be more apt to go to bed early, and therefore would be in better condition to work during the day.¹⁴

Across the South, cotton mills were constructed at explosive rates. Fourteen mills stood in South Carolina in 1880, even fewer than in 1860. But between 1895 and 1907, sixty-one new textile mills were built and older ones were expanded and updated. By 1910, there were 167 cotton mills in South Carolina, a number second only to Massachusetts.¹⁵ A key group of South Carolina mill developers were responsible for much of this boom. These barons included Leroy Springs, John T. Woodside, and Lewis W. Parker whose company eventually operated more than one million spindles in South Carolina. Charleston native W.B. Smith Whaley, however, was South Carolina's main proponent of textile production and innovator in mill design.¹⁶

William Burroughs Smith Whaley (1866-1929), like many of his New South counterparts, received much of his education in the North, attending Stevens Institute of Technology and Cornell University, from which he graduated in 1888. After working as a mechanical engineer in Rhode Island and being exposed to textile mill design and operation, Whaley returned to South Carolina in 1893, establishing himself in Columbia

⁹D.A. Tompkins, *Cotton Mill Commercial Features: A Textbook for the use of Textile Schools and Investors* (Charlotte: D.A. Tompkins, 1899), 34.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Brent D. Glass, *The Textile Industry in North Carolina* (Raleigh: N.C. Department of Cultural Resources, 1992), 42.

¹²Tompkins, 35.

¹³Ibid., 35.

¹⁴Tompkins, 35 and Glass, 42.

¹⁵Edgar, 256.

¹⁶Ibid.

as a mechanical engineer specializing in mill design. The following year, Whaley and Gadsden E. Shand, a Columbia civil engineer, founded W.B. Smith Whaley and Company. Between 1895 and 1907, the firm designed twenty-one mills in South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, and North Carolina, most of them in South Carolina. One of his largest mills was the sixty thousand-spindle F.W. Poe Manufacturing Company in Greenville with over nine hundred employees. Through the firm's work, Whaley and Company introduced many architectural and technological innovations to mill design in South Carolina.¹⁷

Columbia's mill development, both in and near the city, mirrors the history of textile manufacturing across the Carolinas. From a slow antebellum start, textiles evolved as the major economic engine in the city by the early twentieth century. Small textile concerns operated in and around Columbia from its earliest days. The first substantial factory was the Saluda Manufacturing Company, chartered in 1834 and located about two miles north of Columbia. The company operated off and on for about fifty years, but it was never a success and burned in 1884. The arrival of the railroad and improved energy sources were necessary for modern textile production, but once those two needs were met, the scene was set for the arrival of the modern manufacturing. Although New South industrialists like D.A. Tompkins recommended that mills be built along railroads in rural areas, the allure of Columbia's extensive rail connections and readily accessible electricity pulled manufacturing facilities towards the capital. As in Charlotte, several mills were located on the edge of the city or just beyond the city limits, but despite neighboring urbanity, mill villages were still constructed, lending credence to the notion of the mill owner's desire for control of his operatives. By 1920, an estimated one-sixth of the state's white population lived in mill villages.¹⁸

Columbia's first post-Civil War mill was the Congaree Manufacturing Company, a small, steam-powered operation that proved unsuccessful and lasted only about three years. Three other mills began operating around the turn of the twentieth century. Founded in 1894, Columbia Mills Company was the first mill in the United States to be powered entirely with electricity. The Palmetto Cotton Mills opened in 1899 and the Glencoe Cotton Mill began operations in 1909.

Four other Columbia mills date from the textile boom-period of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century: Richland Cotton Mills Company (1895), Granby Cotton Mills Company (1897), Olympia Cotton Mills (1899), and the Capital City Mills (1900). Although the Richland Mill was a steam-powered facility, the other mills took advantage of the electricity produced at the recently completed hydroelectric plant on the Columbia Canal. Whaley and Company designed and managed these mills, collectively known as the Whaley Mills, and they represent the firm's most advanced and innovative designs.¹⁹

¹⁷ National Register Multiple Property Documentation Form, "Textile Mills in South Carolina Designed by W.B. Smith Whaley, 1893-1903," E 1 – 3.

¹⁸ David L. Carlton, *Mill and Town in South Carolina: 1880-1920* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 7.

¹⁹ Historic Preservation Consulting, Inc., 5.

The Whaley Mills, on the city's southern edge and easily visible from the State House, brought the New South economy to the capital as well as the poverty associated with mill villages. Workers labored from six in the morning to 6:30 p.m. Monday through Friday and for nine hours on Saturday for wages that were, on average, sixty-percent lower than those earned by mill hands in other parts of the country.²⁰ An 1896 "Christmas tree" benefit for impoverished children sponsored by *The State*, had to be postponed from its Christmas Eve date to December twenty-sixth when it was discovered that most of the beneficiaries would be working at the mills on Christmas Eve, but would have a half day off on Saturday, the twenty-sixth. By the following year, the Columbia Ladies' Benevolent Society was one of many local charities becoming overwhelmed by requests for assistance and appealing to the public for more help: "Since the establishment of more factories, there is a greater number of cases calling for relief, and the illness of the past summer among this class, as well as among others, having depleted our treasury, we ask contributions from the generous-hearted whose sympathies abound for the poor."²¹

In 1907, when August Kohn wrote *The Cotton Mills of South Carolina*, two thousand thirty-six people worked in the four Whaley Mills. Of those, officials reported to Kohn that only thirty-two were under the age of twelve, but Kohn notes, "every mill did not freely give the desired data." Kohn reported that of the three hundred fifty children living in the Olympia mill village, only one hundred and forty attended school.²² This was despite the fact that a 1903 South Carolina law directed that no child under ten could be employed in a factory, mine, or mill. The age increased to eleven in 1904 and to twelve in 1905.²³

Mill owners and operators maintained control of the low-paid operatives and minimized complaints about hours, wages, and working conditions through well-applied paternalism. By providing housing that was often better than that the operatives had left behind in the country, schools, churches, recreational, and health facilities, owners convinced both workers and the public that the company was taking care of its own. In reality, however, schools were poorly run and were often over-crowded or under-attended, housing was sometimes sub-standard, churches were "designed less for the encouragement of religion than for its control," and the company maintained price-controls at the store, often assisting in the operative's descent into debt.²⁴

Like the mill's bell or whistle wafting into the mill house dictating the beginning and end of every shift, the company had access to every aspect of the operative's life. Broadus Mitchell, in his 1930 book, *The Industrial Revolution in the South*, wrote, "The church and the school, not to speak of the welfare departments, have been sponsored and contributed to by the employers, and have been engines of his will and servers of his convenience." He went on to say that operatives have been "stall fed," receiving "a

²⁰ Edgar, 460-461.

²¹ Carlton, 135-136 and *The State*, October 23, 1897.

²² August Kohn, *The Cotton Mills of South Carolina* (Columbia: South Carolina Department of Agriculture, Commerce, and Immigration, 1907), 109 and 139.

²³ Edgar, 463.

²⁴ Carlton, 101-104.

considerable part of their compensation in kind – gardens, medical attention, free pasturage, wood and coal at cost, and, above all, exceedingly low rents.” In this situation, workers were bound to the mill because they had little cash and operatives generally accepted the services of the mill in exchange for their silence about unsafe working environments and unsanitary living conditions. Mitchell acknowledged that textile mills provided employment to a segment of the rural population (poor, landless whites) that was often living in abject poverty, but he felt that “the company-owned mill village has some time since become a means of repression of the worker, consciously maintained by the employer.”²⁵

Mitchell was not the only writer discussing the paternalism of the textile mill. Paul Blanshard, writing for the *New Republic* in 1927, reported, “What the mill workers gain in well repaired roofs and inside toilets, they lose in community control. . . . The worker has neither standing as a citizen nor training for citizenship apart from the dominant figure of his industrial overlord.”²⁶ Indicating that the services provided by the company stifled reform, he wrote, “Social workers hired by kindly mill owners give excellent personal service, but they are not free to criticize the worst features of village life.”²⁷ By providing housing and other assistance to operatives, mill management hoped to stay beyond reproach in the eyes of the workers and the public.

In Columbia, where since 1891 Labor Day had been celebrated with unusual gusto, labor unrest arrived early. The National Union of Textile Workers participated in the 1900 Labor Day parade and began a call for child labor legislation, the establishment of a state bureau of labor with inspection powers, and reduced working hours. Although *The State* reported, “Labor organizations have cut no figure here. The people are satisfied with a good living and want no disturbance of the amicable relations between capital and themselves,” the management of the Whaley Mills nervously announced plans to build a public hall, library, and school and donate land and money towards the construction of a church.²⁸ This did not pacify workers and by August 1901, with many of his workers planning to march in the Labor Day parade, Whaley ordered operatives to work overtime to make up their lost hours in advance of the parade. When the mill hands failed to work overtime on Saturday, they found themselves locked out on Monday morning. On August 28, mill employees went on strike, but the mills continued to run and strikers were given eviction notices. Whaley, however, did not like *The State*’s coverage of the strike. He denounced the press, and thus lost a potentially valuable ally. Ultimately, with the union unable to offer meaningful financial assistance to the strikers, the strike fizzled and just four months later, workers presented Whaley with a gold watch for Christmas.²⁹

Despite this element of dissatisfaction, the “extreme and cruel poverty” *The State* found in Columbia’s mill villages, and the control exercised by mill managers and

²⁵ Broadus Mitchell, *The Industrial Revolution in the South* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1930), 136-137 and 141.

²⁶ Paul Blanshard, “Servants of the Spindle,” *The New Republic* (September 28, 1927): 144.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 145.

²⁸ *The State* (Columbia), Industrial Art Edition, July 8, 1901; Moore, 311.

²⁹ Moore, 311-312.

owners, most villages offered living conditions better than those the operatives left behind. Mill hands usually came from hardscrabble farms where existence was a day-to-day struggle. Typical of the experiences of the families coming to the mills were those of Lola Derrick Byars:

My family came down from a farm in the Dutch Fork section of Richland and Lexington counties. We lived on a farm so poor it would grow nothing but rocks, my daddy cut cord wood on the side to buy food. He had heard about the mills opening in Columbia and one day he just decided to load all of our belongings and us onto the wagon and come to Columbia. He drove that old wagon onto the ferry at the Broad river and crossed. We came straight to the Granby Mill Village in 1898 and went to the mill to get a job. I was 8 years old and worked in the Granby Mill until the Olympia Mill opened and then went to work there. We got one of those nice new houses on Fifth Street. I was an experienced worker when I reached twelve years of age and could run eight sides. I had two new dresses and plenty of food.³⁰

Regardless of the low pay, long hours, company controls, and sometimes dangerous working conditions, mill life was, for many, a vast improvement over life on the farm. Indeed, many second and third generation villagers were able to take advantage of the schools and their parent's steady income by attending college and moving out of the mill village.

By the late 1910s and the early 1920s, although unionization was still shunned, industry leaders were addressing many complaints about sanitation, child labor, low wages, and worker safety. But hard times were on the horizon, just when the rest of the country was experience an economic boom. Drought and the arrival of the boll weevil depressed the price of cotton and tobacco, and banks were folding. Farming techniques had depleted the land and people were leaving South Carolina in droves. Those who didn't leave the state came to the textile mills, but between 1923 and 1927, most textile firms were only marginally profitable or were actually losing money.³¹

Historian Bryant Simon describes the situation:

An economic crisis gripped the South Carolina Piedmont five long years before the stock market crash signaled the beginning of the Great Depression across the rest of the nation. The wartime boom that has thrust textile production to new heights during the 1920s went bust. Falling demand and changing fashions at home along with the emergence of cotton manufacturing industries in India and Japan cut deeply into profits. Rejecting production cutbacks, southern mill owners

³⁰ Alvin W. Byars, *Olympia-Pacific: The Way it Was, 1895-1970* (Columbia: by the author, 1981), 20.

³¹ Edgar, 485-488.

responded by churning out more cloth and yarn in frantic bids to grab part of the dwindling market.³²

To counteract over production, companies began to “stretch-out” work, whereby machines were sped up while the number of employees was decreased. One South Carolina worker described it as “taking three mens [*sic*] jobs and putting it on one.”³³ Some owners coupled this with the reduction of the number of hours the mill was operating, some even going to three-day weeks. As a result, workers who kept their jobs made less money because of reduced hours, and while they were at work, they were supervising more machines running at faster rates than ever before.³⁴

For years, unions had tried unsuccessfully to make inroads into the Southern textile industry, but “mill owners deliberately destroyed every attempt by the workers to unite their forces in recognized labor unions.”³⁵ Now, however, under the dire economic conditions of the late 1920s, they were able to organize laborers. During this period, several textile strikes took place across the South, but in South Carolina, where the state itself was in debt and cash was growing increasingly rare, the strikes accomplished little.³⁶

The Depression only worsened a bad situation. Starvation became a reality across the state and by the middle of 1933, one-fourth of all South Carolinians were being assisted through the Federal Emergency Relief Administration. The National Industry Recovery Act provided textile workers with better pay, but it allowed companies to continue to cut the number of workers. Furthermore, the act did not guarantee a forty-hour workweek or outlaw stretch-outs. By 1934, half of South Carolina’s textile workers were members of the United Textile Workers (UTW). On September 3, 1934, the UTW led a General Textile Strike at mills from Maine to Alabama, including those in Columbia. The strikes turned violent across the South, but they remained peaceful in Columbia.³⁷

As the industry began to falter in the Depression, owners began to divest themselves of mill villages. By the mid-1930s, the mill village had become a less-than-desirable burden to the factory for a number of reasons. Most obvious were the ever-increasing maintenance expenditures. In addition, with child labor completely abolished, the mill also found it less advantageous to provide housing when only the adults were potential employees. Access to automobiles made it possible for workers to live farther away from the mill and owners who needed to comply with the new 1938 federal minimum wage found it prudent to convert the money allocated to housing into increased

³² Bryant Simon, “Prelude to the New Deal: The Political Response of South Carolina Textile Workers to the Great Depression, 1929-1933,” in Gary M. Fink and Merl E. Reed, eds., *Race Class, and Community in Southern Labor History* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1994), 42.

³³ Paul Eli Clark to Blackwood, n.d. [ca. 1931], quoted in Simon, 44.

³⁴ Edgar, 488.

³⁵ Blanshard, 144.

³⁶ Edgar, 488-489.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 505.

wages. Following the strikes of the 1930s, the village was also seen as a vehicle for labor unrest; a place where dissatisfied workers would mingle, talk, and ultimately organize. Furthermore, new mill owners and managers were not as paternalistic as their predecessors and viewed the village as an unwanted vestige of the past.³⁸ In 1939 alone, twelve companies sold over thirty mill villages, including the Olympia village.

Labor turmoil continued throughout the 1930s, but the industry's brief World War II recovery quelled much of the unrest. Despite the boom created by wartime demand, South Carolina's textile industry would never enjoy another heyday like the one that had ended by the mid-1920s.³⁹ Following World War II, the industry's decline resumed, fostered by more overseas competition and greater technological advances that led to a reduced workforce. Mergers, take-overs, and increased mechanization helped companies stay afloat, but it could not stop the closure of over eight hundred textile mills nationwide between 1975 and 1985.⁴⁰

³⁸ Glass, 84-84; Stayner, 38-40

³⁹ Edgar, 505.

⁴⁰ Glass, 100.

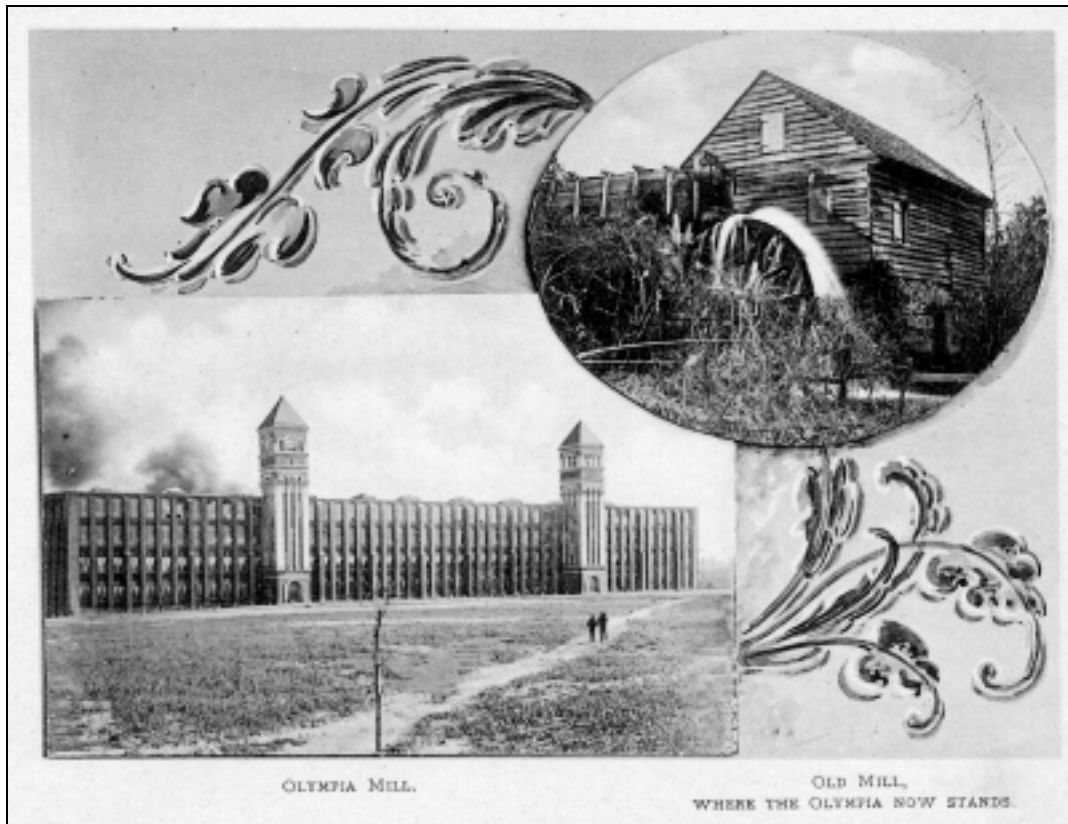


Plate 2: Olympia Mill, from a Columbia souvenir booklet, ca. 1910

The Olympia Mill

One of W.B. Smith Whaley’s four Columbia textile mills, the Olympia Mill, opened in 1899 and with over 100,000 spindles and 2,250 looms, it was the largest cotton mill under one roof in the world.⁴¹ Named for the flagship of Admiral Dewey’s victorious fleet at the Battle of Manila Bay, Whaley began planning Olympia before his Granby Mill was fully operational. Located next to the Granby Mill, the original Olympia site contained 104 acres straddling Columbia’s corporate boundary and was accessible to most of the rail lines entering the city. Whaley awarded the \$186,000 contract to T.C. Thompson Brothers of Birmingham, Alabama.⁴² *The State* waxed poetic about Olympia in 1901, heralding it as “Peerless Olympia, Wonderful Example of Engineering Skill,” and proclaiming it “the most beautiful, the most majestic, and upon close investigation, the most admirable specimen of mechanical construction in the realm of Southern

⁴¹ Shpiro, 21; Carlton, 135.

⁴² Byars, 9-10.

industrial activity.” The enamored writer went on to say, “It is the Mountain of Olympia, on the plain of Elias.”⁴³

The mill is a monumental four-story rectangular brick building standing to the north of the Olympia mill village. The building stands one hundred fifty-one feet, two inches wide and five hundred fifty-three feet, two inches long.⁴⁴ One of the most architecturally outstanding early twentieth century industrial buildings in South Carolina, the mill features distinctive soaring twin towers positioned on its north elevation. The base of each tower contains an arched entrance. A terra cotta sign reading “Olympia Cotton Mills” occupies the area above the entrance on the southern tower. The bases of four pilasters with Corinthian caps rest on the entablature above each tower’s entrance. These soaring pilasters extend approximately two-thirds the height of each tower. Above the pilasters, the towers are divided into three sections, each separated by a molded beltcourse. The upper field features three, grouped arched bays on each elevation. The arch motif—cast in stone and employed as a structural element—repeats liberally on each tower and elsewhere on the building. A pyramidal roof surmounts each tower.

Arched head windows are arranged rhythmically on each level of the front, side, and rear elevations. The rear of the mill reveals a series of appendages that are contemporary with and complement the larger building. Pilasters and arched bays enhance the three-story section of the mill that is attached to the main building with a hyphen and stands to the south of the mill. A tall round brick tower rises from the two-story powerhouse standing behind the three-story part of the mill.

Inside, the mill’s floors are composed of several layers of wood separated by layers of tarpaper. Interior walls were finished with concrete stucco to a height of five feet, above which they were finished with plasters. In the towers, “Venetian mosaic” covered the floors and the wainscoting. Towers, two on the front rising about sixty-five feet above the main building, and two on the back equal in height to the mill, housed stairways and toilets. At the top of these towers, were 15,000-gallon reservoirs supplying the sprinkler system.⁴⁵

The Olympia Mill produced sixty-four by sixty-four cloth that was thirty-six and one-half inches wide and weighed five and one-half yards to the pound. The mill also produced eighty by eighty sheeting that was thirty-eight and one-half inches wide and weighed seven yards to the pound.⁴⁶

To finance the construction and operation of the Olympia Mill, as well as his other Columbia mills, Whaley did what no one else in the South was doing: he sought investment locally and had no substantial backing from Northern investors. Possibly because of this, Olympia and the other Whaley Mills never had access to adequate amounts of cash. His beautiful, thoughtful designs and his use of the most modern machinery available were expensive, and by July 1900, Whaley found his business completely over extended. Over the next year, he managed to secure loans, but to no

⁴³ *The State*, Industrial Art Edition, July 8, 1901.

⁴⁴ Byars, 12.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 17.

avail. By June 1903, Whaley was unable to make loan payments. In November, a new board of directors was elected. This board reflected the interests of northern creditors: Whaley and William H. Lyles, also a Columbian were retained, R. Goodwin Rhett of Charleston was added, but the majority were from the north, representing Massachusetts, Maryland, New York, and Rhode Island.⁴⁷

Following the reorganization, Whaley resigned as president and withdrew from his engineering firm, Whaley and Company, which subsequently became Shand and LaFaye. He left Columbia for Boston and devoted himself to engineering, working to improve internal combustion engines. After his death at the age of sixty-three in 1929, he was buried on Long Island in an unmarked grave. "A man's work, Whaley said, should be his memorial, and his was the mills he had built."⁴⁸

Whaley's successor as president of the Whaley Mills was Lewis Parker. Under Parker's leadership, the mill villages underwent great improvements. Swamps behind the Olympia and Granby Mills and behind the Olympia village had long been the source of malaria and mosquito plagues, but by 1907, Parker had drained some of these low places. Parker supplied civic gathering spaces, hired trained nurses, and set aside a five-acre wooded tract for park space. He provided a new building for the Olympia School and established five kindergartens, one for each mill, plus a fifth for African American children.⁴⁹

Parker was also busy wrestling with the ever precarious financial situation of the Whaley mills, which had been renamed the Hampton Group. Parker refinanced, negotiated, and reorganized for over ten years, but in 1915, Pacific Mills of Massachusetts purchased the mills for the bargain price of \$3.2 million.⁵⁰

Pacific Mills controlled the mills for nearly forty years, during which time the mills went through the Great Depression, labor disputes, the sale of the mill village, and World War II. In 1954, Pacific Mills sold the factories to Burlington Industries who sold them to M. Lowenstein and Sons the following year. M. Lowenstein and Sons held the mills until 1988 when they sold the Granby and Olympia Mills to Springs Corporation. Finally, after years of downsizing and production cuts, Granby and Olympia were closed in 1996.⁵¹

The Olympia Mill Village

The Olympia Mill Village dates from the opening of the mill in 1899. Bounded by Heyward Street, Bluff Road, Granby Lane, and by the quarry, the village's design incorporates a grid pattern and uniform lots with back alleys. The earliest development occurred along Olympia Avenue and spread south, down the long blocks of the numbered streets. The numbered streets were renamed for states in the mid-twentieth century when

⁴⁷ Moore, 307-308; Byars, 18-19.

⁴⁸ Moore, 308.

⁴⁹ Byars, 55-56.

⁵⁰ Moore, 308.

⁵¹ *The State*, April 23, 2000.

the city of Columbia renamed some of its streets with numbers. The village was nearly built-out by 1920, but along Virginia Street (originally 10th Street), and along the cross streets of Whitney, Dover and Quarry, near their intersections with Virginia Street, the homes date exclusively from the late 1930s through the 1950s or 1960s. The mill is located on the north side of the village and supervisors' homes were located further to the north on Whaley Street, now inside Columbia's city limits. The Olympia School anchors the village's southeastern corner.

The mill houses are frame buildings and are either single-family residences or duplexes, with many being constructed so that they could easily oscillate between use by one family or two families. One common type is the two-story, side-gable house with a saltbox shed across the back. This



house had four rooms downstairs and two rooms up and could either be a six-room, single-family house or a duplex with two three-room units. Another duplex style consisted of a building with a one-story, usually side-gable unit attached to a two-story, hipped roof unit. Also common are two-story shotgun houses with hipped roofs. There were two version of the one-story, three-room plan: one featured a modified shotgun plan with an inset porch, while the other was an L-shaped building with an engaged porch. House styles were alternated along the street and a variety of colors were used to paint the houses.⁵²

When first constructed, Olympia's residents obtained water from common pumps located at intervals throughout each block. Privies and cow pens were located behind each

Plate 3: Typical Olympia Mill Village house

house, and houses did not have window screens. Behind the mill was a low-lying swamp that provided perfect breeding ground for mosquitoes. Malaria, smallpox, and flu epidemics were common. During the smallpox outbreak of 1921, several houses at the end of Ohio Street (then Eighth Street) were used to quarantine patients.⁵³

Although sanitation and living conditions improved under the leadership of Lewis Parker in the 1910s, including the draining of one of the swamps, more improvements came in the 1920s. Toilets were moved inside to enclosed back porch rooms at most

⁵² Byars, 109.

⁵³ Ibid., 109.

homes while in the two-story shotguns, they were installed at the foot of the stairs. Window screens were installed, the remaining swampy areas around the village were drained, streets were paved, and electricity was brought to each home. Street trees were planted and the mill began providing space for cows and hogs to the west of the village, near the river, thus eliminating animal pens in backyards. By the 1920s, Olympia had a Y.M.C.A., five churches, a medical dispensary, and playgrounds, athletic fields, parks, and a school that were the envy of Columbia.⁵⁴

Columbians may have wanted better recreational facilities and schools for their children, but most Columbians looked down upon their “linthead” neighbors, although *The State* had at first lauded them as “industrious, intelligent, frugal, and have the native instincts of honesty, integrity, and fidelity which are essential to good citizenship.”⁵⁵ One villager recalled, “You always heard that Olympia was rough because of the so-called white trash element. I take offense at that, because the majority of these people have worked hard since they were children, and they didn’t have the benefits that their critics had.”⁵⁶ Thus, the social ostracism of some Columbians and a strong pride of place, particularly after the improvements of the early 1920s, fostered a tight, cohesive spirit and helped operatives turn “linthead” and other derogatory terms into badges of pride.⁵⁷ This pride is still in evidence as thousands continue to return every three years for Olympia School reunions.⁵⁸

The Olympia mill village has a fairly long tradition of education. The first school opened in October of 1901 in a house, which stands at 1170 Olympia Avenue, next to the present school building. The house is one of the standard mill houses: a two-story, six-room, side-gable building with a saltbox shed across the back. The principal was Miss Mamie Boozer. By 1903, with a growing number of pupils, two more teachers joined Miss Boozer.⁵⁹ Four years later, the little house was bursting at the seams with 230 students.

Around 1909, the mill constructed a new, two-story, brick school building with a hip-roof and a portico. In the mid-1910s, as the school population proliferated, particularly as child labor was outlawed, various additions were made to school. By 1913, Olympia School was the largest public school in Richland County. Despite adding new classrooms and resorting to the old house for classroom space, overcrowding continued to plague the school.⁶⁰

In 1926, a new building to house the high school students opened. The ca. 1909 building became known as the Olympia Grammar School. Although the grammar school suffered damage in a 1931 fire, it continued to be used well into 1960s when it again

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 109-110.

⁵⁵ *The State*, Industrial Art Edition, July 8, 1901.

⁵⁶ Merll Truesdale quoted in *The Point* (Columbia), March 1992.

⁵⁷ Stayner, 64.

⁵⁸ *The State*, April 23, 2000.

⁵⁹ Byars, 155.

⁶⁰ Lawrence William Patrone, “History of Olympia Public School, A Seminar Presented to the Faculty of the School of Education.” (master’s thesis, University of South Carolina, 1950), 3, 6-7, 12-14; Byars, 159-160.

burned. The high school was a long, one-story, brick building with a hip-roof and a hip-roof portico. Curriculum included classes in French, commercial geography, textiles, and home economics, in addition to standard English, math, history and science courses. At the Olympia schools, unlike most schools in South Carolina in the late 1920s and early 1930s, teachers had to complete special training courses and teachers used modern report cards to improve communication among parents, teachers, and students.⁶¹

During the Depression, the curriculum was restructured to include more industrial and vocational classes. Meanwhile, the school population continued to swell. In 1938, the Works Progress Administration built a new vocational building and gym at the high school. These new wings extended in an L-shape from the southern end of the 1926 building, to which a copula was added at this time.⁶² More additions were made on the north side of the 1926 building in the 1960s after fire destroyed the ca. 1909 grammar school.⁶³

By the 1930s, the textile industry, along with agriculture and the state's other industries were in the throws of an economic depression that had plagued South Carolina since the mid-1920s. Olympia's directors and leaders found it necessary to join the growing number of textile companies who were selling their villages. Olympia's houses, communal garden plot, recreation facilities, and pastureland were sold. The mill hired one individual to act as its selling agent and through him, sold the houses directly to buyers. Selling prices were very affordable. A three-room house, for example, cost on average \$250 and could be had for only \$45 down and \$3 per month. Occupants had the right of first refusal and by 1941, seventy-five percent of the occupants owned their homes. For the first time, non-textile workers were living in the village, making up a little less than ten-percent of the village population. Because workers did not have the training or education to leave the mill, most stayed even if they did not buy their homes. In these cases, real estate companies often purchased the houses and the operatives continued to rent.⁶⁴

Now that they owned their own homes, residents began making changes to their houses. New windows, asbestos siding, and later aluminum and vinyl siding were installed. Porch posts were replaced with bungalow-style posts-on-piers or with decorative iron posts. In some instances, porches were enclosed partially or entirely. Rooms were added to side and rear elevations, and occasionally to the front elevation.

After World War II, the automobile and suburban living helped decrease the village's value. In addition, as non-textile newcomers arrived and the village's children took advantage of post-war prosperity and educational opportunities, the village's cohesion began to erode. Throughout the 1960s and especially through the 1970s, the population of the village became increasingly comprised of retirees, who, presumably, had retired from the mill, and non-textile workers. In 1970, the twelve-year Olympia School became a middle school and integration and consolidation policies bused children

⁶¹ Byars, 166, 170-171.

⁶² Ibid., 176, 169.

⁶³ *The State*, November 6, 2001.

⁶⁴ Stayner, 67.

from Olympia to other schools. By 1980, less than fifty-percent of the residents were homeowners and during the previous ten years, the number of vacant buildings had increased by thirty-six-percent. Textile workers made up less than six-percent of the village population.⁶⁵

Today, the Olympia mill village stands as the most complete mill village in the Columbia area. The greatest loss to the village was the November 5, 2001 Olympia High School fire. Nearly the entire school, undergoing a \$15 million renovation, burned to the ground. The 1938 gym was saved, but plans for site's future remain in doubt.⁶⁶

Other, less dramatic changes have occurred as well. After World War II, Minimal Traditional houses and Period Cottages were constructed on Nevada and Virginia streets. Minimal Traditional houses, mobile homes, and Ranch houses are also found scattered throughout the village as infill. Many of the original mill houses have been altered, most commonly by the addition of synthetic siding, changes to porches, and new windows and doors. Overall, the village, its houses, and the mill remain intact and are proud representatives of Richland County's textile history.

⁶⁵ Stayner, 79-80 and 84.

⁶⁶ *The State*, November 7, 2001.

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VIII. Evaluation of Recorded Properties

A. National Register Properties

Olympia National Guard Armory

B. Evaluation of Properties Recorded During Survey

The Olympia Mill Village is a residential area laid out along a grid comprised almost exclusively of dwellings. The village, however, does include churches, commercial and civic buildings, a school, and the mill itself. Although some alterations have been made to the houses, the mill village as a whole retains its integrity and is an outstanding example of an industrial housing complex associated with a regionally important New South industrialist.

Three hundred and eighty-two buildings were surveyed and included the following:

- 354 houses
- 1 boarding house
- 1 union hall
- 1 armory
- 2 churches
- 4 outbuildings
- 1 school
- 1 mill
- 9 stores

Operative Housing

Originally, there were approximately 300 houses for mill workers. Each contained three, four, or six rooms in houses that were one or two-stories in height. There were two one-story plans, each with three rooms. One of these was a gable-front house with an inset porch, similar to a shotgun; the other was an L-shaped, gable roof house with an engaged porch. A third plan was the six-room, two-story house. Comprised of a two-story, side-gable section with a saltbox shed across the rear, this dwelling had four rooms downstairs and two upstairs and could easily be divided to create two three-room apartments. Two families could also use the other two-story plan. This house is basically a two-story, hip-roof shotgun oriented with the short end of the house facing the street. This house has two rooms downstairs and two rooms upstairs. The addition of a double-tier porch on the long side of the house with an exterior staircase allowed for the division of the house into two apartments. Another duplex plan consisted of a one-story, side-gable unit attached

to a two-story, hip-roof unit with a full-width front porch. Each house had front and back porches, open brick pier foundations, weatherboard siding, brick chimneys, and six-over-six sash windows.



Plate 4: Gable-front house with inset porch

Houses maintain a uniform setback of about twenty feet from the street. The various plans are alternated along to the street and alleviate some of the monotony commonly associated with mill village streetscapes. The most common early alteration was the addition bathrooms, usually accomplished by enclosing part of the back porch. Most of the open pier foundations have been filled with bricks or concrete block.

A second type of operative housing is the boarding house. One still stands in Olympia, located on Olympia Avenue. This is a large, hip-roof, two-story building with both Craftsman and Colonial Revival elements. Single, male workers lived in this building.



Plate 5: (above) One-story, L-shaped house

Plate 6: (below) Two-story, six-room house with saltbox shed





Plate 7: (above) Duplex with two-story unit and one-story unit

Plate 8: (below) Two-story shotgun house



Post-World War II Housing

After the mill sold the village, and after World War II, new housing stock began to appear in Olympia, especially along Nevada and Virginia streets. These houses fall into a very limited number of nationally popular types and styles. Most common is the Minimal Traditional house. This is usually a brick, side-gable house, generally with a gable-front section. Subdued Colonial Revival trim is sometimes found at the cornice or the main entrance. Another common style is the Period Cottage, which, like the Minimal Traditional house, is usually a side-gable dwelling with a gable-front section. The Period Cottage has a fairly steep roof and door, attic vent, and porch openings often feature arches. Both the Period Cottage and the Minimal Traditional are usually executed in brick and have side porches. Ranch houses are also found scattered throughout the village while another infill choice was the mobile home.

Commercial Buildings

There are nine commercial buildings in the Olympia village. Most of these date from the early twentieth century and are similar to Nix's Olympia Grocery, a one-story, gable-front building with a brick façade and stepped parapet. These small commercial buildings were community-gathering spots and supplied operatives with a place to socialize and purchase needed items.

Civic and Community Buildings

There are two churches in the Olympia village survey area. One is a gable-front, frame building (5394), now known as the Bible Church of God, with gable returns and weatherboard siding. This building probably dates from around 1910. The other is Saint Mark's Lutheran Church (5412). Built between 1954 and 1955, this is a substantial, brick Gothic Revival building with buttresses and stained glass windows.

Also in the survey area is a two-story building that served as the union hall for the United Textile Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America and the Textile Workers Union Local 254. An unusual, fortress-like structure, this hall features over-sized, brick buttresses and concrete block.

On the edge of the village, beside the Olympia School, is the Olympia National Guard Armory. Also constructed of brick, the Armory has Art Deco design elements, such as stepped pilasters. The Armory has been determined eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

Schools

One school is located in the village. The Olympia School in its current form, dates from the 1926 construction of the Olympia High School. In the 1930s and 1960s, substantial additions were made to the property. The 1926 portion is a one-story, brick building with a hip-roof and a hip-roof portico. Additions are also one-story, brick buildings, and feature arched porticos with decorative tile. With the exception of the 1938 gymnasium, the school burned in November 2001.

Mill

The Olympia Mill is a monumental four-story rectangular brick building standing to the north of the Olympia mill village. The building stands one hundred fifty-one feet, two inches wide and five hundred fifty-three feet, two inches long. One of the most architecturally outstanding early twentieth century industrial buildings in South Carolina, the mill features distinctive soaring twin towers positioned on its north elevation. The base of each tower contains an arched entrance. A terra cotta sign reading “Olympia Cotton Mills” occupies the area above the entrance on the southern tower. The bases of four pilasters with Corinthian caps rest on the entablature above each tower’s entrance. These soaring pilasters extend approximately two-thirds the height of each tower. Above the pilasters, the towers are divided into three sections, each separated by a molded beltcourse. The upper field features three, grouped arched bays on each elevation. The arch motif—cast in stone and employed as a structural element—repeats liberally on each tower and elsewhere on the building. A pyramidal roof surmounts each tower.

Arched head windows are arranged rhythmically on each level of the front, side, and rear elevations. The rear of the mill reveals a series of appendages that are contemporary with and complement the larger building. Pilasters and arched bays enhance the three-story section of the mill that is attached to the main building with a hyphen and stands to the south of the mill. A tall round brick tower rises from the two-story powerhouse standing behind the three-story part of the mill.

Inside, the mill’s floors are composed of several layers of wood separated by layers of tarpaper. Interior walls were finished with concrete stucco to a height of five feet, above which they were finished with plasters. In the towers, “Venetian mosaic” covered the floors and the wainscoting. Towers, two on the front rising about sixty-five feet above the main building, and two on the back equal in height to the mill, housed stairways and toilets. At the top of these towers, were 15,000-gallon reservoirs supplying the sprinkler system.

The mill has been determined eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

C. Properties Determined Eligible for Listing in the National Register
Olympia Mill

IX. Data Gaps

The project did not include any archaeological evaluation nor was a review of archaeological site files at the South Carolina Institute of Archaeology conducted.

Supervisory houses associated with Olympia Mill were not surveyed because they are located within the city limits of Columbia and were outside the survey area boundary. Furthermore, they were documented in the 1990 survey of the associated Granby Mill Village.

X. Recommendations

Although determined as ineligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, the Olympia Mill Village does appear to retain a remarkable level of integrity. The village maintains architectural cohesion and its streetscapes, layout, design, and feeling are all intact. The determination of eligibility for the area surveyed in this project should be reconsidered. Exact boundaries for a National Register district should be determined followed by the more exhaustive research necessary for the compilation of a National Register nomination.

Based on a boundary derived from the historic bounds of the Olympia Mill Village as noted on Sanborn maps, a potential National Register district has been delineated on the accompanying map. Vacant lots and non-contributing buildings were drawn out where possible. Based on this boundary, and a period of significance that begins in 1900 and ends when the mill began selling the mill houses in the late 1930s, approximately eighty percent of the buildings would be contributing properties. Because the Olympia School (5066), which was nearly destroyed by fire on November 5, 2001, was still intact at the time of the survey, the proposed boundary includes this property, but it may be drawn out easily.

While none of the mill houses are individually eligible for listing on the National Register, the village as a whole retains its overall integrity. Very few houses remain unaltered, but most have only one or two changes, the most common of which are the application of synthetic siding and the installation of modern windows. These changes, however, do not detract from the integrity of the whole, which is dependant on setback, scale, age and overall form. Additions to a home's façade,

porch enclosures, and other alterations that are so severe as to make the house unrecognizable are the only changes that would render a house non-contributing. Olympia Mill Village is a complete unit with churches, commercial buildings, houses and the mill, and as such it is worthy as a whole for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places.

Figure 2: Map of Potential Olympia Mill Village National Register District

XI. Appendices