

# *The Huntsville Historical Review*

Fall-Winter 2003

Volume 29

Number 1



*Lewis Hine in Huntsville*

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*Published By*

*The Huntsville-Madison County Historical Society*

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**COVER ART**

Photo of The Clark Family photographed by Lewis Hine  
in Huntsville, November 1913

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*Lewis Hine (1874-1940)*

## President's Page

As the society begins its new year of working toward meeting its objective of local historical education and preservation, we are anticipating an interesting year of meetings and publications. We are very appreciative of the work that was done in the previous administration. I am personally grateful to Mr. David Milam and his slate of officers.

In becoming more acquainted with the operation of the society it became apparent to me that there is a cadre of very able, dedicated people without whom the society would not have been to achieve what it has. We should all be very appreciative of these people, some of whom are still performing their jobs now.

I look forward to working with these dedicated people and to the newcomers to the Society's board. I know that with the continued dedication and effort we will be able to further the goals of the society.

Virginia P. Kobler  
President

# Editor's Notes

## About This Edition

Welcome to the Fall / Winter 2003 edition of *The Huntsville Historical Review*. This is a special edition of the *Review*, dedicated to commemorating the work of Lewis Hine, America's great early twentieth century photographer, in Huntsville. The inspiration for dedicating this edition of the *Review* to Hine's work came from Ranee Pruitt, Archivist at the Huntsville-Madison County Library and organizer of the library's exhibition of Hine's photographs of Huntsville, scheduled to open on November 2. The bulk of the writing for this issue was done by Susanna Leberman. Susanna is a native of Huntsville and a graduate student in the history program at UAH. Much of the material she presents here was developed from her master's thesis dealing with industrialization in Huntsville. Through their work, Ranee and Susanna have both contributed greatly to our Society's objective of preserving and recording the history of Huntsville and Madison County.

## The Frances Cabaniss Roberts Writing Prize

The Board of Directors of the Huntsville – Madison County Historical Society announces the establishment of an annual prize for historical writing named in honor of the late Professor Frances Cabaniss Roberts.

Widely recognized for her dedication to the teaching of history and the maintenance of the most rigorous academic standards, Professor Roberts was the first full-time member of the history faculty at the University of Alabama at Huntsville and, later, Chairperson of the Department of History. She also served as President of the Huntsville-Madison County Historical Society and as Editor of *The Huntsville Historical Review*.

Competition for the Roberts Prize is open to the public and carries with it an award of \$500.00. Essays are welcome on all aspects of the history of Huntsville and Madison County, or on other areas if they relate in some way to Madison County. Essays should be approximately 20-25 pages in length and will be judged by a panel chaired by the Editor of *The Huntsville Historical Review*.

The Society will publicly present the Roberts Prize at its annual membership meeting, currently scheduled for June 2004. The winning essay and others judged to be of publishable quality will be published in *The Huntsville Historical Review*.

Deadline for submission of essays for the Roberts Prize is 16 April 2004. Essays should be addressed to The Editor, *The Huntsville Historical Review*, Post Office Box 666, Huntsville, Alabama 35804.

Ed Cochran  
Editor



## Hine in Huntsville: What the Photographic Detective Found

B. SUSANNA LEBERMAN

Everyone likes a good detective story, and that is exactly what Lewis Hine was – a detective with a camera. In 1908 Lewis Wickes Hine, a school teacher turned photographer, was commissioned by the National Child Labor Committee (NCLC) to investigate, document, and expose the harsh realities of the lives of America’s working children. For the next eight years, he traveled the United States photographing child laborers. The haunting images he captured were critical to raising public awareness in a country that denied or ignored the brutality of child labor. Their realism horrified Southern civic boosters, mill owners, and poverty stricken parents.

Hine brought his investigative skills to Huntsville on three separate occasions, first in November 1910 and, later, during two separate visits in November and December of 1913. His pictures capture the spirit of the children who helped keep Huntsville’s cotton spindles spinning, preserving one brief moment of their life. Hine believed that seeing is believing. “Whether it be a painting or a photograph,” he said, “the picture is a symbol that brings one immediately into close touch with reality.... In fact, it is



*The Clark Family, November 1913*

often more effective than the reality would have been, because, in the picture, the non-essential and conflicting interests have been eliminated.”<sup>1</sup>

Through Hine’s pictures the image and reality of working children in Huntsville mills in the early twentieth century has been preserved. The Huntsville photographs are significant because they contain at least three key elements. First, they reflect Lewis Hine the man, giving insight into his life and learning process. Second, the photographs tell stories that would otherwise be lost and forgotten, illuminating a period of Huntsville’s industrial growth. Third, Lewis Hine and his pictures provide a model of social critique not made up of philosophical questions, but of compassion and action. Within these three elements lie the answers to what Hine found in Huntsville.

While Hine’s photographs of Huntsville reveal much about his character, to fully understand their importance we need to know something of the man himself. Lewis W. Hine was born in Oshkosh, Wisconsin on September 26, 1874 to Douglas Hull and Sarah Hayes Hine. Douglas Hine died shortly after Lewis graduated from high school 1892. His unmarried sister Lola had already been teaching at a local school, but without their father’s



*Hine photographing in a slum.*

income her wages were not enough to support the small family.<sup>2</sup> Eventually Hine found work, and it is this part of his life that the photographs reflect. Hine's own experience, "in a furniture factory, a bank, a retail store, thirteen hours a day, six days a week, for a miserable four dollars in wages colored his entire existence and filled him with a passion from which he could never escape."<sup>3</sup> His pictures reveal a concern for the politically voiceless. Compassion and empathy manifest themselves in the way Hine was able to capture the feelings of the person in a single moment, for with fifty pounds of old fashioned camera equipment, there was little chance for a second shot.

Hine did not set out to become a master photographer or social detective. He first worked at odd jobs, and briefly attended the University of Chicago in 1900. Hine then moved back to Oshkosh where he became acquainted with Frank Manny, Professor of Education at the State Normal School (SNS). Although it is not clear that Hine was ever a student there, in 1904 he married Sara Ann Rich, an 1897 graduate of SNS. In 1901 Manny, who had become Hine's friend and mentor, was appointed Superintendent of the Ethical Culture School (ECS) in New York City. Manny hired Hine as an assistant teacher of nature study.

After moving to New York City, Hine returned home in 1902 upon the death of his mother and again in 1904 to marry Sara. The couple moved to New York, where Manny had suggested that Hine become the school photographer, encouraging him to incorporate photography as a teaching tool. Hine chose photographing the immigrants arriving at Ellis Island as his first large project. Manny was eager that his ECS pupils learn to respect the new immigrant pilgrims just as they were taught to respect the early Plymouth Rock pilgrims.



*Young Russian Jewess, 1905*

Hine honed and developed his photographic skills with a modified box-type 5 x 7, magnesium flash powder camera, creating beautiful works of enduring significance such as the *Young Russian Jewess* (1905) and *Climbing to America* (1912).

The project was perfect for Hine, and later he wrote to Manny that he was thinking of becoming a professional sociological photographer. Although at first apprehensive about leaving teaching, Hine later reasoned, "I was merely changing the educational efforts from the classroom to the world."<sup>4</sup> And so he did.

Between 1908 and 1918, Hine worked as a photographic investigator for the NCLC, helping to educate people about the horrors of child labor and the need for government legislation and enforcement. Hine's definition of child labor and exploitation was specific. He found no fault in children working at odd

jobs, doing chores, or training as apprentices. These jobs developed useable skills. His campaign against child labor directed its efforts to the exploitation of children as cheap labor. Hine said, "There is work that profits children, and there is work that brings profit only to employers."

Employing children to gain high profits from their work was exploitation, and this practice of hiring and exploiting children for cheap labor kept families in a continual state of

need. Because children worked for less, and were too small to complain, they were often employed to replace adults. This had staggering effects.



*Climbing to America, 1912*

“In industries where large numbers of children were employed, their low wages pulled down the earnings of everyone else, so that grown-ups could not earn enough to support their families.”<sup>5</sup> The result was a constant increase in the number of struggling families whose children were required to work.

In Huntsville, specifically at the Dallas and Merrimack Mills, Hine was not granted admittance. In 1913, however, he did gain access to Merrimack’s small school, Dotheboys Hall.



*Students and  
Teachers  
at  
Merrimack’s  
Dotheboys  
Hall*

conditions at the school, comparing it to Squeer's school for boys in Dickens' novel, *Nicholas Nickelby*. Alabama law at that time required children to attend school for eight weeks out of the year, but Hine found that children at Dotheboys Hall attended school for only half the day and worked the rest of the day after school. Then children who worked the day shift went to school in the afternoon. To enforce the law, the State Factory Inspector published a book containing names of children ineligible for employment due to school absenteeism.

Both Dallas and Merrimack must have been well guarded, because Hine was not able to sneak in, as was his practice when he was not freely admitted. In many other areas he would gain admittance by trickery. Sometimes he posed as a Bible salesman or an industrial photographer; he used any scheme that helped him enter the places where children labored. Apparently, since there are no inside photographs of the mills or news articles about him being arrested in Huntsville, all Hine was able to do was visit with the children during shift changes and at their homes. His photographs portray the children not as broken victims, or objects of pity and horror. "Hine's people are alive and tough. His children have savvy." They had not given up on hope, and neither had Hine.<sup>6</sup>

Lewis Hine's Huntsville photographs reflect first the understanding of a man who knew factory work and who was confidently hopeful in his purpose, but they also preserve the stories of the overshadowed, adding names and faces to the story of Huntsville's industrial growth. These names and faces were not those of the rich mill owners, which have been so often studied and remembered, but those of the unknown worker. These lost stories illuminate a forgotten period of Huntsville's industrial development. At first glance, there is almost something sacred about looking into the eyes of the person whose image is reflected, like being privy to a special secret that everyone else has forgotten or has never known. Whether it is an immigrant face, the New York tenements (his first NCLC assigned project), or the mill child working in Huntsville, Hine's photographs bring about feelings of responsibility. The responsibility to ask why, for after viewing an image of a Huntsville child, such as the savvy face of Charlie Foster whom Hine photographed in 1913, one asks, Why is this beautiful and lively child working? How did he get into this position and what was his life like? What was going on in Huntsville socially and economically to make Charlie Foster an eligible worker? This is no Charles Dickens story set in far-away London, but the true story of industrial Huntsville.

Lewis Hine photographed Charlie Foster in 1913 in front of Merrimack Mill. Many times Hine would follow the children home to get photographs of their families and living conditions, but only the single picture of Charlie



exists, labeled simply Charlie Foster, November 1913. By all accounts Charlie was born in New Market, Alabama, on May 3, 1901. This particular Foster family was not listed in the 1910 census, so the birth date on the work release affidavit his father Jess signed cannot be corroborated. The fact that the family was missing from the census also raises the question, Where were they? It is possible, like so

many other families, that they moved between neighboring states, perhaps between family in New Market and Tennessee.

Since New Market was a farming community, it is possible that Charlie's family was part of the mass movement from farm to city. In the last part of the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth, many farmers left the land and moved to town. As in many cities, Huntsville boosters welcomed the potential laborers, even incorporating them into the campaign to advertise the city's growing industries as they actively sought investors. In one early account, *The Huntsville Independent* proudly announced that the Huntsville Cotton Mill "employs one hundred boys and girls who would otherwise be out of employment."<sup>7</sup> *The Mercury*, another local Huntsville paper, praised the town's flourishing job market:

We would suggest to young men of Alabama, that there is no need to go West, so long as Huntsville is developing at its present rate. Any young man of energy and business tact can succeed in our city. He can always make an opening, if there is any good in him.<sup>8</sup>

Although the turn of the century was breathing new life into southern industry, many were adrift in economic turmoil. As Elise Hopkins Stephens wrote, "Poor whites from the outlying hills and blacks from the surround-

ing fields flocked to Huntsville in search of work. As private businesses got on their feet, the whites were absorbed into the work force. Blacks looked to the United States government and to the Republican party for help.”<sup>9</sup> Russell Freedman observed, “ Throughout the segregated South, mill work was reserved for whites. Blacks were seldom hired. Most mill hands were impoverished white sharecroppers and tenant farmers who had abandoned worn-out farms for the promise of steady employment in the mills.”<sup>10</sup>

Indeed, entire families worked in the mills, and children were expected to work just as children today are expected to go to school.<sup>11</sup> Many parents, themselves uneducated, found education a waste of time. They felt that youngsters should work to help support the family, just as they worked earlier on the farm.<sup>12</sup> The practice of hiring whole families was attractive to mill owners. While single white male itinerant workers were able to float from mill to mill looking for better pay and living conditions, families found it harder to leave. By employing the entire family, the employer received not only inexpensive labor but also considerable sway over that labor.<sup>13</sup>

Many families depended totally upon the mill and life in the mill village. Workers’ lives revolved around the mill, socially and economically. All needs were met by the mill, as workers lived in mill housing, played on mill owned teams, and bought food from mill owned stores. Wayne Flynt described the constancy of mill life:

It was theoretically possible that a man’s mother might attend a pre-natal clinic established by the mill, that the baby be born in a mill owned hospital and delivered by a mill paid doctor, that he be educated in a mill-supported school, married in a mill-subsidized church to a girl he had met in the mill, live all his life in a house belonging to the mill, and when he died be buried in a coffin supplied at cost, by the mill in a mill-owned cemetery.<sup>14</sup>

For many, this was life in the mill and mill village.

Charlie Foster’s life is in some ways a mystery, for it does not seem to be as mill life was for many. Charlie’s first work release form was signed to Merrimack Manufacturing Company on May 19, 1913. He was listed as being 12 years old. The child-like scrawl of his father’s signature suggests either a limited education or a hand affected by rheumatism. There is no Jess Foster listed in the Huntsville Directory for 1913, so Charlie may have been staying with another family. He worked at Merrimack for a year, and then began work at The Huntsville Knitting Company on May 11, 1914. His father again signed for Charlie in the affidavit and in the work release book, in which all working children were required to be registered, but his first job with Merrimack was not recorded in this book.



OFFICE OF INSPECTOR OF COTTON MILLS.

The State of Alabama, )

Madison County.

Before me, Jessie Green,

Notary Public, in and for said State and County, this day appeared Jess Foster

who being duly sworn on oath says that ~~she~~ <sup>He</sup> is the parent (or legal guardian) of Charlie Foster

who is a minor and who of <sup>His</sup> own volition desire to be employed by The MERRIMACK MANUFACTURING COMPANY. And who further makes oath that said Charlie Foster

was born on the 3rd day of May, 1901, 19      
at or near New Market, Ala., and ~~she~~ <sup>He</sup> was delivered by Dr. Charlie Blanton  
and is now 12 yrs. of age.

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 19th. day of May, 1913.

Signed J. Foster

Jessie Green

Notary Public ~~MISSISSIPPI~~

Any one making a false affidavit will be prosecuted to the full extent of the law.

W. H. OATES, M. D., Inspector.

*Charlie Foster's Work Release Affidavit*

There is little evidence to show how long, or sporadically, Charlie lived in the Huntsville or Madison area. There are no marriage, deed purchase, or voter registration records for him. He appeared in the 1922-23 Huntsville directory, which listed him as a Merrimack employee living at 235 "A" (later to be known as Alpine) Street. There was also a Robert L. Foster living a few places down at 232 "A" Street, also employed at Merrimack, who was perhaps a relative. In the 1944 directory, published the year before Merrimack sold the individual mill houses, Charlie's name appears again, listed at the same address. By then, he would have been in his forties. Since there are no purchasing deeds, it seems Charlie did not buy his house, and there is no record of him being buried in the Merrimack Cemetery, so he remains a mystery. Possibly, Charlie and his family followed immigration patterns and moved between states.

The image of Charlie Foster is only one face shedding light on and raising questions about the forgotten history of Huntsville industry. The photographs of Hine's Huntsville investigations stand as a testament for voiceless families. The pictures illustrate how children grew up in and out of the mills. Children gave their youth to the textile industry, leaving only faint paper trails, with the only proof of their ever having existed being a

single photograph. Perhaps Charlie's family still thrives somewhere, not knowing how they are tied to Huntsville's forgotten stories. We know because it was documented by Lewis Hine's photographic investigations.

In addition to reflecting his own character and putting a face on this early period of Huntsville's industrialization, Hine's Huntsville photographs also demonstrate his approach to social critique and reform. Hine's model for reform was very basic: he conducted his investigations, photographed what he saw, arranged them into photo stories, and exhibited his material at conferences. He also continually wrote articles and pamphlets, and designed posters intended to raise public consciousness, such as the poignant "Making Human Junk."

As we can see, Hine combined innovative techniques in his photography to ignite a calculated reaction. For this reason Hine has been described as a "social agitator first and photographer second."<sup>15</sup> His focus was on



making stirring pictures to further his cause, not on creating beautiful pictures for art. Hine's message is clear – child labor is “making human junk,” and the process propels society into a vicious social circle. “You all know how the circle goes.” Hine wrote. “Child labor, illiteracy, industrial inefficiency, low wages, long hours, low standard of living, bad housing, poor food, unemployment, intemperance, disease, poverty, child labor, illiteracy, industrial inefficiency, low wages—but we are repeating.”<sup>16</sup> Ever the social agitator and activist, he had a simple social vision: to stop the “vicious circle” and make a better America for everyone.

In 1916, Hine paired his photographs with Scott Nearing's philosophical treatise *Poverty and Riches: A Study of the Industrial Regime* to create an in-depth look at industry in America. In defining the subtitle “The Industrial Regime,” Nearing explained that the power of industry was the ruling power in the world, and he used the word “regime” to denote “recognition of this rulership or leadership of industry.” Nearing asked the nation to judge the effectiveness of industrial rule: “Has this industrial domination proved socially advantageous?”<sup>17</sup> Hine's

photographs throughout the book are answer enough. The industrial regime produced a gulf between owners and workers, economic parasitism, and exploitation of laborers. Nearing, one of the many theorists struggling with this new role of industry in society, concluded, "Large scale industry has come to stay. It is an integral part of social life. It must be made a servant of man." For change to ever come, the industrial regime must put people over profits, human well being over monetary gain.<sup>18</sup>

Nearing encouraged his readers to ask themselves, What can I do about it? Hine asked his viewers, What can *we* do about it?<sup>19</sup> Although he was initially encouraged with the response to his photographs, Hine eventually learned that "not truth but self-interest moves 'the authorities' and that the only irrefutable truth, delivered in a package of photographic image and data (dates, places, names, ages, heights, hours of work, daily earnings), would appeal to the sole force capable of moving them [the authorities]: public opinion."<sup>20</sup> If things were going to change for the children in his pictures, the public would have to force that change. Hine traveled, asked questions, poked around where he was not allowed, wrote pamphlets and articles, gave lectures, and he allowed other authors to use his work. He presented the public with his findings, hoping the power of public opinion would fight the power and money of the mill men.

Hine took about thirty pictures in Huntsville over his three visits, all of which were in wintertime. What did Hine find in Huntsville? First, he found more information to fuel his anger. Many of the children the photographed are wearing ragged and torn clothing, no jackets, and no shoes. He also found more information to turn over to the NCLC. His reports to the committee described many age violations, and many children under twelve years old told Hine that they had been working in the mills for several years.<sup>21</sup> The subsequent NCLC report named Alabama, along with Georgia and the two Carolinas, as the blackest spots on the child labor map.

In 1911, the NCLC held a conference in Birmingham, Alabama featuring Hine's photographs. An Alabama journalist who attended the conference and was stunned by Hine's work reported in the *Birmingham Age-Herald*:

There has been no more convincing proof of the absolute necessity of child labor laws and the immediate need of such an enforcement than by these pictures, showing the suffering, the degradation, the immoral influences, the utter lack of anything that is wholesome in the lives of these poor little wage-earners. They speak far more eloquently than any work—and depict a state of such affairs, which is terrible in its reality—terrible to encounter, terrible to admit that such things exist in civilized communities.<sup>22</sup>



*Child Workers Photographed in Huntsville  
by Lewis Hine*



The crusade for child labor laws was a new beginning for reform in the South. Alabama had the first child labor law in 1903, but reform had opposition, and not only from rich mill men. Many parents and children resented reform efforts. As Edward Ayers wrote, “Children were often eager to go into to the mill with their parents, sibling and friends.” The children would want to “help” and this would turn into a full time job. The job would come into being as a family would face a crisis and need an extra worker, or if a supervisor needed someone to fill in. Child labor thus reflected both the desires of the child’s family and the needs of industry, and both resented the efforts of reformers to enact laws that would limit their choices. Reformers often attacked parents rather than mill owners, and much controversy surrounded the reform movement. The reformers saw themselves as “mediators, educators, and facilitators” who wanted to encourage progress already alive in the South, and to help children who wanted to go to school and their parents who wanted to send them.<sup>23</sup>

The fight for child labor legislation would be a long battle, in which the child labor reformers’ strongest weapon would be public opinion. The NCLC’s efforts, along with Hine’s investigative photographs, proved to be a persuasive tool. Many Americans would be exposed to Hines exhibits, and like the Alabama journalist they became devoted supporters of child labor legislation. Hine believed that public opinion was the only power that could fight mill power, and many of his supporters argued that reform of the child labor laws should fall under the responsibility of the Federal Government. Congress responded by passing child labor laws in 1916 and 1918, but the Supreme Court deemed them unconstitutional on the grounds of states rights and denying the freedom of children. A constitutional amendment concerning a national child-labor law, passed by Congress in 1924 failed ratification and after ten years it died.

Perhaps ironically, it was the Great Depression of the 1930s that brought about an end to legalized child labor in the United States. By the 1930’s, child labor had already begun to decrease. The Depression forced adults to compete for the lowest paying jobs usually held by children. Powerful labor unions also opposed child labor, and industry itself needed a better-educated work force. Child labor had already begun to decline when President Roosevelt signed the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938. This law set a minimum wage and maximum hourly standard for all workers in all states. It also prohibited the hiring of children under sixteen years old in manufacturing and mining trades, and was eventually amended to include other businesses as well.<sup>24</sup>

Lewis Hine dedicated years of life to investigating the working conditions of the politically and economically voiceless and, although he died in poverty

and virtually forgotten, he succeeded in his moral quest. If Lewis Hine had never come to Huntsville, stories such as Charlie Foster's would have been lost, for who else would have taken pictures of one insignificant worker out of hundreds? Through Hine's photographic investigations, Huntsville and its people are included in a growing field of both social and labor history.

As people delve into their heritage as individuals and as citizens, more questions will be uncovered. Questions equal interest, more interest means more information will be available to future generations, and that is exactly what Hine had wanted — to preserve childhood, present his findings, and improve the future. Hine saw America was “making human junk,” and he actively fought against it. This curious little man, with a camera nearly as big as himself, found the darkness of the child laborers of Huntsville and illuminated it with flash magnesium powder. Hine has left posterity with names, faces, and dates. Now it is up to us to find the particulars.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> John R. Kemp, *Lewis Hine: Photographs of Child Labor in the New South* (Jackson and London: University Press of Mississippi, 1986), p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> *America and Lewis Hine: Photographs 1904-1940* (Millerton, New York: Aperture, Inc., 1977), p. 16.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 16-17.

<sup>5</sup> Russell Freedman, *Kids At Work: Lewis Hine and the Crusade Against Child Labor* (New York: Clarion Books, 1994), pp. 19-22.

<sup>6</sup> *America and Lewis Hine*, 131.

<sup>7</sup> Elise Hopkins Stephens, *Historic Huntsville: A City of New Beginnings* (Woodland Hills, CA: Windsor, 1984), p. 66.

<sup>8</sup> *Huntsville Mercury*, 16 March 1893, p. 4.

<sup>9</sup> Stephens, p. 66.

<sup>10</sup> Freedman p. 32.

<sup>11</sup> Stephens, p. 66.

<sup>12</sup> Freedman, p. 32.

<sup>13</sup> Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 114.

<sup>14</sup> Wayne Flynt, *Mine, Mill, and Microchip: A Chronicle of Alabama Enterprise* (Northridge: Windsor Publications, Inc, 1987), p. 128.

<sup>15</sup> *America and Lewis Hine*, 128.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., pp. 230-231.

<sup>17</sup> Scott Nearing, *Poverty and Riches: A study of the Industrial Regime* (Philadelphia: The John C. Winston Company, 1916), pp.13-14.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., pp. 230-231.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., pp. 227.

<sup>20</sup> *America and Lewis Hine*, 128

<sup>21</sup> Kemp, p. 15. This report can be found Lewis W. Hine, "Alabama Investigations," MS dated November 1910, in the National Child Labor Committee Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>22</sup> Kemp, p.10. Also found in *Birmingham Age-Herald*, 11 March 1911, Scrapbook, 49, NCLC Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>23</sup> Ayers, pp. 415-417.

<sup>24</sup> Freedman, pp. 93-94.

# Lewis Hine and the Progressives

B. SUSANNA LEBERMAN

Lewis Hine contributed significantly to the interpretation of America's early twentieth century industrialization. His influential photographs continue to shape the way that historians view and study American industrialization. Although he contributed a great deal to the imagery of this time in America's growth he died, virtually penniless and alone, in obscurity. Hine's photographs today, many of which are stored in the Library of Congress, are national treasures, and this unique photographic collection of people at work and play is a legacy yet to be fully explored. The pictures, along with a vast body of reports from his field investigations, articles, and other material reflect all the best that pre-World War I progressive social reform had to offer. Despite his rising popularity and acclaim of his work, many still do not recognize its full impact. Nor do they see how it reflected a consistent moral vision and engaged some of the central ethical and political issues posed by progressive reform in the United States between 1890 and 1940.<sup>1</sup> To have a deeper awareness and richer understanding of this priceless legacy it is necessary to place Hine in the social movement with which he was affiliated, to be conscious of the consistent characteristics molding the progressive reform movement, and to be aware of existing historical debate that directly affects the treatment of progressivism in both the classroom and in the public's understanding.

## The Progressives

Mark Twain labeled the era between the end of Congressional Reconstruction in the 1870's South until the early stages of Progressivism in 1900 as "The Gilded Age." The word "gild" literally means to cover a baser substance with gold. Twain used it to symbolize how outwardly prosperous American society seemed, while at the core it was deceptively degenerate. Today, this term conveys a vision of a corrupt and decaying system. It was an era in which the most recognizable caricatures are those of fat, dirty businessmen, competing in a two party political system of Republicans and Democrats, all feasting on government favors, voting fraud, and gain through public subsidies. The total image is that of "glittering materialism." Many different reform groups – the Knights of Labor, prohibitionists, farmers, and populist reformers – all sought to bring about change, and all failed. Out of this Gilded Age climate sprang the seeds of progressivism.<sup>2</sup>



With the twentieth century came a new group of reformers known as the Progressives. Reform activists from all different social classes adopted the new adjective “progressive.” Encompassing journalist “muckrakers,” social workers, enlightened business men, and child welfare and labor reformers, as well as issue-oriented political activists, the reform fervor helped transform American public opinion as well as public policy in the years before the First World War.<sup>3</sup> The progressive spirit moved through society escalating in popularity, even spreading into national politics when Theodore Roosevelt introduced progressive sentiment in his 1901-1909 presidential terms. He fought for a wide variety of causes from environmental reform



### *Wealth and Poverty: Contrasting Views of the Gilded Age*

to women’s rights.<sup>4</sup> Like the multi-faceted President Roosevelt, progressivism appealed to a wide variety of people. Citizens joined the reform movement in the hopes of reordering and righting the corrupt elements that had plagued American society during the Gilded Age. Progressive zeal spread to Democrats and Republicans, as both parties eventually claimed ties to progressivism.

Striving for political change, the reformers paired rhetoric with what Richard Hofstadter has called “the business of exposure.” Lewis Hine’s

legacy is a perfect example of progressive promotion as Hine worked with child labor reformers, exhibiting his photographs in conferences designed to raise public awareness. As the progressives created a definite pattern of exposure to gain publicity, they also spoke with a specific rhetoric. Working for governmental change, many progressive legislators, such as Wisconsin legislator Thomas J. Mahon, structured their political speeches to focus on human needs and social inequality. In his 1911 speech, “Labor Reform as Human Conservation,” Mahon urged industrial leaders to shift their focus from gaining high profits to conserving human well being:

Why not conserve ourselves? If conservation of forest and water-power and minerals, if conservation of property, is good, why not tackle the question of the conservation of human life? Isn't it of greater importance, doesn't it go to the happiness of the home and through that to the well-being and prosperity of the nation?

A great human movement is sweeping through the world. It is finding expression even in our legislative bodies. We have felt that the time has come when we must pause for a moment on our commercial and industrial strife and consider the welfare of human beings.<sup>5</sup>

Through speeches and what might be termed “propaganda” in later age many progressives, including Hine, forced Americans to reexamine their social and political values. Diversification of the population brought about by immigration, the rise of a strong consumer culture, and the move to an industrial economy all came together to create a fertile environment for change. Many Americans embraced this social movement and rallied behind activist leaders in the hopes of making lasting political changes that would better the lives of people struggling under the system.<sup>6</sup> In spite of the movement's widespread popularity and appeal, historians remain engaged in a continuous debate over the true nature, goals, and motivations of the progressive movement. This has been caused by the very diversification that helped progressivism become a mass movement.

### **Consistent Characteristics**

Scholars continue to debate the positive and negative aspects of progressive reform, citing various opinions in regard to the effectiveness and integrity of the movement. Though there are numerous debatable issues, there remain basic commonalities that historians have identified and can agree upon. These consistent commonalities provide a measure of continuity for discussions of the era.

One main progressive characteristic is a definite set of attitudes concerning industrialism. By the 1900s, big business and large-scale industry were permanent features of American life. Most citizens, including the progressives, generally accepted their permanence. Progressives did not seek to abolish industry, but instead sought to improve the conditions of industrial life. While they accepted industry, they loathed the results of the industrial revolution on American life. Therefore, a “powerful irony lay at the heart of progressivism: reforms that gained vitality from a people angry with industrialism ended up by assisting them to accommodate it.”<sup>7</sup>

Another characteristic of Progressivism is a basic optimism about people’s ability to change their environment. The reformers assumed that human action could and would produce an improved and safer lifestyle for the “victims” of industry. Progressive reforms reflected this mindset, creating a doctrine of intervention. Directing people’s social and economic affairs to bring about desired reforms intended to improve industrial life is the basic model of “Progressive Interventionism.” Progressive interventionists employed two basic methodologies in their campaign for human betterment: evangelical Protestantism and the sciences.<sup>8</sup>

Many progressives were motivated by a Christian duty to “purge the world of sin” and right the wrongs of industrialism. The spirit of generosity or a spirit of intolerance could motivate Protestant reforms. Protestants are also criticized for creating reforms that manipulate people into the Protestant social order. This has also been a focal point for critics. Questioning reform as an agent of social control, revisionists speculate how progressivism negatively affected society by creating an environment that favored whites. Thus, some progressive reform helped to create an environment favorable for the development of racism, and the exclusion of immigrants.

Those reformers who were not driven by “Protestant revivalism” found common cause with the newly emerging social sciences. Social scientists relied on expertise and the scientific method of compiling data. The social scientist shared the interventionist attitude but relied on trained professionals to gather information that would aid them in making expert recommendations to the government. These reformers expected the government to implement the needed changes based on their advice. Although Protestant and social science-based methods for reform differed, they both worked to raise public support for change, making people aware of the injustices and poverty under which many of their fellow citizens were suffering. The result was the first massive nation wide reform movement – Progressivism.<sup>9</sup>

## **The Historians Debate**

In recent times there have been several historical debates concerning

the Progressive Era and the nature of progressivism. One interesting criticism is over the word itself. Richard McCormick of Rutgers University has stated, "There is a malaise among historians about the concept of progressivism and a growing urge to avoid the word itself whenever possible."<sup>10</sup> He offers three explanations for this trend.

First, progressives themselves shaped the connotations attached to the word "progressive." It had casually been used to describe someone who is "good" or "enlightened." Historians are uncomfortable with this because they want to use analytical and impartial words that do not carry a moral judgment. Second, many historians are dissatisfied because they are disillusioned with the twentieth century liberal reform. They find its rhetoric insincere and its reforms failures. This use of "liberal reform" refers to the academic tradition of liberalism, not the modern sense of liberals and conservatives. The third explanation has its origins in the complexity of twentieth century reform. Because it was so invasive of all society, the social progressive movement was so popular and diverse it had no coherence or unity, making it difficult to pinpoint a principal infrastructure, key leaders, a central approach, or a specific organization.

However problematic the term and concept of "progressivism," it is deep-rooted in the history and language of the era. For this reason McCormick stresses that the term cannot be abandoned, and it has experienced a revival. He sees this as a chance to regain respect for the early twentieth century reformers, to "see why their rhetoric and true goals sometimes clashed; to understand why they sometimes failed to achieve their purposes; and to grasp how they, like liberals ever since, often were confused over whether the United States was, in the final analysis, a harmonious society or a divided one."<sup>11</sup>

Before World War II, there was little criticism of the progressive reform movement. Instead of renouncing the word and what it signified, many historians embraced it, following the tradition of Charles Beard and his "Progressive School" of history, which held that the progressive reformers had actively opposed big business and corrupt industrialists. It emphasized that progressives wanted to strengthen the system from within through legislation, not to destroy it. Most school textbooks between 1930 and 1960 maintained this view.

From the 1940s until the 1960s, many historians who came out of the turbulent World War II years scorned progressivism. They held that progressive ideology depended too much on human goodness, and underestimated how evil humans could be. Many of these scholars left progressivism and moved toward consensus history, bringing with them reservations about the importance of social change and mass social movements. With these

WWII-era reservations came questions. The consensus historians opposed the image of progressives being champions of the masses. If they were not champions, who were they? What did they accomplish, and why?<sup>12</sup> Following the consensus tradition of questioning, many other schools of historical thought began to review the reform era – its inequalities, its affects on women’s rights, immigration, and party politics. Because Progressivism was so big and diverse, historians no longer try to particularize and unify it to one way of knowing.<sup>13</sup> Instead, questions continue to be raised. Though it is clear they can never be truly answered new questions and issues develop continuously.

## Conclusion

The progressives have created long running debates for people interested in the pre-World War I years. Today, many debates center around questioning whether the reformers did what they did out of a desire to “rescue victims” from the “evil capitalism” out of a sense of Christian duty, or if this large progressive movement was bent on social control, that in helping the poor “urban masses” the reformers could maintain and strengthen their particular ends. Robert Westbrook contends that although this treatment of social control has produced many persuasive arguments, it overlooks the individuals, like Lewis Hine, who were well aware of the “the ethical implications of paternal benevolence.”<sup>14</sup> Evidence of his awareness can be seen in his pictures. Hine’s sensitivity to the issues materializes in the way he treats his photographic subjects. His photos are not snapshots of suffering mass humanity, but an interaction between photographer and subject. This allows the subjects to actively participate in controlling the way they will be viewed by all who see the pictures. “As a consequence of his commitment to a democratic ethic and his resistance to benevolent paternalism,” Westbrook notes, “Hine’s photographs of workers not only opened to view the difficult circumstances of their lives but also revealed their strength and solidarity.” His photographs make the observer part of the struggle between worker and exploiter. “We face not deadened boys and girls, but are thrust instead into the midst of their deadening, a much more painful prospect.”<sup>15</sup>

No matter how professionals debate issues of selfish motivations or factors of social control, children were being exploited in coal mines, canneries, textile factories, steel mills, nameless sweat shops, cotton fields and other venues of work. Americans across the nation joined together, under the name of the progressive reform movement, to make public opinion a fighting force against what was happening to children and other politically voiceless people. At least the reformers, whatever they were, did not ignore child labor while

blindly living off of the comforts that it provided. The progressives chose to expose and to combat this evil and nothing will ever take that away.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Leon Fink (ed.), *Major Problems in the Gilded Age and the Progressive Era: Documents and Essays* (Lexington and Toronto: D. C. Heath and Company, 1993), p. 329.

<sup>2</sup> William L. Barney, *The Passage of the Republic: An Interdisciplinary History of Nineteenth-Century America*, (Lexington and Toronto: D. C. Heath and Company, 1987), pp. 363-364.

<sup>3</sup> Fink, p. 300.

<sup>4</sup> A. R. Riggs and Tom Velk, "New Hampshire Governor Nahum J. Bachelder and the Grange in Progressive Politics, 1905-1912," *Historical New Hampshire*, Vol. 55, (Fall/Winter 2000), p. 77.

<sup>5</sup> Quoted in Fink, p. 309.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 300.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 318-319.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 319-320.

<sup>9</sup> Francis G. Couvares (ed.), *Interpretations of American History: Patterns and Perspectives* (New York: The Free Press, 2000), p. 178.

<sup>10</sup> Fink, p. 316.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 316-318.

<sup>12</sup> Couvares, pp.179-183.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 191-193.

<sup>14</sup> Fink, pp. 331-332.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 335.

# The Dallas and Merrimack Mills

RANEE PRUITT

*[Editor's Note: This essay is based on two newspaper articles that first appeared in the September 16, 1955 edition of The Huntsville Times, and are reproduced here with permission.]*

When Lewis Wickes Hine came to Huntsville in 1910 and 1913, he photographed children working at the Dallas and Merrimack manufacturing companies. The following articles on the Dallas and Merrimack mills were originally published on September 16, 1955 in The Huntsville Times, an edition that focused on the Sesquicentennial Celebration of the founding of Huntsville.

## **Dallas Manufacturing Company Dallas St. off Oakwood Ave.**

When construction of the Dallas Manufacturing Company mill was completed in 1892, the facility was considered to be one of the largest and finest mills in the Middle south.

Incorporated here on February 26, 1891, and commencing operation on November 8, 1892, the mill remained in full operation, except for periods when it was closed by strikes, until 1947. It was then operated on a partial basis until 1949, when stockholders voted to sell the mill.

Nashville, New York and Huntsville capital was invested in the original Dallas Manufacturing Company, named after the treasurer and general manager of the facility. T.B. Dallas of Nashville. G.M. Fogg of that same Tennessee city was the first president.

Among the major stockholders from the beginning was the Milliken family of New York, which supplied at least two presidents and one vice president for the corporation, and maintained its interests to the end. Deering-Milliken Company of New York served as sales agents for the mill.

Capital first authorized was \$500,000, but that was quickly increased, and increased again, until authorized capital, when the mill was sold in 1949, was \$1,500,000.

Employing about 500 persons, the initial plant was designed for 700 looms and 25,000 spindles. Only eight years later, however, the plant was doubled in size and capacity.



In 1900, the facility was listed as having an investment of \$1,250,000, 1,191 broad looms, 350 narrow looms, 50,000 spindles, and employing 1,200 hands. The brick, iron and stone mill building was four and five stories high. Floor space was estimated at about 300,000 square feet.

Its products were bleached and brown shirting and sheeting. At that time, it was estimated the mill used about 20,000 bales of cotton annually.

Mr. Dallas was manager of the mill until 1902, when he was succeeded by W. R. Rison, Sr., who died in 1904. He was succeeded by his son, A. L. Rison, who remained until 1925. Harry M. Rhett then took over the local management. He retired in 1935, and was succeeded by George S. Elliott, who became secretary and treasurer, and general manager.

By 1916, the machinery and the mill was said to have included 58,752 spindles and 1,419 looms. Cotton consumption was estimated lower than previously, at about 11, 500 bales annually.

As the years went by, the mill was converted from steam power to electric power; new and more efficient machinery was installed.

As much a part of the mill as the plant itself was the village. Started about the turn of the century, the village by 1916 included about 120 houses and 74 tenement buildings. They were situated on ground that only 18 years before had been occupied by thousands of U.S. troops encamped during the Spanish-American War.

More houses were built, until a peak of about 350 houses were owned by the mill, according to George Elliott, former general manager.

Rison School was built by the mill about 1921.

The houses, for the most part, were sold during the middle 1940's to employees. Early rents were determined by the room. According to some of the old timers at the mill, room were rented (several rooms to a family) for about a dollar a room per month.

There is little information about early wages, but a long-time employee of the mill, who in 1893, Mrs. A. D. Bowers, told "The Times" in 1949 her first month's pay amounted to about \$14.00.

In 1902, according to Miss Rose Marlowe in 1949, the hours were from 5:45 a.m. until 6:15 p.m., about 12° hours per day.

Dallas manufactured grey goods exclusively until its death in 1949. Hard hit by the strike of 1947, the mill operated only on a limited basis until July of 1949. On the fifth of April, the stockholders, who included many local persons, voted to order the assets of the mill sold.

In July, at public auction, most assets were sold for a total of \$953,617.00 to various parties. A breakdown by the auctioneer showed the following major sale prices:

Machinery, equipment and office supplies, \$693,807.00; industrial real estate, which included the main plant building with 282,540 square feet of

floor space and warehouse space of 34,940 square feet, \$175,000 unimproved land, several dwelling units and the recreation building, \$84,000.00.

Most of the millhouses previously had been sold to employees residing in them. Total asset sales brought in approximately \$1,200,000.00 according to Mr. Elliott. When the mill was closed permanently, it had 53,088 spindles and 1,274 looms. It was employing then only about 300 persons, but before the strike in 1947, was employing about 700 persons. Cotton consumption in normal operation was between 25,000 and 30,000 bales per year.

The officers, at the time of liquidation, included: F. G. Kingsley of New York, president; Roger Milliken of New York, vice president; George S. Elliott of Huntsville, secretary and treasurer; Charles T. Landman of Huntsville, assistant treasurer. E. S. Bennett was operating superintendent from 1940 to 1949.

Local stockholders included Lawrence Goldsmith, M. B Spragins, Mrs. James Watts, Mrs. Addison White, Mrs. Bob Lowe, Charles Landman, Mr. and Mrs. George Elliott and Mrs. Warren Sockwell.



*Dallas Manufacturing Company was chartered in 1890 by T. B. Dallas, and began operation in 1892 as Alabama's largest cotton mill, manufacturing cotton sheeting. The mill closed in 1949, the mill and village were incorporated into Huntsville in 1955.*

***Addendum:***

When Dallas Mill closed its doors in 1949, two businessmen from Boaz, Alabama purchased the property for \$175,000. They leased the mill to Genesco, or General Shoe Company in 1955 for their shipping and warehouse department. The building was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1979. In September 1987, Gene McLain, a real estate broker in Huntsville purchased the property and used the buildings as warehouses. Dallas Mill burned to the ground in the pre-dawn hours of July 24, 1991. Mr. McLain commented that it looked “like the ruins of Rome”.

***Merrimack Manufacturing Company,  
Of Lowell, Mass.  
Triana Blvd.***

One of Madison County’s oldest and largest manufacturing concerns today is the huge Huntsville Manufacturing Company which employs approximately 1,700 persons to turn out some 95 million yards of cloth each year.

Formerly known as the Merrimack Manufacturing Co., which started construction of a plant here in 1899, Huntsville Manufacturing Co., now is operated by M. Lowenstein and Sons, Inc. of New York.

Its 145,596 spindles and 3, 437 looms, plus related facilities, require some 601,000 square feet of floor space to make it the largest cotton mill in the South under one roof. It is valued at approximately \$11,500,000.

Manufacturing only cotton clothe for printing at the Rock Hill Printing and Finishing Co. in North Carolina, the company uses approximately 43,000 bales of cotton each year to make its 95 million yards of cloth. Seemingly a huge amount, the local product provides only about six weeks supply for the huge bleachery and print mill at Rock Hill.

Merrimack Manufacturing Co. of Lowell, Mass. Came to Huntsville in 1896 to purchase 1,390 acres of land for a cotton mill at a price of about \$40,000.

Tracy W. Pratt, one of the leading business men in Huntsville’s history, was credit for locating the Merrimack company here, and for several other mills as well.

Construction of the three-story No. 1 mill began in 1899. Many of the brick used for the No. 1 mill and the adjacent smokestack (which required more brick than the plant building did) were made right on the spot.

The work was completed the following year, 1900, and operations were commenced immediately. The first homes of the village to house mill workers was also started about this time.

At this time, the mill was reported to employ about 500 hands at 700 print cloth looms and 25,000 spindles. Its cotton consumption was estimated at 5,000 bales per year.

Only two years later, construction of No. 2 mill, a five-story brick structure, was started. That was completed in 1904.

It was about 1910 that one of Huntsville's most famous and beloved citizens came to the city to serve as agent for Merrimack. He was Joseph J. Bradley, who came here from Georgia, where he had been a mill superintendent.

Until his death on October 26, 1933, Mr. Bradley was a leader in practically every community undertaking, and almost worshipped by the mill employees, whom he championed.

The mill prospered under Mr. Bradley, and a report in 1916, showed it was producing approximately a million yards per week of print cloth, percales, organdies and khaki.

Cotton consumption was given at 15,000 bales per year, and machinery was listed at 2,579 looms and 103,000 spindles. There were approximately 900 employees and 966,000 square feet of flour space. In addition, the mill was operating schools for children, a kindergarten, a library and a domestic Science department. Mr. Bradley helped to pioneer the home demonstration work in this area.

In 1920, the present sanitary sewer system was started, sidewalks were paved and curbs and gutters installed along the village streets, the store and recreational buildings were erected, and recreational buildings were erected, and the major portion of Joe Bradley School was completed.

By 1925, the village houses were completed. They totaled 279 units, of which 236 were two family dwellings.

When Mr. Bradley died of diabetes in 1922, he was succeeded by his son, Joseph J. Bradley Jr., who was agent for about 15 years.

Following him was Henry McKelvie, who was succeeded by A. D. Elliott, vice president and general manager, who came in 1945. Shortly after Mr. Elliott came to Huntsville, Merrimack was purchased on January 14, 1946, by M. Lowenstein and Sons, which now operates eight large mills and the largest printing and finishing company in the world at Rock Hill and employees 10,000 persons.

At the time of the purchase, the name of the local plant was changed to Huntsville Manufacturing Co. Machinery included 109,696 spindles and 2,562 looms. The 700 employees turned out approximately 77 million yards of cloth annually.

In 1949, houses in the mill village were sold to employees in October, and in November, the company reservoir on Russell Hill and the entire water system of the mill and village, to the City of Huntsville.

Two years later, Huntsville Manufacturing Company gave to the Madison county Board of Education the 24-classroom Joe Bradley School, which now has an enrollment of about 900 students (through the ninth grade).

In 1953, the modern building connecting mills No. 1 and No. 2 was constructed. air conditioned, it contains 52,650 square feet of floor space. In 1954, in another major move, the basement of the No. 1 mill was air conditioned at considerable expense, and an extensive remodeling program was started on the plant's machinery.

Executives of Huntsville Manufacturing Co. residing here at the present time include: Mr. Elliott, vice president and general manager; W. E. Dunn, general superintendent; Peyton W. Drake, assistant comptroller; Burton Case, assistant secretary; P. W. Ellington, superintendent of weaving and warp preparation; B. G. Stumberg Jr., superintendent of carding and spinning.

***Addendum:***

Huntsville Manufacturing Company, a division of M. Lowenstein Co., of New York, owned and operated the former Merrimack mill until 1985, when it was sold to Spring Industries of Fort Mill, South Carolina. The plant closed in 1989, and the contents were sold at auction. The mill, the last operating holdout of what was once Huntsville's industrial backbone in the cotton milling industry, was demolished in 1990, with only the Merrimack Mill Village remaining as the physical sign of the existence of the facility.



***Merrimack Manufacturing Company began operation in 1900.  
A second mill building, added in 1903, made it one of  
the largest in the South.***

# Children of the Mills: Faces of Huntsville Mill Children

B. SUSANNA LEBERMAN

During his career as a photographic investigator, Lewis Hine took thousands of pictures in the United States and Europe. Who are these people that stare back at us across time through Lewis Hine’s photographs? While the identities and ultimate fates of many will never be known, there is a substantial body of material that allows us to identify many of Hine’s subjects – including those in Huntsville.

Many of Hine’s photographs include his field notes – names, places, dates – information Hine captured to validate his findings. In addition to their intrinsic value, Hine’s field notes also provide a starting point for other researchers following in his footsteps. This article, based on notations Hine made concerning photographs he had taken in Huntsville, is an example of the way in which his documentation has served later historical and genealogical research.

## Gracie Mae Clark

Hine photographed the Clark family during his visit to Huntsville in November 1913. According to Hine’s field notes, Gracie Mae Clark (center, in the white dress) was a 13-year-old spinner who lived with her family at 268 A (Alpine) Street. This is the sum total of Hine’s field notes on the Clark family. This is enough, however, to allow a modern day investigator to reconstruct Gracie’s life.

*Gracie Clark  
November 1913*



Gracie’s work release affidavits identify her parents as Jim A. and Lucinda Clark. According to the 1910 census, the Clarks had had six children: William, 13; Zetta, 12; Gracie, then six; Bertie, five; Lindon, three; and Elsie (a son), one. Her work release affidavits also shed revealing light on her early employment history:

<i>Date of Employment</i>	<i>Employer</i>	<i>Reported Date of Birth</i>	<i>Reported Age</i>
January 1912	West Huntsville Cotton Mills	March 1, 1899	12
July 1912	Merrimack Manufacturing Company	March 1, 1899	12
January 1913	Lowe Manufacturing Company	March 6, 1900	12
March 1915	Dallas Manufacturing Company	March 8, 1899	16

Work release affidavits were the means by which parents gave their permission for children to work in the mills. Jim (also a mill worker) and Lucinda executed release affidavits for three of their children – Gracie, Will, Zetta, and Bertie. All were made with their “mark” (an “X”), rather than a signature. According to the January 1912 affidavit, Gracie was 12 years old. But the 1910 census, made when the Clarks were living as farmers in New Hope, recorded her age as only six. This means that Gracie was in fact only nine years old when she began work at West Huntsville Cotton Mills. It is possible that the later affidavits from July 1912 and January 1913 indicate that she was working at several mills at the same time, rather than moving from job to job. There is no available evidence that Gracie attended school for the mandatory eight weeks a year. That she received at least some education is suggested by the fact that her name does not appear in the 1914 *Children Ineligible for Employment*.

Gracie married Will Forrest on July 6, 1918 (Marriage Records 44: 114). According to their marriage certificate, Will was 19 years old, weighed 142 pounds, and stood five feet, six inches tall. Gracie, who was only 14, was described as five feet tall and weighing 110 pounds. Gracie apparently did not need her parents consent to get married; her “mill birth date” made her legally of age. Their marriage certificate describes both Will and Gracie as cotton mill workers. Will appears to have just been able to sign his name to the certificate; Gracie, who could not write, made her mark with an “X.”

## Sanford Franklin

Sanford Franklin was the son of William E. and Ida Jane (Hall) Franklin, both of whom were originally from Winchester, Tennessee. According to the 1910 census the Franklins had ten children: Richard, 17; Hattie, 15; Garland, 13; Lenora, 11; Sanford, seven, Lee, six; Mattie; Wilburn S.; William A.; and Lillie.

Sanford began work at the Merrimack Mill when he was 10 years old. Richard, his eldest brother, signed his work release affidavit, which was filed in August 1913. The affidavit lists his age as 12. (This, of course, is inconsistent with the census of only three years earlier, which gives his age as seven. In November 1913, Sanford told Lewis Hine that he had been working in the mill for four months.) This age discrepancy appeared years later on Sanford's marriage certificate. Sanford listed his age as 24 in 1925, when he was really 22 years old. He was not a minor, so why did he use his "mill age"? Maybe he sought to maintain consistency, or maybe he really believed that he was 24.



*Sanford Franklin  
(far left)  
with two other  
boys  
November 1913*

In Hine's photograph, Sanford (on the far left) stands with two other boys in front of what appears to be a backyard pasture. Of these three boys, Hine only recorded Sanford's name. The other two boys could be family or neighbors. His brothers, Garland and Lee, were close to his age, and both worked at Merrimack. The 1920 census lists Will, the father, as employed



as a spooler, Garland as a weaver, Lee a spinner, and Sanford as a doffer. Doffing was a hard work. It was a doffer's job to push a large wooden doffers box from row to row and collect finished spools. If the doffers were small, they would have to climb up the side of the looms to reach the top spools. Often they would not wear shoes because it made climbing easier. This was a typical job for boys in the textile mills.

The Huntsville City Directory for 1922-23 listed Sanford as a Merrimack employee living at 250 A Street. His parents, William and Ida, are also listed with the same employer and house number. William died the next year on March 26, 1923. Ida died in January 1925. They are both buried in Merrimack Cemetery.

In June 1925, Sanford married Ella Grace Campbell, a cashier. Details provided by the marriage certificate aid in creating a fuller picture of a grown Sanford. He was five feet, eight inches height, and weighed 140 pounds. Ella was five feet, six inches tall and weighed 125 pounds. Although he had been working since he was ten, Sanford was literate enough to sign the marriage certificate. He listed his occupation as a shipping clerk with residence in Memphis, Tennessee. It is possible that Sanford and Ella moved away permanently because the couple has no later listings in the City Directory; neither is buried in the Merrimack cemetery.

*Sources:* Marriage records for Madison County, vol. 50, p. 646.  
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Census, 1920, Merrimack Precinct, Madison County, Alabama, line 17.  
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Ann Maulsby, *Children of Industrial Huntsville* (Huntsville, AL: Ann Geiger Maulsby, 1987), pp., 98-99.  
Ann Maulsby, *The Merrimack Cemetery* (Huntsville, AL: Ann Geiger Maulsby, 1998), pp., 42, 125, and 128.

## **Eliza and Pink Durham**

Lewis Hine photographed Eliza and Pink Durham, the children of Pinckney and Permillia Durhamm, in November 1913. The Durham's had seven children: Eliza, Henry, Joe, Myrtle, George (known as Pink), Jimmie, and Lola. The youngest two children, Jimmie (1909-1922) and Lola (1916-1917) died early and are buried in Merrimack Cemetery.



*Eliza and Pink  
Durham*

Pinckney died some time between 1916 and the 1920 census. Pinckney and Permilla are both listed in the Huntsville City Directory for 1916, and in 1920 the census lists her as a widow.

At the time of Eliza and Pink's picture, Eliza's leg was broken. Hine wrote that her leg was broken on the job when a boy ran over her with a doffing box (a heavy wooden box used for the collection of spools). When Hine returned to Huntsville in December 1913, he took another picture of Pink. Because the picture is from a distance his face is not visible, but Hine labeled the photograph as "Pinkie Durham, 8 year old sweeper, going to work, noon hour." If he worked a regular eight-hour shift he would have gotten off at eight at night and walked home.

There are no records of Eliza having been married, but by the time of the 1920 census she was apparently no longer living with her mother and siblings. She is not included in the list of household inhabitants. Pink is listed as a 17-year-old doffer. He was the sole financial support of the remaining family members at home.

Pink married Lana May Muscgrove on November 18, 1922. In order to be married, Pink need the permission of his legally appointed guardian, J. B. Morgan (who, coincidentally, had been appointed that same day). Pink's signature on the marriage certificate is legible, but it is obvious that he is not used to writing. According to their marriage certificate, Pick was five feet, eight inches tall and weighed 145 pounds. Mary was five feet, six inches tall and weighed 128 pounds. Both listed their occupation as cotton

mill employees and their religion as “none.” Lana herself was the daughter of a cotton mill worker. Her father, Call, died on July 28, 1922 when he fell into a Merrimack well and drowned.

Pink and May had three children. Their 11-month-old daughter, Corrine, died at home after a brief illness in 1931. She is buried in the Merrimack cemetery, and is the only one their children buried there. Pink and May also had two sons, J. D. and Howard Durham. Pink and his family apparently moved away sometime after 1931, and are not listed in subsequent Huntsville city directories. We do know that May’s family eventually moved back to Harden County, Tennessee. Perhaps the young couple followed them there.

*Sources:* Ann Maulsby, *Merrimack Cemetery*, pp. 37 and 72.  
Marriage records for Madison County, vol. 48, p. 237.  
Madison County Probate Court Estate Packet, File No. 6951.  
Census, 1920, Merrimack Precinct, B Street, house 311.  
Huntsville City Directory, 1911-12, p. 143.  
Huntsville City Directory, 1920-21, p. 162.

## The Henson Family

Lewis Hine took this picture, which he labeled “Pete Henson, Merrimack,” in November 1913. The picture was used in Daile Kaplan’s *Photo Story* to illustrate the harsh reality of child labor. Kaplan urged his readers to “note the downtrodden expression and posture.” It has been difficult to learn more about young Henson. There were no “Pete Henson” work release affidavits for any of the Huntsville mills, including Merrimack. There was, however, a Henson family that had four boys and three girls. According to the information in the Maulsby’s *Merrimack Cemetery*, none of the boys were named Pete, but it is not unusual for these children to be



known by an entirely different name. The head of this particular family was Mollie Henson. James T. Henson, her husband, is believed to have died in Tennessee. The family moved to Huntsville where they found work in the textile mills. Sithie, William, Charles Edward, David, Brooks, McGee, and Myrtis were the recorded children's names. There was only one other family of Hensons, and their boys were all too old to be "Pete."

David, standing next to the youngest Henson boy and most likely our "Pete", started work in July 1913. It is highly unlikely that he was 12 years old as the affidavit states. The two older children had already been employed for a year when David began working. There are no affidavits for the girls. If they started jobs after 1915, there would be none because affidavits were no longer in use. Mollie Henson is listed in the Huntsville City Directory for 1916-17 as the widow of James, and she was employed at Merrimack, along with her sons. According to the 1920 censuses, Molly lived on A Street, and was remarried to a man with the last name of Dickson. The household was comprised of four Henson children and one Dickson child (who was only a year old). The Henson children included two daughters, McGee and Marie (called Myrtise in the cemetery book), and two sons, James and Brookie (called Brooks). James, most likely called David earlier, is listed as a 17-year-old weaver. If he was seventeen in 1920, that would make him seven in 1913, and judging by the picture, just the right age for "our" Pete. In January 1942, a marriage certificate was issued to a James David Henson, whose father was Jim Henson. The birth date James David Henson reported was August 22, 1902, and his occupation was a textile worker.

Mollie, who married again for a third time to a man named Taylor, is buried in Merrimack Cemetery. Her tombstone reads "Mollie Lee Henson, May 9, 1878—December 16, 1935." We have located no further information concerning James David; only Mollie is listed as buried in the cemetery.

*Sources:* Ann Maulsbey, *The Merrimack Cemetery*, p. 52.

Ann Maulsbey, *Children of Industrial Huntsville*, p. 130.

Huntsville City Directory, 1916-17. p. 159.

Daile Kaplan, *Photo Story: Selected Letters of Lewis Hine*, (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1992), p. 29

Census, 1920, Merrimack Precinct, Madison County, Alabama, line 36.

Marriage records for Madison County, vol. 74 p. 3.

## Madeline Causey

Hine photographed Madeline Causey in front of a mill house in Merrimack village in November 1913. It is likely that she has just finished a shift at the mill. Her eyes look very strained, and her hair is pulled neatly under a wrap. According to the 1910 census, Madeline's family were farmers in Hillsboro, Lawrence County, Alabama before moving to Huntsville. Her parents were James T. and Allis Causey. They had seven children, six of whom were still living in 1910: Ethal Mae, 13; Estelle L, 11; Austin H. (Oscar), nine; Susie M. (Madeline), seven; Pearl, four; and Byron H. two.

Madeline began working on October 20, 1913, (the month before Hine's investigative visit). Her affidavit lists July 7, 1901 as her sworn birth date, but the census records indicate that she was born in 1903. Twelve years old on paper, and ten in actuality, Madeline helped support her family. There is little information about Madeline and her family. There are no known Causeys buried in the Merrimack Cemetery; the family was not living in the village at the time of the 1920 census, and there are no listings for Causeys in the later editions of the Huntsville City Directory.

Hine took two photographs of Madeline. The one displayed here shows her in a lightweight dress with bare feet on a hard packed mud ground in November. The bottom of the house is exposed, and this scene creates a sense of deprivation. The second picture is a beautiful close up of her face, which reveals the soft detail of her features. It is obvious in both photographs that she is utterly exhausted. Both are typical of Hine's work One is



*Madeline Causey  
November 1913*

able to empathize with her after a long day at work, and to remember that she is only ten years of age.

Sources: Census, 1910, Hillsboro, Lawrence County, Alabama, line 8.  
Ann Maulsby, *Children of Industrial Huntsville*, pp. 51-52.

### **A Note on Finding-Aids**

For those readers interested in conducting additional historical or genealogical research, the following finding aids are available at the Huntsville-Madison County Public Library:

- ***Madison County Child Labor Sign-out Book***. This is an original book that parents or guardians were required to sign before a child could work in the mills. Because there was a law stating that children must be at least twelve years old to work in textile mills, there are corresponding affidavits in which the legal guardians swear to the age and personal information about the child. Ann Maulsby has organized this information in her compilation, *The Children of Industrial Huntsville*. This book is an easy way to quickly cross reference names with possible siblings without having to look through the whole registry or affidavits.
- ***Affidavits***. According to Ann Maulsby, affidavits were discontinued on September 1, 1915 by authority of Act 169, which stated that no children under the age of 16 could work in mills. But one benefit to looking at the originals (located in the Probate Office on the library's third floor) is to see if the guardian signed his or her name, or made their mark with an "X."
- ***Census Records***. Census records provide a wealth of information. They list occupations, nativity (place of birth), the total number children a family had, and of that number how many were living. These records may also identify neighbors. For example, the Merrimack census taker in 1920 went door to door by street. The census is taken every 10 years. Census records from Tennessee and Alabama can be viewed on microform in the Heritage Room on the library's third floor.
- ***Children Ineligible For Employment***. Published by the State Inspector in 1914. If a child did not meet the minimum eight-week requirement prior to 1914, his or her name should be in this book. The original is located in the University of Alabama Library in Birmingham, Alabama. There is a copy available in the Heritage Room.

- ***The Huntsville City Directory***. Another excellent source of information, the various editions of the city directory list names, addresses, employer, spouse, or widow.
- ***Merrimac Cemetery Book***. Compiled and published by Ann Maulsby, this is a unique source of information concerning the Merrimack mill community.
- ***Dallas Mill Employment Records***. This is an original book located IN THE probate Office on the library's third floor. To use this book effectively, a researcher has to know the year in which Dallas Mill hired a particular individual. Users can go to that year, scan the names, and determine the exact date of employment and termination. It also states the job that person had.
- ***Marriage Certificates***. A standard tool of geological research, marriage records for Madison County are locate din the Probate Office on the third floor of the library.
- ***Property Deeds***. Deed information is maintained kept in the Madison County Court House in downtown Huntsville. If a researcher is looking for a private citizen use the reverse index. The reverse index lists the name of the buyer, rather than the seller.

# Remembering Life in the Mill Villages

B. SUSANNA LEBERMAN

Harold E. Gill and Melvin “Pete” Hunt both grew up in Huntsville during the 1930s. Although they grew up on different sides of town, both men shared something in common – they were child laborers. Harold grew up in the Merrimack and Lowe Village area, and by the time he was 10 worked as a delivery boy. Pete grew up in Dallas Village, and by the time he turned 16, worked in Dallas Mill.

Harold Gill and Pete Hunt’s life experiences as child laborers plus their willingness to share intimate knowledge about the workings of mill life are treasures. Their stories are testaments to the hard working generation, who worked, lived, and grew up in the shadow of the Mills.

## Interview with Harold Gill



Harold E. Gill, the son of Sterling D. and Ida Mae Edmison Gill, was born on May 17, 1928. His father was a Lowe Mill carpenter. After working in the mill, Mr. Gill went on to graduate from college and owned a successful real estate business; he now lives in Guntersville, Alabama.

*Mr. Gill  
in 1940*

SCHOOL DAYS  
1939-40

***Q. What did the Huntsville textile mills make?***

**A.** They made all types of cloth, fabric, and some of it was dyed. They made print material for dresses and shirts and things of that nature. They



would take the raw cotton, and they would card it out, make it thin, and spin the thread to make the cloth. They would spin it out, and make long fibers and spin the fibers together and in that way they could make the thread. They started with cotton bales and ran it all the way through. The process would come out with bolts of material. After it was made into the cloth it went into the dye room. Then they would dye it different things or it would go to the print room. Where they made printed material they would have it where it went to different clothes and it would go for different things. Now this is in the finishing part, and sometime the mills would finish it and sometimes the mills would just ship what they called the domestic or the cloth to other mills that would make whatever. It might be a dress mill that would make dresses or shirts or things like that. All they did at the mills in Hunt was to process and make the cloth and then it was shipped someplace else for whoever brought it from the mill. [After they shipped it out] it could go anyplace. It could go to a place that made sheets or go to a place that made shirts or anything like that. It was shipped to a finishing room or someplace like that would do the finishing work on it. All they were concerned about was making the cloth

***Q. Where did they get the cotton?***

**A.** They would buy the cotton from cotton brokers. There were several cotton brokers around Huntsville. On the west side of the square they had several officers there that they called the cotton block, but because that was where the cotton brokers were and the farmers would bring their cotton in by the load and they would take samples of it and they would stretch it to see how long the fibers were and what quality it was and then they would buy it from the farmers based on the price that was current at that time. They wanted good grades. The cotton broker graded the cotton. It was graded after it was ginned. When the bale came on the wagon or truck, mostly back then it was wagons, from the gin, they would take a hook bill knife. The bale would be wrapped in a toe sack like material on the outside and then bands on and around it. They would take this knife about the middle of the bale, and split a place big enough to take out some cotton from there. Then they would take it (the cotton) and wrap it in a piece of paper and then that's when they stretched it out to see how long the fiber was. It might be short fiber or long fiber. And then they would grade the cotton based on the length of the fiber. Then [the brokers] would sell it to the mills for use in making material.

***Q. How did the mill ship their products after the production process?***

**A.** It was loaded on trains. The railroad was essential. Without the railroads the mills would have no way of shipping their loads. Back then the

railroad was it. There weren't as many trucking companies as we know it today. Everything was shipped by rail. They had two. The NC and SL, which was the Nashville-Chattanooga and St. Louis railroad, ran through Huntsville and the Southern, which was a different rail, ran north and south. Everything we had was shipped in. I worked for a grocery store. When we got a shipment of flower it was shipped in by boxcar load. We would go to the boxcar, get the flower or whatever, and take it back to the store. Everything was handled through the rail system. Without it nothing would be shipped in or out.

***Q. Were you ever inside the mill while production was running? What most do you remember?***

**A.** Yes, once or twice in different mills. Mostly in Merrimack mill and I have been in the Dallas mill. They were pretty much uniform throughout. They just had big rooms. They would have a whole floor of looms and a whole floor of other type. It was very very loud. In fact most everyone who worked in those mills became real hard of hearing.... For the most part they were all pretty well deaf from the sound. The breathing conditions were not the best in the world. There was lint floating around in the rooms. I doubt that they would allow that today for health reasons. It was not good conditions.

***Q. Did the mill workers ever have any walkouts or strikes?***

**A.** They might have a strike every now and then. They might walk out for a few days, and strike for a few more pennies an hour. I remember one strike. They stood outside on the road that led to the mill and people would cross the picket line. They might strike for 10 cents an hour or something like that. This might have been before any unions. It was just people themselves. Then when unions came in it got to the point they were demanding more than the mills could pay. That was the reason some of them started shutting down.

***Q. Did you ever hear anyone complaining in the villages about their jobs in the mill?***

**A.** That was the only place they had to work. That was the paying jobs. Of course back in the depression there were a lot of the cotton mills, which closed down, and people did not have any work. They worked 3 shifts a day. The mill ran continuously. They ran from 6 AM - 2 PM, 2 PM - 10 PM, and 10 PM - 6 AM. That was the 1<sup>st</sup> shift, 2<sup>nd</sup> shift and 3<sup>rd</sup> shift. And they

would rotate these about once a month so that the same people would not be on the midnight shift. It was hard work—tedious work. It didn't do much good to complain. It was either work there or be out of work. They worked 7 days a week.

***Q. Did it pay well?***

**A.** Back then it was about what anybody could get. Men were working on W.P.A. [the Works Projects Administration] for a dollar a day.

***Q. W.P.A.?***

**A.** Yes, the Work Progress Administration [sic]. When the depression hit in 1929, there were no jobs. You did what you had to do to survive. You took any kind of job you could get even if it were \$1.00 a day or \$2.00 or anything. The mills were able to ship their materials across the country, so they were about the only employment around till they started Redstone Arsenal about 1940. There were no jobs around except the mills.

***Q. What did a typical mill village house look like inside?***

**A.** Spartan. Had a bed in the bedroom. They might have straight kitchen style chairs in the living room. This was back in the early 40's. They would have a kitchen table and an icebox in the kitchen. The ice was delivered. Then of course later on they had refrigerators. Most folks had an icebox. Some walls were painted and some used wallpaper. Some of them had big wide paper. Some had painted paper. It wasn't sheetrock. They had beaded board. It was a thin board about three inches wide that meshed or interlocked together. There was no insulation and just drop siding on the outside of the houses, so they were not very well insulated. There was a fireplace in the living room and a stove in the kitchen and that was the heat for the house.

***Q. What interaction did the different mill villages have with each other? Did the mill workers from each village associate with each other?***

**A.** Not unless they had a reason or wanted to visit relatives in another area. There wasn't a lot of socializing going on. The women didn't socialize because it took about all their time to get food prepared and put on the table and then clean it up. They had to wash clothes on the washboards and washtubs outside. They didn't have time for too much visiting. No telephones. There was a phone in the grocery store one street over from our

house. Mr. Dutton ran that store. His phone number was 2J. Do you understand? That's how many phones there were. There weren't that many phones in the whole system. The police was 303, that was their number. That gave you an idea about how many phones that were available. So there wasn't that much communications back and forth. If you wanted to communicate with someone you would have to go see them, but there wasn't that much visiting. Most people did their visitation around the church. [For recreation] we had a YMCA in our neighborhood. The other areas had some recreation. We had a theater. The movies we saw were shown on what we called the Y. (YMCA). The Merrimack had a theater. The movies were shown usually on Friday and Saturday. Then they started showing them on Tuesday night. It would cost a nickel or dime to see a movie. There were 3 theaters in downtown Huntsville. There was also one for the blacks, the old Princess Theater.

Later in the 40's people had radios, but very few. The main thing back then was just hard work. People worked hard in the mill and when they came home they still had to work hard.

***Q. What can you remember about working in the store and going to school? Can you tell us about growing up and working in and around the Huntsville mill villages?***

A. The school that I attended was two blocks from my home [at the corner of 4th Street and 10th Avenue]. That was West Huntsville School. It pulled all the students from West Huntsville, Lowe Mill Village, and Douglas Hill area. They all came into that school, and Joe Bradley School was at Merrimack. All the young people from the mill village there went to Joe Bradley School. Lincoln and Dallas had S.R. Risen School. At the time the city limits of Huntsville was only four square miles. There was a mile in back direction from the Courthouse and so the people who lived within the city limits went to Huntsville High School or to East Clinton Street School or wherever the city had their schools. We were all in the County, under the county system. Risen, West Huntsville, and Joe Bradley were all part of the county system. [While the mills built their own schools they were administered by the county school system.] Most children lived in walking distance of the schools and walked to school.

I worked after school. I delivered groceries and drove the truck when I was 10 years old. The owner of the store had an old A-model truck, and I learned to drive, in that truck. I would deliver groceries in a two or three block area in that truck. Later I worked for Mr. C. J. Walker. He owned a

store, and across the street Mr. J.C. Brown owned a store. Almost everyone ordered their groceries. Mr. Walker had a fellow named Moorehead. He would walk out through Merrimack Village and he would take orders from the people who bought from Mr. Walker, he would write the orders down and then bring them back to the store.

Mr. Brown did the same thing. The way we filled the orders was someone would carry or read out the order we would go to the shelf and get the item or items and put them into metal containers. We would then deliver it to the customer's house in the metal containers.

The owner bought the meat we supplied to the village from Ardmore. We would have to walk the animals to the slaughterhouse. There we would leave the animals and they would be slaughtered. Then after they were slaughtered and hung we would take the truck, drive over, and load them up. They would already be skinned and we would take them back to the store and we would hang them in the cooler. Then as we needed we would cut the different parts for steak or whatever off of the steer. We had a fellow who did a lot of the cutting, but each one of us could cut if people wanted steak or something like that. We would cut up some and put it in a display counter. It would be on trays in this counter or meat boxes and people could see through and make a selection. The same thing happened with hogs. The hogs were killed for things like sausage and pork chops. Again, we did our own cutting.

The orders taken on Monday would be delivered on Wednesday. Most people would be working in the mill and not at home. Most people left their houses unlocked, so we would knock on the door and if there wasn't anybody there, we would take the groceries and set them on the table, or if there was milk or something like that we would put it in the icebox or refrigerator. We would deliver twice a week and on Saturday we would deliver not only to Merrimack but also to South Mill Village.

Back then people had their own cows. We would deliver cow feed on Saturdays. My Saturdays consisted of being at the store by 5:00 A.M. in the morning. We would load cow feed and take it out, and deliver it in the communities.

Each house had an outbuilding. Some people stabled their cows in the buildings. We would deliver the feed and put it into that building. Then we would make a first run with the groceries into Merrimack. Then we would take a load to South Mill Village. Then we would take out what we called short orders.

About 6:00 P.M. we would return to the store. Then we would clean up the store. We would sweep it and clean up the butcher blocks where we cut

our own meat. We would load a big load of trash and take it to the trash dump. When we returned we would put the truck back in the farm where it was kept. This would be about midnight. So that was a day. I was paid three dollars.

***Q. What was the worst aspect of your job? What did you like least?***

A. It was hard work. I was small, and you had to lift large sacks of cow feed. You got awfully tired. Saturday night we had to clean the butcher blocks, and go to the dump. That's it, Saturdays. It was a long day. Then I had to walk home.

***Q. What did you like the best about working for the store?***

A. The pay, it was a job in the depression. I was fortunate to have a job.

### **Pete Hunt Remembers**

Pete Hunt is the son of Dallas Mill picker-machine operator Sydney Hunt and Edna Hunt. Mr. Hunt retired from Huntsville City Animal Control in 1978. He now lives in Huntsville.

My real name is Melvin, but father gave me my nick name Pete. I had a twin sister that was born the same time. They called us twins and we grew up in the [Dallas] mill village. My father lost three fingers in the Picker Room. [The picker machine would tear bales of cotton to pieces.] I never got close to it. The man that was over that machine running, restricted it...tell you to get out and get back. He was afraid that if you reached your hand in there [the machine] would catch it. A friend of mine it did catch his hand and it pulled his whole right arm off. He reached in to pick up a piece the pickers left and lost his whole arm. I thank the Lord I wasn't [working] in there.

My twin did not work in the mill. She helped mother around the house. [When people got sick in the mill village] they would call my mother. If they could not get a doctor, they would come and get my mother. While my Dad at that particular time was working he would get up and put his clothes on, and go with her wherever it was, and they would walk. She would do the best she knew how if she had experience with that particular [ailment]. I never will forget a man who said, "Thank the Lord she knew what she was doing. Do you see that boy there? We wouldn't have him if it hadn't been for your mother." He said the doctor had him on something and he didn't have him on the right thing. "I came and got your mother. She said

you go and get me some goat milk.” They thought they were going to lose the kid, [and mother nursed him through the night]. The next day the doctor looked at him and said he’s better. [The boy’s father told the doctor] to “get out the door and never come back.” After my father got sick I quite school at the age of sixteen. Mother couldn’t work, and my twin sister wanted to quit too. I said no. A man is more able to make a living without an education.

## **Working in the Mill**

Dallas mill had a 10ft fence all the way around it. They had gates that you went in and you had to go right by the office. They had a guard at each gate, and if you didn’t have a good excuse you didn’t get in. You had to go through the office and tell them your business. The guard carried you wherever you needed to go...whichever department you wanted. Every morning I would get up a half hour early. They gave me a full [extra] hour [of pay] if I would get in the spinning room earlier in the morning and push the [loom] shuttles backward. [After the whistle blew the employees] all walked in, together in a line. You had so many looms that you worked at that particular time. The card room was the third floor up. The cotton went through the picker room, to the card room, spinning room, back down to the cloth room, the spinning room was where they made the cloth. There was two parts there, and they had one room on one side of the elevator and spinning room on the other side of the elevator. I might work here this week or next week work there because wherever was needed [a person] the most, that’s were they’d send someone. [After they first hired me] I went to work on the evening shift. We worked from 1:00 to 10:00 at night, and then the other shift would come in and work from 6:00 to 1:00. Each person put in 8 hours. Ten dollars, that’s what I drew per week for 40 hours work—ten dollars a week. I fed four of us on that.

## ***Mill Memories***

- The mill smelled like cotton and sweating people. They wouldn’t open the windows on account of dust getting in.
- The men respected the women that worked in there because they knew them, knew the family, probably the whole family from boyhood up.

- [The worst thing about working in the mill] I guess you could say could have been the noise or it could have been confinement. You had to stay particularly around close to where you were supposed to be working in case anything went wrong.
- If you were working and something went wrong they had a lever that was steam powered that would cut it off. They had 4-6 men who were mechanics whose sole job was to work on the machines.
- My older brothers worked in the spinning room. When they were going to school they gave them time off to go in and work. They used to go in and work so many hours and they would go to school. When they got out of school they would go on back to the mill and put in a few more hours.
- When you first went to work in there you couldn't tell what [people were saying]. The boss man would have to carry you out in the hallway, where we went up and down the stairs, and he'd tell you, out there what he wanted done. [My wife said it took her a month before she naturally began to read lips after going to work in the weaving room.]

### *Life in the Mill Village*

The whole village seemed like a family. People would come to visit, and if you weren't home you'd see wrote on a tablet "I've gone so and so, be back so and so. Make yourself at home or we will see you again next time," with the door wide-open, nothing but the screen. Sometimes we would go to town. We could walk about a mile to downtown that was before the city began to spread. Then we had a streetcar that went through to Stephens Ave. to the end of the mill village. That's where it stopped. The motorman would swing it around and go back and it would come up to one street above east of Andrew Jackson and then it would come up to Pratt, make a right turn on Pratt and go down to Holmes. They had seats on it just like on a bus. I could ride from Dallas clear over to West Huntsville Mill and over to Merrimack.

Lincoln [Mill and village] was right across the railroad tracks, which us kids growing up used to get on that railroad track and throw rocks at Lincoln, or they got to throw them at us. This is the way it worked in the village. If a family of kids got unruly there was always a senior, like a lady or gentleman that saw it. If they couldn't stop it they went to the parents. Well, the parents would come down and stop it whatever it was. In other



words, [families watched out for these kids, as if] they were their own. They loved each and everybody of that particular village. [Sometimes, truces were called.] The men from Dallas had a ball team, Lincoln had a ball team, [and] Merrimack had a ball team. Well, every weekend during ball season one would play the other. When we would go across the railroad track over to the ballpark on Lincoln they didn't fight us and we wouldn't fight them as long as we were going to the ball game. But if there was no ballgame we could throw rocks at each other.

The people that lived in the village depended on that mill for living. The mill owned the house [and] they kept it up. They would come out and do repairs if you needed a pipe changed in the house or anything, all you had to do was turn it into the office and they sent a crew out and worked on it. They had crews for wood; they had their own plumber, their own electrician. They had their own fire truck. Back then they had an alleyway between this street and this street. You used to have coal out there, and you could order a ton or a half-ton. They had a little house built here that they would slide open the door and throw the coal in there. You would go out there, load your basket, and carry it back into the house. Well, right opposite to it was the bathroom...the particular type that they had at that time. When you sat down on the wooden stool, the water would start running, because it came from above it. [The water] ran the whole time you sat on it and just as soon as you got through and got up, the lid went up, and cut the water off. I mean to tell you, we had it nice.

# Administration

## Statement of Purpose

The purpose of the Huntsville-Madison County Historical Society and *The Huntsville Historical Review* is to provide an agency for expression for all those having a common interest in collecting, preserving, and recording the history of Huntsville and Madison County. Communications concerning the society should be addressed to the President, P.O. Box 666, Huntsville, Alabama 35804.

*The Huntsville Historical Review* is published twice a year, and is provided to all current members of the Society. Annual membership dues are \$10.00 for individuals and \$18.00 for families. Libraries and organizations may receive the *Review* on a subscription basis for \$10.00 per year. Single issues may be purchased for \$5.00 each.

## Editorial Policy

The *Review* welcomes articles on all aspects of the history of Huntsville and Madison County. Articles concerning other sections of Alabama will be considered if they relate in some way to Madison County.

Statements of fact or opinion appearing in the *Review* solely those of the authors and not imply endorsement by the Huntsville-Madison County Historical Society, the Publications Committee, or the Editor. Questions or comments concerning articles appearing in the journal should be addressed to the Editor, P.O. Box 666, Huntsville, Alabama 35804

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