FROM COTTON FIELDS TO COBWEBS: A CASE STUDY OF COMMUNITY AND PRESERVATION IN THE TEXTILE INDUSTRY OF BELMONT, NORTH CAROLINA

by

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A thesis submitted to the faculty of
The University of North Carolina at Charlotte
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts in
History

Charlotte

2016

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ABSTRACT

ALLYSON ELIZABETH MILLER. From cotton fields to cobwebs: a case study of community and preservation in the textile industry of Belmont, North Carolina. (Under the direction of Dr. AARON SHAPIRO)

The oldest mill in Belmont, North Carolina still stands today. Almost one hundred and fifteen years old, the Chronicle Mill has made a legacy for the small town of Belmont, establishing a sense of community and identity for its people. At one time, the mill was the nexus of life for Belmont, as people migrated from the fields into the factory. However, Belmont's history, identity and historic landscape face a new challenge in the wake of urban sprawl. As more people move to Belmont, the established sense of identity is re-envisioned. Historic structures, such as the Chronicle, root identity and orient space. Thus, preserving the historic built environment protects our history, memory, and sense of identity. This thesis argues for continued preservation of the Chronicle Mill because of its significance. The Chronicle encompasses the history of the town, connects two commercial districts of Belmont, and serves a repository of memory and sense of place. To allow the Chronicle to fall in disrepair would perpetuate the formation of a "placeless society," one devoid of its history and identity. Informed by the scholarship of preservationist, historians, architects, and philosophers, this thesis expounds upon the study of memory and the preservation of the built environment.

DEDICATION

To Mom,
who first taught me to love history and then
gave me the support and confidence to explore it.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project would not have been possible without the encouragement and support of many people. First, I am grateful to my thesis chair, Dr. Aaron Shapiro. His insightful advice, constructive criticism, dedication, and patience for this project broadened my understanding of the textile story and deepened my appreciation of historic buildings. The impeccable support and commentary of my other committee members, Dr. Amanda Pipkin-Anderson and Dr. Daniel Dupre reminded me to always tell the forgotten stories of history. Other members of UNC-Charlotte's history faculty, Dr. Peter Thorsheim, Dr. Maren Ehlers, and Linda Smith, provided encouragement, direction, and a listening ear when I needed it the most. Special thanks to the Belmont Historical Society and Alan Millican's Pictorial Museum, whose resources helped me uncover the history of the Chronicle Mill. I am especially grateful to all those who took time to tell their story about life in Belmont's textile industry: Red Joy, Bobby Brown, Carol Trull, Max Robinson, Doug Brewer, Beverly Lineberger, and Alan Millican. For their friendship and support, I am indebted to my fellow graduate students, Emily, Layne, Alison, Jake, and Ian. Without them, this process would not have been near as rewarding or fun. Finally, my mother, Catherine Miller, my sisters Kristen and Audrey, my brother Trey, my brothers-in-law Adam and Percy, and my fiancé, Anthony, were unwavering in their support, love, and guidance during this challenging but exciting moment in my life.

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CHAPTER ONE: THE TEXTILE INDUSTRY NARRATIVE

His never-steadying hand grasped mine. His fingers, long and arthritically knotted, stretched out from a calloused, time-worn palm. His veins, visible etchings of life filled with manual labor, snaked across his tanned skin. Although his body revealed his age, his quick mind never betrayed it. "I heard you'd like to interview me," his voice echoed in the shop. "The name's Red Joy." His blue eyes turned, however, to acknowledge his friends who were occupying most of the barber chairs in the room. They exchanged quick quips with one another, often about Doug, the white-haired, 83-year-old barber, as well as taking moments to share the latest news of the town. Before too long, though, Red assumed his seat as the leader of the helm, the laughter quieted, and the tale of a timeworn and cobwebbed mill town began.

"I told them I was a spinning doffer." [1] Red Joy's memory flashed back to when he enlisted in the U.S. Navy in 1941. Without experience in military training or combat, Red only knew to tell the recruiter his skill in doffing yarn at the textile mills in Belmont, North Carolina. "He looked at me and said, 'what the hell's a spinning doffer?'" [2] To the recruiter, the job of a doffer–replacing full bobbins of yarn with empty ones—was strange, but to Red, it was the only life he knew.

The Southern textile industry encompassed the South starting in the 1880s, rewriting the agrarian story with a new industrial spin. It ended in 1994 when overseas

[1] Red Joy, interview by Allyson Miller, Belmont, North Carolina, January 20, 2015.
[2] Ibid, Joy

industries brought on by NAFTA garnered too much competition. Doffing, spinning, twisting, and fluffing, the textile industry enlisted everyone, bestowing upon them a sense of identity and community. Yet, just as the word doffer vanished from common vernacular, entrepreneurs are once again reinventing the South's identity and landscape by valuing new infrastructures over historic preservation. Metropolitan districts and growing businesses progress in Gastonia and Charlotte, with expansion, relocation, and displacement as the new business model. As new development spreads, smaller surrounding cities like Belmont are now in the crosshairs of business executives. Yet, a town's history and sentimental attachments to the historic built environment stands in developers' way with the potential to impede their efforts to redevelop a smaller city's commercial landscape. However, the historic built environment does not have to be viewed as such a challenge. In instances like the Chronicle Mill, adaptively reusing the historic structure can be highly beneficial to the community, its people, and the planned development proposal.

Historical value, including its architectural and aesthetic characteristics, and the memory attached to a building or location, grounds a community with a sense of place. Structures exuding these traits reinforce identity in the wake of urban sprawl. The timeworn buildings occupying Belmont's main streets, like the Chronicle Mill, do not have voices to save themselves. The host community speaks for the structures' significance and preservation due to sentimental yearnings for a former time. Positive stories of the past and canonization of the ancestral fathers shroud the city's historic buildings. However, a site's true worth in terms of preservation is in the structure's ability to revitalize the economy, reinforce community, and keepsake history and

memory. These exist for the three-story brick building known as the Chronicle Mill in Belmont, North Carolina.

The Chronicle Mill, beloved by many, was Belmont's earliest textile mill. The first bale of cotton passed through its machines in February 1902, under the supervision of Mr. R.L. Stowe and Company. Stowe had the mill constructed in what is now present-day Belmont, but what was then a small, agrarian town named Garibaldi. Baldy, as the locals knew it, was a train depot, primarily designed as a site for passengers to disembark and restock their food supply, and a place for the train conductors to refill and cool the steam engines. Garibaldi was also a place where farmers sold their produce and kids played in the rivers that surrounded it on either side. Described as a rough and tumble town by some, due to frequent cockfights and tavern brawls, Baldy was home to people who made an honest living working the land.

In the years following the Civil War and as industrialization reared its iron head in the years following the Civil War, the farming community of Garibaldi transformed into the mill town of Belmont. Mills became increasingly popular during the Reconstruction period, as plantation owners and entrepreneurs searched for a new way to earn a profit and for common people to find a living wage. R.L. Stowe was the first entrepreneur to bring the textile mills up the Catawba River to Belmont and secure a sustainable economy for his hometown. Belmontians lacked a stable payroll, like other surrounding towns. Although Gaston County was relatively detached from larger cotton plantations and the workings of slavery, the South as a whole laid in economic ruin.

Reconstruction-era entrepreneurs built textile mills along the edges of powerful, southern rivers to help restore the South's financial and economic integrity. A variety of

historians note the exclusion of northern industries as being the factor that led to southern rehabilitation and redevelopment.[3] Although society shifted toward industry, its people and their position in the community remained the same. Mill owners replaced the once all-controlling planters as the new elite class. Overseers of cotton fields became overseers of factory floors. And as for the poor white farmers and African-Americans, their low positions in the community also remained unchanged. The socioeconomic status of the people, however, was not the only aspect that remained the same.

Communal ties and the interdependent environment of the agrarian society continued into the factories. Between shared spaces, limited food, and exhausting work hours, the textile industry mimicked that of the previous agrarian one. Mill villages and factory floors became the new congregational areas, a reminder of farming town centers, fields, and churches. People shared commonalities in their work experiences in the factory as they had previously in times of harvest and planting. Although not alone in her argument, Jacquelyn Hall, in *Like a Family,* states, "Rural values and ways of life helped farmers-turned-millhands create a new industrial world in the Piedmont South."[4] However, other historians disagree with the notion that textile workers depended upon one another for assistance. Their arguments support textile workers as being individualistic.

Most writers and scholars of the textile industry between the 1920s and the 1970s find southern textile workers as having an ornate sense of individualism, which they

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[3] Broadus Mitchell, *The Rise of Cotton Mills in the South* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1921); W.J. Cash, *The Mind of the South* (New York: Vintage Books, 1941); C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951); George Tindall, *The Emergence of the New South 1913-1945* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1967); Holland Thompson, *From the Cotton Field to the Cotton Mill* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1906); Jacquelyn Hall, *Like a Family: The Making of a Southern Cotton Mill World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987).

[4] Hall, *Like a Family,* 43.

attribute to the supposed segregated and individualistic lifestyle of the farm. George Goog, the top American Federation of Labor official in the South, described southern textile workers in in the November 1928 issue of *American Federationist,* "The native Southerners of the small towns and country communities are traditionally independent on their own estimation, believing themselves sufficiently capable individually to take care of their own interests, and feeling that it is an admission of weakness to call upon their fellow workers for assistance or concerted action." [5] He explains further." The problem confronting the organizing of workers in the South is vastly different from that of any other section. The type of native worker, his environment, mental attitude and traditions tend to create extreme lethargy towards his own betterment, particularly relative to activity in the labor movements." [6] Others speak of southern textile workers' lack of community concerning the 1929 and 1934 textile strikes. Liston Pope writes in *Millhands and Preachers: A Study of Gastonia*, that workers were individualistic and only collaborated in short bursts, adding slightly to the argument that workers dealt with their employer individually.[7] W.J. Cash in *The Mind of the South*, argues that southerners proved incapable of coming together to prepare for a strike, or to even pay their union dues.[8] Another scholar, Robert Blauner, in his 1970 book, *Alienation and Freedom: The Factory Worker and His Industry*, states that southern workers had an extreme sense of individualism, boldly stating southern workers as being incapable of organizing collectively, except in the shortest forms of violence. [9] And finally, Irving Bernstein

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[5] George Googe, *American Federationist,* 35, (1928):1327.
[6] Ibid, 1327.
[7] Liston Pope, *Millhands and Preachers: A Study of Gastonia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1942).
[8] Cash, *The Mind of the South.*
[9] Robert Blauner, *Alienation and Freedom: The Factory Worker and His Industry* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 80, 87.

speaks the clearest to southern textile workers' individualistic nature and the reason the textile strikes failed as being: "His rural tradition, his ingrained individualism, his ignorance, his isolation, his restless mobility, his apathy, his poverty, his suspicions of northerners joined to impeded his capacity to act collectively."[10] These arguments support the theory that southerners depended upon northern influences to initiate and perpetuate the strikes of 1929 and 1934; southerners were incapable of fighting for themselves.[11]

Despite such efforts to claim textile workers as being individualistic, these arguments fail to note the overwhelming degree of paternalism and control found in the textile industry, which not only suppressed workers' ability to unionize but also unequivocally creating tighter family-like bonds between workers. To use extreme individualism to describe textile workers strips them of their autonomy, and overlooks the communal activities found within the industry, such as mill baseball games, mill villages, interdependency within work, and even the textile strikes themselves. Before textile mills, farmers depended on "a dense web of reciprocity and exchange," as Hall describes.[12] And although each family was charged with the responsibility to tend to their livestock and crops, the survival of the area depended on the larger interdependence of kith and kin. Additionally, during the textile strikes of 1929 and 1934, southerners were

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[10] Irving Bernstein, *The Lean Years: A History of the American Worker, 1920-1933* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1960), 40.
[11] Lynd Staughton, "*We Are All Leaders" The Alternative Unionism of the Early 1930s,* (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1995); Jeremy Brecher, *Strike!* (San Francisco: Straight Arrow Books, 1972); Thomas Tippet, *When Southern Labor Stirs* (New York: Jonathan Cape and Harrison Smith, 1931).
[12] Hall, *Like a Family,* 4

agents of their own change by marching from town to town in a group known as the Flying Squadron.[13]

The town of Belmont and the Chronicle Mill does not support the argument and theory of textile individualism due to the family-like bond and paternalistic control present in its community. Through a variety of oral history accounts, recorded histories, and pictures, one can see that it was due to the presence of paternalism, with R.L. Stowe as the father figure, that textile mills continued and even further perpetuated the formation of communities. With that said, the continual deconstruction of Belmont's textile mills, with emphasis on the Chronicle Mill, will have drastic ramifications on the city's community, memory, and interpretation of its past.

A building provides a sensual perception for a person to be able to form better connections with the past, and therefore, preservation is much more than just saving the integrity of a historic building; it is the preservation of history. Preservationist James Fitch argues that the historic landscape of the town act as a theater of memory.[14] He insists that one attaches memories to buildings to help solidify their understanding of the past. Other scholars in the field of preservation push Fitch's argument further, stating that the historic built environment prevents the formation of a "placeless society," one in which no communal bonds can be formed because no commonality remains. This idea of "placeless society" is most notable in the city of Charlotte, North Carolina since most of its historic buildings have been demolished to make room for new redevelopment. As for

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[13] Vincent J. Roscigno and William F. Danaher, *The Voice of Southern Labor: Radio, Music, and Textile Strikes, 1929-1934* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004); Patrick Huber, "Mill Mother's Lament" *Southern Cultures* 15, no. 3, (2009): 81-110. Patrick Huber, *Linthead Stomp: The Creation of Country Music in the Southern Piedmont* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008).
[14] James Fitch, *Historic Preservation: Curatorial Management of the Built World* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 2001).

the breakdown of community, scholars in history and psychology agree that the historic built environment aids place attachment. Psychologists Setha Low and Irwin Altman, for instances, suggest that "place attachment can develop social, material, and ideological dimensions, as individuals create ties to kin and neighbors, own or rent land, and participate in public life as residents of a particular community."[15]

Textile mills perpetuated the building of community and created present-day Belmont. They continue to support the town's identity in the wake of urban sprawl and this thesis highlights the impact historic buildings have in creating a sense of place, the continual formation of a communal identity, and the preservation of memory. The Chronicle Mill's preservation is more than just the saving of resources; it extends the current argument that historic buildings are worthy of preservation because of their ability to define who we are.

This thesis is divided into three additional chapters—the narrative of the textile industry, the Chronicle Mill's historic value in the present-day community and its critical position as a connecting link to reunite Belmont through its geographic position, its memory, and its role as an adaptively reused building. In chapter two, the Chronicle Mill's history reinforces the argument that interdependence and communal relationships lay at its heart, with roots in the region's agrarian society. Chapter three argues that the Chronicle Mill presently serves to connect downtown and East End Belmont, emphasizes the importance preservation has on a community and highlights the Chronicle's potential as a mixed-use or an adaptively-reused structure. It also explores the relationship between the built environment and memory along with the silence of remembered history and the effect memory has on preservation. An additional digital media outlet is available at

[15] Setha Low and Irwin Altman, *Place Attachment* (New York: Plenum Press, 1992).

http://allysonelizmiller.wix.com/thechroniclemill to provide aspects of the Chronicle's story, such as the oral interviews, videos, and music, as well as a marketing plan designed to encourage continued efforts, engagement, participation, and involvement in the newly preserved Chronicle Mill.

CHAPTER TWO: BUILDING A COMMUNITY BRICK BY BRICK

"No other area of North Carolina can tie its fortunes so directly to a single non-agriculture industry so completely….no other industry gave jobs and stability to so great a number of needy people as did the Southern cotton industry to the unemployed whites in the years after Reconstruction" argues historian Robert Allison Ragan, author of *The Textile Heritage of Gaston County, North Carolina 1848-2000*.[16] Whether it was the humming of the spindles and pulley belts or the promise of a stable paycheck that lured people into Belmont's first textile mill, the textile industry of the 1900s helped southerners recover from the transitional period following the Civil War. It was from these textile mills that Belmont transformed into a tighter, more connected community that is still visible today.

The Community Between Two Rivers

A century before the giant textile industry traveled up the river, however, the town of Belmont was a small plot of land nestled at the confluence of the South Fork and Catawba River, known as The Point (see figure 1). The first Anglo settlers arrived at the Point in 1750 by following the 'Great Wagon Road' south through the Shenandoah Valley. Of Scots-Irish and German descent, these settlers traversed North Carolina's

[16] Robert Ragan, *The Textile Heritage of Gaston County, North Carolina, 1848-2000: One Hundred Mills and the Men who Built Them* (Charlotte: R.A. Ragan & Company, 2001).

backcountry seeking cheaper land and a greater opportunity to farm. They chose to settle the Point due to its fertile soil and plentiful resources.

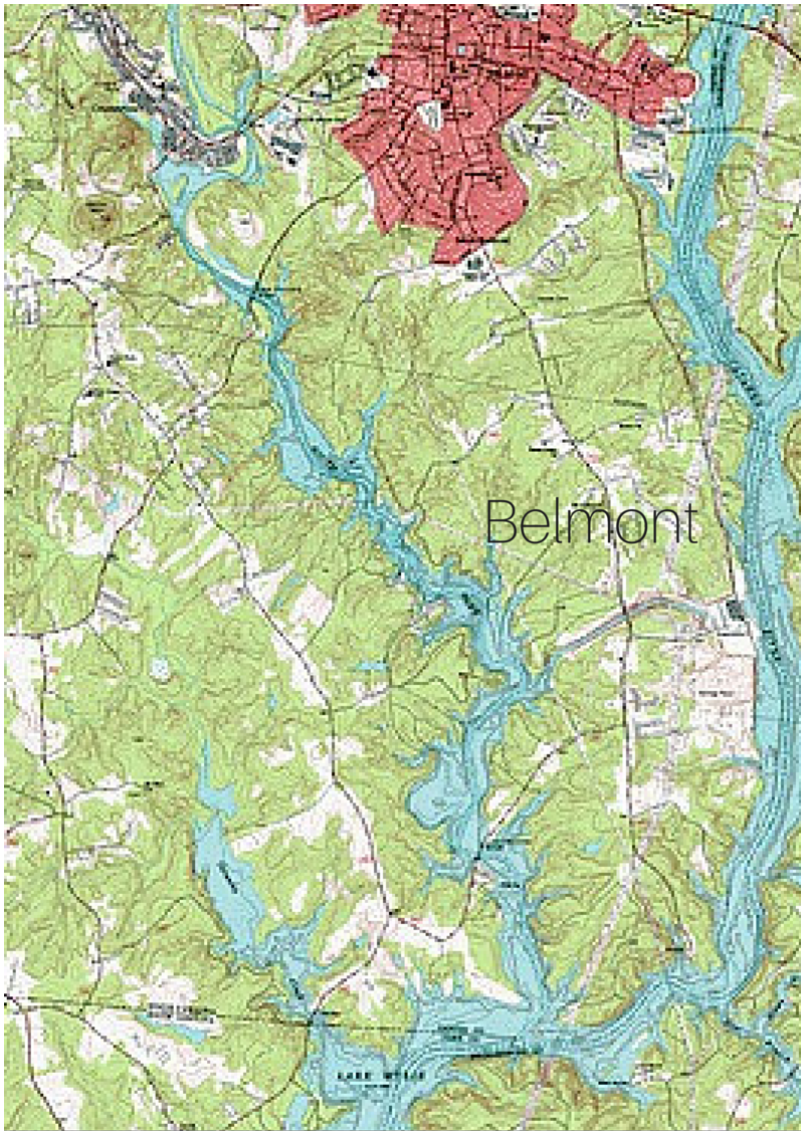

Figure 1: Location of the Point/Belmont between two rivers.
Source: "City of Belmont Map," Maps and GIS

The settlers developed an agrarian society within the Point, producing crops to support their family in the new region. The structure and gender divisions visible in the textile mills of the 1900s, with men working in the mills and women tending to the home and the children while also working twelve-hour shifts on the factory floor, are rooted in the gender-specific roles developed during the early agrarian days of the Point. The

men's role on the farm consisted of a majority of their time spent in the fields, harvesting the crops and tending to animals, while a woman's day included nurturing the family, preparing meals, sewing, and tidying the living spaces—until the harvest season brought them outside to help the men. In both societies, the industrial and agrarian, children were additional means of production, assisting with the household and farm work—later helping in the mills. These divisions in roles and understandings of responsibility were critical in the survival of the family—in both industries.

The agrarian society of the Point, later named Garibaldi, lasted for over a century until post-Civil War Reconstruction. The biggest need following the war was for Belmont to have an established, stable income and payroll for its people, who could not compete in sales against larger plantations still harvesting cotton. Fortunately, stability for the region was not far off as Robert L. Stowe and his brother opened the town's mercantile store. For several years, the Stowe brothers sold farming supplies of the community and heard the woes of many farmers who passed through their store. R.L. Stowe, author of a book on Belmont's early history, suggested before the textile industry, the residents of Belmont had no income. "When I came here and started in business, [payrolls] were about $115 a month."[17] The railway company was the only paying industry in the area. Railroad foremen received the most pay at $40.00 a month while the other section hands made less than $20.00. To Stowe, for a region like Belmont to prosper and grow, it needed a new industry. And his sought-after industry would be textiles.

[17] R.L. Stowe, *Early History of Belmont and Gaston County North Carolina*, (North Carolina: R.L. Stowe, 1951), 13.

The Chronicle Mill

At the start of the 1900s, R.L. Stowe garnered financial support in his textile endeavor from fellow Belmont townsmen. Bobby Brown, a Gaston County historian and long-time resident of Belmont, explains that the meeting of Belmont's first textile company was unique and unusual in the manner to which it was held:

> There was no buildings to meet in. The churches they thought were improper places to discuss business. The only other place was the store, the general store, and the schoolhouse. The school was in session, so they met for the organization of the Chronicle Mill, they met in the railway station; in the waiting room of the Southern railway station, and they formed a company to begin the investment process for the Chronicle Mill.[18]

The meeting itself was successful in accomplishing its objective: to build a mill and bring profits to Belmont. The men also agreed to name the first mill after Major William Chronicle, a Major in the Lincoln County Regiment during the American Revolution.[19]

> The community was very aware of the Chronicle family and their contribution to the war…the Battle of King's Mountain was a turning point…his [William Chronicle] being from here gives Belmont the direct connection with the successfulness of the American Revolution through Major William Chronicle…It was a very honorable title to name the mill. [20]

In 1901, construction of the Chronicle Mill broke ground near Garibaldi Station—a railroad station situated in the middle of present-day, downtown Belmont. The three-story, red brick mill followed the open concept design of other textile mills in the area, most notably the Loray Mill in Gastonia. But the mill operated on steam powered through a steam engine, rather than a large, powerful river (see figure 2 and 3). [21] R.L. Stowe

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[18] Bobby Brown, interview with Allyson Miller, Belmont Historical Society, Spring 2015.
[19] William Chronicle joined the army to spread freedom throughout the lower portion of the state, battling for the last time on October 7th, 1790 during the military campaign at the Battle of King's Mountain.
[20] Brown, interview, 2015.
[21] Although the Loray is much larger, consisting of six stories, the Chronicle Mill mimicked its structural design.

stated, "[I]t didn't cost so much to build a factory building back then."[22] Bricks cost $3.75 per thousand, and a mason's charge was $1.75 per thousand. Additionally, Stowe used heart of pine floor–"the best lumber of any mill in Belmont"—throughout the Chronicle.[23]

Another key component that set the Chronicle apart from surrounding mills was its use of a humidification machine. Lack of humidity was an issue that plagued early mills, as moisture was needed to pass cotton through the machines. The earliest technique was to produce steam using boiling pots of water positioned right next to the machines.[24] For the Chronicle Mill, however, it was the first to combat the issue of humidification. Willis Carrier, a young engineer and soon-to-be inventor of the air conditioner, ventured to the Chronicle Mill as part of his degree certification to work and improve upon the cotton manufacturing process. When he arrived, he began work on a humidification machine that used the condensation formed on the mill's ceiling pipes. His device used giant fans in the ceiling to blow the condensation into the air, spreading moisture and eliminating the need for steam created by boiling pots of water.[25] Although the initial purpose was to use the condensation droplets to ease the cotton manufacturing process, the combination of the mill's large windows and the occasional breeze produced a cooling effect. The success of this humidification machine at the Chronicle Mill lead Willis Carrier to perfect his machine and install it in other mills, as well as invent what we know today as the air conditioner.[26]

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[22] Stowe, *Early History,* 57.
[23] Ibid, 57.
[24] Robert Ragan, *Textile Heritage,* 132.
[25] Brown, Interview, 2015.
[26] Ragan, *Textile Heritage,*132.

As for the governing of the mill, the Chronicle followed the Rhode Island System. In the textile industry, there were two basic strategies employed to govern a mill, to organize the board of executives, and to hire workers: the Rhode Island system and the Waltham system. The Waltham system was most notable within northern textile mills. Mills under this system governed by a joint-stock organization, built boarding houses, and employed mostly women, whereas the Rhode Island system was most popular in the South. Southern mill owners used the Rhode Island system because of its three distinctive

Figure 2: Loray Firestone Mill in Gastonia, North Carolina
Source: Alan Millican Pictorial Museum

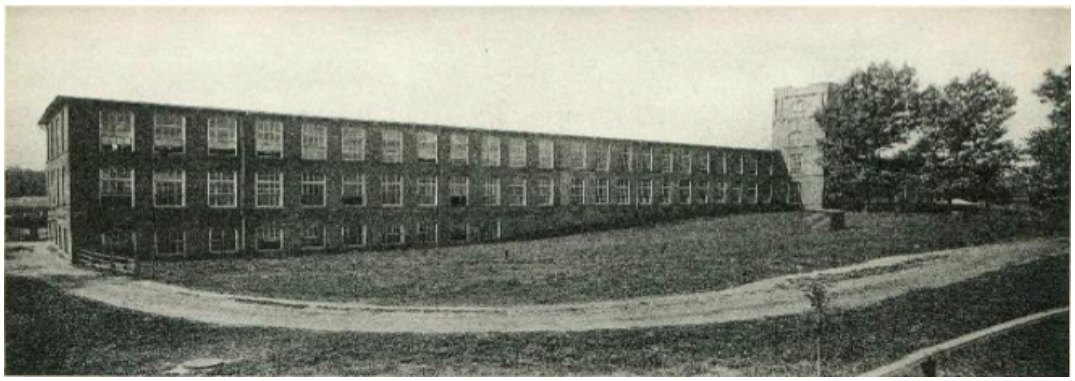

Figure 3: The Chronicle Mill in Belmont, North Carolina
Source: Alan Millican Pictorial Museum

traits: the mill operated on partnerships, built at sources of water, and is managed by one of the owners. As for the labor force, it consists of entire families, living in houses owned by the mill. The Rhode Island the most popular system option to follow due to the region's agrarian society roots—where families were already acquainted with performing collaborative work to ensure survival.[27]

Mill Life and the Community

The Chronicle Textile Mill Company began in 1902 with 5,000 spindles, winders, and twister machines spread throughout several rooms and floors. Manufacturing started in the opening room, where workers, predominately African-American, prepared bales of raw cotton for the carding machines. As explained by Jacquelyn Hall "because of the dust and the ever-present of danger of fire, this room was often located in an adjacent warehouse or in the basement of the mill."[28] Mill operatives mainly assigned African-Americans to this job to uphold the policy of segregation in the workplace. These workers unloaded cotton from the trains and transported it to the picker room. Pickers fluffed and cleaned the cotton as part of their job before it was able to pass it into the mill and through the carding machines (see figure 4).

[27] Ragan, *Textile Heritage,* 3.
[28] Hall, *Like a Family,* 49.

Figure 4: The Carding Machines. Noticed the pulley belts extending to the ceiling, this was the most dangerous part of working cards.
Source: Alan Millican Pictorial Museum in Belmont, NC

Card machines performed the task of pulling cotton between a maze of steel points to clean the fiber, align it, and prepare it to move into the next manufacturing phase.[29] Cotton was full of twigs and dirt that needed to be removed before being compacted into rope. Because of this, carding machines were designed with sharp teeth to pull cotton apart and clean out debris. Although an essential room, it was also the most dangerous area in the mill. Pulley belts extended from machines into drive shafts in the ceilings. In the rare chance a worker's clothing, arms, or hands became trapped in the belt during cleaning or adjustments, it caused detrimental damages. Max Robinson, a local Belmontian, shared a story of his great-grandfather who worked in the Sterling Mill (a mill in Belmont) in the early part of the 1900s. While working the card machine, the sleeve of his great grandfather's shirt became caught in a pulley, dragging him up to the

[29] Ragan, *Textile Heritage,* 420.

ceiling and back down again, resulting in his untimely death.[30] In addition to the danger, the room was also the loudest in the mill, with the noise and hum of the machinery heard throughout most of the town. Carol Trull, a Belmontian, reflected that "on Sunday it was almost eerily silent because the mills did not run."[31] The spinning, twisting, and winding rooms were areas of the mill where tasks and jobs became more tedious and detail oriented, requiring workers with smaller hands to "work the knotter."[32]

Rooms in the mill were not only divided based on machines and tasks but were also divided by race and gender. African American men worked outside, unloading bales of cotton. African American women found jobs outside the mill industry, washing clothes, or watching white mill workers children. White men worked in the most dangerous areas of the mill, requiring brute strength and endurance to keep the machines running, whereas white women labored with more tedious tasks, such as the ones present in the spinning and twisting rooms. Despite these initial gender divisions, there are accounts of white women blurring the gender line by performing jobs traditionally designated to men—especially in Belmont. Carol Trull recalls a woman by the name of Daisy Mae, who worked alongside men and dressed "just like a man, wearing overalls"—a radical outfit of choice for women in the early 1900s.[33] Other women, besides Daisy Mae, worked these jobs, like the grandmother of Belmont's Beverly Lineberger—the first woman to work in the carding room at the Chronicle Mill. The women who countered these gender norms are described as tough, man-like women. This rhetoric is used as a way to explain why these women were the exceptions to the standard status quo of the

[30] Max Robinson, interview with Allyson Miller, Belmont Historical Society, Spring 2015.
[31] Carol Trull, interview with Allyson Miller, Belmont Historical Society, Spring 2015.
[32] Brown, Interview, 2015.
[33] Trull, Interview, 2015.

mill rather than the expectation. Beverly Lineberger talks about her grandmother: "people tell me she was a tough woman. She worked but also kept house and did the cooking."[34] Hints of this merging of tasks are not, however, a new occurrence. This can be seen as early as the region's agrarian society, where women joined men in the fields to help harvest and plant crops.

As for children, before the passing of the Fair Labor Standards Acts in 1938, they found their way into the mills at an early age due to the South's Rhode Island System of governing. Mill operatives sought out entire families to fill positions, which included children. Hall states, "[C]hildren first learned about factory labor when they tagged along with a parent or sibling, carried hot meals to the mill at dinnertime, or stopped by after school."[35] Children spent most of their early days wandering in and out of mills, bringing their parents and siblings food during their twelve-hour shifts. Ethel Faucette, a former textile worker, in an interview with Jacquelyn Hall, explained that the mills dubbed the term 'helping' to describe the work younger children did during their older siblings' or parents' lunch break. It was a way for younger children to learn the trade and to be ready to enter the mill when they turned an appropriate age.[36] Red Joy, now approaching ninety years old, went to work in the Majestic Mill of Belmont when he was a teenager. "I started work when I was fourteen-years-old, my sister was twelve. When I joined the Navy, they asked me what I did, and I told them I was a spinning doffer, 'what the hell is a spinning doffer?' but if you went to ask the mills for a job, they would ask 'well, what can you do, work in the carding room, other places, or doff spinning?'"[37] Joy spent

[34] Beverly Lineberger, letter to Allyson Miller, Spring 2015.
[35] Hall, *Like a Family,* 61.
[36] Ibid, 61.
[37] Joy, Interview, 2015.

twenty-four years as a doffer in the spinning rooms, where he worked to remove full bobbin of finished twisted cotton and replace it with an empty bobbin. Children's early interactions guaranteed future workers for mill operatives.

Oftentimes, textile work did not demand a worker's entire attention. Many workers enjoyed small breaks in between changing bobbins or tying up yarn. Although not necessarily taxing, millwork was accompanied with an unpleasant environment. From the heat of the machines to the duration of work hours, mills had almost unbearable conditions. In interviews with Jacquelyn Hall, former mill workers of other North Carolina mills described the conditions as being, "...awful hot. All that machinery a-runnin making heat. It was bad. Terrible hot out here. You'd come out of there, your clothes was plumb wet."[38] Carol Trull described the heat of the Climax Mill of Belmont during the summertime as:

> [I] worked in the summer. Did not have air conditioning and the humidity was so bad. Most workers wore t-shirts and overalls breeches. Ten or fifteen minutes in, you were soaking wet. And I would doff twisters and those bobbins would get so wet from the sweat dripping off my nose…sometimes your hands would slip. But to me, it was sort of like a sport. When you got your body adjusted to it, you didn't even pay any attention, and most people who worked didn't it was something you knew. It was a cool sweat was not like the sun, but you were in a sweat box. [39]

Other accounts of working in the mill suggest that the machines became overheated and bumping into them would cause burns to the skin. But it was through the closeness of workers laboring in the mill and living in close proximity to each other in the mill villages that people survived less-than-ideal working conditions.

The textile mills helped foster a communal bond in Belmont. Doug Brewer, a Belmontian who spent his younger days in the Chronicle Mill village remembers the

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[38] Hall, *Like a Family,* 62.
[39] Trull, Interview, 2015.

atmosphere of the town during the mill industry. "Someone was always trading tomatoes."[40] After work, people would return to their village to prepare dinner, and spend the evening sharing stories, memories, and song with one another. "No one ever stayed in their houses; they were always sitting on their porches together telling stories."[41] The community, like other mill towns in the area, also spent their time in sporting events, such as baseball. Mill owners selected workers who were the best at the sport to play on their team and compete against other mills in town. During the summertime, there were always friendly rivalry games taking place, bringing the entire town to the baseball field to root for their mill (see figure 5).

As textile mills grew in popularity and success throughout the 1910s, Belmont's businessmen began to open more mills in the town. More workers poured in from the mountains and in the upper parts of South Carolina to find work in the mills. Belmont's population grew, just like in other mill towns, as did mill owners' earnings. The increase in production led to the further distancing of earnings of wealthy mill owners and wages of workers. With these divisions in socioeconomic and living conditions becoming more apparent, the notion of striking slowly moved into the foreground of many workers' minds. In northern mill towns and absentee landlord southern mills, workers met openly to air their grievances and discuss the possibility of walkouts and strikes.

[40] Doug Brewer, interview with Allyson Miller, Belmont, North Carolina, 2015.
[41] Trull, Interview, 2015.

Figure 5: The Acme Mill Baseball Team in 1955.
Source: Alan Millican Pictorial Museum in Belmont, NC

In 1929, sparks of revolts ignited throughout the north and south. Waves of workers walked out of their mills, refusing to return until mill owners acknowledged their demands and improved working conditions. Dick Reavis, contemporary historian and author of the introductory section for the 1930's *Southern Workers Newspaper*, speaks of the impoverished conditions in the Loray Mill in Gastonia, as: "In 1929, Loray's white employees were laboring 55-66 hours per week for $12-$20, while their children worked 55-60 hours for as little as $5 per payday."[42] It was the absentee landlords and the refusal to recognize the poor quality of life in the mills that had most workers up in arms.

The southern textile strikes of 1929 and 1934 are where scholars divide on the characteristics and capabilities of southern mill workers. One group of historians argue that textile workers, being individualistic in nature, were incapable of initiating the textile strikes, except for in small bursts of anger. Their argument supports the notion that the National Trade Workers Union and others from the North had to muster southern workers

[42] Dick Reavis, "Introduction," *Southern Exposure*, January 1, 2012.

into action, and even then could not sustain the strikes due to the workers' lack of willpower.[43] Alternatively, historians like Jacquelyn Hall argue that southerners were capable of coming together due to their closely-formed communities to strike for improved working conditions, as seen in southern textile workers groups known as the Flying Squadron. This school of thought notes that the NTWU was involved in the strikes, but had minimal influence.[44]

The strike of 1929 began at the end of March, with the arrival of the NTWU to Gastonia. The Loray Mill, a monstrous production with six floors and over 600,000 square feet, was the ideal choice for a union headquarters as the mill was full of dissenting textile workers. Loray workers demanded better treatment from their absentee landlords, Manville and Jenkes, and together with the NTWU walked out of the mills in protest on April 1st. They demanded their owners recognize their union and agree to their demands being for five fired workers to be rehired, an end to piecework, a five-day-work-week with a $20 weekly wage, and more cost-efficient housing (see figure 6). [45] As suspected, Manville and Jenkes refused to acknowledge these demands and responded by calling on the North Carolina governor, Max Gardner, to send the National Guard. Within two days time, the National Guard arrived in Gastonia arresting ten workers the first day. The 1929 strike lasted roughly three months. Workers proclaimed that their only option

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[43] Janet Irons, *Testing the New Deal: The General Textile Strike of 1934 in the American South* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2000); George Googe, *American Federationist,* 35, (1928):1327; Liston Pope, *Millhands and Preachers: A Study of Gastonia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1942); Robert Blauner, *Alienation and Freedom: The Factory Worker and His Industry* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 80, 87; Irving Bernstein, *The Lean Years: A History of the American Worker, 1920-1933* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1960), 40;

[44] Vincent J. Roscigno and William F. Danaher, *The Voice of Southern Labor: Radio, Music, and Textile Strikes, 1929-1934* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004); Patrick Huber, "Mill Mother's Lament" *Southern Cultures* 15, no. 3, (2009): 81-110. Patrick Huber, *Linthead Stomp: The Creation of Country Music in the Southern Piedmont* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008); Hall, *Like a Family*, 1987.

[45] Piecework is work paid by the rate of doing a specified job.

was to return to the mill, as they needed a source of income. Historians who believe southerners incapable of collectively coming together use the 1929 textile strike as their main example to support their claim.

Figure 6: National Guardsmen outside the NTWU headquarters with a sign for the Union's demand.
Source: Alan Millican Pictorial Museum in Belmont, NC

Although the strike of 1929 ended without much cause for celebration among mill workers, the hostility and resentment towards absentee landlords and the worker's plight continued. Five years later, the call to strike came once more in Gastonia on September 3, 1934—Labor Day. 20,000 workers walked out of the mills in Gastonia, spreading the message to other southern mills that it was time to demand improvement to working conditions. Through September and into October, the strikes rallied an estimated 400,000 southern mill workers. Southerners were more involved in this strike, banding together to march and spread the revolt throughout the South. The 1934 strike itself supports the argument that southerners were agents of their own change, by emphasizing the collaboration and sense of community present in these marching mill workers, known as

Flying Squadrons. During both strikes, however, Belmont, just ten miles shy of Gastonia, never became dramatically involved.

Paternalism shrouded Belmont behind a veil, secluding and sheltering its people from outside influences. Belmont's mill owners who lived in the town were members of churches, had children that attended school alongside mill owners' children, and were active members of the community. Unlike Gastonia and the Loray Mill, Belmont's mill workers were accustomed to seeing their mill owner make rounds through the various mill buildings. They were acquaintances, friends, and above everything else, father figures to the workers—providing them living accommodations, food, and a stable income. Although Red Joy was just a young boy at the time of the 1934 strike, he remembers the town marching just once towards the yarn mill located in East End. He admitted that although the group gathered together, they quickly disbanded with the arrival of the National Guardsmen. (see figure 7). Belmontians continued working in their respective mills, and never caused a large amount of trouble for the guardsmen. As Red described the incidents that occurred throughout the months of the strike, it seemed as if the guardsmen were searching for reasons to remain in the town. Red recalled one incident when his neighbor did not obey a guardsman's command to turn in for the night quick enough. His neighbor, who was sitting on his porch, moved too slowly back into his home for the guardsmen, calling for him to throw the man into his home and stabbing him with a bayonet. Another incident that Red shared of the strike was when a window was broken in the mill. Guardsmen tried to place blame on the workers, accusing them of attempting to sabotage the integrity of the mill. However, people discovered glass on the lawn outside of the mill, implying that the only way a window could break was from the

inside—an area only accessible by guardsmen at the time.[46] In these glimpses of history, one can see that the closeness of community and workers relations with their mill owners—Belmont's founding fathers—protected the town from much violence.

Figure 7: National Guard posted in front of the yarn mill in Belmont.
Source: Alan Millican Pictorial Museum

The textile strike of 1934 ended six months after it began without many changes made. The NTWU relocated to Washington D.C. to lobby for workers' rights in Congress, and striking textile workers begged for their jobs back. The Chronicle's role during the strikes, however, reinforces the historiography. Paternalism played a direct role limiting strike efforts in Belmont as compared to neighboring towns like Gastonia who had outside ownership. Although paternalism was present in absentee landlord mills, the difference for Belmont was the immediate control and intimidation citizens felt because of their close proximity to their mill owners. The notion of individualism applies only to the town as a whole. With the shroud of paternalism, Belmont removed itself from the events happening just ten miles away. The community formed within Belmont

[46] Joy, Interview, 2015.

between workers and mill owners prevented the outbreak of a strike. It was only until workers and other community members fully escaped the veil of paternalism during World War II that resistance towards the town's mill owners began.

The Effects of War on the Home Front

On December 7, 1941, the textile industry and the United States faced tumultuous change to its environment. The country had just entered into World War II and with that came significant reconfiguring of the region. In Belmont, stores closed early to save resources and conserve energy. Additionally, strong, able-bodied men were called into action and drafted into the military. This left women, children, and those unable to fight to continue textile manufacturing. During this period, gender was not seen as a divider for mill tasks. Mill owners needed women to cover jobs particularly carried out by men to keep the mills operational. And although women proved worthy to perform the same jobs as men during this time, when the men returned from war they were forced back into their gender-specific duties. But other changes would come when the war ended, and the men returned home.

Many returning soldiers reentered and went back to their normal lives before the war, but some did not. Some returning soldiers felt that "the hard experiences of war had changed their outlook. Some no longer wanted to go back to the cardrooms and spinning frames or to live on the mill village hills. Some resented what they considered a lack of representation in government. They felt it was time to replace the old familiar faces of the 'city fathers' with younger faces, replac[ing] old ideas with new [ones.]"[47] Having escaped the paternalistic cloth and gaining life experience outside the mills, these men felt it was time that others had a chance to hold power in Belmont—to unseat the mill

[47] Ross Yockey, *Between Two Rivers* (Belmont: City of Belmont, 1996) 142.

owners, to dismantle the all-controlling paternalistic founding fathers. But this political reconstructing would not be the only change that followed the war.

Toward the latter half of the 1970s and into the 1980s, Belmont's textile industry stagnated. Belmont in the first half of the century witnessed the construction of approximately twenty mills. Since the 1950s, only seven mills had been built in the town, with the last one constructed in 1984 by R.L. Stowe III. Inheriting the Stowe Mill Company from his grandfather, Stowe III worked to regenerate the industry. His new mill, named in honor of the company's longest employed mill worker—Raymond S. Helms—created 180 new jobs. This mill, however, failed due to Belmont's growing population and increasing overseas competition. Bobby Brown commented that although he grew up in the mill villages, and his parents worked in the mills the majority of their lives, he did not pursue employment in the textile industry.[48] With encouragement from a former high school teacher, Brown attended college and received his Bachelor's degree, allowing him to find work outside of North Carolina. Other Belmontians, like Carol Trull and Red Joy, grew up in mill villages and worked in the mills, yet ventured into other professions, such as postal service work. The Belmont textile industry waned.

To address declining profits, several mill owners like the Lineberger Company sold their mills –the Acme, Acme II—to the Parkdale Company in Gastonia. S.P Stowe also sold his mills – Majestic, Climax and Stowe Thread –to the Parkdale Company. These transactions were the first in town history; no other non-local company owned a mill in Belmont before the 1970s. The R.L. Stowe Company, the great paternalist of them all, tried desperately to maintain economic stability for their mills; however, cheaper non-American-made textiles and the approval of NAFTA in 1994 destroyed competition for

[48] Brown, Interview, 2015.

locally manufactured products. In an unavoidable move, R.L. Stowe III decided to consolidate the company's assets, closing almost all of his grandfather's mills in a span of ten years. The R.L Stowe Company ended in 2006 and what it meant to live in a mill town changed forever.

The textile industry in Belmont no longer contributed to the city's economic growth. From the eroding away of paternalism following World War II to NAFTA's implementation in 1994, Belmontians increasingly found employment in other trades. The identity created by the textile industry soon vanished in Belmont. If not careful, however, more than just identity could vanish from Belmont with the ending of the textile industry. According to scholar Robert Putnam in his book *Bowling Alone,* people's relations hinge on two types of social capital: bonding and bridging.[49] He insists that bridging occurs when people become acquainted to people who do not have similarities, whereas bonding is becoming friends with people of the same background. However, bonding in a community setting lays the foundation for bridging. Putnam suggests the failure to bond ultimately causes problems with bridging. For Belmont, the breakdown of community bonding with the ending of the textile industry and the demolition of several of the town's mills could cause ethnic conflicts and further identity crisis. Luckily, this breakdown has not occurred in Belmont due to the community-wide activities, such as city parades, open-invitational city meetings, Friday night live concerts, and the preservation of its historic structures.

Progress takes different shapes and forms, oftentimes depending on the level of communal bond in a city. In metropolitan Charlotte, city planners believe that to improve,

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[49] Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone,* (New York: Simon & Schuster Paperback, 2000).

the city needs new infrastructure. New buildings replace old ones, and the historical landscape of the city is demolished. In Belmont, however, people understand progress as remembering their roots and staying connected to the past. The next chapter will explore the geographic positioning of the Chronicle Mill, and its service as a connecting link between the old and new community of Belmont.

CHAPTER THREE: THE CONNECTING LINK BETWEEN TWO RIVERS

If one were to drive through Belmont in the years following 2006, the remnants of the textile industry would barely be visible. The bricks of the old Chronicle Mill would exhibit signs of age with its gutters full of rust and the grass growing wildly. Despite its dilapidated appearance, however, the Chronicle's legacy in developing Belmont's community, the memory attached to the structure, as well as it serving as a connecting link between the town's two divided commercial districts are reasons for its continued presence in the town's local geography.

The Chronicle Mill presently resides on Catawba Street, a stone's throw away from both downtown Belmont and East End—two separate commercial districts. Its structure serves as the dividing line between these two sides of Belmont, a division that town officials have tried to reconnect for some time. The area surrounding the Chronicle resembles a scattering of a few remaining mill houses, but nothing more. Belmont's great textile mills that once encompassed the town are mostly gone, leaving only three to keepsake the memory. To provide room for the throngs of people seeking residence in this newly transformed bedroom community, textile mills and mill houses were demolished, signaling the end of Belmont's need of the textile industry and the town's transition into modernity.

Between 2000 and 2012, Belmont's population increased nineteen percent, from 8,794 to 10,492. [50] However, the geographical positioning of its residents resembles that of the early textile industry. New families flock to Belmont proper, seeking housing in closer proximity to the downtown district—many residing in historic mill houses. This is similar to the story of the early 1900s, when textile mills promised a new life and community for farmers. Also, the racial divides in Belmont still carry over from the days of the segregated textile industry, as most African American families still reside on the outskirts of the town. However, that is where the story ends. People no longer seek to reside in Belmont for the sake of financial stability and wellbeing. Instead, they establish a residence in the small town and commute to work in Charlotte. The appeal and lure of the textile industry are gone from the town of Belmont, and with it, its people's unifying identity.

To brace for the arrival of 'outsiders' and to still hold community values and history close, Belmont's City Council voted to participate in the North Carolina Main Street program run by the North Carolina Department of Commerce in 2010. The Department of Commerce designed the program as a way to help small areas, like Belmont, keepsake their history while still promoting economic development through historic preservation. For Belmont, the message was simple: "downtown Belmont is weaving a history of active local living with garden to table dining, diverse outdoor recreational opportunities and family-friendly entertainment."[51] Belmont undertook a monumental task of preserving downtown Main Street, restoring many of its buildings to

[50] "Belmont, North Carolina," *Citi-data,* http://www.city-data.com/city/Belmont-North-Carolina.html, accessed 4/22/15

[51] Belmont's Main Street Program, *Social Networking*, http://www.cityofbelmont.org/Departments/PlanningandZoningDepartment/MainStreetProgram.aspx.

their original characteristics (see figures 8, 9, 10). Buildings like the Belmont Hotel, which served as a place for people to gather during the early days of Belmont when it was still known as Garibaldi, underwent restoration, including transforming the building

Figure 8: View of Main Street in Belmont, NC with its trees and refinished front façades. Source: City of Belmont and the North Carolina Main Street program.

Figure 9: Front façade of Stowe Mercantile Store newly painted. Source: City of Belmont and the North Carolina Main Street program.

Figure 10: The Belmont Hotel with its three businesses located in the bottom floor.
Source: City of Belmont and the North Carolina Main Street program.

Figure 11: East End barren landscape
Source: North Carolina Main Street Program for Belmont.

Figure 12: Plain façades in East End
Source: North Carolina Main Street Program for Belmont.

into a mixed-use venue with space for three commercial businesses. The town planted greenery, repainted buildings' old bricks, and even restored a Coca-Cola advertisement painted on the side of a building in the 1970s with the slogan, "It's the Real Thing." This new revitalization of Main St. Belmont suggests, however, that the downtown district is transitioning away from its historic industrial society. This is evident due to the lack of restoration efforts made to preserve the town's textile mills. Instead of industry, downtown Belmont now serves as place for people to shop and eat in a historic town outside the larger city of Charlotte.

Unfortunately for East End, the smaller of the two commercial districts, many of its façades remain plain and its landscape barren, primarily consisting of remnants of textile mills and mill houses with few shops lining a small section of the street. Although known for housing the town's largest textile mills, Belmont officials had not yet concentrated on revitalizing East End. The Department of Commerce insisted Belmont

not forget all of its historic landscapes: "Your built environment is part of your cultural heritage, and is worthy of preservation."[52]

As to why such importance should be placed on these old structures in Belmont, specifically in East End, cuts to the very nature of identity and our place in a society. By caring for the historic built environment, Belmont can prevent a "placeless" society from forming—a prediction many historians say will occur in the wake of urban sprawl and the continued development of commercial landscapes. An example of this phenomenon is the great banking city of Charlotte. After decades of gentrification, most dominant in the 1960s and 1970s, much of Charlotte's historic buildings disappeared to make room for redevelopment. Devoid of history and sense of attachment, Charlotte residents search for inhabitants in smaller towns, like Belmont. As described by Dolores Hayden in "Urban Landscape History: The Sense of Place and the Politics of Space," people are searching for locations that give them a sense of place and spatial perception.[53]

Belmont's historic built environment offers its residents the chance to connect with one another and form communal alliances. Just as the mills brought people together for baseball games, parades, and community gatherings—textile mills can do so again by being adaptively reused in the current landscape. To preserve Belmont's textile mills will keepsake the community and identity that the textile industry created. As argued by Donald Meinig, landscapes are "at once a mould and a mirror of the society that creates them."[54] To raze or let the mills fall into despair would cause Belmontians to no longer feel a sense of attachment to the town's founding history. Such occurred in the 1970s and

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[52] Ibid
[53] Dolores Hayden, *Urban Landscape History: The Sense of Place and the Politics of Space* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1997).
[54] Donald Meinig and John Jackson, *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes: Geographical Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 112.

1980s in Belmont when people began to move away from the textile industry. The sense of identity and shared hardship in Belmont slowly declined along with the closing of the town's twenty-six mills. Presently, with the continued destruction of mills, Belmont's population will continue to drift away from its textile heritage. Not only does this detach the town from its former identity and commonality, it also disrupts the memory tied to the historic built environment.

Fleeting Memories of the Built Environment

What is memory? As defined by scholars Kenneth Foote and Maoz Azaryahu, "Memory is related to the objective notion of "history" but is often a selectively embellished or mythologized version of events, people, and places that serves social or political ends."[55] Memories are malleable objects that attach themselves to the built environment and determine the worthiness of historic preservation.[56] For the Chronicle and Belmont's textile industry, the sentimental memories expressed by its residents are the primary motivation for the mill's preservation. Belmont's city council feels pressure to preserve these historic structures based on the public's sentimental attachment to the past.

Memories themselves are not static beings; they are continuously redefined to match the public's current interpretation of the past, and to apply that interpretation to today's built landscape. For the Chronicle Mill, its current interpretation and memory in the public's eye are one that would unite the city's identity as a historic textile community. From the point of view of historian David Glassberg people possess a "sense

[55] Kenneth Foote and Maoz Azaryahu, "Toward a Geography of Memory: Geographical Dimensions of Public History and Commemoration," *Journal of Political and Military Sociology,* 35, 1 (2007): 126.
[56] Melinda Milligan, "Buildings as History: The Place of Collective Memory in the Study of Historic Preservation," *Society for the Study of Symbolic Interaction,* 30, 1 (2007): 106.

of history," and with that comes their identity. Glassberg believes that for people to have a deep sense of history, they must have a connection to a particular place and that knowing what occurred in certain locations creates a sense of belonging to the community. Additionally, it is this sense of history that attaches emotions to the built environment.[57]

Other historians support Glassberg's argument, suggesting historical structures are monuments of identity and, over time, people develop emotional bonds and connections with structures.[58] Scholar Maria Lewicka explains the connection as psychological, in which the bond between a person and building is "a prerequisite of psychological balance and good adjustment, that it helps to overcome identity crises and gives people the sense of stability they need in the ever-changing world."[59] To her, "no matter how mobile a person may be, some form of attachment to a place is always present in our life."[60] The Chronicle Mill's preservation acts as an anchor, connecting a person to their identity and separating them from others. It is for this sake–the sake of identity and a sense of history—that Belmont looks to preserve her historic structures.

The preservation and memory of the Chronicle Mill furthers these historians' views on historic structures serves as a way for people to define their identity based on their past, while additionally demonstrating the malleable nature of memories to reflect

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[57] David Glassberg, *Sense of History,* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 2001).
[58]Nathan Wachtel, "Memory and History: Introduction," *History and Anthropology* 12 (1986): 207-224; Tom Hayes, "Why do Places Matter? Memory," *Preservation Leadership Forum*, (2013); F. Kaid Benfield, "Why Historic Buildings Matter to the Environment," *Huffington Post*, 2012; Steven Hoelscher and Derek H. Alderman, "Memory and Place: Geographies of Critical Relationships," *Social and Cultural Geography,* 5 (2004): 349-351;
Joe DePriest, "Saving Gastonia's Loray Mill," *Charlotte Observer*, 2012; Pierra Nora, "Between Memory and History," *Representations,* 26 (1989): 7.
[59] Maria Lewicka, "Place Attachment, place identity, and place memory: Restoring the forgotten city past," *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 28 (2008), 211-213.
[60] Ibid, 212

the public's current feeling towards a structure. Based on oral history accounts, Belmont's citizens urge the city to preserve the old mill because it provides the city a sense of identity in the wake of urban sprawl and commercial redevelopment. It is through their political and social influences to preserve their history that nostalgic memories of the textile industry redefine the Chronicle's narrative. Memories from residents like Carol Trull, Bobby Brown, Doug Brewer, and others overflow with sentimental yearnings of an early time in Belmont's past. As Glassberg suggests, however, the political involvement and agenda in inventing a sense of history cause dissemination of some stories of events and repression of others.

The accounts and stories told about Belmont's textile industry are full of compassion, nostalgia, yearning, and appreciation while repressing the challenging nature and conflicts once present in the textile mills. Examples of this are present in several memories and oral histories from Belmont locals. Bobby Brown describes R.L. Stowe as benevolent and an influential role as a father figure rather than a capitalistic mill owner.[61] Stowe is remembered for bringing Belmont into the industrial age, his work to supply poor farmers with housing and a paycheck, and his kindness. To Carol Trull, "The mill company was good for the people. I never thought that they did anything wrong. They provided a good living for us, [and] we always appreciated that."[62]

Other memories, including of the textile strikes, still present a nostalgic narrative of the textile mills. The long hours working the looms are remembered by Carol Trull and Max Robinson as almost leisurely. The men explained that workers were conscious of when the bobbins needed changing, or the loose ends of the yarn had to be tied, allowing

[61] Brown, Interview, 2015.
[62] Trull, Interview, 2015.

them to take breaks and sit down throughout the day. Trull and Robinson give the reason for the job title doffer, meaning to "doff off" or lounge around. Trull commented that one could find most of the Majestic Mill's doffers across the street playing pool during their shifts and that all it took was a yell from the supervisor to come change the bobber.[63] Trull's memory of racing down the mill on a doffing cart, or the jokes the workers played on each other, such as the supervisor asking for Trull to fetch a bobbin stretcher, changes the narrative of the mill's strict environment and supervisor's harsh discipline.[64] Other memories suggest that the mills provided its workers with snacks for their breaks on a mobile vending machine known as a dope wagon. The wagon was wheeled around to different departments with candy, sodas, and medicine—hence the name for the wagon when workers poured BC powder into the Coca-Cola drinks for faster relief of headaches. In the memories of these oral accounts, the mill had a more relaxed environment.

This transformative nature of memories is due to how we remember. Humans are not able to provide a replicated copy of an experience because our memories change based on the meaning of the experience. Applied to the oral accounts of Belmont's textile industry, one can see that the positive experiences are more remembered over time, strengthening the political and social pressure to preserve historic structures. In addition, it is also the art of forgetting that shapes the historical narrative. Many oral accounts remember the good more than the bad. In the documentary *Uprising of 1934* discussing the textile strike of the 1930s, many of those interviewed repress memories of the strike,

[63] Ibid
[64] Trull, Interview, 2015.

creating a sense of forgotten history.[65] To them, to speak about the strike during the 1930s could have lead to more unpleasant events, such as termination and removal from their home. But even today, the silence embedded during the textile strike is still present, creating challenges and difficulties some sixty years later. Over the course of several years, however, the silence led to the forgetting of the bad to remember the good.[66] Examples of memory repression are even present in the oral accounts in Belmont.

Segregation was present in Belmont's mills until the Civil Rights Movement of 1964. Mill owners restricted people of color from working inside the mills with their fellow white counterparts. This discrimination caused significant economic hardships for many African-American families and even forced them to search for housing beyond Belmont proper. African-American males labored outside of the textile mills, sometimes in harsh weather elements, or they found work in machine repair shops to try and earn a paycheck. As for African-American women, they found work watching the children of the mill workers, completely separate from the rest of the textile community. However, the memory of Anna Young, the first African-American elected to the Belmont city council in 1981, presents a positive remembrance of the textile industry. Young recalled that her mother needed work, so she approached R.L. Stowe, who put her in charge of preparing the Christmas baskets for his textile workers. She labored for three weeks, filling the baskets with ham, fruits, and small toys for children. For Anna Young, her memories reflect the caring nature of R.L Stowe, and her family's involvement in the community, in which she stated, "It didn't matter what color we were, we were part of

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[65] *The Uprising of '34*, Directed by George Stoney (1995; PBS), DVD.
[66]Gary Kirby, Jeffery Goodpaster, and Marvin Levine, *Critical Thinking* (Upper Saddle River: Pearson Education Company, 1999).

the fabric in some way."[67] To Anna, Stowe gave her mother a job and the experience of watching her mom prepare the Christmas baskets left a positive memory. However, Anna Young's memory of the textile industry represses the memory of segregation, in which R.L. Stowe's benevolence did not extend to providing her mother a job in the mill.

Memories are shaped and changed to fit the current model of today. As explained by David Lowenthal, "Some aspects of the past are celebrated, others expunged, as each generation reshapes its legacy in line with current needs."[68] Our memories integrate into the present-day environment, causing them to change to fit contemporary objectives. The objective of many Belmont residents is to preserve the city's historic structures; without buildings, many residents fear their identity, history, and memory will vanish.

The consensus of scholars is that historical significance and impact of memory plays a large role in the preservation of a historic structure. But these structures also contribute to the keepsaking of memory by serving as an anchor of the past. Historian Tom Mayes asserts that "places serve as a mnemonic aid—they remind us of our memories, both individual, and collective…".[69] Historic buildings help root people in their community. Scholar Richard Sennett argues that as commercial redevelopment spreads, our sense of "attachment and engagement with specific places is dispelled… and the accumulation of shared history, and of collective memory, diminishes…".[70] Preserving the Chronicle Mill will act as a repository of memory for the community's

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[67] Anna Young, Interview by Jeff Mason, video recording, Belmont City Council, April 24, 2014.
[68] David Lowenthal, *Past is Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 11.
[69] Tom Mayes, "Why do Places Matter? Memory," *Preservation Leadership Forum,* (2013), http://blog.preservationleadershipforum.org/2013/12/04/old-places-matter-memory/#.Vwh96BMrLq0.
[70] Richard Sennett, "New Capitalism, New Isolation: A Flexible City of Strangers" *Le Monde Diplomatique* (2000).

early textile days. It will secure Belmont's identity as a historic textile community, and it will give people a sense of their history.

The Chronicle Mill's preservation also provides an opportunity to highlight the significance older structures can have in connecting people to their community and their town's identity. To preserve the Chronicle would not "arrest time, but to mediate sensitively with the forces of change" as explained by John Lawrence, former dean of Tulane's School of Architecture. Also, preservation is a justifiable future for the Chronicle because of its ability to represent both a noun and verb—terms coined by Norman Tyler in his work *Historic Preservation: An Introduction to its History, Principles and Practices.* Tyler defined buildings as nouns based on their physical structure acting as significance.[71] The Chronicle Mill would serve as a noun because of its physical space in the community. It is significant because it was the first of the textile mills and due to its unique design of operating on steam power instead of water. Tyler would also suggest that the Chronicle is significant due to its function as a verb, in which the mill symbolizes the events of the industry, such as the strikes and community activity. It is the tandem working of both noun and verb that gives the most recognizable reason for the Chronicle Mill's preservation.

Old places like the Chronicle Mill root us in time, "giving us a sense of security and safety" as Juhani Pallasmaa "Dwelling of Time" an article in the forum of *Why Old Places Matter.* [72] For Belmontains, the Chronicle Mill's preservation provides a direct connection to Belmont's past, but also a connection to the community itself. The Chronicle Mill's preservation would reconnect downtown Belmont and East End. Bobby

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[71] Norman Tyler, Ted Ligibel, and Ilene Tyle, *Historic Preservation: An Introduction to its History, Principles, and Practices,* (New York: W.W Norton & Company Inc., 2009), 15.
[72] Juhani Pallasmaa, "Dwelling of Time," *Forum Journal* 29, 3, (2015): 21.

Brown stated that he believed the rehabilitation of the Chronicle Mill will "serve as a bow to tie Belmont together again."[73] The Chronicle Mill, situated on Catawba Street, built the Belmont over a century ago. It now has the opportunity to do so again, by serving as a mixed-use venue and uniting Belmont.

The current owner of the Chronicle Mill, John Church, seeks to restore the mill to its original construction, removing any additions to the mill's original structure. Church plans to revitalize the mill into a mixed-use venue for future businesses and entertainment venues. By converting the mill into a multiple-use building, Church plans to continue Belmont's theme of a place for families to congregate, eat, and shop down Catawba street and into East End. Due to the Chronicle's location in the middle of downtown Belmont and East End, it serves as a much-needed linchpin to connect the two commercial districts together. The plan is to use the Chronicle as an additional place for people to "mix, mingle, and mill about," while keeping the textile history of Belmont alive.[74] It can accomplish the objective of linking the two commercial districts, because it can serve as a shopping district like in downtown Belmont, while also promoting the history of the textile industry as most notably seen in East End.

The plan for the Chronicle, the three-story building, is to divide each floor into useable business spaces, with enough room for large groups of people to gather. The lower level, the cold basement, has the possibility to be transformed into a local brewery, using the cool temperatures to help ferment beer. The main floor of the Chronicle could be used as a meeting and conference room area, with plenty of space for business to set up shop for people, whereas the top levels to be converted in a hotel space (see figure

[73] Brown, Interview, 2015.
[74] http://chroniclemill.com/transformation-vision/impact/

13). The outside section of the Chronicle is large enough to host concerts and other outdoor functions, which are both frequent during the summer months in Belmont. The Chronicle's restoration could assist the city in revamping the historic district, extending it from downtown Belmont into East End.

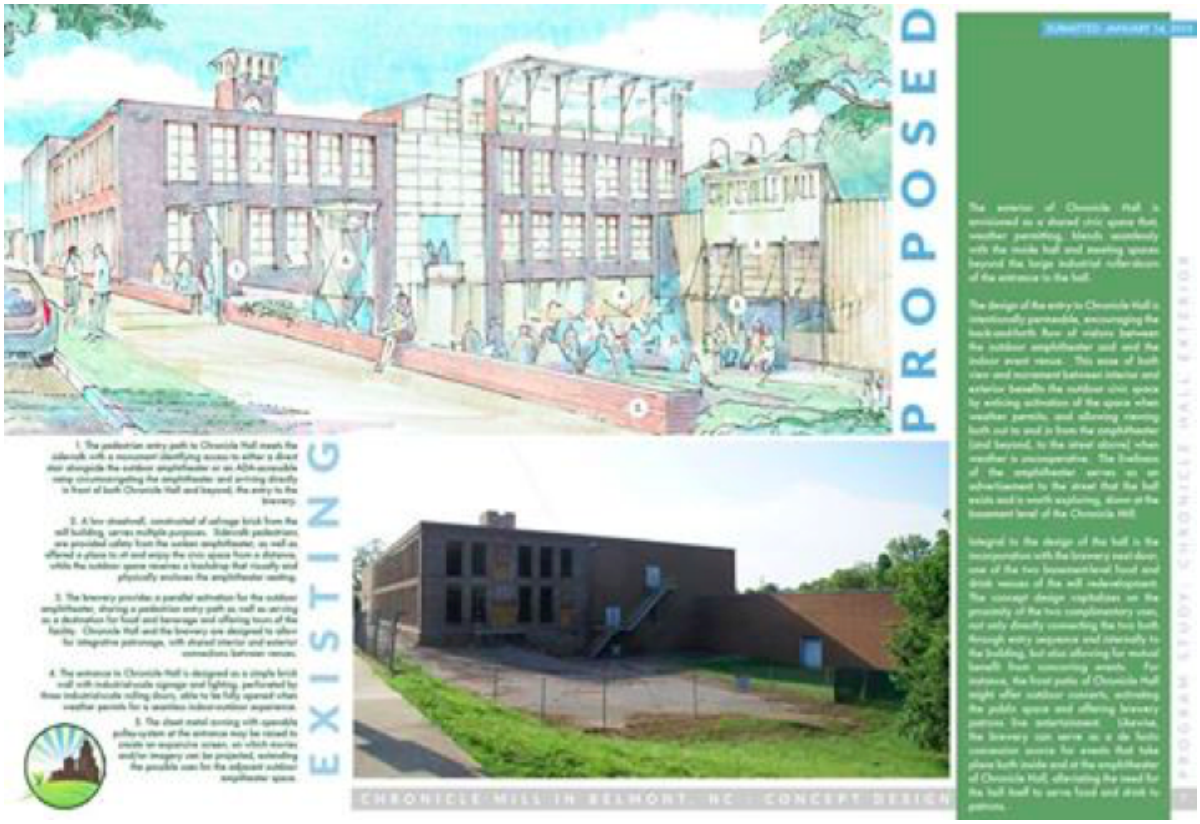

Figure 13: Proposed plan for the Chronicle Mill
Source: The Chronicle Mill, Facebook.

Ending of an Era

It is possible that the group of men who huddled around the fire on that cold day in February of 1901, never envisioned the significant contribution the Chronicle Mill would make in the maturation of Belmont's community. The Chronicle Mill's economic success influenced the building of other textile plants in Belmont and enticed people to migrate from their farms into the factory gates. Throughout the century it operated, from 1901 to 2006, the Chronicle helped to bond and shape camaraderie of Belmont's people.

The potential for economic gains and the possible connection of two business districts is a strong motivator for investors to preserve the Chronicle. However, one of the most important outcomes stemming from the Chronicle Mill's preservation is that the memories and the city's history will have an anchor. As the landscape of the textile industry vanishes and the land redevelops into other infrastructures, the built environment fails to serve as a mnemonic aid, and modernity begins to overshadow the past. The restoration of the mill has the potential to preserve the memory and history, and ignite and rebuild the city of Belmont, as it did when it first opened its doors in 1901.

The strong communal bond formed during the textile industry contributes to people believing that the preservation of the mills matter. The mills represent the salt of the earth and working hard for one's survival. It epitomizes the town of Belmont, its people and is the anchor for their history. The mill built the town brick by brick, and now brick by brick the town is preserving its first textile mill: the Chronicle.

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