

Shinin' the Rails:
The Story of Cliffside



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Fall 2007

It was 1987, I was seventeen, and my parents made me travel with them to the place where my father grew up. Up to that point, we had visited the remnants of the town before, where my father would show us around empty lots and fields describing exciting events and crowded buildings from a place in time that seemed vastly distant from the loneliness of the vacant lots of today. The running joke was that my father was born in a field since the house he was born in and most of the town had been razed in the early 1970s. But on that spring afternoon in 1987, nothing in that area was lonely as thousands of people milled around the area, gathering for a town reunion; it was the first of its kind for the former residents. I had attended family reunions in the past but this one was of a different family, a family whose bloodlines were the streets and whose patriarch was not a grandfather but a grand entrepreneur. The marriage that started this family of millhands was between a man, Raleigh Rutherford Haynes, and a mill town. This town was Cliffside, N.C., located in Rutherford County near the South Carolina line. While the town has been long gone, the memory of vibrant bygone days lives in the minds of the former residents.

The town may be gone but the mill still operates. It was operating in 1987 when my father took me through part of it. Standing at one end of the long line of looms, looking down the row at the workers, I was noticing all the cotton fibers floating in the air when my father shouted over the noise of the vast machinery, “This is why I went to college.” I understood that as that was the mentality by which he had raised us – to go to college and explore the world. What I did not understand was that when we exited the mill and walked up the road, my father became very nostalgic and reminisced in telling my sister and me all about the town. But, that was true of many of the people at the reunion. My grandmother – so excited to be there - would introduce me to people (including relatives that I already knew) and tell what they had gone on to do or become; all of which did not involve standing at a loom.

Throughout the day and for years to come, I wondered why the contrast. Some people did not seem to like working in the mill but they certainly enjoyed living in the mill town. When interviewing residents, I found an upbeat tone in their voices and a certain twinkle in their eyes as they began to see their childhood days again. When introducing myself to people, I could see the wheels turning as they figured out who was my father, grandfather, grandmother, uncle, and so on; then, they would speak of them as if they were all kin. My father says going back to the town today does not make him wish to be there again, but he enjoyed the time he was there. To this day, the former residents of Cliffside meet on an annual basis for a reunion in which they recall tales and facts of life nearly fifty years ago or longer. Ben Humphries said there was no need to structure these meetings because everyone just loves to talk of the days of yore.¹ Why do they do that? Many historians would say that millhands despised the work and despised the existence; yet, that weekend I sat in a theater to watch a silent film of the town made in the 1930s with hundreds of people of an older generation excitedly pointing out various people on the screen. I sat with people who did not seem downtrodden; they did not appear to have been denied a good life. Cliffside is a town that is fondly remembered by those who lived there which is at odds with historians who over the last several decades have viewed the paternalism of mill owners as exploitive and manipulative.

Scholars need to resolve the differences between historians, who view mill towns with derision, and former millhands, who view mill towns with loyalty. When talking with former

¹ Ben Humphries, telephone interview by author, October 18, 2007.

* All pictures came from Cliffside Historical Society.

residents of Cliffside, they exhibit a sense of pride about the uniqueness of their town and how it was quite possibly different and better than the average mill town of the Piedmont. While their comparison could be debated, their fondness can not. Why do these townspeople, who live with the luxuries and conveniences of the twenty-first century, long for the simple days of yore? The reasons include the paternalism of the mill owner, the community feel of togetherness among the millhands, and the feelings of nostalgia. People such as a retired Marine Corps officer, a retired school cafeteria worker, a former cotton buyer for the mill, a retired professor, and a retired vocational rehabilitation director recall these days in a different light from more formal historians.

Historians have generally held a negative view of the Piedmont mill culture, although the view has changed over time. The first to write of the mill town culture was Frank Tanenbaum in 1923 who called the mill town a “curious institution” whom has no life except that destined by the mill. He wrote of the people with pity, saying, “They are like children but rather strange, lost-looking, and beraved [sic]. They are men and women who have been lost to the world and have forgotten its existence.”² Wilbur J. Cash concurred as he wrote about how the southern white culture was stunted in advancement due to the mill towns’ perpetual poverty and isolation. This perception is quite the contrary from the earlier hope from the 1880s that mill towns would be an uplifting concept for the poverty-stricken South. Supportive of this theory was Broadus Mitchell, who wrote in the 1920s that mill founders were selfless aristocrats uplifting the southern white society.³ However, David L. Carlton believed that historians over the century have perceived millhands as “white slaves,” living in a village reminiscent of the plantation days. Historians have viewed this system in different lights ranging from “total institution” in pleasant terms to the negative connotation of a police state, like Cash and Tannenbaum supported.⁴

Historians’ view of paternalism has been debated over the last century as positive and negative. Mill owners have seen themselves and been seen as benevolent paternalists; they exerted much control upon the workers’ lives yet there was also much charitable contributions given to workers. Mitchell held to this view as he believed the owners had the workers in mind and sought to provide them with amenities in their community, which would result in happier workers. This idea is similar to the plantation relationship that other historians felt were being carried over from the antebellum days.⁵ C. Vann Woodward assaulted this idea of benevolent paternalism, focusing on the high rates of profit among the owners. He believed the owners saw the workers as capital only.⁶

By the latter part of the twentieth century, historians like Carlton believed that millhands had greater autonomy within the paternalistic paradigm than once believed. The notion that mill owners manipulated, exploited, and abused workers is currently being reexamined by these historians, especially as comparisons are made to the corporate practices of globalization today. In *Like A Family*, Jacquelyn Dowd Hall and the other authors took a different approach by examining how millhands saw themselves. This new approach was not focused on the vertical social relationship of owner and workers but how the workers perceived themselves, among themselves. Their argument is that the millhands formed a strong, vibrant culture that did not

² Jacquelyn Dowd Hall et al. *Like A Family: The Making of a Southern Cotton Mill World*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), xvi.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Gary M. Fink and Merl E. Reed, ed. *Race, Class and Community in Southern Labor History*. (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1994), 17-18.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., 19.

pay much attention to the suppression of paternalism, and in some cases, resisted the welfare work promoted by the owners.

Cliffside was the idealistic dream of an entrepreneur who as a child explored the horseshoe bend of the Second Broad River where the town was built.⁷ Raleigh Rutherford Haynes was a Rutherford County native who dabbled in various economic activities such as farming, banking, mercantile, land ownership and manufacturing. In 1884 he started building mills in the areas of the county like Henrietta in 1887, Caroleen in 1895, and Forest City in 1897. In contrast to his previous mills, Haynes had a desire for Cliffside to be different; one in which there would be an equal emphasis on the town as well as the mill. His idea was to have a town with religious, orderly, happy people provided with conveniences of comfort. According to Clarence Griffin's history of Rutherford County, poverty and ignorance were to be absent from this ideal town.⁸ Haynes' entrepreneurial goals were similar to other mill owners of the time.



His creation of the mills and the town was part of a wave of mills opening across the Piedmont. Following the devastation of the Civil War and the economic struggles of Reconstruction, textile mills were originally perceived as a saving grace for poor white families.

Cliffside was born at the turn of the century as work on the mill and the accompanying dam was completed in 1901. In May, 1902 machinery began to be installed; machinery that had to be hauled by wagon three miles from the railroad junction. Once the mill was complete, the products had to be transported in the same manner. By 1905, Haynes was able to have a rail line built by G. Kelly Moore, the man who continually carried out the construction of Haynes' ideas.⁹ Cliffside Mills became one of the leading manufacturers of gingham for many years; then shifted to making terry cloth.

As the mill was being constructed so was the town. Beginning with North Main Street and then other streets over time, the town began to take shape; but, it was the character of those who lived on those streets that was a concern for Haynes, just as it was for other mill owners of the time. Since mill towns were erected around natural resources, it was the human resources that had to be brought in. To do so, many mills recruited tenant farmers from the Piedmont and mountain people from western North Carolina. The appeal for these people was two provisions: steady income and the housing provisions, both of which were granted by the mill. This was very promising for poor white farmers of those regions¹⁰ who had been almost totally dependent upon the unpredictable weather.¹¹ While farming was rewarding and farmers were beholden to none, the lure of steady income was powerful; so much so that former farmers never left the mill once they realized the benefits of consistent pay. Plus, once these workers and their families experienced running water and electricity in housing, they thought they had become 'rich' and never went back. This included William and Odie Lancaster who moved to Cliffside as the town was being built in order to escape the poverty of farming.

In addition to the housing, Cliffside was also a definitive town with a main store that sold clothing, groceries, hardware, and general merchandise; a furniture store that opened in 1902; a

⁷ Mrs. Grover C. Haynes, *Raleigh Rutherford Haynes*. (Asheville, NC: Miller Printing Company, 1954), 9.

⁸ Clarence W. Griffin, *History of Old Tryon and Rutherford Counties, 1730-1936*, (Asheville, NC: Miller Printing Company, 1937), 597-598.

⁹ *Forest City Courier*, June 29, 1922.

¹⁰ Hall et al., *Like A Family*, 36.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 42.

bank; a drug store; a laundry; a mill where flour and wheat were ground; and a meat market.¹² In addition to these businesses, several churches were built with help from the mill, including Cliffside Baptist Church in 1903. Among those the church licensed and sent out to preach was William Lancaster, who also worked in the mill. The *Charlotte Chronicle*'s editor, Archibald Johnson, claimed in 1910 that Cliffside was the "model mill village" where the company "encourages the embellishment of houses in every possible way."¹³

By 1910, Cliffside had grown to two thousand residents along the nearly thirty streets within a one mile radius. According to the census, at this point most wives did not work, instead they were at home tending to the garden and household chores; yet, fathers worked along with children over the age of eight or ten. Even though children worked, the mill encouraged them to attend school in the midst of working at the mill. The idea of most of the family members working was another element in the recruiting process, especially for those who moved down out of the mountains. They were not as apt to take such a risk unless there was the certainty or possibility for multiple family members to work. This included extended family members, such as cousins and in-laws who were classified as boarders according to the 1910 census.¹⁴ While the pay may have been better than farming, a total family effort was required to survive. This, in turn, perpetuated the dependence upon the mill as the only source of income for the family.



At this time, the primary job of those who worked was that of a weaver in the mill; 223 people were weavers of the one thousand workers in the town.¹⁵ In these early days, the mill ran six days a week with one shift of twelve hours each day. While this would appear to require great endurance from the workers, the shift included a one hour lunch break in which people could tend to business, visit significant others, or rest in addition to lunch. In the early part of the century, Cliffside was an isolated village with a majority of the time spent at the mill and all consumer provisions found in the town. Also, this class of people was not apt to own an automobile or able to afford a horse and buggy from the livery stable, although some did. All of these observations show the dependence that people had upon the mill. Those farmers who lived outside of Cliffside were also dependent on the mill as they would bring their cotton in town, where the mill had the capacity to process cotton from beginning to end with cotton gins located in town.

The editor of the 1910 article from the *Charlotte Chronicle* wanted to expose the idealism of Cliffside to a national audience to combat the stereotype of southern mill towns. He wrote that it was R. R. Haynes's concern for the people that made the community such a pleasant place to live and thus successful, writing that the company had the townspeople's best interests at

¹² *Forest City Courier*, June 29, 1922.

¹³ Cliffside Historical Society, "Remember Cliffside." http://remembercliffside.com/history/1910/1910_more-about-cliffside_pf (September 26, 2007). (Hereafter, referred to as the "Remember Cliffside" website)

¹⁴ "Remember Cliffside" website.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

heart. He admitted that this paternal government acted like a monarchy but it was acceptable because life in the town seemed to be ideal.¹⁶

The year 1922 is a perfect example of how this paternalism permeated throughout the society of Cliffside. The benevolence shown in this year was a stark contrast to the hard times faced by the textile industry and the town. At this time, there was much labor unrest around the state. By 1919, the United Textile Workers had gained strength in North Carolina, and this proved to be a very active year for the labor movement in America. By 1921, the economy began to sputter, and the recession slowed down the textile industry, leading mill owners to cut workers' pay and hours. For example, a loom worker "who had made \$32.50 a week in 1920 made only \$21.41 in 1922."¹⁷ One practice that occurred in mills around the state was "a stretch out" whereby workers were asked to work fewer hours with less pay but required to operate more looms and produce more per worker than in the past. This put added pressure on the hard times faced by millhands.

The plight of the average farmer would have been even worse at this time; which propelled men like William "Pop" Ingram to give up on farming as a way of life and settle for the meager wages of a millhand. In 1920, Pop and his wife Sarah, a Catawba Indian who left the reservation to get married, moved to Cliffside from Cherokee County, S.C. with their five of their nine remaining children, including their son Harry; those who were old enough went to work in the mill while their mother stayed home with the younger children.¹⁸

In addition to these hard economic times, the flu epidemic of 1917-1918 contributed to the difficulty faced by the townspeople as family members died, taking with them their monetary contribution to the household. William Lancaster, who was doing bi-vocational work as a millhand and doing pastoral work, visited and helped many families affected by the flu until he succumbed to the illness himself and died in 1918. This put added pressure on Odie who was left with three children – Jesse, Meredith and Albert - and one on the way;¹⁹ Odie worked at the mill except for short periods after the birth of each child and became temporarily disabled after the birth of her last child who was stillborn. After struggling for a few years following William's death, Odie made Jesse and Meredith quit school (Meredith was halfway through high school) in order to work in the mill.²⁰

In 1922, these hardships were juxtaposed with generosity from the mill. Following the death of R. R. Haynes in 1917, all operations of the mill and the town were left to one of his sons, Charles, who continued the benevolent paternalism in much the same way as his father until his death in 1958.²¹ There was as much respect for Charles as there was for his father. Following the death of the patriarch of the town was the erection of a community building five years later that served the people in various ways, including a community room, an auditorium, a

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Anita Price Davis. *North Carolina During the Great Depression: A Documentary Portrait of a Decade*. (Jefferson, NC: McFarland Publishing Company, 2003), 167-8.

¹⁸ James Ingram, interview by author, September 26, 2007.

¹⁹ Albert Lancaster, interview by author, October 29, 2007. Odie had two other daughters who died very young.

²⁰ James Ingram, interview by author, September 26, 2007. Meredith did not return to school until 1961 when she graduated from Glen Alpine High School. Working at the state hospital, she was unable to advance without a diploma. Without GED programs in existence, her only option was to return to high school. Therefore, for two years she worked a few hours in the morning, attended two classes at the high school, and returned to work until the evening. Her husband signed her report cards, and at graduation she was surrounded by her three grown children. This allowed her to move up at the hospital and acquire other jobs over the years.

²¹ "Remember Cliffside" website

barber shop, public baths, theater, gym and other rooms discussed later in this research. The R. R. Haynes Memorial Building was dedicated in 1922 with much fanfare from the community. The dedication of the building centered upon the benevolence of R. R. Haynes, as different speakers recounted his character and the charitable work and the support he gave the townspeople.²²

An article from the March 2, 1922 edition of the *Forest City Courier* proudly described the new school that was built by the mill for the town. The school still stands today and is listed on the National Registry of historic places. The cost of the then-modern facility was a quarter of a million dollars paid by the company, and included the latest supplies available in the early '20s. Included at the school was an auditorium that seated one thousand, an indoor playground, supplies for all grade levels that included blackboards, maps, globes, and the latest style of desks. The school was also designed to have a high school department. This was very different from the one room schoolhouse with one teacher twenty years prior.²³ When the school building opened in April, the town closed down and a parade was held from the downtown to the school grounds to celebrate the school's opening.²⁴

Up to 1922, Cliffside had decent coverage in the *Forest City Courier* based out of a town a few miles away; but in March Cliffside began to receive its own section in the newspaper. As the newspaper states it, "through an arrangement perfected with Mr. Charles Haynes..." the *Courier* devoted a page to Cliffside called "Cliffside News."²⁵ In April, a ballpark was built with a grandstand – named Haynes Park – as there were high hopes that the mill's ball team would have a good year. By the fall, Cliffside Baptist Church had a new facility built with the help of the mill, where many of the managers attended.²⁶

Despite these accolades, Cliffside was still isolated, even from the towns that were only a few miles away. Very few cars were owned by the townspeople; therefore, it was unlikely that many left the town very often, especially as the mill provided for their consumer needs with shops in town. Former resident Terry Hines said, "It was a self-contained village that offered all things to all people – housing, materials, recreation."²⁷ Even if people traveled or were knowledgeable of the world, there was still a parochial view of this small community.

1934 was a significant year for labor strife in North Carolina. It was in this year that one of the largest textile strikes occurred in the United States. For many southerners, it was the first time they resisted the owners.²⁸ Yet, in Cliffside there was no unionization of workers, nor a strike, but there were hard times.

By the 1930s, there was much labor unrest throughout North Carolina, including places around Cliffside; this unrest was due to several factors. Fear among the workers of the owner's control over their whole existence; their behavior was submissive due to the threat of being removed from the mill and home. There was the uneasy tension of attending church as some managers kept tabs on church attendance, and some workers believed the church preached submission to the boss in order to appease the owners. In Honea Path, S.C. the mill owned

²² *Forest City Courier*, June 29, 1922.

²³ *Ibid.*, March 2, 1922.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, March 27, 1922.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, March 16, 1922.

²⁶ "Remember Cliffside" website.

²⁷ Amy Revis, "When Textiles Was King ..." *Foothills Magazine*, September 5, 1999

²⁸ *Uprising of 1934* produced by George Stoney et al., 86 minutes, Hard Times Production, Inc., 1995, videocassette.

everything, including the store where workers' debt was so high that some workers' whole paycheck was docked to pay the store.²⁹

The Great Depression led to a drop in production, which led to the "stretch out" practice by owners, which resulted in disgruntled workers with struggling families. In the midst of this, the New Deal opened the door for unions to organize. Yet, owners rebuffed this as it was an intrusion upon their benevolence, seeing this as if the workers were scoffing at them, despite the fact that they gave them many provisions. This also gave workers power which upset the social and working status structure of a mill town. On Labor Day of 1934, a textile strike occurred across the South, lasting three weeks. In the end, unions were not able to carry out the policies they had hoped with the strike. Violence ensued, resulting in several deaths around the state. The state government favored the owners, and many strikers were blacklisted by the mills or forced to move out of the mill town. Anita Price Davis stated that there were two sides to the strike in 1934: many workers found the "family environment of the mill village" appealing and "saw the rules as keeping their community safe and pleasant for them and their families";³⁰ while others saw the paternalism as suffocating and abusive.

In the midst of all this unrest Cliffside sputtered along, escaping these calamities. Nearby mill towns of Henrietta and Avondale had some union members but Cliffside was void of them. According to resident Hollis Owens, a flying squadron of union members met in those towns then "went down to Cliffside and called upon the people left in the mill to come out and join them."³¹ Then, they proceeded to knock down the mill gate, which did very little to gain any support from the workers. Owens said there was such a loyalty to the Haynes family³² that a union could not gain any support in town; this is supported by the fact that those interviewed for this research had very little recollection of union activity at the mill.

This is not to say that the mill was an exception during the depression; people were faced with hard decisions. During the late twenties and the thirties, the mill was not fully operational. Harry Ingram worked as a loom fixer in the mill, and due to this valued work he was paid more than the average worker; yet during that time, Harry, who married Meredith Lancaster in 1928, in their teenage years, sought different jobs. They moved to Mecklenburg County in 1929 for a year until the mill began operations again; plus, Cliffside was home to them. According to their youngest son, Jim, Harry returned to the town because of the town not the mill; it was Cliffside where he had grown up and he had a kinship with his fellow residents.³³ In 1932 at the height of the Depression, Harry was out of work; Meredith had just given birth to their second child, Harry Jr. (Laverne was born in 1929) and did not have enough milk for the baby until the doctor brought them some cans of milk. Since the mill was not running, Harry Sr. went to work for the Works Progress Administration for a while and would hunt for animals to eat, including chickens, rabbits and birds.³⁴ As many people in town had similar struggles for survival, the mill relaxed the rent requirements on the housing.

In a recent interview, Albert Lancaster recalled the mill handing out small amounts of money to families during this time.³⁵ Throughout the thirties, the mill struggled as the people did, operating one to two days a week for quite some time. During the Depression, the

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Davis, *North Carolina During the Depression*, 179.

³¹ Hollis Owen, telephone interview by author, October 18, 2007.

³² Ibid.

³³ James Ingram, interview by author, October 6, 2007.

³⁴ Harry Ingram, Jr., telephone interview by author, October 28, 2007.

³⁵ Albert Lancaster, interview by author, October 29, 2007.

townspeople were drawn together as they all faced the common enemy of extreme poverty. Albert spoke of how people took care of each other, helping each other make ends meet. He recalled how the grocery store owner was generous in providing food items on credit.³⁶

Another intriguing piece of optimism in the middle of such a struggle dealt with Albert's senior year in high school. His homeroom teacher had the goal of taking the senior class to Washington, D.C. His class set about collecting donations and making items to sell. They raised the money and took a trip to the capital even at this most difficult time.³⁷

World War II led to great change in Cliffside, along with other textile towns in the Piedmont. After a slowdown in the textile industry, the war created a great boom for the mill; three shifts were in order, operations occurred six days a week, thus extra jobs were available. In his diary, Harry Ingram, Sr. wrote about working second shift at the mill and working at the local saw mill earlier in the day. Additionally, he and his oldest son would pick cotton on some Saturdays.³⁸ The eight hour shift implemented by the federal government in the thirties meant there was no more one hour lunch break. Employees received no specific break time and had to rush away from their job to grab a quick bite from the mill café or use the bathroom. This is when workers would cover for other workers or family members would come to help out. Harry would bring Meredith lunch when he could, while Harry Jr. would bring his father supper on the second shift.³⁹

During the forties and fifties, life in the town was paradoxical with plenty of memorable times amidst a stagnant economy. There were three main churches in Cliffside; the Baptist church where many people attended along with the Haynes family, the Methodist church, and the African-American church. Once every three months, all three churches would hold a joint service. There was plenty of baseball to play through the high school and the mill, the theater was crowded, and there was plenty of fishing and hunting to occupy people's time. Yet, the war and the different economic times put people on different paths, some of which led people away from the mill. Albert Lancaster had been recruited by Charles Haynes to attend a cotton buying program at N.C. State in the 1930s; then, he returned to work for the mill, helping to judge and assess the cotton brought by farmers. After Albert returned from the war, he decided to try to make more money which meant leaving Cliffside. His brother, Jesse left as well. Pop's son, Bill, who served in the war, also left.⁴⁰ After the war, production died down and work became reduced again. By the 1950s, the mill was on a downhill slide of production. The paternalism that had protected the workers over time had passed as the Haynes family sold the mill to the Cone Mill Corporation.

In August 1953, Harry Sr. had a heart attack and was unemployed for one year; there was no compensation from the mill. After his heart attack, he was left doing menial jobs at the mill such as sweeping. His pay and Meredith's were not enough to adequately pay the college tuition for his son, James, and take care of Odie, who lived with them. After a couple of years of struggle, they decided a move to Morganton was needed. Working for the state hospital, Harry Sr. and Meredith were able to purchase their first home and were guaranteed health insurance.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Harry Ingram, Sr. diaries, 1943.

³⁹ Harry Ingram, Jr., telephone interview by author, October 28, 2007.

⁴⁰ James Ingram, interview by author, October 13, 2007.

This insurance came in handy when Harry Sr. suffered another heart attack. They were surprised that insurance paid for the hospital and he still got paid while out of work.⁴¹

It is interesting to note that the reason the Ingrams move to and leave Cliffside are one in the same: the provisions of a job. The move to Cliffside in the early part of the century was to gain a job that paid a steady income and supplied housing. Sixty years later, the reason to leave Cliffside was to find better income with benefits that would be necessary to afford better housing.

⁴¹ Ibid.

With the history of the town as a backdrop, the question to be examined is why people look back at those times with fondness of the good times while the hardships seem to be diminished. Harry Ingram Jr. spoke of how as a teenager his older sister had to build a fire and prepare breakfast for the family each morning, saying “I don’t know how she did it.”¹ Yet, Harry and his sister both downplayed the hard times and recounted more of the good times in their interviews. The following paragraphs will explain the millhands’ fond recollection by examining three answers: the paternalism of the mill, the sense of togetherness, and nostalgia.

Paternalism is a concept that is filled with contradictions. Historians such as Tannenbaum and Cash saw the textile industry as manipulative while the residents of Cliffside and other mill town residents disagree (yet some would side with the historians). The paternalistic nature of the owners was to provide many amenities in regards to the town yet that also kept wages low. Paternalism had a limit; it provided housing, and people were grateful for that, yet the housing eventually became outdated. The hope of the mill life and the reality of it does not quite match up; Tannenbaum’s pessimistic view in the early 1920s is juxtaposed with the earlier notion from the 1880s of mill towns being billed as lifting up the southern white culture from perpetual “poverty and defeat.”² The following aspects of paternalism are what made people have a bond with the mill and the owner.

The first factor is the moral code established in the town. Laverne Simpson, when asked why the town was so successful in creating a good atmosphere, credited R. R. Haynes’ emphasis on trying to create a strict, moral society within the town; saying, “He didn’t allow trash...” to live there.³ Like other paternalistic owners of the time, Haynes sought to have a disciplined class of workers. This was common among mill owners throughout the Piedmont as they exerted their influence over the millhands. Whether driven by principles or economics, owners held a tight reign on the societies they created. In some towns, church attendance was heavily encouraged, and monitored. No alcohol was sold in Cliffside. If a person did not follow the ‘rules,’ then as Ben Humphries said, the mill “called for your house;” meaning that the person was fired and summarily removed from the mill house and thus the town. Yet, he went on to say that Haynes was strict about his moral code, resulting in a kind town with “anything a man could want.”⁴ Other former millhands outside of Cliffside respect the strict town atmosphere in which they were raised; Lora League Wright said, “We had to walk a chalk line. And I deeply appreciated it too.”⁵ This is not to say that these codes were universally accepted. There is evidence of those who felt this paternalism was too suffocating or controlling; yet, the research of Cliffside shows a more positive view of this moral code.

A second factor comes from the millhands’ acceptance of paternalism. This idea of paternalism was ingrained into the millhands to the point that most accepted it or sought out the positive of it as opposed to rebelling against it like some places did around the state. To rebel against the mill owner was a difficult process – such as joining a union with hopes that a difference could be made before one’s job was lost - and it came at a great cost. Losing a job at the mill was a big gamble to take but losing one’s home and one’s community was a greater sacrifice that people were not willing to take. Whether mill owners purposely schemed to set the

¹ Harry Ingram, Jr., telephone interview by author, October 28, 2007.

² Hall et al. *Like A Family*, xvi.

³ Laverne Simpson, telephone interview by author, October 28, 2007.

⁴ Ben Humphries, telephone interview by author, October 18, 2007.

⁵ Allen E. Tullos, “Habits of Industry: A Study of White Culture, Protestant Temperament and the Emergence of the Carolina Piedmont,” (Yale University: PhDss) 163.

system in this manner for purposes of power remains unclear as there is evidence for this as well as evidence for those who had great concern for their workers. Either way, millhands accepted this paternalism for it was a way of life. When Jim Ingram was asked if there was any animosity among the millhands with the management, he emphatically responded, “Gosh almighty, no.” To Jim, there was a sense of respect for the management but not reverence.⁶ Besides the social acceptance of this system, there was also the influence of familial paternalism. Allen E. Tullos wrote in his dissertation, “The paternalistic structure of the Piedmont family supported and made legitimate the fatherly authority within the mill.”⁷ There were father figures in the mill from the owner to the superintendent to department over-seers. The workers were somewhat like children looking up to these men (it was a male-only hierarchy) for guidance and direction.⁸

A third factor, and perhaps the simplest and most direct, is employment. When asked if Ecusta, the company her father worked for, was exploitive or manipulative in regards to how they treated the employees with extra benefits, Vivian Ingram responded, “No. And if it was, so what? It was a job, and before that there were no jobs.”⁹ Ecusta came to Brevard in the late 1930s and provided jobs where none existed. The people of the area were grateful and thus loyal to this large employer. Kiah Hollingsworth, her father, could not find work at the beginning of the Depression. He moved his family in with his mother and then his mother-in-law, then he moved to Greenville, S.C. but returned once Ecusta opened a plant in Brevard.¹⁰ His lack of schooling and the limited employment opportunities of the area enhanced the bond workers like him had with the plant.

Along with the provision of jobs, was the provision of housing, community, stores and a way of life. One of the biggest draws in recruiting mountain people was the provision of a home with running water and/or electricity. Once these people experienced homes with these amenities, they decided that farming was something to which they never wanted to return. The mill painted the houses every five years, helped plow people’s gardens at one point, and there was no tax for any of the public services as the mill provided it all.¹¹ Here again is the ‘catch’ with paternalism: while the houses provided were viewed with gratitude they were of simple 1920s construction and did not receive much improvement over the decades. In the 1940s when Jim Ingram nailed up a picture of Ted Williams, the nail went through the single-board wall.¹²



⁶ James Ingram, interview by author, September 26, 2007.

⁷ Tullos, “Habits of Industry,” 165.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Vivian Ingram, interview by author, October 13, 2007.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ “Remember Cliffside” website.

¹² James Ingram, interview by author, October 13, 2007.

Looking back to 1922, the town of Cliffside was provided with many amenities without paying taxes to support the town services. The school, which is still operational today, was equipped with the most modern capabilities for the time period. Several of the sources researched brought up the quality of the teachers and the principal, Clyde Erwin, who went on to be the North Carolina superintendent of education.¹³ The R. R. Haynes Memorial Building served the community through various rooms, including a theater, a community room for people to gather and relax, a library, a barber shop and beauty shop, a small café, public bath and showers, an auditorium (for auctions, singings, and bake sales), a doctor's office, a dentist, and other services that changed over time.¹⁴ Next to the community building was another service for the community: the cannery. The mill built the cannery for the townspeople to can their homegrown food items; they were also able to leave them in the basement of the community building until they needed it. Harry Jr. remembers taking a wheelbarrow downtown to pick up items for the family.¹⁵

Mrs. Grover Haynes' biography of R. R. Haynes mentioned the various community activities promoted by the mill: ice cream parties in the summer, oyster suppers in the winter, box suppers outside, the display of new clothes the mill was producing for the town to see, and a skating rink.¹⁶ "It was a self-contained village that offered all things to all people – housing, materials, recreation," said Terry Hines, general manager of Cone Mills' Rutherford County plants who went to school in Cliffside.¹⁷

In 1908, R. R. Haynes organized the Cliffside Band and hired well known musicians to serve as successive band leaders; band members included William Lancaster and his son, Jesse. The band consisted of employees of the mill for the "benefit and pleasure of the people of Cliffside."¹⁸ After WWI, the thirty member band reformed and renamed itself the Haynes Band in remembrance of Haynes. The mill paid for the band to have the most up-to-date instruments. On Sunday afternoons, the band would perform in the town park. The mill also paid for the installation of an elevator in the local Baptist church.¹⁹ This was true of other mills as well. Ecusta, in Brevard, offered family activities such as softball, horseshoes, swimming in the lake, movie nights for children, grease pole climbing and other events. Ecusta also bought band uniforms and instruments for the local public high school – not one funded by the company - as well as paying for a band leader.²⁰

While these activities were helpful to the community in general, at times the mill would show generosity in individual cases. After her last child was stillborn, Odie became disabled due to the delivery. The doctor said she would not be able to walk again, but over time Odie rehabilitated herself to the point that she could walk and she could work. During her time of difficulty and with no disability pay, insurance, or compensation the mill let her continue to live in the mill house and allowed her to slowly come back to work until she could work a full schedule.²¹

¹³ "Remember Cliffside" website.

¹⁴ James Ingram, interview by author, September 26, 2007.

¹⁵ Harry Ingram, Jr., telephone interview by author, October 28, 2007.

¹⁶ Haynes. *Raleigh Rutherford Haynes*. 49.

¹⁷ Revis. "When Textiles Was King..." *Foothills Magazine*.

¹⁸ *Forest City Courier*, June 29, 1922.

¹⁹ Albert Lancaster, interview by author, October 29, 2007.

²⁰ Vivian Ingram, interview by author, October 13, 2007.

²¹ Laverne Simpson, telephone interview by author, October 28, 2007.

Therefore, all of this creates a family's dependence upon the mill. Added to this would be the fact that the mill was the primary if not sole employer of the town. Even if people worked for stores in town, it was the mill that influenced or controlled the local businesses; therefore, the mill's influence permeated throughout the entire economy of the town. With so much of the family working in or around the mill, there was an atmosphere of psychological or social debt – and perhaps financial debt – to the mill.

Summarizing all of these factors, it would be clear to see that former millhands would have a propensity to be devoted to the mill in much the same way that people have loyalty to their families, even if there were situations of abuse or strained relations. Cliffside residents recalled with gratitude that the mill would not charge much rent on the home or would lower it during hard economic times; but, that was true of the textile mill in Cooleemee and other towns.²²

One final point about paternalism is that the relationship was not simply flowing in one direction. While the owner was able to direct and control much of the relationship, there was some reliance upon the millhands to make it work. While the millhands were dependent on the owner, the owners were dependent on them as well. Human capital, unlike other factors of production, had to have a cooperative element for productivity to occur. "Owners depended on workers to master their jobs and labor cooperatively with supervisors and with one another. Otherwise, goods could not be produced, profits could not be realized"²³ In the midst of this relationship, management sought to connect with the workers by creating "a bond of loyalty through individual contact. They exercised their authority in direct, personal terms; they could be benefactors and autocrats at the same time."²⁴ Therefore, when one of the owners at Union Bleachery in Greenville, S.C. would periodically walk through the mill and speak to employees at length, his purpose will always be a mystery as no one can know his motivation.²⁵ For those from Cliffside, they will side with benevolent paternalism while scholars have so far sided with manipulation.



²² Janice Gaston, "Life in 1934," *Winston-Salem Journal*, October 13, 2007.

²³ Hall et al., *Like A Family*. 52.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 91.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

While the vertical relationship between management and millhands played a role in the workers' affection for the bygone days, so would the horizontal relations among the millhands. In *Like A Family*, in interviews and survey conducted, and among other sources researched, the constant theme is that the millhands were one big family. This idea of being a 'family' of workers is a reflection of the togetherness they felt; the sense of oneness in work, in community, in faith, and in struggle. Albert Lancaster said sixty years after he left the town he could still recall where everybody lived on each street.¹ The Cliffside website has hundreds of pictures that were contributed from many residents. When asked why such devotion for others in the town, former residents struggle with an answer – much like people do when asked why they should be loyal to their family – and eventually say they 'just do;' much like Ben Humphries' comment that "Cliffside was a way of life."² After probing their thoughts for a while as they try to dissect this natural, subconscious affection, they come up with various answers, such as family, the mill culture, events that bonded them, and the sense of community.

The most influential agent in the socialization of the mill culture's familial perception is the family itself. "The family,' writes Erich Fromm, 'represents the spirit of the society into which the child enters.' To understand the temperament, the social character, the structure of feeling in the white industrial milieu of the Carolina Piedmont, one begins with the region's families."³ Kinship played a large role in creating a family atmosphere as mill towns were populated by large families as well as extended family. This is true throughout the history of Cliffside. The 1910 census showed that families had quite a few children and a significant number of households boarded extended family members, such as a cousin or brother-in-law.⁴ William "Pop" Ingram's family moved to Cliffside in the 1920s with five children; by the 1940s most of these children had stayed in the town to continue their lives there. This worked to aid both the workers and the owners. The draw for mountain families in the earlier part of the century was that the children could be put to work along with the father. Mills were organized to allow for whole families to be part of the process. With the entire family working there (including small children), familial ties kept the family bound to the mill,⁵ which cultivated a perpetual class of long-term workers thus benefiting the owners. "Lela Rainer's parents took her out of school when she was twelve and sent her to the mill. 'Ma thought it was time. They thought maybe it would help 'em out, you know. They was making such a little bit. And they thought the little bit I made would help.'"⁶

It was this sense of helping the family in times of need that increased the familial bonds.



While today's world appears to be marked by individualism, even among family members, the bygone days of mill life involved every family member's contribution to the cause. When children worked, the money made was given to their father; when a child became an adult and still lived at home, he paid board to his family. Harry Ingram Jr. took supper to his father each night as Harry Sr. (Pop's son) worked second shift. When the mill closed for a week for the Fourth of July, some families opted to work together on projects of

¹ Albert Lancaster, interview by author, Oct. 29, 2007.

² Ben Humphries, telephone interview by author, Oct. 18, 2007

³ Tullos, "Habits of Industry." 161.

⁴ "Remember Cliffside" website.

⁵ Hall et al., *Like A Family*. 52

⁶ *Ibid.*, 62.

necessity instead of vacationing. Harry Sr.'s family would pick blackberries and can various fruits during that week.⁷ In September of 1943, Harry Sr. wrote in his diary about picking cotton along with Harry Jr. Throughout the fall of that year, his children picked cotton after school to earn money for the family.⁸ When Laverne Ingram was a teenager and her parents were working in the mill, she was responsible for preparing breakfast for her younger brothers; which is a reflection of a mill culture that resulted in parents working thus making older siblings look after younger ones.⁹

With large families, this doling out of responsibility was possible. Harry Sr. recorded in his diary how he worked on Saturdays for a few hours to help his wife accomplish her job at the mill, a pattern he did for several months during World War II.¹⁰ In August, 1953, Harry Sr. had a heart attack. He was unemployed for one year with no compensation from the mill. After this, Harry worked a menial job as a sweeper and blower, getting loose cotton fibers out from under the machines and away from the looms. His son, James was willing to forgo college to work in the mill to help the family. Meredith, his mother, talked James into going to college as she recognized education as the way out of the mill. While James worked jobs at Western Carolina and in the mill during the summer, Meredith took on extra jobs wherever she could.¹¹ Events and factors like these that strengthen the familial bonds provide such a contrast to today's market of how to create that sense of belonging; a quick search on Amazon showed over thirty-four thousand books available on how to raise a child. Fifty years ago, very few books existed but most people would agree they were not needed.

The family-factory bond existed in the mill culture and was due to the entire family's dependence on the mill. All about one's childhood could be affected by the happenings at the mill. For children born in the mill town or raised there from a young age, "the sounds and sights of the mill came to be joined and identified with the meaning of home itself. The deepest ties between parents and their children were enmeshed with the factory environment."¹² This leads to the mill as an influence upon the sense of togetherness among the townspeople. How the mill went, so did the people. In an e-mail, Renita Walker wrote, "The mill offered a brotherhood so to speak for the people in there. It was the one thing that made all of them alike and that everyone could talk about, complain about, and also be proud of all at the same time."¹³ (11-3) Cliffside was not a town of different occupations, nor was it made up of suburbs where neighbors worked in different places. Everyone worked in or around the mill. This effect is symbolized by the mill whistle; it was this whistle that over the decades blew to signify different times of the day – the start of work, the lunch hour, and the quitting time. In this way, the mill acted as a centrifugal force, drawing people to depend upon it for large and small aspects of their lives. Of course, the very existence of this community depended on the mill operating and generating income.

While the effects of paternalism have already been explored, there were small factors that contributed to this centrifuge of community. In the first half of the century, the mail was not delivered to people's homes but to one location – the one spot where a representative from each

⁷ Harry Ingram Jr., telephone interview by author, October 28, 2007.

⁸ Harry Ingram, Sr. diaries, 1943.

⁹ Laverne Simpson, telephone interview by author, October 28, 2007.

¹⁰ Harry Ingram, Sr. diaries, 1943.

¹¹ James Ingram, interview by author, September 26, 2007.

¹² Tullos, "Habits of Industry," 164.

¹³ Renita Walker, email to author, November 3, 2007.

household would pass by once a day: the mill office.¹⁴ Around Thanksgiving when people say it is cold enough to kill a hog, they would take their hogs behind the boiler room at the mill where the hot steam would scald the skin and allow for easy removal.¹⁵ James Ingram recalls that when the mill would release the water from the dam in order to clean the intake pipes, people would come out to catch the stranded fish by wire nets or see the sights of what lurked underneath the water level.¹⁶

For many former residents of Cliffside and some other southern mill towns, it was the sense of community from among their neighbors that helped create a culture of comfort and safety. Many former mill workers from various towns recall that everyone knew everyone, no one locked their doors and no one felt afraid. In a survey conducted of former Cliffside residents, over eighty percent replied that it was the people that made Cliffside a special place to live. Michael R. Harmon, an investor who bought the old plant in 2004, replied by e-mail that, “People sat on their porches or town center steps and talked to neighbors when they walked by.” It was, “a quiet, tranquil setting.”¹⁷ This idea of community can be seen in James Ingram’s work at the Graveyard Grocery. James helped deliver groceries to those who had called in their shopping list. If the resident was not home, James would place the cold items in the refrigerator while other items were left on the table. People could pay for these groceries on pay day if needed.

Living in one town, with one main employer, where children go to one school, and there were just a handful of churches, this town exuded a tight, single-focus community. Dr. Anita Davis wrote that the camaraderie among the residents was key to this unity; “They studied together, worked together, worshipped together, and had fun together. The students began school in the same building from which they graduated. They went to school for twelve years together.”¹⁸ In opposition to this was Ecusta which drew workers from various communities in Transylvania County. Vivian Ingram recalled that the factory did not have a family feel despite the paternalistic activities promoted by Ecusta. Since workers were spread among different communities and different lives, there was not a common bond outside of work. While these workers were bound by the common experience at Ecusta; that was all there was to unite them.¹⁹ The sense of oneness in a community like Cliffside was also promoted by the uniformity of the people. Small southern mill towns lacked diversity in race, culture, and occupation (although there was a community of small African-Americans who lived in a specific area of Cliffside), thus resulting in conformity; the similarities among the townspeople included income, housing, clothing as well as values, attitude and behavior. Some of this was dictated by paternalism and some by the religious values found in the Bible Belt.

All of this led people to see others in such a similar light, as if there was a kindred spirit among them, that it promoted the idea of togetherness. With a sense of unity in a community, it then is easier to feel a sense of loyalty as opposed to critiquing it. The potential strike of 1934 serves as an example of this loyalty. Despite the mill’s inability to pull people out of the desperate times (which no mill was likely to have done), people sided with the mill instead of joining against it.

¹⁴ “Remember Cliffside” website.

¹⁵ “Remember Cliffside” website.

¹⁶ James Ingram, email to author, October 26, 2007.

¹⁷ Michael R. Harmon, email to author, November 2, 2007.

¹⁸ Anita Price Davis, email to author, November 2, 2007.

¹⁹ Vivian Ingram, interview by author, October 13, 2007.

An additional agent within this community feel was the proximity of living. With a small downtown and city limits that spanned a mere mile, people lived in and among each other. Donnie Rupe lived in town for part of his childhood before moving a mile out of town to a farm; “We were lonely there,” he said. “I could honestly say I loved being around a lot of people.”²⁰ It was not very difficult for one to know the workings of each person’s household. Once when Meredith Ingram’s neighbor had a sick child in the hospital, the phone rang in the middle of the night to inform the household that the child had died. Due to the technical issues of phones back then, Meredith was able to listen in on the call from her phone despite it being sent next door. Upon hearing this news, Meredith started next door to console the mother only to find several other neighbors on the front lawn who had listened in as well.²¹

An event such as the tragedy described represents the final contributing factor to the sense of togetherness that led to affection for the town. Ben Humphries said that people suffered together, thus bringing the community closer.²² The Flu Epidemic of 1918-1919 affected entire families, coupled with a harsh winter. People helped each other out, visited, and cut wood for people for heat. With these extra chores, all in the family had to pitch in. In the Great Depression, people again came together to help neighbors survive. Albert Lancaster remembers the grocery store owner who was generous in providing food items on credit.²³ Following this time is World War II when people worked together for the common cause of something bigger than their world whereas the Depression was about survival.²⁴ The rationing, the number of men drafted (including Albert Lancaster and Bill Ingram, Pop’s son), and the increase in production all contributed to the idea of community. While these events had a widespread effect upon a town, it was the smaller events that carried just as big an impact. The Sunday after Harry Sr. had a heart attack, a person came to his house from the church to deliver \$500 in cash that had been raised during the worship service.²⁵

²⁰ Donnie Ruppe, email to author, November 2, 2007.

²¹ Laverne Simpson, telephone interview by author, October 28, 2007.

²² Ben Humphries, telephone interview by author, October 18, 2007.

²³ Albert Lancaster, interview by author, October 29, 2007.

²⁴ Harry Ingram, Jr., telephone interview by author, October 28, 2007.

²⁵ James Ingram, interview by author, October 13, 2007.

Nostalgia is defined as a bittersweet longing for things, persons, or situations of the past; in a sense it is being homesick. A cynical approach would be to look at the nostalgia among former millhands and say that their memory of the ‘good ole days’ does not match the actual history they lived in during those harsh times. However, in the interviews conducted and the writings of the earlier century, a sense of optimism and pride was found among the research. While there were hard times, tough living, and a lack of medicinal cures, a sense of comfort seemed to embody the community. Marc Siegel, MD wrote about this issue in his book, *False Alarm*. He explored how today’s world is far more safe in regards to worker safety, disease and consumer products, yet people today experience a greater amount of fear of things than those in the past.¹ Also, Gregg Easterbrook made the assertion that life in the United States has vastly improved in a multitude of aspects yet men and women today are less happy than in previous generations. In *The Progress Paradox*, he discussed how less satisfied people are today with more conveniences and income at their disposal compared to a past generation that had greater contentment with fewer possessions and less money to spend.²

People say the old days were of a simpler time, but what does that mean? Vivian Ingram believes that the economic situation of the thirties and forties made it seem that way. Since there was less money, there was a greater appreciation of the few possessions one had. She recalls getting, “crayons and a coloring book from Aunt Ella. I had never had crayons before.” She also recalls having one story book and one fairy tale book when she was very young.³ To her, the world seemed smaller as the local town provided all her needs. The informality of today’s world as people live in suburbs, neighborhoods have people working in different locations, and there is greater income at their disposal, creates less of a community feel, leaving former millhands with a longing for those simpler days that perhaps gave them a greater feeling of comfort.

The personal accounts of the respondents suggested that they enjoyed going back in time to relate the life they once lived. Much of the information they told dealt with personal happenings, stories of their childhood, who lived near whom, etc. Interviewees would begin a quilt-like pattern of relating who lived near them and how their relatives related to others in the town. This was true of the town reunions; there were a plethora of stories that kept people busy the entire day. Ben Humphries, one of the facilitators of the reunions, said there was no need to plan events of the day because people were too busy reliving those relations of long ago.⁴

Primary documents showed there was not a sense of oppression among the people of Cliffside. Although there was a fair amount of disgruntled workers around the Piedmont in places like Honea Path, S.C. and Gastonia, N.C., Cliffside seemed to escape this. Harry Ingram, who died in 1972, kept a diary starting in the forties; in his recordings of life there was no sign of bitterness or disdain for mill work. His entries focused on what was done each day – whether at work, at home, or at church – which is representative of many yeoman workers of the Carolina Piedmont as they did their jobs, took care of their families, and had gratitude for their possessions. On February 9, 1943, he “walked to Avondale to get Meredith box of candy for birthday;” he walked the three mile distance due to the gas rationing during the war.⁵

¹ Marc Siegel, *False Alarm: The Truth About the Epidemic of Fear*. (NJ: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 2005)

² Gregg Easterbrook, *The Progress Paradox*. (New York: Random House, 2004), dust jacket.

³ Vivian Ingram, interview by author, October 13, 2007.

⁴ Ben Humphries, telephone interview by author, October 18, 2007.

⁵ Harry Ingram, Sr. diaries, 1943-45.

The newspaper articles and editorials from the Forest City Courier that spanned the 1920s to the 1940s presented an upbeat environment in Cliffside with much positive reporting. The editor of the paper in the early twenties provided flowery and elaborate language in describing events such as the opening of the R. R. Haynes Memorial Building and the school. However, it is possible that the Haynes family's contributions to the county had a direct or indirect influence upon the direction of this writing. Either way, by the thirties the Courier's coverage of the small towns in the area reported much social and church activity but little strife or unrest.

In and among the long hours of work, the cotton dust in the air, the roar of the machinery, and the danger of the spinning parts there was an underlying sense of pride among the workers. The authors of *Like A Family* found that for a majority of the men they interviewed, they "recounted proudly the skills they had acquired in the mill."⁶ For supervisors and fixers of looms, this pride would make sense as they solved problems and made equipment run faster, but even simple machine operators had this same opinion. They had pride in knowing their equipment and keeping it working. This pride among the yeoman class extends from the farmer mentality of taking ownership of their area (whether that is their loom or the room where they work) and figuring out the various elements that affect its production. In their monotonous jobs, "workers tried to carve out room for personal dignity and control."⁷

Work was not all drudgery, despite the poor working conditions. There was certainly danger working in textiles; numerous stories persist of workers being maimed, having limbs mangled, struggling with chronic problems such as brown lung and "Monday morning sickness" when cotton dust provoked workers to cough, and death – whether immediate or eventual as in the case of Kiah Hollingsworth who worked around asbestos for many years in a mill in Brevard, N.C. There were few safeguards on machinery, no compensation for those injured, and the push for profit led many textile mills to keep wages low. Juxtaposed to this is the idea that work was not all drudgery for the workers. The research in *Like A Family* displays the various ways that workers created a positive atmosphere in the midst of mill work. Since this type of work was an assembly line type of process, a glitch or delay early in the process left workers down the line idle. Also, workers had some down time as they waited for the thread to fill up the bobbin; giving them a little bit of time to relax. Since all workers were in this process together, there was a willingness to cover for each other, such as watching the loom of the person next to them for a few minutes to give their neighbor a chance to go to the bathroom or smoke or grab a snack. Harry Ingram had flexibility with his position as a loom fixer and was able to bring lunch to Meredith as she stayed at her loom. During this down time, some women would gather in the bathroom and chat, sing religious songs or tell crude jokes – it was the one place where women could get away from the men. Some of the men would actually leave the mill to go fish or play baseball during a slow down at the mill. The doffers, who were normally boys, would occasionally have time to go fishing or swimming behind the mill until the head doffer would whistle for them. They would tuck in their shirts, come in wet and go back to work.⁸

The website www.remembercliffside.com is an extensive website with a variety of pages and a multitude of contributions from former residents of the town. The website itself is full of nostalgia, but the memories of those days long past have very little to do with work in the mill and much more to do with life around and outside of the mill. Stories of fishing holes, Christmas past, ball games, and family events dominate the site. One line in particular from the site evokes

⁶ Hall et al., *Like A Family*, 74.

⁷ Ibid., 91

⁸ Ibid., 87-88.

feelings of nostalgia, speaks to the oneness experienced among the neighbors of the town, and reminds them of the paternalism that defined this town. It is from a review of the events from 1922. After listing events in a monthly order, the last line states, “And something else went unreported. Late that night, after the streetlights were turned off and a stillness settled over the town, Santa Claus came to Cliffside.”⁹

In November 2007, Jim Ingram stood at the top of the cemetery overlooking the town that once existed. In walking around the gravestones, he recounted when and how various people died, including his grandparents. In his voice were elements discussed in this research - pride, nostalgia, sense of community; yet, there was also the pragmatism of marching forward with time. He stated, “All in all there was a sense of oneness throughout. It may be difficult to explain. Many young folks went on to college or other type [of] training and left for more opportunities, as did I. But, my heritage is here and I am proud of it.”¹⁰



So it was with Cliffside; time marched on. Like other mill towns across the Piedmont, Cliffside’s passing occurred in the latter part of the twentieth century. By this point, the global economy was taking its toll upon the textile industry; factories in other countries where production costs were lower and American economic policy made it hard for manufacturers to remain in the South. By the late twentieth century, the textile industry had nearly disappeared. Cliffside’s production had been steadily declining since the end of WWII. In 1948, Cone Mills bought the plant. Eventually, two new plants were built a couple of miles north of town (one of which is not open anymore), while the original mill declined in operation.¹¹

In the 1960s, economics and progress literally paved the way toward demise for this little town in Rutherford County. Since Cliffside was not a municipality, the houses were supplied by the mill along with the water and power which became a losing proposition for the mill. In lieu of a much-needed refurbishment of the houses, the mill cast off their responsibility for them; the houses not bought and removed from company-owned land by anyone were destroyed. The paternalistic era of housing provisions had come to a close. Now, little side streets have disappeared or simply dead end where brush and trees stand where houses once populated the area. In the early seventies, the need for swifter travel took traffic on a more direct route past the downtown. Highway 221-A, the main road from Forest City to Gaffney, S.C. followed many twists along the route but none as sharp as the left turn through the downtown before crossing the bridge over the Second Broad River near the mill’s dam. By 1962, the traffic volume through the downtown ranged from 1,300 to 3,200 vehicles each day and Cone Mills suggested a new route.¹² In 1974, a new bypass was built along with a new bridge that provided a direct and quicker route, thus avoiding the downtown entirely. As cars cruised downhill, across the bridge, and up the hill onto Gaffney, there was scant need to visit or even notice the peripheral town on the right hidden by the trees. With few residents to serve, the dead end downtown eventually was razed by Cone Mills. With this demolition went the memorial building that included the

⁹ “Remember Cliffside” website.

¹⁰ James Ingram, email to author, October 26, 2007.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² “Remember Cliffside” website.

theater; and, ironically, the last movie to be shown there was *Dracula Has Risen From The Grave*.¹³

The town has risen from the grave only in the minds of those who lived there long ago, and the gravestones are the few sites left. The school still operates today, the three main churches still stand, and the clock tower from the memorial building was salvaged and stands on the hill where R. R. Haynes' home once sat. Each of these represent the three key elements of the fondness former residents have of this town: the school symbolizing the nostalgia and pride that many people spoke of in the survey, the churches embodying the sense of community, and the clock tower reminiscent of the paternalism that caused all of this to exist.

To stand in the barren wide-space of pavement, past an old chain link fence while staring down at a decaying mammoth brick facility, it is hard to imagine that a vibrant town once stood there. While the buildings are gone, the old iron railings of the mill office still stand where mill workers waiting for the shift change would hang around and chat, which was commonly known as "shinin' the rails."¹⁴ Even though it is hard for some people to imagine the past, it is not hard for former mill workers to recall this bygone town, and even today – through the annual reunion and their website – they continue "shinin' the rails."



¹³ Alfred Reno Bailey, *Cliffside: Portrait of a Carolina Mill Town*, (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2005), 111.

¹⁴ "Remember Cliffside" website.