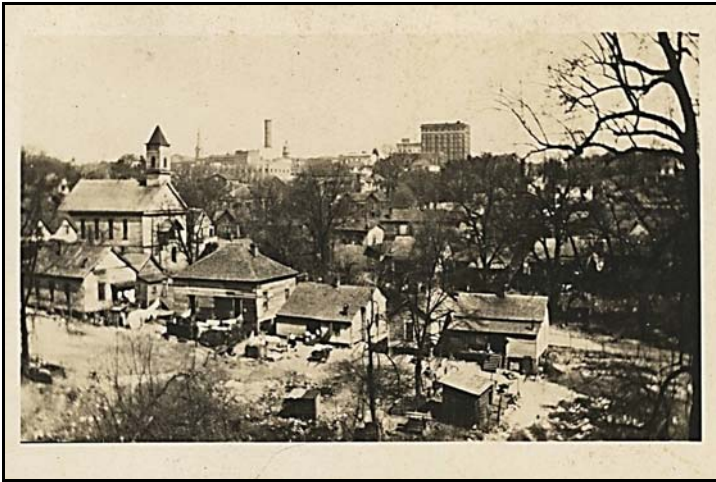# Athens Historian

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A View of Athens From Mount Zion

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The purposes of the Athens Historical Society are:

1. To discover, collect, and preserve all materials, especially original and source materials, pertaining to the history of Athens, Clarke County, adjacent counties, and related areas.
2. To disseminate this knowledge for enlightenment of our citizenry through preparing, editing, and publishing historical materials descriptive of Athens and related areas, or sponsoring programs and activities of historical interest.
3. To promote historical research.
4. To promote preservation and perpetuation of historic sites.
5. To bring together those interested in the history of these areas.
6. To promote and stimulate public interest in and appreciation of the history of Athens and related areas, and to develop in every way an understanding of their historical past.

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On the cover: *View of Athens from Mount Zion*, a real photo postcard of the Athens skyline in the 1920s. From the Georgia Photo File, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia Libraries.

NEW INSIGHTS INTO THE AFRICAN AMERICAN SECTION OF THE OLD ATHENS CEMETERY

by Thomas H. Gresham

On November 17, 2015, a backhoe dislodged human remains while digging a footing for a new University of Georgia building under construction in the parking lot of Baldwin Hall. It quickly became clear that this was an old burial, probably associated with the Old Athens Cemetery, the fenced boundary of which was 60 feet to the north. State regulations governing the inadvertent discovery of human remains (OCGA 31-21-6) guided immediate archaeological investigation of the area. Ground penetrating radar indicated that four more graves existed very close by, and that these burials were almost certainly part of the Old Athens Cemetery, which was founded around 1800 as the free, public burying ground for all Athenians, white and black, free and enslaved. While a few researchers had stated clearly that enslaved persons and African Americans were buried at the Old Athens Cemetery, this fact is not well known and is not explicitly included in most descriptions of the cemetery.[1] No one was sure where, how or how many persons of African descent were buried in the Old Athens Cemetery, although some, including Athenian Fred Smith, Sr., were confident that the area around Baldwin Hall was the place where enslaved persons and post-emancipation African Americans were buried. Because the African-American section was not visible, marked, or publicly known, it was vulnerable to construction disturbance in 2015.

The exposure of burials in the Baldwin Hall parking lot led to three years of archaeological and historic research into this southern portion of the Old Athens Cemetery and the exhumation and reburial of graves

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[1] Patricia Irvin Cooper and Glen McAninch, *Map and Historical Sketch of the Old Athens Cemetery, Jackson Street, Athens, Georgia*, Old Athens Cemetery Foundation, 1983.

in the project area, culminating in a comprehensive final report.[2] The bulk of this article derives from that final report. The entire 0.3-acre construction area was searched for graves, but almost half of the area had been previously graded down below the depth of grave shafts (generally 3 to 5 feet). In all, 105 graves and 10 sets of previously dislodged human remains were detected. The density of graves in the preserved area where graves could still have existed was about 700 graves per acre, or about 62 square feet per grave. Graves with human remains and burial artifacts (coffin hardware and personal items) were found up to and extending underneath the main portion of Baldwin Hall, built in 1938, and its rear extension, built in 1942. Fragmentary human remains outside of grave shafts were found in the builders' trenches of Baldwin Hall (main portion and rear addition), indicating that graves were disturbed in the 1938 and 1942 construction episodes.

Of the 97 graves excavated, all but two contained various combinations of human remains (bone and teeth), personal artifacts (buttons, amulets) or coffin hardware (nails, screws, handles).[3] Two adult-sized graves had no human remains and may reflect prior exhumation, possibly shortly after Oconee Hill Cemetery opened in 1856 or just prior to the construction of Baldwin Hall in 1938. At the outset of the exhumation process the project archaeologists were curious to learn the ancestry of those buried, namely whether these were persons of African descent. Given topographic similarities to the old city cemetery in Madison, Georgia, where whites were interred on a ridge top and enslaved persons on a lower slope, it was anticipated that the graves at Baldwin Hall would be of enslaved persons, but with the recognition that they could be a southerly extension of the visible white graves to the north. One of the first graves excavated seemed to have physical characteristics of Euro-Americans, but then most subsequent sets of human remains (mainly skulls) had characteristics typical of persons of African descent. Three graves had artifacts typically associated with graves of enslaved persons (pierced coins or faceted glass beads worn around the neck), while another grave, of a very large person with remnants of a military uniform (boots, buckle,

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[2] Thomas H. Gresham, Laurie J. Reitsema, Kathleen A. Mulchrone, and Carey J. Garland, *Archaeological Exhumations of Burials in the Baldwin Hall Portion of the Old Athens Cemetery, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia*, Final Report. Southeastern Archeological Services, Athens, 2019. Courtesy of the University of Georgia.

[3] Because of safety concerns, eight graves could not be excavated.

military buttons) appeared to indicate a white soldier. It became clear that ancestry could not be reliably assessed using visual observations, and it was agreed that as many samples as possible would be submitted for DNA analysis of ancestry. While this analysis of mitochondrial DNA is complex and does not readily address the issue of "race," the results can be simplified to say that the graves at Baldwin Hall were of enslaved people of African descent and post-emancipation African Americans. Notably, the grave containing military clothing was confirmed to be that of a large, adolescent male of African descent, presumably an enslaved body servant from the Civil War, who was buried in his provided uniform.

Artifacts found at the bottom of the grave shafts date burials to almost the entire nineteenth century, from the antebellum period to well past 1856, when the cemetery was "closed" to further burials and use of the newly opened Oconee Hill Cemetery was encouraged. It is likely that African American use of the Old Athens Cemetery quickly diminished when the Gospel Pilgrim, Bethlehem (Brooklyn) and a third African American cemetery opened in the early 1880s. Graves in the African American section of the Old Athens Cemetery were carefully prepared in the style typical of whites and African Americans in Georgia in the nineteenth century. A rectangular grave shaft with straight, smooth walls was dug about three to four feet deep, and then a second shaft, carefully shaped and sized to the coffin, was dug down another foot and a half. The wood coffin was slipped into the lower (secondary) shaft and covered with wooden planks to create a burial vault of sorts (Figure 1). In a revelatory recent study of grave types, James Davidson has shown that this style of creating a secondary vault was imported by slaves from West Africa, and was quickly adopted throughout the South.[4] The coffins were hand made to the size of the person, and for most of the nineteenth century were usually hexagonal, but sometimes rectangular. There was little difference between coffins of affluent and enslaved persons. Jefferson Franklin Henry, born enslaved and living in Athens in the 1930s told WPA interviewers that "White folks' coffins was made the same way, only theirs was stained

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[4] James M. Davidson, "They Laid Planks 'Crost the Coffins: The African Origin of Grave Vaulting in the United States," in *International Journal of Historical Archaeology*, Vol.16 (1), 2012, 86-134.

…".[5] Willis Cofer, who was enslaved near Washington, Georgia, told WPA interviewers "White folkses was laid out dat way same as [slaves]".[6] Because of the slave narratives, we know the name of the man who constructed many of the coffins used for enslaved persons in the Old Athens Cemetery. Former slave David Wilborn was born on the Athens plantation of Dr. Edward Ware (part of today's Ware-Lyndon House), and he told WPA interviewers that his father, a Cherokee Indian named Robert Wilborn, made coffins in which to bury Ware's enslaved workers and for Ware to sell to others.[7]
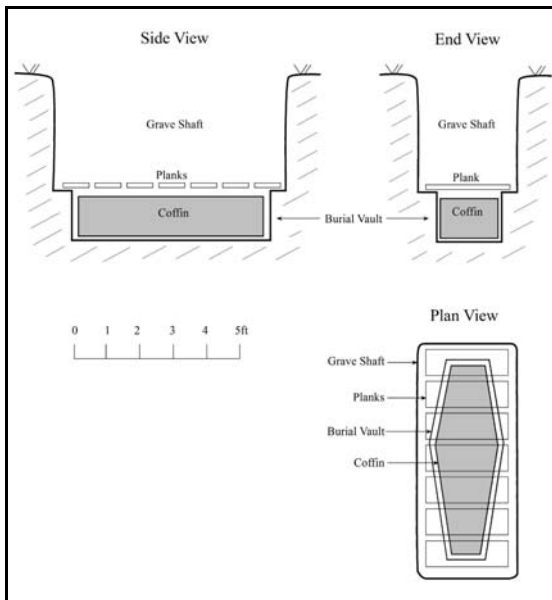

Figure 1. Schematic view of a grave in the African-American section of the Old Athens Cemetery.

Besides exhuming and reburying the remains from the Baldwin Hall construction site, the project sought to research the origins, expansion, diminishment, and disturbance of the Old Athens Cemetery, with a primary goal of establishing its maximum former extent of both the white and African American sections of the cemetery. The discussion of this research consumes

[5] *Georgia Slave Narratives*, Part 2, 186. WPA Slave Narratives reprint in collection of the Heritage Room, Athens Public Library, Athens, GA. No publisher or publication date is given in the volume.

[6] *Georgia Slave Narratives*, Part 1, 207. WPA Slave Narratives reprint in collection of the Heritage Room, Athens Public Library, Athens, GA. No publisher or publication date is given in the volume.

[7] Patricia McAlexander, editor, "WPA Narrative of David Wilborn, Ex-slave, born in Athens, Georgia, 1856." In *Athens Historian*, Vol. 16, 2016, pp. 42-47.

over 70 pages of the final report, and will be greatly condensed here.[8] There were already settlers living near the area that was selected to be the University of Georgia in 1801. At that time, it was part of Jackson County, for which the 1800 census recorded 6,328 whites and 1,408 enslaved blacks. The date of the first burial is unknown, but is suggested to be between 1794 and 1801.[9] The earliest inscribed tombstone dates to 1817. In 1806, the University constructed its first masonry building, Franklin College, and Athens was incorporated as a town with 17 families, some of whom owned slaves.[10] The first census that includes Athens was in 1810, when the population of the town was
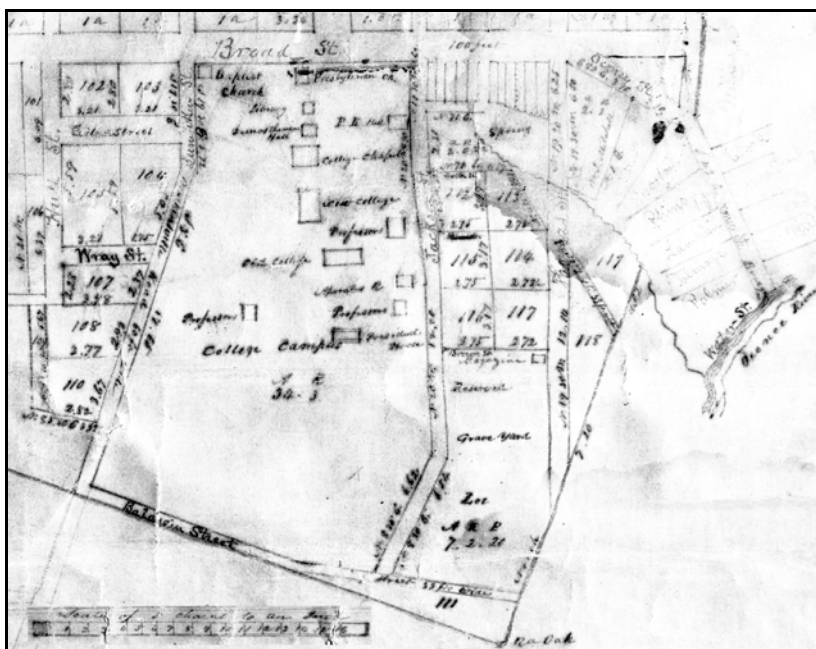

Figure 2. Detail from the Milledge Purchase map by W. L. Mitchell, ca. 1852. (Athens City Records - Maps and Blueprints, collection MS1633a, oversized folder 1B, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia Libraries.)

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8 Gresham *et al.*, 2019.

9 Mary Bondurant Warren, *Jackson Street Cemetery: Original City Cemetery of Athens, Georgia.* Athens: Heritage Papers, 1966; Cooper and McAninch, 1983.

10 Joel Tomas Bowen, *Room to Grow: A Historical Analysis of the Physical Growth at the University of Georgia, 1785 to 1900*, PhD Dissertation, University of Georgia, 1990.

139 whites and 138 blacks. Assuming a nineteenth century annual mortality rate of 20 deaths per 1000 population, this means that five or six Athenians were dying and being buried each year.[11] One of the first descriptions of the location of the first burials is by Augustus Hull, who notes that corpses were first interred "on college hill" and then in a nearby one-acre parcel designated by the town.[12] It is unclear exactly where the first burials were, but the one-acre cemetery is where the Old Athens Cemetery developed. The established cemetery, free to all and with little regulation or management, continued to grow. In 1817, the University of Georgia Board of Trustees resolved that a new street would extend from Front Street (today's Broad Street) "back of the President's Garden and extending toward the Grave Yard."[13] The cemetery continued to grow along with Athens' population. At some point Jackson Street was extended southward, and in the 1880s several newspaper articles noted that since the street "was carried through the old cemetery," grave depressions and bones were filling the street and the adjoining sidewalks.[14] Having examined all known maps of Athens and reviewed the developmental history of the cemetery, it seems that the most accurate representation of the size and location of the Old Athens Cemetery is shown in the ca. 1852 *Milledge Purchase* map by W. L. Mitchell.[15] (See Figure 2.) The plot labeled "Reserved Grave Yard" has the notation "A 7, R 2, P 20," which denotes that the plot is 7 acres, 2 rods, and 20 poles in size, or 7.625 acres. Because this is a carefully surveyed map and was done only three years after the University Board of Trustees resolved to have the cemetery fenced, it is likely that it is accurate.[16] Still, there are problems in getting it to

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[11] Michael R. Haines, "The Urban Mortality Transition in the United States, 1800-1940," *Annales de Demographie Historique,* Vol. 1, 2001, 33-64.

[12] Augustus Longstreet Hull, *A Historical Sketch of the University of Georgia*, Atlanta: The Foote & Davies Company, 1894, 39.

[13] *Minutes of the Trustees of the University of Georgia, 1794-1817*, 31 July 1817, 268 (transcription, 239). Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia Libraries. https://dlg.galileo.usg.edu/guan/ua2-042/pdfs/ua02-042-006-001.pdf.

[14] cf. *Athens Banner-Watchman*, February 6, 1883, p. 1.

[15] *Milledge Purchase Map*, ca. 1852, Athens City Records - Maps, Plans and Blueprints, Collection MS1633a, oversized folder 1B, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia Libraries.

[16] *Transcription of Minutes of the Board of Trustees of the University of Georgia, 1837-1857*, Vol. 3, 177, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia Libraries.

overlay modern maps. The "best fit" of this 7.6-acre cemetery on a modern map is shown in Figure 3. It is bounded by the west side of Jackson Street, the east side Thomas Street, the north side of the lower driveway to Baldwin Hall and by an indistinct line somewhere near the north end of the Jackson Street Building, now the home of the College of Environment and Design. The brick Bishop House that still stands on Jackson Street was built in 1837; about 30 years after the first graves were dug. It seems unlikely that it would have been built over such recent graves, and thus the northern limit of the cemetery is probably south of this house.

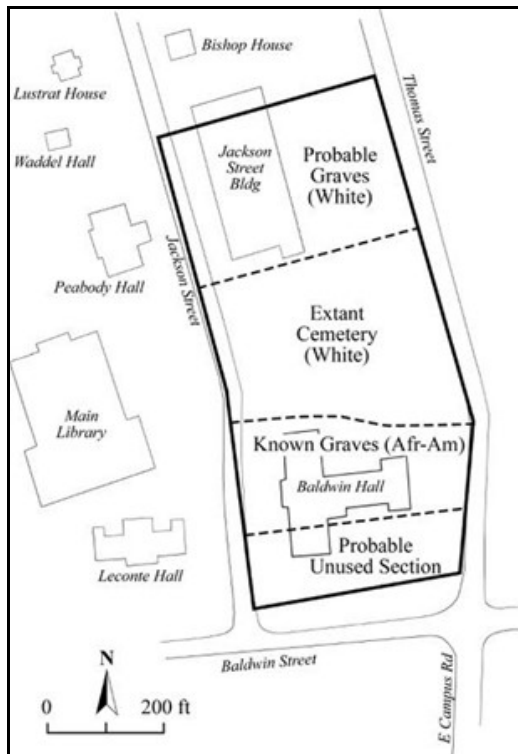Census records and estimates by Coulter for 1860 show that the racial makeup of Athens was nearly even for the life of the cemetery, from c. 1800 to 1856.[17] For instance, census schedules examined by the author show 687 whites and 694 blacks in Athens in 1830 and 1,238 whites and 1,415 blacks in 1840. Coulter estimates 1,955 whites and 1,893 blacks in Athens in 1860.[18] Although some whites and enslaved persons of Athens could have been buried elsewhere, such as on outlying family plantations, there were no church or other sizable cemeteries in Athens. Weeks's recording of cemeteries in Clarke County lists only one small family cemetery inside the

Figure 3. Estimation of the maximum extent of the Old Athens Cemetery.

[17] E. Merton Coulter, "Slavery and Freedom in Athens, Georgia." *Georgia Historical Quarterly,* 49, no. 3 (1965), 264-293.
[18] Ibid.

nineteenth century city limits, other than the Old Athens Cemetery and Oconee Hill Cemetery.[19] It seems probable that the great majority of those living in Athens prior to 1856 were buried at the Old Athens Cemetery, and that there would be roughly equal numbers of white and black burials. Given that it is likely that enslaved persons had a higher mortality rate than whites and given that it is reported that far more African Americans than whites continued to be buried in the Old Athens Cemetery after its 1856 closure, graves of persons of African descent most likely outnumber graves of whites, perhaps by a wide margin.[20]

The excavations at Baldwin Hall showed that graves in the African American section were dense, about twice to three times the density at other more rural African American cemeteries.[21] However, the graves only rarely overlapped one another. There were voids of graves where faint traces of large trees could be seen, confirming nineteenth century reports of the cemetery being in tall trees. Artifacts in graves confirm newspaper reports that African Americans continued to be buried into the latter part of the nineteenth century. We could not discern precisely how or when the cemetery became racially segregated, but suspect it began with the very first burials, with whites on the higher ground to the north and enslaved persons on the lower slopes to the south. The confirmation that virtually all graves in the Baldwin Hall lot were of persons of African descent and the fact that white graves are visible about 30 feet to the north suggest that there was a sharp dividing line between the two sections that closely corresponds to the present (and relatively recent) southern wall/fence of the Old Athens Cemetery. We do not know how or if this dividing line was marked when the cemetery was in use. Ground penetrating radar and excavation down to a nineteenth century ground surface around the southern end of Baldwin Hall showed no graves there. It appears that African American graves occupied about two acres, and white graves occupied about four acres, as shown in Figure 3.

When the first grave was disturbed by construction in 2015, many in Athens were bewildered and incensed that the existence of these graves was not known and considered. In fact, the extent of the

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[19] *Athens-Clarke County, Georgia Cemeteries.* Eve B. Weeks (ed.). Athens Historical Society, 1999.

[20] The town sexton reported 6 whites and 57 blacks buried in the Old Athens Cemetery in 1867. *The Southern Watchman*, Athens, GA, January 8, 1868, 3.

[21] Gresham *et al.,* 2019, 28.

cemetery into the Baldwin Hall lot had never been well documented, although it had been known in the African American community and proposed by a few historians in obscure publications. There were some second-hand reports that graves had been moved prior to the construction of Baldwin Hall in 1938, but this turned out not to be true. The principal message from the unfortunate disturbance of the African American section of the Old Athens Cemetery may be the importance of researching, documenting. and publicizing history. The portion of the Old Athens Cemetery that was more visible was saved from removal and development in the early 1960s, largely because it was visible. Hopefully the research initiated by this project and the memorial to those of African descent once buried here that was erected on the front lawn of Baldwin Hall will bring needed visibility and recognition to this section of the Old Athens Cemetery.

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SAMUEL WATKINS: A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF THE BELL RINGER AT THE UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

by Laura E. Nelson and Randy L. Reid

The topic of enslaved labor at the University of Georgia has generated intense public interest over the past several years.[1] Efforts to uncover the details of this story are hindered, however, by the absence of specific information regarding the lives of enslaved people employed by the University both as individuals and as workers. These challenges arise in part from the fact that the University did not actually own any enslaved persons. Rather, the University hired the labor of its enslaved workers from whites who resided in the vicinity of campus. University records provide some information about some of these hired workers, but they are generally superficial and limited to the names of the enslaved, the rate for their hire, and/or the name of their owner. Yet, in some instances, it is possible to trace the stories of enslaved workers who the University employed as hired labor in some detail and a more nuanced context. The life of Sam Watkins, the campus bell ringer, is one of those stories.

Samuel Watkins was born at the turn of the nineteenth century. Almost nothing is known of Watkins's life prior to his appearance in the records of the Demosthenian Society at the University of Georgia in the mid-1800s, but it is possible that he appears in the 1822 inventory of property of Judge Stephen Harris as one of the enslaved laborers owned by the prosperous resident of Eatonton in Putnam County, Georgia. Based on his will, it appears that Watkins likely spent his early years as a field hand laboring on Harris's nearby plantation. In bequeathing his property to his wife and children, Judge Harris stipulated those enslaved workers who performed household duties

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[1] For work on this topic, see Chana Kai Lee, "A Fraught Reckoning: Exploring the History of Slavery at the University of Georgia," in *The Public Historian*, Vol. 42, No. 4 (November 2020): 12-27. For coursework at UGA that has focused upon slavery and race at the university and in Athens, see "Teaching Initiatives," UGA & Slavery, accessed January 7, 2022, https://slavery.ehistory.org/teaching,

should continue in that role, while those assigned to plantation labor should be hired out.[2] Sarah Harris seems to have adhered to her husband's final wishes even after she moved her family to Athens, which indicates that Watkins had labored on the plantation and been used as hired-out labor thereafter. As an advertisement in the Milledgeville newspaper *Georgia Journal* suggests, Sarah began the process of hiring out the former plantation workforce in 1823.[3]

Although none of the people enslaved by the Harris family were immediately sold away following Stephen Harris's death, the community in which Watkins had grown up was effectively scattered through the process of hiring out. Moreover, Sarah Harris relocated to Athens by 1830, but the census record for that year indicates that she had with her only sixteen of the nearly fifty enslaved people included in her husband's will.[4] Whether she had sold the other enslaved workers or distributed them to her children as they came of age, cannot be determined from the documentary evidence.

Records indicate that Sarah Harris began to lease some of her enslaved workers to the University of Georgia to serve as campus servants in 1836.[5] The University did not engage in the ownership of enslaved people, but rather hired their labor from their owners–generally on a yearly basis at a rate of $75 to $300 per year. Beyond maintaining the cleanliness of the University's buildings, the school expected these enslaved servants to engage in all the functions required for the daily operation of the University such as hauling water and firewood, cooking, and helping to maintain the University's botanical garden.[6]

In addition to their duties as "college servants," the University also permitted its students to enjoy the benefits of having an enslaved servant to wait on them. For the sum of one dollar per annum–paid to

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[2] Inventory and Appraisement of the Estate of Stephen W. Harris; Last Will and Testament of Stephen W. Harris, September 14, 1822, found on Ancestry.com. *Georgia, U.S., Wills and Probate Records, 1742-1992*, original located in Putnam County, Georgia Probate Court.

[3] "Negroes to Hire," Milledgeville *Georgia Journal*, December 16, 1823, 1.

[4] 1830 Census, Putnam County, Georgia.

[5] *Minutes of the Trustees of the University of Georgia*, Volume III, August 1, 1836, p.22, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia Libraries, Athens, Georgia; Lee, "A Fraught Reckoning," 21.

[6] *Prudential Committee Report*, December 17, 1842, p. 16, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia Libraries, Athens, Georgia; Lee, "A Fraught Reckoning," 22.

the University, not to the servant–students could have their fires made, their shoes cleaned, and their rooms scoured. Between 1828 and 1859, the price of "servant hire" rose from $1 to $10 per year, but the system remained fundamentally unchanged until emancipation finally came at the end of the Civil War.[7]

Inevitably, some students took advantage of their privileged position to abuse or even viciously assault the enslaved people on campus. The University faculty did not ignore these brutal transgressions, but records indicate that they treated them as only slightly more serious than the use of profanity on campus or being disrespectful to a professor.[8]

Sam Watkins labored within this system and within this environment for much of his adult life. During his years of labor at the University, he was generally known as Sam Harris, but the University students usually referred to him as "Old Sam," "Big Sam," or "boy Sam." Although the specific details of his day-to-day duties have not been recorded in detail, one University student later recalled, "Old Sam . . . was the college bell ringer. He made the fires in the professors' rooms, sometimes swept them out and was at the beck and call of every student in Old and New College."[9]

Surviving records do not indicate that Watkins suffered the physical abuse too often aimed at others of his status, but he did not escape the pranks played by bored students who did not consider him very bright. The students took pleasure in simultaneously shouting for him from every part of campus. Watkins invariably responded by going first to the last person who had called him. While Watkins' response seems perfectly reasonable, his reaction struck the teenage boys as "ludicrous to witness."[10]

Watkins's most frequent appearances in contemporaneous sources involve his work at the Demosthenian Society, one of the two debating societies on campus. He appears in both the Society's minutes and its

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[7] *Minutes of the Trustees of the University of Georgia*, Vol. IV, November 3, 1859, 33.

[8] *Minutes of the Faculty of Franklin College,* Vol. I, 1822-1836, June 13, 1823; March 15, 1825, 12, 57. For discussion of the abuses that enslaved laborers endured, see Lee, "A Fraught Reckoning," 22-3.

[9] Augustus Longstreet Hull, *Annals of Athens, Georgia, 1801-1901* (Athens: Banner Job Office, 1906), 175-6.

[10] Augustus Longstreet Hull, *A Historical Sketch of the University of Georgia* (Atlanta: The Foote & Davies Co., 1894), 140.

treasury reports. These records indicate that by 1860 Watkins was negotiating the terms of his own labor. The documents clearly demonstrate that the members of the society bargained with him to secure his labor and paid his wages directly to him. Sarah Harris's name appears nowhere in these records. Watkins's ability to engage in this business enterprise probably derived

The Demosthenian Hall on the UGA North Campus. (Courtesy of the Library of Congress, public domain.)

from the practice permitted by some slaveholders and hiring employers of allowing the enslaved to hire themselves out during their off hours.

The Society generally paid $15 per year for the cleaning of its hall.[11] Watkins also earned extra income by performing additional duties such as delivering firewood to the Demosthenian Hall. While Watkins's earnings were insufficient to live on, they would have provided opportunities for him and his wife Lizzie to enjoy some level of material comfort denied to many other enslaved people.

Watkins' relationship with the Demosthenians proved contentious on more than one occasion. In April 1861, a bucket allocated for Sam's use when cleaning the hall was lost or damaged. The Society members moved to reduce Watkins's pay to fund the purchase of a new bucket, as they deemed him "very negligent in his duty."[12] On March 1 of the following year, the membership returned to this theme following a committee report, which noted, "The floor was dirty, and the spit boxes, as if they had not been cleaned out this term."[13] Rather than pay Watkins his usual wage, the Society's treasurer demanded a committee to investigate the complaints about the quality of Watkins's work.[14]

After conducting their investigation "against negro boy Sam," the committee reported that Watkins had agreed to reduce his charges for

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[11] *Demosthenian Society Treasurer Report*, January 27, 1860, UGA Literary Societies Papers, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia Libraries, Athens, Georgia (Hereafter: UGA Literary Societies Papers).

[12] *Demosthenian Society Minutes*, April 13, 1861, UGA Literary Societies Papers.

[13] *Demosthenian Society Correspondence and Reports*, March 1, 1862, UGA Literary Societies Papers.

[14] *Demosthenian Society Minutes*, March 8, 1862, UGA Literary Societies Papers.

"attending the Hall" to $7 per year. Watkins, however, declined to acknowledge any inadequacy in the quality of his work. Instead, he agreed to accept a reduction in pay "in consequence of [the] reduction of students in attendance of college exercises" due to the Civil War.[15]

This new arrangement did not survive the year. The records do not mention the cause of the break, but by January 1863, the Demosthenians – desperate for someone to clean up after them – appointed another committee "to see Negro Sam and find out for what wages he would agree to keep the hall swept and fires made."[16] Watkins now agreed to do the duties for $1 per month. The Society immediately accepted the proposal.[17] Yet within a matter of months, the University closed its doors due to the disruptions of the war and Watkins's employment with the Demosthenians again ended.

When the University resumed classes and the Demosthenians resumed their activities in January 1866, the Society quickly offered Watkins his former position, which he promptly accepted.[18] Only weeks later, however, Watkins and his employers were again at odds. Although the nature of the Demosthenians minutes does not make the nature of their complaint clear, the members summoned Watkins–who they now referred to as "Freedman Sam"– to give testimony before the membership.[19] Watkins appeared as ordered, but the Society viewed his responses as contradictory. His inability to provide satisfactory explanations along "with other circumstantial evidence, was deemed sufficient to warrant the case be carried before the Freedman's Bureau."[20] The outcome of the complaint to the Freedmen's Bureau remains unknown, but Watkins continued his custodial work for the Society until 1868.

In April of that year, he crossed a line that his employers would not tolerate – he openly supported and cast his vote for the Republican Party. The Demosthenians voted "to turn off the old freedman servant

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[15] *Demosthenian Society Minutes*, March 15, 1862, UGA Literary Societies Papers.

[16] *Demosthenian Society Minutes*, January 29, 1863, UGA Literary Societies Papers.

[17] *Demosthenian Society Minutes*, February 5, 1863, UGA Literary Societies Papers.

[18] *Demosthenian Society Minutes*, January 20, 1866, UGA Literary Societies Papers.

[19] *Demosthenian Society Minutes*, March 10, 1866, UGA Literary Societies Papers.

[20] *Demosthenian Society Minutes*, April 7, 1866, UGA Literary Societies Papers.

of the D. Hall, because this negro, . . . ungrateful for the numerous favors bestowed upon him by the Society during the last twenty years, had voted the radical ticket, and thus declared himself an open enemy to the honor, liberty, and life of his benefactors." Immediately after voting to dismiss the seventy-year-old Watkins, the members also voted to expel all honorary members of the Society who had publicly endorsed the "radical ticket."[21]

Census records indicate Watkins worked as a day laborer and as a janitor at the University for most of the remaining twelve years of his life.[22] It is possible that he eventually returned to work for the Demosthenian Society. As age ravaged his body, however, he increasingly turned to housework. He and Lizzie lived at 166 Broad Street and while it is not clear if they owned their home, they did acquire a vacant half-acre lot on Billups Street.[23]

Samuel Watkins died on September 26, 1880. Lizzie survived him by nearly eleven years. The *Athens Banner* took note of his passing. Choosing to ignore the injustices that had defined and proscribed so much of Watkins's life, the newspaper praised him as "one of the old town characters of Athens" who was "universally respected" at the University and within the wider Athens community. Despite Watkins's often difficult relations with the Demosthenians, the newspaper concluded, with no apparent sense of irony, he "was as loyal a Demosthenian as any of them."[24] One doubts that Watkins would have agreed or defined his life in terms of his service to the Demosthenians or the University. For all the injustices and limitations that circumscribed Sam Watkins's life, in the end, that life belonged to him and to Lizzie.

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WHITEHALL MILL VILLAGE

by Dorothy Harnish and Cari Goetcheus

Southern textile production was a home-based, hand-crafted industry prior to the 1830s. While the Industrial Revolution in England developed machine-manufactured cloth between 1760 and 1820, similar technologies developed in the United States not long after; first in New England during the late eighteenth century, then in the South by the early nineteenth century.

Early advocates for textile manufacturing in Georgia were motivated by economics and pride: as an industrial alternate to the decade-long declining agricultural economy of the 1820s, and independence from Northern states where cloth was manufactured from the cotton grown in Southern states.[1] The 1828 federal tariff on cotton product imports offered an additional incentive to build factories in the South as the tariff negatively affected Southern consumers because they imported more finished goods than the rest of the country.[2] Mill owners advocated locating the manufacturing facilities close to the supply of cotton, especially given the availability of waterpower from rivers and streams to power the looms and other machinery. Access to a workforce for these new Southern mills, however, was a challenge. Emulating the practices used in New England mills, Southern textile mills adopted the family system of labor and recruited entire families from nearby rural areas as their main workforce. Mill owners provided workers with

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[1] Newspaper articles and editorials during the late 1820s and early 1830s throughout the South generally decried industrialization, hence it was a careful balancing act when Southern investors chose to start manufacturing companies and build mills. Michael J. Gagnon, *Transition to an Industrial South: Athens, Georgia, 1830-1870* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2012), 14; Richard W. Griffin, "The Origins of the Industrial Revolution In Georgia: Cotton Textiles, 1810-1865," in *The Georgia Historical Quarterly*, 42, No. 4 (December, 1958): 357-360.

[2] Gagnon, *Transition to an Industrial South*, 15; Griffin, "The Origins of the Industrial Revolution In Georgia," 360.

houses located near the mills and a company store where employees could purchase necessities.[3]

Once called "Manchester of the South," Athens, Georgia played a significant role in the establishment and growth of the Southern cotton textile industry.[4] Athens' location along the rocky shoals of several branches of the Oconee River, and its emergence as an important railroad hub, gave the city an advantage which it put to good use in its early water-powered mills. In the early 1830s, Clarke County and Athens boasted three cotton mills: the Georgia Factory on the North Oconee River five miles south of Athens (1830);[5] the Athens Factory on the North Oconee River adjacent to downtown Athens (1832); and the Princeton Factory on tributaries of the Middle Oconee River on the way to Watkinsville (1835).[6]

Several researchers have noted the importance of Athens' early cotton mills to the development of the Southern textile industry.[7] Yet through the lens of historic preservation, which aims to retain tangible pieces of history, two of those three early mill complexes have been greatly physically impaired over the years. A small portion of the

[3] Arden Williams, "Textile Industry," in the *New Georgia Encyclopedia* (15 July 2020, Web, 12 April 2021), https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/business-economy/textile-industry/.

[4] Louis A. DeVorsey, Jr., "Early water-powered industries in Athens and Clarke County," in *Papers of the Athens Historical Society*, Vol. II (1979): 39-51.

[5] The Athens Manufacturing Company established a textile mill c. 1830, in the area now known as Whitehall. In 1832 they established a second mill, the Athens Factory, near downtown Athens. In 1839, The Georgia Manufacturing Company was created to manage the Athens Manufacturing Company's first mill (known as the Georgia Factory), because the majority of the Georgia Factory's assets (buildings and stock) were owned by a single investor, John White, who had managed the Georgia Factory since 1833.

[6] Princeton Factory was originally created as Camak Factory in 1834. DeVorsey, "Early water-powered industries in Athens and Clarke County," 41; Louis A. DeVorsey, Jr., "Georgia Factory and White Hall, Georgia: A *Vade Mecum*," Paper presented at the joint meeting of the Georgia Historical Society and the Athens Historical Society, (1977); Steven A. Moffson, "Athens Manufacturing Company." National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (2002): 10; Kathleen A. Day, "Camak House," National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (1975): 8; Connie Malone and Lisa D. Vogel, "Georgia Factory." National Register of Historic District Information Nomination (1991): 7.

[7] Gagnon, *Transition to an Industrial South*, 2012; DeVorsey, "Early water-powered industries in Athens and Clarke County," 1979; Griffin, "The Origins of the Industrial Revolution In Georgia," 1958.

Athens Factory has been rehabilitated with some of its remaining mill housing located on Carr's Hill, while the Princeton Factory was recently demolished, although some associated housing remains. Amazingly, much of the Georgia Factory mill, warehouses and its village remain intact. This article focuses on the history and development of the Georgia Factory and its associated mill village, the former town of Whitehall, and the lifeways of the worker operatives of the various versions of the Whitehall mills.

Development of the Georgia Factory and its Mill Village

Seeking to take advantage of local economic opportunities, a group of savvy entrepreneurs, comprised of Athenians William Dearing, John Nesbit, Abraham Walker, and Augustin Clayton, as well as John Johnson of Massachusetts, established the Athens Manufacturing Company in 1829.[8] This group purchased a substantial tract of land along the North Oconee River five miles south of Athens as the site of their new enterprise. This portion of the river had a sharp bend in it where water slowed and could be forced into a mill race to power the proposed textile mill. Thomas Moore, the previous owner of the property, exploited the waterpower via a dam and mill race to operate both a grist mill and a sawmill.[9] The investors built a four-story wooden textile manufacturing mill downriver from the dam and began operations in 1830, with John Johnson as the mill manager. The mill included 30 weaving looms and 1000 spindles for spinning cotton yarn.[10]

In 1833, after parting ways with John Johnson, Augustin Clayton convinced the other company directors to hire John White to manage their North Oconee operations.[11] White, an Irish immigrant who Clayton met while visiting Washington, D.C., possessed considerable

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[8] DeVorsey, "Early water-powered industries in Athens and Clarke County," 41.
[9] Upriver from the future location of the Georgia Factory, there had been a grist mill, built after 1799, when John Malone bought that property and constructed a dam across the North Oconee River. In 1820 Thomas Moore bought that property and more in the area. There was already a mill race on the property when he bought it. DeVorsey, "Georgia Factory and White Hall, Georgia: A *Vade Mecum*."
[10] *The Athenian*, IV, No. 5, February 2, 1830, 2; DeVorsey, "Georgia Factory and White Hall, Georgia: A *Vade Mecum*"; Griffin, "The Origins of the Industrial Revolution In Georgia," 360.
[11] Gagnon, *Transition to an Industrial South*, 44.

experience in textile manufacturing.[12] Over the next decade, White purchased numerous parcels of land around the factory, as well as increasing shares of company stock. He eventually became sole owner of the factory and much of the land that surrounded it.[13] Incorporated as the Georgia Manufacturing Company in 1839 to carry out cotton manufacturing, people referred to White's operation as the Georgia Factory.[14] It was the first successful river-powered textile mill in Clarke County and one of the earliest in Georgia.[15]

The mill management adopted the family labor system originally developed by Samuel Slater, a New England mill owner who employed entire families and provided their housing.[16] Due to the Georgia Factory's distance from Athens and farms from which they recruited workers, coupled with the limits to transportation over poor roads, the mill owners needed to provide housing for the workers. With the factory built on what little flat land there was adjacent to the river, a mill village slowly developed on the hills above it where the owners constructed a dozen small houses along both sides of the main road leading to the mill.[17] Early mill villages, such as at the Georgia Factory, developed organically with housing locations following the topography along ridgelines and ravines, and roads carefully navigating steep slopes connecting houses, churches, stores and the factory. At the Georgia Factory village, when more housing was needed, side streets extended from the main road onto the hills surrounding the factory

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[12] There are conflicting dates and stories regarding how John White met Augustin Clayton and when he arrived in Athens. What is known is that his father, Robert White, was a knowledgeable textile mill manager in Ireland and South Carolina, invested in the Athens Factory as a partner, and acted as mill superintendent there for over a decade. Robert White came to Athens in 1832 to work with his son, John, in the earliest days of Athens textile industry development. Gagnon, *Transition to an Industrial South*, 68-69.

[13] DeVorsey, "Georgia Factory and White Hall, Georgia: A *Vade Mecum*."; DeVorsey, "Early water-powered industries in Athens and Clarke County." 42; Moffson, "Athens Manufacturing Company," 10.

[14] DeVorsey, "Early water-powered industries in Athens and Clarke County,"42; Moffson, "Athens Manufacturing Company," 9.

[15] Edwin Mims, *The South in the Building of the Nation: Southern Economic History, 1607-1865* (Richmond, VA: The Southern Historical Publication Society, 1909), 583; John A. Caramia, Jr., "Teaching about the Local Community: Focus, Techniques, and Resources," in *Georgia Social Science Journal*, 12, No. 2 (Spring 1981): 3.

[16] Arden Williams, "Textile Industry," in the *New Georgia Encyclopedia*.

[17] DeVorsey, "Georgia Factory and White Hall, Georgia: A *Vade Mecum*."

buildings. Such mill villages were referred to colloquially as 'mill hills.'[18] The population in the Georgia Factory mill village proved sufficient early on such that by 1833 the government established the Georgia Factory Post Office; Thomas Moore served as its postmaster.[19] In addition to the post office, the early mill village included a company-owned store, a school, and churches.[20]

By 1838, White had built a house near the mill from the heart pine lumber of three existing mill houses.[21] It is unknown when the first bridge was built across the North Oconee River, but mill housing soon appeared on its west side. At some point in the 1840s, White replaced the older wooden dam with one of wood and stone.[22] In 1854, White replaced the original wooden factory building with a larger three-story brick structure (150 feet long and 60 feet wide on the same site) entirely powered by water turbines.[23]

The new factory housed 1,704 spindles, 20 looms, and employed 70 mill worker operatives.[24] Tall windows and oil lamps provided light, and wood-burning furnaces provided steam heat. Weaving machines occupied the first floor, while carding and spinning machines were on the second and third floors, respectively. A system of shafts, wheels, and belts throughout the building distributed power to machinery. The mill produced cotton yarn, shirting, sheeting, osnaburg[25] and canvas tent cloth for both home consumption and later Civil War needs.[26]

By the 1860s John White passed management of the daily operations to his two sons, James and John R. When John White died in 1881, his son John R. White oversaw an impressive period of growth

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[18] Robert W. Blythe, Steve Davis, Cari Goetcheus, Jennifer Brown Leynes, Kaye Lanning Minchew, H. Sussman, Christine Trebellas, Lisa D. Vogel, "Textile Mills and Villages" in *Cotton Mills, Planned Communities, and the New Deal: Vernacular Architecture and Landscapes of the New South*, ed., Debbie Curtis Toole (Athens, GA: Green Berry Press, 1999), 124-209.

[19] "A new Post Office has recently been established at the Factory, between Athens and Watkinsville, called the 'Georgia Factory Post Office,' and Thomas Moore, Esq. appointed Post Master." *The Southern Banner*, March 30, 1833, 3.

[20] Ibid.

[21] DeVorsey, "Georgia Factory and White Hall, Georgia: A *Vade Mecum.*"

[22] Ibid, 5.

[23] DeVorsey, "Georgia Factory and White Hall, Georgia: A *Vade Mecum.*"; Moffson, "Athens Manufacturing Company," 10.

[24] DeVorsey, "Georgia Factory and White Hall, Georgia: A *Vade Mecum.*"

[25] A rough fabric often used for slave garments.

[26] John A. Caramia, Jr., "Teaching about the Local Community," 3.

with expansion of mill buildings, warehouses, power sources, and transit within the Whitehall community during his tenure. More housing was built across the North Oconee River, initially along the flat areas on the main road leading west away from the river. As that main road ascended the steep hill to a ridgeline three-quarters mile west of the Georgia Factory, side streets extended onto adjacent hills, creating concentrations of housing with an occasional church and community store, essentially a second cluster of mill houses as an expansion of the village.

In 1885, the Georgia Manufacturing Company consisted of two main buildings. Weaving, spinning, and carding occurred in the brick three-story factory building and a large stone structure served as a warehouse for bales of cotton. An office occupied the end of the warehouse building.[27]

As a business leader, John R. White recognized consistent power to his mills and access to regional markets via railroads would greatly help his envisioned expansion. Hence, it is no surprise that in 1889 a railroad line from Macon to Athens was routed through White's 2,500 acres with a stop on the ridgeline west of the Georgia Factory.[28]

When fire destroyed the main factory building in 1892, White replaced it with a new and larger two-story brick building. Two additional buildings housed a larger warehouse and a small office. Further, a new power source employing two turbines, and electric lighting was installed, the mill race and tail race were lengthened.[29]

Early Mill Workers and Community Members

The original mill owners routinely relied on the labor of enslaved workers on their plantations. Not surprisingly, they chose to use those same workers in their textile mill and rent the labor of enslaved workers from nearby plantations. Across the three mills in the Athens region, it was noted that in each of them they "gave employment to 80-100 persons, and about equal number of white and black…. one mill owned its own slaves (Athens Factory) and the other two (Georgia Factory and

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[27] *Athens, Georgia 1885.* (1"=50'.) New York: Sanborn Map and Publishing Company, Mar. 1885.

[28] Gagnon, *Transition to an Industrial South*, 69.

[29] DeVorsey, "Georgia Factory and White Hall, Georgia: A *Vade Mecum*"; Caramia, "Teaching about the Local Community," 11.

Figure 1. Circa 1925 aerial view of the Georgia Factory along the river and its mill hill above. Note the mill houses on both sides of the main road that carefully descends the steep hill to the North Oconee River below. (Gary L. Doster, A Postcard History of Athens, Georgia, *2002, used with permission).*

Princeton Factory) hired them at a monthly wage from local planters."[30] A February 1830 article in *The Athenian* newspaper reports on a factory opening by describing the machinery and the mill workers. It asserts that the "small slaves" employed by the factory "learn with so much readiness as to give their instructors little or no trouble" and managers from the North affirmed they perform "as well if not better than whites."[31]

English traveler James S. Buckingham, who visited Athens in 1839, provided one of the earliest descriptions of mill worker labor conditions. Buckingham directly observed operations at one of the three cotton factories. Although it is unknown which mill he visited, he noted

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[30] James S. Buckingham, *The Slave States of America In Two Volumes*, Vol. II. (London: Fisher, Son & Co., 1842): 112; Griffin, "The Origins of the Industrial Revolution In Georgia," 363.

[31] "The Athens Factory." *The Athenian*, February 2, 1830, 2.

that operations were similar at all three.[32] Regarding the use of black and white workers together, he commented that "there is no difficulty among them on account of colour, the white girls working in same room and at the same loom with black girls; and boys of each colour, as well as men and women, working together without apparent repugnance or objection."[33] He observed that "the Negroes here are found to be quite as easily taught to perform all required duties of spinners and weavers as whites and are just as tractable."[34] Interestingly, Buckingham reported that the labor cost of rented enslaved workers was higher than for free whites because the mill owner had to feed them. Thus, he said, "free labour is much cheaper to him than the slave."[35] Regarding where the workers lived, Buckingham stated, "the white families engaged in these factories live in log huts clustered about the establishment on the river's bank, and the Negroes repair to the huts allowed them by their owners when they are near, or stay at the mill, when their master's plantation is far off."[36] He also observed the unhealthy condition of the workers, with fever and dysentery causing many deaths.[37]

In his research on labor in early Southern textile mills, Dr. Allen Stokes asserts that Southern planters often viewed employment in cotton mills as a profitable use of enslaved people who were very young, very old, or otherwise unfit for fieldwork. He found that the most available labor, not color or legal status, determined the source of workers in the mills. The industry did not require craftsmen and many workers, both white and black, learned basic skills of spinning or weaving on farms and plantations. After the Civil War, the Georgia Factory continued to rely on the family system for labor, but war widows, orphans and other displaced people increasingly sought work in the mill. Resentful over the necessity of competing with freed people of color for employment, postbellum whites viewed the cotton mill as a predominantly white domain.[38]

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[32] Buckingham, *The Slave States of America In Two Volumes*, Vol. II, 111-114.
[33] Buckingham, *The Slave States of America In Two Volumes*, Vol. II, 112.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Buckingham, *The Slave States of America In Two Volumes*, Vol. II, 113.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Allen Stokes, "Black and White Labor and the Development of the Southern Textile Industry, 1800-1920," (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of South Carolina, 1977): 2.

Census records provide some insights on early mill workers' lives. The 1850 census, listing only occupations for white males over the age of fifteen, indicates most mill operatives were younger than twenty, while the specialists, like weavers or spinners, were between twenty and thirty years old.[39] Textile mill positions noted were manufacturer, superintendent, clerk, guard, machinist, operative, weaver, spinner, carder and dyer, while townspeople occupations included carpenter, minister, grocer, and wheelwright.[40] The 1860 census included women's occupations but was still limited to whites. Women under the age of thirty made up most of the employees, while males under the age of twenty accounted for most of the rest; six children under the age of fifteen also labored in the mill. In addition to the mill occupations noted previously, reeler, drawer, boss and factory worker were added, along with two male schoolteachers who had joined the community by 1860.[41]

The first post-Civil War census in 1870 paid greater attention to the occupations and type of work performed by mill hands regardless of age, gender, or race. That census noted the mill employed 173 workers, all white; 118 females and fifty-five males. Of those workers, there were thirty-four girls and seventeen boys under the age of fifteen. A more complete picture of village residents can be seen with the addition of a physician, four schoolteachers, a shoemaker, a store clerk, a constable and a rum maker.[42] Ten years later, the number of mill employees had risen to 191–122 females and sixty-nine males. Like the 1870 census, the 1880 census indicates all the workers were white. As in previous years, women under the age of thirty made up the largest number of employees.[43] Peak employment at the mill occurred in the 1880s and 1890s when the number of workers reached nearly 200 people.[44]

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[39] Ruth R. Caproni, "The Manuscript Census and Local History: A Study of Whitehall, Georgia," *Historical Geography 639* (University of Georgia, Spring 1978).

[40] Caproni, "The Manuscript Census and Local History," 11.

[41] Caproni, "The Manuscript Census and Local History," 12.

[42] Caproni, "The Manuscript Census and Local History," 13.

[43] Caproni, "The Manuscript Census and Local History," 3.

[44] Ibid.

Development of the Town of Whitehall

The mill community of Whitehall was established as a municipality in 1891. The continued success of the Georgia Factory provided the community with the population and stability required for incorporation. John R. White's successful 1889 campaign to convince the Covington and Macon railroad to build their rail line through Whitehall and construct a station further strengthened the community's application for incorporation. Created as a "round town," the Act of Incorporation established Whitehall's boundaries as "three-fourths of one mile in air line in every direction from factory buildings of the Georgia Manufacturing Company."[45]

Whitehall took its name from the newly built (1892) brick home of the White family.[46] A mayor (John R. White) and four-member council

[45] *State of Georgia, Acts and Resolutions of the General Assembly*, 885.

[46] The White's family home of White Hall is a brick two-story Queen Anne style house built at the southern end of Milledge Avenue; it is either the second or possibly third house built by the White family. Little is known about the first wooden house that John White built for his family, neither its specific location, architectural style nor the length of time the family resided in it. Local lore says that

Figure 2. White Hall, the ornate brick home of the John White family, still stands in Whitehall. This photo was taken by Albin Hajos and published in his "Souvenir of Athens, Georgia Photo-Gravures," in 1901.

1838 wooden house was built near the factory out of the wood of three mill houses. White, being a traditional mill manager, probably built his home within a short distance, even viewing distance, of the factory he managed. Although he would have already acquired much land and factory stock by that time, and the mill was doing well, the mill village was centered around the factory with not much housing too far along the main road across the North Oconee River, so it is unlikely with the condition of roads at the time that White lived too far away. Hence, the authors speculate that between the 1840s - 1860s a second wooden two-story house, known as *Monte Vista*, was built on the same site as the current brick mansion. What is known is that when John R. White had the site prepared to build the 1892 brick house, Monte Vista was moved 300 feet west to make way

provided governance of the town until the 1930s.
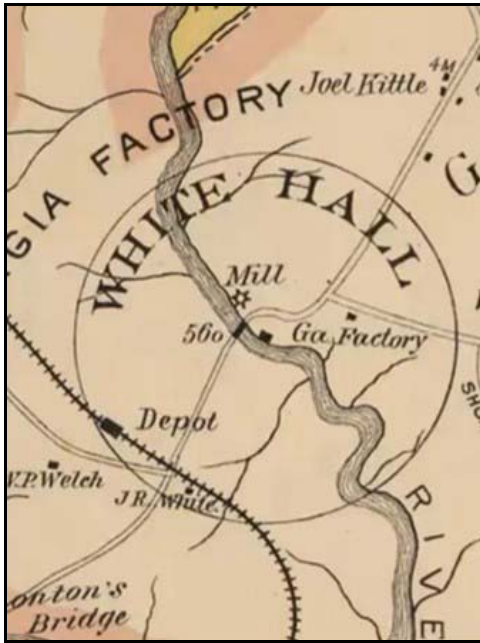
Figure 3. The municipality of Whitehall was created as a 'Round Town' using the Georgia Factory as the center point with a ¾-mile radial distance defining its boundary. Detail from Clarke County, GA and the City of Athens, containing maps of the city, by Charles Morton Strahan, C.M.E. 1893.

An 1893 report by County Surveyor Charles Strahan provided a concise description of White Hall. Strahan described the town of 400 people located on the east bank of the North Oconee River as essentially a "factory town, peopled almost entirely by operatives of the Georgia Factory."[47] He noted that it had "a station and post office on the Macon and Northern RR on the west side of the river" as well as "two good church buildings …two excellent schools…a fine grist mill, several stores selling general merchandise, and a good blacksmith shop."[48] The community of Whitehall appears to have been a well-developed country town with the mill as its physical and economic center.

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for construction of the brick residence. Further, it was used as the White children's schoolhouse, after the brick house was built. In 1906, Monte Vista was deconstructed, numbered, labeled and relocated to Dillard, Georgia, via rail to Mountain City, then ox-drawn wagons to its final site on a hillside to be used as the White family summer retreat. The house, albeit expanded over the years including a porch addition, exists presently as Rabun Manor Resort. Bob Harrell, "House Began its Journey to Dillard 145 Years Ago," *Dateline Georgia* column, *Atlanta Constitution*, July 19, 1972, 8-A, from Newspapers.com archives, accessed May 12, 2022.

[47] Charles Morton Strahan, C.M.E. *Clarke County, GA and the City of Athens, containing maps of the city.* (Atlanta, GA: Chas. P. Byrd Printer, 1893): 38.
[48] Ibid.

The Georgia Factory relied on the dam upriver of the mill to power all aspects of manufacturing, but it was inconsistent at best, especially as mill production grew over the decades. White recognized the benefits of hydroelectric power and completed a more substantial dam and power plant downriver in 1895 to provide his factory with consistent power. Once that dam was constructed and production increased, a few years later White worked with partners to construct a second and larger power plant at the confluence of the Middle and North Oconee Rivers.[49] Hydroelectric power freed White's operations from the geographic limitations imposed by reliance on water-driven power.

White constructed a second textile operation, the Whitehall Yarn Mill, in 1897. Located next to the Central Georgia Railroad depot ¾ mile west of the first mill, this operation supplied the yarn for the Georgia Factory. The new mill's location adjacent to the railroad depot provided cost-effective transportation of both raw materials and the finished products of White's textile mills. The new mill also necessitated additional worker housing. Although housing had been established in pockets along the main road from the original mill village

Figure 4. Mill operatives in front of one of the Georgia Factory mill buildings, c. 1908. (Courtesy of Whitehall resident Paulette Moon.)

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[49] Moffson, "Athens Manufacturing Company," 10. These power plants remained in operation well into the 1940s.

for some time, the new housing was located close to the Yarn Mill essentially creating a second concentration of mill houses, stores, and churches in the expanding village. By this time the community of Whitehall extended beyond its official boundaries from the top of a ridgeline half a mile east of the Georgia Factory, down to the North Oconee River and then west half a mile up to the top of a ridgeline where the Whitehall Yarn Mill and the White's brick home was located.

When John R. White died in 1918, his holdings passed to his sons, Hugh and Robert. Hugh and Robert faced severe financial pressures almost immediately. The ravages of the boll weevil drove up cotton prices even as World War I simultaneously drove up the demand for textiles and created labor shortages as men were called up for the draft. Struggling to adapt, they sold parcels of land and mortgaged both the Georgia Factory and its mill village to a local bank. These difficult business decisions and the onset of the Depression forced the company into bankruptcy in 1929.[50] The bank then sold the company's assets at public auction.[51]

In 1930, Thomas and Herb Swartz, two brothers from New Jersey, purchased a second piece of White family land and built a one-story brick textile factory near the Georgia Factory cotton warehouse. Their company, Thomas Textiles, began manufacturing diapers soon after.[52]

In 1935, the Oconee Textile Company, a separate local company, purchased the Whitehall Yarn Mill, the two hydroelectric plants, the Georgia Factory and the mill villages. The following year, Robert White sold the brick house and the family's remaining land holdings to the Rural Rehabilitation Company, who then deeded the property to the University of Georgia. This transfer helped limit large scale commercial development and preserved the nineteenth century characteristics of many houses in the mill villages.[53]

World War II's demand for textiles brought a temporary flush to local mills, such that by 1946, Thomas Textiles had purchased the former Georgia Factory cotton warehouse and main factory building from the Oconee Textile Company, and later acquired the entire mill

[50] Moffson, "Athens Manufacturing Company," 10.
[51] Malone and Vogel, "Georgia Factory," 8.
[52] Caramia, "Teaching about the Local Community," 12.
[53] Ibid.

factory complex.[54] Seven years later, the company–no longer interested in maintaining the mill villages–offered the houses and land for sale. Many mill employees purchased the houses and continued living there.[55]

Thomas Textiles produced infant and children's clothing under private labels for major American department stores. They later transitioned to making clothes under their own label, but by the 1980s sales had slowed significantly and the plant closed.[56] In 1997, Miller-Gallman Developers in Atlanta purchased the river mill complex and converted it into 62 loft apartments, which occupied both mill buildings, the cotton warehouses, and the payroll office. This renovation preserved many of the original building exteriors and floor plans, along with historic materials and structural elements.[57]

Mill Owner-Worker Relations in the Early 1900s

Strahan's 1893 report on the Georgia Factory District found the company to be "one of the strongest and most reliable cotton mills in this state," a good investment "with wise and conservative management."[58] He praised John R. White as "an exceedingly able mill man, who not only knows how to run the finances but is thoroughly posted on the practical details."[59] He asserted that "the good feelings which exist between the management and operatives are largely due to the good judgment and tact which the officials of the company display."[60] This effective management approach enabled the Georgia Factory to avoid the labor unrest that provoked strikes at several Georgia mills during the early 1900s. Nevertheless, as noted above, the opening decades of the twentieth century brought almost insurmountable challenges to White's operations that ultimately

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[54] Thomas J. Swartz, Jr. *Thomas Textile Company, Inc. 1921-1997: A Brief History.* (1999), a manuscript in the Thomas Textile Company collection (MSS-013) of the Athens Regional Library Heritage Room, Athens, GA.

[55] Moffson, "Athens Manufacturing Company," 9; Caramia, "Teaching about the Local Community," 12.

[56] Ibid.

[57] Marion Rice, "Clarke County's once thriving fiber industry has shrunk considerably," *Athens Banner-Herald*, Dec. 2, 2001.

[58] Strahan, *Clarke County, GA and the City of Athens*, 39.

[59] Ibid.

[60] Ibid.

bankrupted the business.[61]

In 1917, journalist J. Archie Willis penned a special feature for the *Atlanta Journal* that served as a recruitment advertisement for the Georgia Factory. After touring the Whitehall village and the factories, and interviewing both operatives and owners, Willis described the happiness of the operatives with their lives in the mill village and the opportunities offered by employment in the mill.[62] While the article does provide extensive information about the mill village and mill employment, its conclusions must be viewed skeptically. It may be an example of management use of a friendly press to deter unions and attract workers. Unfortunately, little other independent information from the local mill workers about their work experiences in the early 1900s survives.

Willis' article describes a strongly paternalistic system where the mill owners took care of their workers, and the workers responded with gratitude and contentment. The reporter lauded the paternalistic management provided by mill owner John R. White and quoted a prominent Athens businessman who avowed that workers saw White as a father who would do anything to help them. According to the businessman, "there is nothing those people would not do if they believed it would be of service to Judge White."[63] The journalist further documented this relationship through interviews with two mill foremen and thirty or forty machine operatives at the mill, none of whom he found to be "disgruntled". One of the foremen explained that he had started at the factory as a doffer boy and came up from the ranks to his current position after forty years of employment. He stated, "I consider this my home, just as do practically all the operatives whom you will find here. It is the best place on earth to work and live, and you can just say this for me that there are not any more men like Judge John R. White."[64]

Willis reported that the Georgia Factory employed seventy-five

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[61] The United Textile Workers union organized strikes at several Georgia urban mills during the early 1900s, describing the harsh conditions and management at many textile mills.

[62] J.A. Willis, "Georgia's first cotton mill is doing uplift work on magnificent scale," *Atlanta Journal*, April 22, 1917, 6-7.

[63] Willis, "Georgia's first cotton mill," 6. John R. White was not a judge, but referred to locally as Judge White.

[64] Willis, "Georgia's first cotton mill," 7.

men and forty-five women for a total of 120 operatives, while the Whitehall Yarn Mill employed a total of sixty workers, including forty-five men and fifteen women. The journalist thought the gender discrepancy indicated that wages were sufficient for the men to support their families without compelling women leave their homes to work in the mill. He also reported that there was very little sickness in the town of Whitehall, and that "it was one of the healthiest places in the state of Georgia," with only one case of typhoid fever that year. He presumed this was due to the "cleanliness of the place."[65]

*Figure 5. The Whitehall Baseball Team photo from 1936-37 season was published in the "Athens Album" in the "Classic Scene" magazine of the Sunday edition of the*Athens Banner-Herald/Daily News*, date unknown.*

Willis visited and interviewed two former mill employees who owned sizeable farms nearby. White had assisted both men by selling them farmland on reasonable terms and encouraging them to take advantage of farming opportunities. Willis voiced approval of all that White and the mill had done to improve working and living conditions for their employees. He noted that if a worker gets sick, "the mill sees that he or she has the best doctor's services to be had, medicines and other things necessary for the treatment and comfort of the patient."[66] These views are an example of the perception of paternalism often used to describe mill management.

Life in Whitehall Mill Village

Early 1900s newspaper articles described Whitehall as one of several "prosperous towns around Athens."[67] In his 1917 *Atlanta*

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[65] Ibid.
[66] Ibid.
[67] "Prosperous Towns Around Athens." *The Athens Banner* (July 15, 1921.)

Journal article, Willis described Whitehall as "a big country community" with all the advantages of rural life. The mill provided rent-free houses for employees. Each family had a garden to plant food and the privilege of keeping cows or hogs in company-owned pastures. Willis also noted that "the mill furnishes a negro and mule to plow the gardens for the operative."[68] The Georgia Factory had provided sixty-two "commodious and comfortable" houses, and Whitehall Yarn Mill provided eighteen houses to accommodate its mill workers.[69] The houses ranged in size from two to five rooms and were "ceiled, newly painted, and set away in the groves that stud the hills rolling back from the Oconee."[70]

Social and recreational activities during this time included a YMCA with seventy members and a female secretary, and two Odd Fellow organizations with seventy active members. The mill provided a baseball diamond for its workers and the village had a baseball team that played rival teams (Figure 5) from nearby mills and communities during the summer months. Many workers also fished and swam in the North Oconee River. The town boasted an organized band (Figure 6) with seventeen musicians and several women's organizations that took care of those "in distress and in time of need."[71]

Figure 6. Whitehall band members in front of the Company store, c. 1910. (Courtesy of Whitehall resident Paulette Moon.)

There were two churches in Whitehall, a Baptist church on Whitehall Road built by the mill and turned over to people in the village, and a Methodist church just outside the village. The Odd Fellows Hall, which the mill owners had built for their employees, also housed the Sunday schools for the community's Baptist and Methodist

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[68] Willis, "Georgia's first cotton mill," 6.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Ibid.
[71] "Prosperous Towns Around Athens." *The Athens Banner*, 6.

congregations. The mill also helped to provide education for children of their employees. The Clarke County Board of Education built a schoolhouse on land sold to them by White in 1897.[72] The school was under the control and management of the Board and designated "for the use of the white people in the vicinity of said schoolhouse."[73] In 1917 the school had an enrollment of fifty boys and girls ages six to sixteen years in seven grades, with night school occurring so mill workers could attend in the evening. In the 1930s a larger school was built on Townes Grocery Road, so this original school was abandoned.

In addition to supporting community quality-of-life activities, White operated a general merchandise store for his employees in a two-story brick building located near the banks of the North Oconee where the Whitehall Road crosses the river. Willis reported that store prices were much lower than the cost of items elsewhere and that "the store is not run for the purpose of making money off the operatives and their families but is conducted for the convenience of the village and its people."[74] Mill workers did not have bank accounts due to the distance of the mill from the town where banks were located. During a mill shut down in 1914 that extended for six months, the Georgia Factory continued to provide its workers with necessities from the mill's store. When the mill resumed operations most of the operatives had remained in the town and returned to work instead of moving to other mills, which was unusual, given the transient nature of mill workers in most other areas.[75]

A 1986 *Banner-Herald/Daily News* newspaper interview with an eighty-year-old long time Whitehall resident who worked at the Georgia Factory for twenty-six years confirms much of this

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[72] This school was located on Whitehall Road across from the Georgia Factory adjacent to the company store.

[73] Athens-Clarke County, Georgia, Office of the Clerk of Courts, *Deed Book QQ*, 115, including plat recorded on September 11, 1897; John R. White to Clarke County Board of Education.

[74] Willis, "Georgia's first cotton mill," 6. The building was converted to a restaurant for a short time in the early 1970s, but does not survive today.

[75] Willis, "Georgia's first cotton mill," 7. In 1914, when cotton had dropped to the point at which there was practically no market for it, the Georgia Factory shut down for six months.
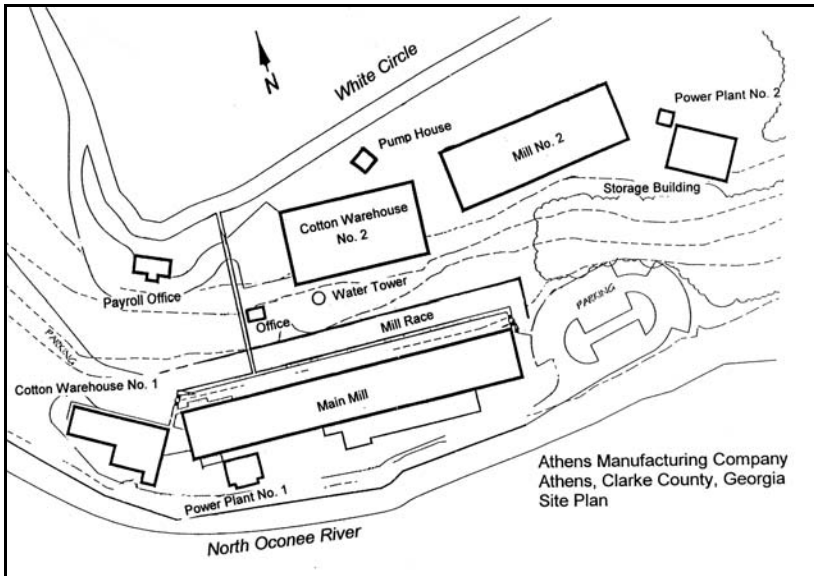
Figure 7. Site plan of the intact historic buildings and features of the Georgia Factory site in 2002. Note that the National Register nomination form is titled Athens Manufacturing Company, when it should be entitled Georgia Factory. (Moffson, "Athens Manufacturing Company," 17.)

information.[76] She had started working in the Georgia Factory at the age of 14 and later worked at Thomas Textiles. She recalled attending school at the Baptist Church, dances at the Odd Fellows Hall over the company store, picnics and barbecues by the river near the bandstand, and buggy or train rides into Athens. Her father was an overseer at the factory and her husband also worked there, but her three children did not follow them into the mills. Regarding mill work as a young girl, she said, "We enjoyed it then because we didn't know any better" and "Everybody worked at the factory. That was the only kind of work there was here at that time."[77]

Whitehall retained its identity as a town until the 1960s. The decision by Thomas Textiles to divest itself of the mill housing in 1953 probably proved fatal to the town's survival. Although many of the

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[76] Mildred Schierman, "Life in Whitehall: Residents recall the glory days in Whitehall, one of Athens' oldest communities," *Banner-Herald/The Daily News*, Athens, GA, February 23, 1986: 12J-13J.
[77] Schierman, "Life in Whitehall," 12J.

employees purchased their homes and continued to live in the community, other houses were renovated or sold to owners who rented them out. Some houses simply fell to ruin. In 1967, after years of inactive governance by the mayor and council, Clarke County repealed the town charter.

Conclusion

Beyond the surviving documentary evidence, many of the historic physical elements in the Whitehall Mill Village exist today. Indeed, the various Georgia Factory buildings along the river and the White Hall mansion have already received listing on the National Register of Historic Places. There is a current nomination effort to secure further listings on the National Register for the cultural landscape of the mill village including mill structures, worker and supervisor housing, and the infrastructure that sustained community life such as the railroad, dams, company stores, churches, and athletic fields.

Throughout its history, change has been the constant theme of the White Hall story; it remains so today. Beginning with the rehabilitation of the Georgia Factory into the Whitehall Mill Lofts in the 1990s, there continue to be proposals to remake the area. These include plans for commercial development in Whitehall, such as the recent construction of the Dollar General Store. A recent roundabout installation by Georgia DOT to assist traffic flow in the area, provides assistance to a current plan to commercially develop the Whitehall Yarn Mill buildings near the intersection of Whitehall Road and Milledge Avenue. Yet, through flush times and thin, Whitehall village persists as a reminder of the mill workers' lives, of the community they built, and of earlier days when textile mills played such an important role in the economy and social culture of Clarke County.

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Digging A Little Deeper:
The Mystery of Mount Zion

by Eve B. Mayes

Occasionally we come across a tidbit of local history that totally defies our efforts to determine its veracity or location. The real photo postcard on the cover of this issue of the *Historian* is just one such tidbit.[1]

Was one of the hills around downtown Athens known locally as Mount Zion? If so, which one?

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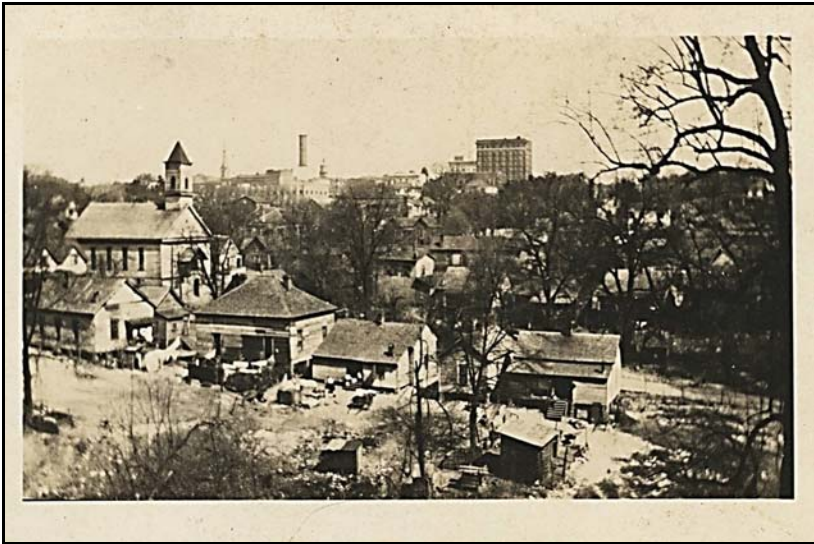
[1]   A real photo postcard was a pre-printed postcard back with light-sensitive photographic chemicals on the front of the card. The image was made in a darkroom by placing a photo negative in contact with the front of the card and exposing it to light. The card was developed with chemicals, rinsed and dried. Examining the stamp box printed in the corner of this photo postcard reveals that it was manufactured by Kodak Professional AZO Paper between 1918 -1930. https://www.playle.com/realphoto/

The photograph on the front of the postcard shows several familiar landmarks on the Athens, GA, skyline of the early 1900s.[2] The church to the left appears to be Ebenezer Baptist Church near Reese and Finley Streets. Working from left to right, you can barely see the steeple of the First Methodist Church on the corner of Lumpkin and Hancock, then the city water tower that stood near the city hall on Hancock; then the dome of the Athens City Hall on the highest point in Clarke County at the corner of Hancock Street and College Avenue. Across College Avenue you can just barely see the roof of the Georgian Hotel. The Southern Mutual Insurance Building, a little taller, is just down the hill on the corner of College Avenue and Washington Street. And the tallest square building in this view was the Holman Hotel (later the C&S Bank, now Bank of America) on the corner of North Lumpkin Street and East Clayton Street.
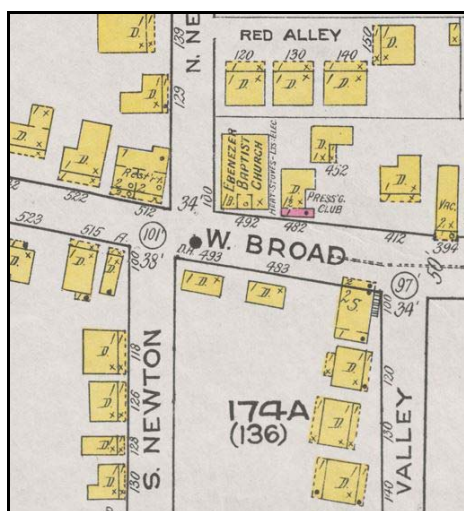
A detail from the 1918 Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps of Athens shows the location of the Ebenezer Baptist Church at the corner of North Newton Street and West Broad Street.[3] The row of houses in the photo are actually across Broad Street from the church, facing South Newton Street (the Holiday Inn Express occupies this site now.)

The 1918 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of Athens shows Ebenezer Baptist Church and the row of houses above it from the photo.

[2] *View of Athens from Mount Zion*, real photograph postcard taken by Sarah Hunter Moss, 1921. Neg. #7038, Georgia Photo File, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia Libraries, Athens, GA. Used with permission.

[3] Detail from Sheet 11 of the 1918 Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps of Athens, Georgia, from the University of Georgia Libraries Map Collection, Athens, GA, online in the Digital Library of Georgia. Accessed June 24, 2022.

But the surprise comes when you turn the postcard over and see what was written on the back by the photographer, Miss Sarah Hunter Moss (her initials are in the top right corner).

She wrote:
Mar. 15th 1921.   S.H.M.
View of Athens from Mt. Zion
Ebenezer (Col. Baptist Church)
Methodist Steeple
Water Tower
City Hall
Georgian Hotel ?
Insurance Bldg.
Holman   ”

To Mr. T.P. Stanley
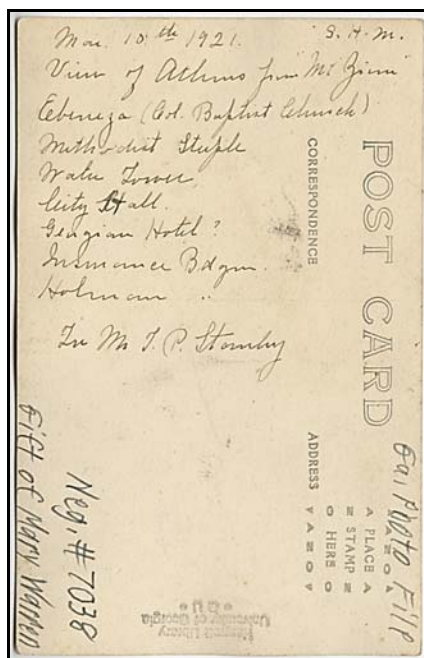
When this little item was donated, the staff in the Georgia Room at the UGA Main Library (now Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library at the University of Georgia, Athens, GA) made some notes in the right-hand corners of the back. The top right corner reads "Ga. Photo File," printed in pencil–this is a collection of photos and ephemera that were saved in vertical files over the years. Unfortunately the provenance of many those items was lost when they were sorted into the appropriate subject folders.

In the bottom right corner, they wrote the negative number assigned to this image (from the photo file): Neg. #7308. Then "gift of Mary Warren." The Hargrett Library stamp is centered on the right edge.

This information reveals many clues to me as to the probable provenance of this interesting photo postcard. The pencil notation confirms that it was donated to Hargrett by Mary Bondurant Warren, my own beloved mother, and a diligent researcher into Athens' history for most of her long life.

The photographer, Sarah Hunter Moss, lived on Cobb Street in the house called "Moss Side" for most of her life. She was Mama's grandmother's sister (Mama's great-aunt, who we always referred to a

"Aunt Sarah" Moss, regardless of our generation). Many of the Moss family archives, including letters, original photographs, and even family Bibles, were collected by my mother over the years as older family members died, and have been given to Hargrett for safekeeping, so future researchers could have access to them.

The man to whom the postcard was addressed, T. P. Stanley, was Thomas Pope Stanley, a cousin of the Moss family, who died in 1958 and is buried in Oconee Hill Cemetery. I believe that Mama might have received this postcard from his widow, Helen Conger Stanley, in the 1960s, when Mama was researching and writing articles about life in antebellum Athens for the *Athens Advertiser*, and later the *Athens Daily News*. Her column, called "Lives and Legends," documented many Athens residents of the era and made such interesting reading.

But we STILL don't know where Mount Zion was in Athens! Please let me know via email to ebmayes@windstream.net if you can help unravel this conundrum! Thanks!

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AHS Merchandise for Sale

Available at http://athenshistorical.org/shop/,
in local book stores, and on Amazon.com

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Athens Historian, Vol. 1 - Vol. 20, each $2.50
Papers of the Athens Historical Society, Vol. I (2007 reprint) $25
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MAPS

City of Athens, Georgia. W.W. Thomas, 1874, 30" x 24" $38
City of Athens, Georgia. C.M. Strahan, 1893, 24" x 27" $38
City of Winterville, Georgia. W.M. Coile, 1906, 24" x 16". $38
Clarke County, Georgia. C.M. Strahan, 1893, 24" x 28" $38

DVD

Bogue, Ron. *The Presence of the Past.* (2016) 23-minute DVD of the original 1987 video. $12

NOTECARDS (with envelopes)

George Cook's *View of Athens from Carr's Hill* (8 notecards). $20
Franklin College, North Campus (8 notecards). $20
Four each of Franklin College & *Carr's Hill* $20
1874 Map of Athens (10 notecards) $12