Project Overview

Merchants and Mill Workers looks at the changes in Huntsville at the turn of the twentieth century through the lens of a local store. This research uses primary sources available in the Harrison Brothers Hardware Collection, including ledgers, pamphlets, product catalogs etc. This research identifies the key impact that the rise of the Huntsville cotton mill industry had on the local economy.

Key Findings

- Few women bought tobacco
- Women from cotton mill villages were a majority of the Queensware consumers
- Black customers were marked as “col.” in the ledgers, except for Henderson and Daniel Brandon and M.E. Williams
- A dramatic shift from tobacco to Queensware in 1900
- Substantial mill village participation in the downtown economy

Harrison Brothers Tobacco

This section of the exhibit follows the customer accounts and day book transactions of Laxson + Kelly, Mrs. L.J. Hughes, and Mrs. Lizzie Barcliff from 1898 to 1901. Changes in the American tobacco industry, such as the increased manufacturing of cigarettes and the impact of the American Tobacco Company trust, influenced the popularity of certain products and trends in customer demographics at Harrison Brothers.

Harrison Brothers Queensware

This section follows the accounts of Ada Reynolds and M.V. Taylor, identified as Dallas Mills employees. Mill workers flocked to Commercial Row to buy accessories, such as Queensware (pictured above), for their homes in Huntsville’s various mill villages. Oscar Goldsmith and W.L. Halsey were key investors in the Huntsville cotton mill industry. Goldsmith and the Huntsville Land Company built Lawrence Village, located around Dallas Mills, and both men operated general stores in local mill villages.

References

1. All images courtesy of the UAH Archives, Special Collections, and Digital Initiatives.

Acknowledgements

All RCEU projects were sponsored in part by the Alabama Space Grant Consortium, the UAH Office of the President, Office of the Provost, Office of the Vice President for Research and Economic Development, the Deans of the College of Science, the College of Engineering, the College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences, the College of Education, and the College of Nursing.