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Dallas Mill Water Tower

Diane Ellis, Executive Director

Remember how much fun it was to take a long car trip to Grandma's and mark the progress of your journey as you passed familiar points of interest? A certain twisting river, a jumble of mountains, a dense grove of trees overgrowing the highway at a particular bend in the road became dots you connected to hasten the passage to your destination. Burma-Shave signs and the familiar "See Rock City" barns were other markers that entertained thousands of children and helped weary parents survive a journey.

Smokestacks, grain elevators and silos, and water towers were familiar signposts, too. As children, we didn't grasp their significance as symbols of America's agricultural and industrial strength. To us these structures were tokens of the mysteries and delights of a specific place, especially if their metal faces bore legends of local interest: "Welcome to Watertown, Home of the Panthers."

Many of these structures are disappearing from the landscape as America's industries change or relocate and the family farm becomes an endangered species. Preservation groups throughout the country seek to protect these structures as their numbers dwindle.

In Huntsville, our textile mill history has left us a few remnants of an earlier era, and one of these is the Dallas Mill water tower (see cover). It's the old timey kind of tower, and though it's a little rusty and covered with vines, it still looks proud and useful. This is an historic artifact worthy of our preservation efforts. The water tower is the type of structure that is increasingly hard to find. It's a symbol of an important industrial era in Huntsville and the South, and it remains a compelling icon for many citizens who were connected with the mill. Travelers entering Huntsville from the east on Highway 72 and I-565 have a wonderful view of the water tower. With the water tower presiding over the entrance to the city in the east, and the space-age artifacts of the U.S. Space & Rocket Center welcom-

ing travelers from the west, Huntsville has a set of bookends bracketing two important eras in the city's history.

A clean-up, a couple of coats of paint and a "Welcome to Huntsville" greeting is all that's needed to provide a signpost of interest to a new generation of children going to visit Grandma.



Dallas Mill Water Tower.
Courtesy Huntsville Public Library.