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Industry Rising: Madison County Cotton Mills, 1809-1885

Whitney Adrienne Snow

The history of early cotton mills in Madison County began in 1809 when Charles Cabaniss built the state's first mill along the Flint River, not too far from Twickenham. By 1860 the area boasted the McFarland Mill, the Flint Manufacturing Company, and the infamous Bell Factory. Each mill relied on either slave or white labor, used the river for trade, transportation, and energy, proved a source of income for cotton planters and farmers, and aided the local economy. Due to foreign, not to mention northern, competition, oscillating economies, the Civil War, and in one case, a natural disaster, each mill, by the end of 1885, had shut its doors. While their heydays proved brief, these mills sparked future endeavors and thus, further fueled the industrialization of Madison County.

The production of cotton in the northeastern part of the Mississippi Territory began in the 1770s, if not earlier. The climate, rich soil, and potential waterpower presented an excellent location for cotton ventures. In 1805 John Hunt settled the area that became known as Huntsville. When Hunt failed to register the land properly, Leroy Pope bought the area, and on December 22, 1809, named it Twickenham after the birthplace of Alexander Pope. Situated in Madison County, which had formed on December 13, 1808, Twickenham attracted many settlers. Not until November 25, 1811, did the name finally change to Huntsville in honor of Hunt. Alabama became a territory in 1817 and then a state in August 1819; Huntsville was its capital for a short time. In its early days, Huntsville was largely plantation and farm-oriented but had beer, candle, plow, hardwood, brick, hat, tanning, and water pump factories. Despite these varied enterprises, cotton remained the foundation of the area's growth. In 1809, the area's first cotton gin began

production.¹ This gin proved only the first of many cotton experiments and a cotton mill soon followed.

In 1809, contractor Charles Cabaniss built a cotton mill twelve miles northeast of Twickenham on the Barren Fork of the Flint River. Accessible water power had a great deal to do with site preference. Along with the mill, Cabaniss constructed a house, storehouse, smoke-house, spring, barn, and forge shop. Once production began, he no doubt advertised, for on February 17, 1818, *The Alabama Republican* reported that the 192 spindle mill, also called the Beech Grove Factory, sold yarn for fifty cents to \$1.25 a pound. Then, on April 18, *The Alabama Republican* noted that Charles Cabaniss would trade thread for cotton and sell thread anywhere from fifty cents a pound to \$1.25 a pound depending on size and type.² Labor consisted entirely of slaves who endured pitiable working conditions. They depended on light emitted from windows or candles and suffered extreme heat or cold depending upon the season. When it came to raw materials, Cabaniss depended entirely on local production. Once

¹Daniel S. Dupre, *Transforming the Cotton Frontier: Madison County Alabama, 1800-1840* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997), 38; Thomas Perkins Abernathy, *The Formative Period in Alabama, 1815-1828* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1965), 74; and Dwight Wilhelm, *A History of the Cotton Textile Industry of Alabama, 1809-1950* (Montgomery: Dwight Wilhelm, 1950), 32. See also, Edward Chambers Betts, *Early History of Huntsville, Alabama, 1804-1870* (1909; repr., Huntsville, 1998), 5, 11, 26, 32, 35, 48-49; and William H. Brantley, *Three Capitals: A Book about the First Three Capitals of Alabama: St. Stephens, Huntsville & Cahawba . . .* (Tuscaloosa, 1947).

² On the Cabaniss mill, see Cecilia Jean Thorn, "The Bell Factory: Early Pride of Huntsville," *The Alabama Review* 32, no. 1 (January 1979): 28; John Singleton, *The World Textile Industry* (London: Routledge, 1997), 75; Wilhelm, 11; and *The Alabama Republican*, 18 February 1818, n.p. . On site preference, see Anthony F. C. Wallace, *Rockdale: The Growth of an American Village in the Early Industrial Revolution* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1980), 13. See also, *The Alabama Republican*, 17 February 1818, n.p.

cotton had been transformed into grades of thread, he employed the Flint River Navigation Company to transport the goods.³ Given that the mill was the only one of its kind, its promise should have seemed limitless and yet, due to poor business, Cabaniss decided to sell.

Having grown dissatisfied with the factory, Cabaniss, in 1819, sold one-third interest in the mill to Henry Shrader. On February 14, 1823, he sold the remaining two-thirds interest to Patrick McStay. He accepted McStay's promissory notes and expected partial payment in spun cotton. When Cabaniss died in 1825, local planter Edwin Jones obtained the mill and renamed it The Prairie Factory. Facing the same market difficulties that plagued his predecessor, Jones eventually closed the mill.⁴ While this mill proved unsuccessful, another was poised to dominate the local textile industry.

On September 4, 1819, Horatio Jones formed a cotton spinning factory on the Flint River and began producing slave clothing. That same September, *The Alabama Republican* mentioned an offer from the Horatio Jones & Company to sell products for cash or seed cotton. The following year, the mill increased its machinery, but this course of action only served to drain funds. In fact, in 1823, the company dissolved due to financial problems. Jones, however, refused to give up and soon formed a new endeavor.⁵

³ William Echols Spragins, *A Brief History and Brief Genealogy of the Andrew Beirne, William Patton, William Echols V and Robert E. Spragins Lines: Beirne-Patton Echols-Spragins Pedigree* (Huntsville: W. E. Spragins, 1956), 7.

⁴ Randall Martin Miller, "The Cotton Mill Movement in Antebellum Alabama" (master's thesis, The Ohio State University, 1971), 11.

⁵ Thorn, 29; James William Bragg, "Frontier Entrepreneurs of Madison County, Alabama: The Bell Factory Enterprise, 1819-1842" (master's thesis,

On October 21, Jones announced his plan to once again spin cotton and coarse shirting and moved the factory downstream. The May 14, 1824 issue of *The Alabama Republican* included his enthusiastic advertisement for cotton in exchange for “good quality yarn.”⁶ The celebratory air of the passage, however, proved deceptive for later that year, Jones sold the mill to Richard Haughton. A few months later, when Jones died, John W. Tilford became director of the factory. Shortly thereafter, Tilford, too, sold the mill.⁷ The sale included five carding machines, 342 spindles, a gin house, a “sixty-saw gin,” a grist mill, two wood houses, and one brick house.⁸ Buyers stood to have one to two years’ credit extended. When the sale day finally arrived, Abner Eason and Joseph Harding, Jones’s cousin, bid \$20,021 and succeeded in purchasing the mill.⁹

Harding and Eason proved no more successful at running the mill than its previous owners had. Their workforce consisted of two slaves whom they paid \$70 a year and provided two suits of clothing, one for winter and one for summer.¹⁰ In 1828, Eason sold his interests to Harding and subsequently moved to Arkansas. With the interests, stipulated Eason, went all debts. Harding accepted this clause hoping to make a success of the

University of Alabama, 1958), 39; *The Alabama Republican*, 14 September 1819, n.p.; and *The Alabama Republican*, 14 May 1824, n.p.

⁶ *The Alabama Republican*, 14 May 1824, n.p.

⁷ Thorn, 29-30.

⁸ *The Democrat*, 5 August 1825, n.p.

⁹ Thorn, 31.

¹⁰“Notes on Textile Manufactures in Huntsville and Madison County, Alabama before the Civil War,” Huntsville Industry Bell Factory, Vertical Files, Huntsville-Madison County Public Library

mill. Despite his efforts, the mill seemed destined to fail because of the inherent risks in the textile industry. Aside from financial and mechanical problems, he had the forces of nature to contend with. When flooding occurred, production halted indefinitely. In 1828, Harding drowned while checking the mill during a flood. In the aftermath, Haughton became administrator for Harding's estate and sold the mill a year later.¹¹

On April 8, 1829, Huntsville businessmen Preston Yeatman, Germanicus Kent, Andrew Beirne, William Patton, James J. Donegan, Isaac Williams, William Forsey, and William Stewart bought the factory for \$12,630. These men, who belonged to Patton, Donegan & Company, Yeatman, Kent, & Company, or Forsey & Company, intended to revitalize the mill.¹² At the time of purchase, inventory included the following: "Factory and machinery in Factory \$18,000; 276 yards of white linsey, \$135.00; 187 ½ yards of brown linsey, \$113.50; two stills and tubs; 35,000 lbs. Seed cotton; 14,013 doz. Spun thread; 3 slaves," and four barrels of whiskey.¹³ Nevertheless, the mill failed to satisfy Forsey and Company which sold out. Determined to make a go of it, the remaining members formed Germanicus Kent & Company, a venture which resulted in the creation of what mistakenly came to be known as the first cotton mill in Alabama.¹⁴

It was Germanicus Kent & Company that dubbed the mill The Bell Factory because a bell, not a whistle, called its workers. On December 29, 1832, The Bell Factory became incorporated.

¹¹ "Notes on Textile Manufactures," Huntsville Industry Bell Factory, Vertical Files, Huntsville-Madison County Public Library; and Miller, 18.

¹² "Notes on Textile Manufactures."

¹³ Spragins, 281

¹⁴ Woodman, 138.

Terms included a thirty-year charter, 1,000 shares worth \$100 each, and a capital stock under \$100,000. The number of votes a stockholder received corresponded to the number of shares, but no individual could have more than twenty votes.¹⁵ While not the first cotton mill in the state, The Bell Factory quickly became the first to produce on a large scale.

While business varied from poor to grand, the owners saw only promise, so much so that several owners were bought out. On March 1, 1934, Patton, Donegan & Company purchased all interests in the factory from Germanicus Kent & Company for \$20,000. The deed included the signatures of Preston and Agnes N. Yeatman, Germanicus and Arabella Kent, and Isaac and Eliza Williams.¹⁶ The new owners, Andrew Beirne, William Patton, and James J. Donegan, had great plans for their mill.

Under Patton, Donegan & Company, The Bell Factory flourished. By this time, the factory consisted of several two-story buildings. The main structure had three and one-half stories in addition to a water wheel in the basement. Other buildings housed machinery for carding, weaving, and dyeing. The mill itself had eight looms, 3,216 spindles, consumed fifty bales of cotton a month, and made sheetings, plaids, ticking, and yarn. Advertised locally and in New Orleans, there seemed no limit to production or expansion until the unthinkable happened.¹⁷

On June 30, 1841, The Bell Factory burned to the ground. While arson was suspected, the cause remained a mystery. The

¹⁵ Betts, 59; Dodge, 89; Wilhelm, 21; and "Notes on Textile Manufactures."

¹⁶ "Bell Factory Deed, 1 March 1834," Huntsville Industry Bell Factory, Vertical Files, Huntsville-Madison County Public Library; and "Notes on Textile Manufactures."

¹⁷ Birdie Campbell, *History of the Bell Factory* (Huntsville: Huntsville Public Library, 1940), 5; and Thorn, 32.

Nashville Merchants Insurance Trust Company only paid half of the \$40,000 loss. Despite the setback, by June of the following year, Patton, Donegan & Company had rebuilt the mill and even installed an auxiliary steam plant. On November 12, 1842, *The Democrat* advertised the company's request for cotton in exchange for bagging, rope, and twine. In this same advertisement, the company also noted that their products were reasonably priced given the economically difficult times. Indeed, the price of cotton continued to drop, and even though the United States had begun exporting textile goods to China, overproduction on a national level had resulted in a severe drop in the price of textiles.¹⁸ The owners, however, firmly believed that their venture would eventually prove extremely profitable.

The owners reaped encouragement from the sight of their rebuilt mill. Surrounded by a ten-foot brick wall, the three-story building stood 100 feet by fifty-two feet. A two-story wing used to house the lappers and woolen machines measured seventy-feet by twenty-feet. As for machinery, insurance coverage increased with each addition. Over time, the factory came to have forty-eight to fifty looms and 2,000 spindles. Supervision consisted of two weavers, one of whom oversaw the watchmen while the other, an owner, ran the mill. By 1858, the mill, then owned by Charles H. Patton, William M. Tabor, and J. J. Omiga, had a supposed worth of \$40,000. The mill continued to rely on the labor of slaves of which all but one belonged to the owners.¹⁹

¹⁸ Thorn, 33; *The Democrat*, 12 November 1842, n.p.; Spragins, 270; Walton, 190; and Beth English, *A Common Thread: Labor, Politics, and Capital Mobility in the Textile Industry* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006), 40. See also, "Notes on Textile Manufactures." On China, see M. B. Hammond, *The Cotton Industry: An Essay in American Economic History* (New York: Johnson Reprint Corp., 1966), 244.

¹⁹ "Notes on Textile Manufactures"; and James Benson Sellers, *Slavery in Alabama* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1950), 203.

Unlike northern mills which depended mainly on white female employees, many early mills in the South relied on slaves. For example, the Rocky Mount Cotton Mills in Edgecombe County, North Carolina depended entirely on slaves belonging to the owners of the mill. While it had a small number of free black employees, some mill hired only white labor. The Graniteville Manufacturing Company in South Carolina, for instance, relied on rural white labor. For the most part, however, many owners expected only racial friction to come from an integrated workforce. The owners of mills using slaves insisted on the superior treatment of slaves compared to that of white workers in New England. However, the use of slaves in mills declined rapidly when the price of slaves skyrocketed in the 1850s. At this point, textile work became more and more associated with poor whites.²⁰

In 1850, the Flint Manufacturing Company, located two miles below New Market, began operations. The mill relied entirely upon seventeen white employees. Owned by Joseph Rice and William Whitman, the two-story, sixty-foot by thirty-foot mill with its three spinning frames and 369 spindles,

²⁰ Holland Thompson, *From the Cotton Field to the Cotton Mill: A Study of the Industrial Transition in North Carolina* (1906; repr., Freeport, NY, 1971), 48; August Kohn, *The Cotton Mills of South Carolina* (Spartanburg: The Reprint Company Publishers, 1975), 24; Douglas Flamming, *Creating the Modern South: Millhands and Managers in Dalton, Georgia, 1884-1984* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 109; David J. Jeremy, ed., *Technology and Power in the Early American Cotton Industry: James Montgomery, the Second Edition of his "Cotton Manufacture" (1840), and the 'Justitia' Controversy about Relative Power Costs* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1990), 25; David L. Carlton, *Mill and Town in South Carolina, 1880-1920* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 84, 114-115, 158; and Broadus Mitchell, *The Rise of Cotton Mills in the South* 1921, reprinted with a new introduction by David L. Carlton (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2001), 209.

consumed three bales of cotton a week.²¹ The owners sought to emulate the success of nearby Bell but proved only moderately successful.

By 1860, Alabama possessed fourteen textile mills, 35,700 spindles, and 623 looms worth \$1.3 million in invested capital. During the 1840s and 1850s, many such mills had arrived in cities such as Florence, Montgomery, Autaugaville, and Mobile. The mills had a combined workforce of 1,300. Only half of the mills had looms and only six processed cotton into cloth. These mills often obtained cotton from agents who purchased from the larger cotton markets of Nashville, Memphis, New Orleans, Atlanta, Macon, and Fayetteville among others though purchasing cotton from neighboring farmers was quite common. In terms of sales, Alabama mills, much like other southern mills, usually had agents who found buyers for their goods and converters, men who altered the products to suit the market. For owners, the sky seemed the limit when it came to future possibilities for the state and the south. In fact, of the nation's 915 cotton mills and 4,300,000 spindles, 443 mills and 217,000 spindles were in the South.²² Elation changed to despair when the Civil War arrived, bringing the southern textile industry to a virtual standstill.

²¹ Miller, 97; and "Notes on Textile Manufactures."

²² Wilhelm, 11, 47; English, 41; Harriet E. Amos, *Cotton City: Urban Development in Antebellum Mobile* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1985), 81, 214; Woodman, 14; Melvin Thomas Copeland, *The Cotton Manufacturing Industry of the United States* (New York: Augustus M. Kelley Publishers, 1966), 182-183, 209-210; William Kessler, "An Outline of the Textile Industry in the United States," in *Textiles . . . A Dynamic Industry* ed. Wilfrid H. Crook, E. C. Bancroft, Lester Blum, Wilson Farman, Frank Farnsworth, and William Kessler (Hamilton, NY: Colgate University, 1951), 13-15; and Hammond, 254, 343.

During the Civil War many southern mills stopped production. Others began making war goods. Southern textile operations, periodically hampered by poor crops and foreign competition, were ill-prepared for war. The conflict put an end to cotton shipments throughout the South and hurt exports, causing Britain to turn to Egypt for raw cotton. Indeed Britain, having anticipated the war, had long been stockpiling cotton in order to avoid dependence on the American South and thus an obligation to assist the Confederacy in its endeavors. Just as problematic were the northern blockades that impeded the transport of southern goods, including textiles. To make matters worse, Confederate money was backed by southern cotton, which had few if any buyers. The fact that many farmers switched from growing cotton to food also hurt southern mills.²³ Other problems abounded.

Throughout the war, the Bell Factory remained inactive. The mill did, however, play a role in the conflict. In 1863, Union soldiers, attracted by the grain mill opposite the factory, produced 3,000 pounds of flour and meal before leaving. The owners of the mill were extremely lucky given that Union

²³ David L. Cohn, *The Life and Times of King Cotton* (Westport, CT, 1956), 209, 131; Stephen Yafa, *Big Cotton: How a Humble Fiber Created Fortunes, Wrecked Civilizations, and Put America on the Map* (New York, 2005), 168; Hammond, *Cotton Industry*, 255; Woodman, *King Cotton*, 205–26; Anthony Howe, *The Cotton Masters, 1830–1860* (Oxford, NY, 1984), 199; Thomas C. Cochran, “Did the Civil War Retard Industrialization?” in *Myth and the American Experience*, ed. Nicholas Cords and Patrick Gerster (New York, 1973), 402; Brent D. Glass, *The Textile Industry in North Carolina: A History* (Raleigh, NC, 1992), 13; Singleton, 50; Anthony Burton, *The Rise & Fall of King Cotton* (London, 1984), 179, 189; Thompson, 58–59; Perry Walton, *The Story of Textiles: A Bird’s Eye View of the History of the Beginning and the Growth of the Industry by which Mankind is Clothed*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1925), 190; John W. Rowell, *Yankee Artillerymen: Through the Civil War with Eli Lilly’s Indiana Battery* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1975), 139; and Campbell, 5. One of the worst crop failures took place in 1856.

soldiers often burned mills. In fact, when operation resumed in 1865, only Bell, Flint, and perhaps one other mill remained in Madison County. Considering the value of cotton on both national and international levels, these mills stood to make a great deal of money.²⁴

The mill in question, The McFarland Mill, had been built about fifteen miles from Huntsville sometime prior to the Civil War by Thomas M. McFarland. The mill produced brown domestic and may have contributed to the making of Confederate uniforms.²⁵ A July 28, 1866, edition of *The Huntsville Advocate* advertised a nearby 400 to 500 spindle “Wool Carding Mill Factory” in reference to The McFarland Factory.²⁶ Success, however, proved short lived, for in 1874, a fire destroyed the mill. It became known as “The Old Burnt Factory.”²⁷ Before its untimely end, the McFarland Factory, along with the other local mills, encountered a challenge just as difficult as that posed by the war—Reconstruction.

In the war’s aftermath, cotton mills faced an uncertain road to recovery. Forced to adjust to changing economies, politics, and competition, owners tried to stay afloat. Deprived of slave labor, an alternative workforce was needed. Though many whites deemed labor a traditionally black role, tenant farmers, small farmers, and mountain residents flocked to mills from near and far in the hope of attaining a better life. Whereas farm work demanded entire families working twenty-four hours a day, mill work offered set hours and bi-weekly pay. With this

²⁴ Rowell, 139. On the price of cotton after the war, see Hammond, 121.

²⁵ Wilhelm, 111-114; and “Notes on Textile Manufactures.”

²⁶ *The Huntsville Advocate*, 28 July 1866, n.p.

²⁷ “Notes on Textile Manufactures.”

in mind, single men and women, widows, and entire families made the trek to the cotton mills.²⁸

Those who transitioned from farm to factory expected their independence would be furthered but were often disappointed. Unlike single northern women who, thought under supervision, found some level of liberty in their ability to become relatively self-supporting, southern men could not support their families on mill salaries. This meant whole families had to work in order to subsist.²⁹

²⁸ Broadus Mitchell and George Sinclair Mitchell, *The Industrial Revolution in the South* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1930), 32; Jennings J. Rhyne, *Some Southern Cotton Mill Workers and their Villages* (New York: Arno Press, 1977), 66, 129; August Kohn, *The Cotton Mills of South Carolina* (Spartanburg: The Reprint Company Publishers, 1975), 126; Wayne Flynt, "Spindle, Mine, and Mule: The Poor White Experience in Post-Civil War Alabama," in *From Civil War to Civil Rights Alabama, 1860-1960*, ed. Sarah Woolfolk Wiggins (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1987), 387; May Simons, "Education in the South," *The American Journal of Sociology* 10, no. 3 (November 1904): 396; M. W. Heiss, "The Southern Textile Social Service Association," *Journal of Social Forces* 3, no. 3 (March 1925): 513-514; H. C. Nixon, *Lower Piedmont Country: The Uplands of the Deep South* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1984), 148; and Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life after Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 111-113.

²⁹ Thomas Dublin, ed., *Farm to Factory: Women's Letters, 1830-1860* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), 23; David Carlton, "Paternalism and Southern Textile Labor: A Historiographical Review," in *Southern Labor History* ed. Gary M. Fink and Merl E. Reed (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1994), 17-25; Elizabeth Hayes Turner, "Women in the Post-Civil War South," in *A Companion to the American South*, ed. John B. Boles (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, Inc., 2002), 350; Thomas R. Brooks, *Toil and Trouble: A History of American Labor* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1964), 244; and Cohn, 251.

While white mill workers did not require the same protection extended slaves, an unbalanced relationship between manufacturers and mill operatives resulted. Corporate paternalism did not derive from planter-slave paternalism. Primarily, industrial paternalism existed in all mills, not just those of the South. Secondly, white workers in no way viewed themselves as slaves. Thirdly, industrial paternalism took the form of schools, churches, and other types of social welfare. Mills did this in order to maintain the loyalty of employees and ensure a perpetual workforce. Owners may have felt some charity toward workers but profit remained the ultimate goal. Motivations aside, the resulting provisions meant unprecedented assistance to workers.³⁰

In November 1868, The Bell Factory, having survived the war unscathed, became The Bell Factory Manufacturing Company. Around that time, the mill switched from water to steam power. This transition proved somewhat later considering that the first steam run mill appeared in New England in 1827 and in the South in 1830, but the price of transporting coal no doubt proved one explanation for the delay. In any case, with its 2,352 spindles, eighty looms, and sixty wool spindles, the mill made sheetings, gingham, ducks, and plaids. Production proved impressing to the extent that in 1868, a Mr. Haines, special commissioner for the state, displayed various selections in Paris, France. Success, however, did not prevent Superintendent William M. Tabor from selling his 200 shares of capital stock to

³⁰ Burton, 60, 197; Flamming, *Creating the Modern South*, 121-124; Wallace, 423; Mitchell, *The Industrial Revolution in the South*, 133; Carlton, *Mill and Town*, 60, 89; Elna C. Green, ed., *Before the New Deal: Social Welfare in the South, 1830-1930* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1999), xv; David R. Goldfield, *Cotton Fields and Skyscrapers: Southern City and Region, 1607-1980* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 125; and Virginia Van der Veer, *Alabama: A History* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1977), 38.

William H. Echols. Echols later assumed the role of superintendent while James R. Stevens became president. Of note, Charles P. Cabaniss, son of The Cabaniss Factory founder Charles Cabaniss, ran the company's office in Huntsville until his death in 1880. During that time and in the years to come, the factory hired mainly white women and children. Workers may have had homes, measuring forty-feet or so, a garden, and one or two cows on company land. By 1881, the mill provided a church and a school for its roughly 300 village residents who earned anywhere from eight to twenty dollars a month. The mill ran successfully until 1885 when it shut down. Reasons included the Southern Railway being built over ten miles away, the costs of transporting cotton and textile products, and competition from the newly built mills in nearby Huntsville. Quite simple, pursuing production offered no profit. As a result, attorney William Echols Spragins, acting on behalf of his mother-in-law, Mary Beirne Patton Echols, liquidated the factory's assets.³¹ When The Bell Manufacturing Company closed its doors, an era ended.

The early mills of Madison County weathered fluctuating economies, local and regional competition, and the Civil War.

³¹ Wilhelm, 45; Alice Galenson, *The Migration of the Cotton Textile Industry from New England to the South: 1880-1930* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1985), 158; *The Weekly Democrat*, 11 December 1868, n.p.; Wilhelm, 73; Joseph Hodgson, ed., *The Alabama Manual and Statistical Register for 1868* (Montgomery: Mail Building, 1869), 75; "Stock Transfer," Huntsville Industry Bell Factory, Vertical Files, Huntsville-Madison County Public Library; Thorn, 31; Turner, 350; and Victor S. Clark, *History of Manufacturers in the United States* (New York: Peter Smith, 1949), 398; Wayne Flynt, *Mine, Mill, and Microchip: A Chronicle of Alabama Enterprise* (Northridge, CA: Windsor Publications, Inc., 1987), 105; Thorn, 36; and Spragins, 139.

The lifespan of each may have been relatively brief, but had helped to prove the area's industrial potential. By the dawn of the twentieth century, Huntsville alone boasted six cotton mills and was well on its way to becoming one of the largest textile cities in the south. At one point the city boasted eleven mills. While the early mills of Madison County had long since closed, they provided their successors with a legacy of, if not success, its possibility.

