

REGISTER OF THE CLIFTON MANUFACTURING COMPANY RECORDS, 1880-1969

Mss 136, 200.5 cu. ft., including 292 boxes, 71 oversize boxes, 70 oversize volumes, 5 folders of oversize material, 1 folder of photographs, 1 folder of negatives, 1 oversize photograph, 50 rolls of positive and 50 rolls of negative microfilm

Introduction

The records of Clifton Manufacturing Company were stored in one of the mill buildings after the Company's closure in the 1970s. They were placed in four-foot square wooden crates and apparently contained only a portion of the entire documentary holdings of the firm. No overall inventory of the Company's records has been located. For the better part of a decade, individuals rummaged through the crates looking for items to sell and for souvenirs. In doing so, records were strewn around the room on the floor in places several feet deep. Whatever arrangement the records had been stored in was seriously disrupted and substantial physical damage was done to the records.

In 1985, Ray Earnhardt, who then owned the mill building in which the records were stored, offered to permit Clemson University Libraries to take whatever records it considered of historical value. During the course of several months approximately 600 cubic feet of material was accessioned as 85-37, the bulk of it being placed in temporary storage in the University's Old Cattle Barn. This represented approximately ten to twenty percent of the records that existed in the mill building. Clemson University Libraries acquired additional material from Michael Hembree and Rev. David Moore in 1989, accession 89-4. The material from Rev. Moore included cloth remnants, ledgers, blueprints, financial records, correspondence, and personnel records.

Pauline Klein, Manuscript Archivist, began work on this collection. Mark Smith, Project Archivist, did much of the initial arrangement and description of these records with the assistance of the following students: David Burns, John Dorris, Lori Robinson, and Doria Wood. Additional processing and organization was done by Karen Ellenberg, Manuscript Archivist, with the assistance of the following students: Srinivas Ambati, Hochin Chang, Brian Ford, Maryann Ingham, Lisa McAlister, Brian Martin, Nita Poston, Girija Rayasam, Mark Sanders, and Pradeep Singh. Final processing work was done by Michael Kohl, Project Director, with the help of several of the above named students. James Cross revised this register in 2000.

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generous grants have permitted these records to be available to the public. There are no restrictions on the use of this collection.

Additional material on Clifton Manufacturing Company can be found at Converse College in Spartanburg, including correspondence, newspaper clippings, board of director's minutes, photographs, stock certificates, personnel records, and auditor's reports. The Museum of American Textile History in Andover, Massachusetts has a collection of approximately six cubic feet. A copy of the series outline and description notes for the collection is appended to the end of this register.

Corporate History

The Clifton Manufacturing Company was founded in 1880 by Dexter Edgar Converse and A. H. Twichell on the Pacolet River site of the South Carolina Manufacturing Company iron works, just outside of Spartanburg. South Carolina business associates and some northern financial support assisted in the venture. Clifton Manufacturing Company also bought water rights on the Pacolet River.

There were ten major stockholders, including Mr. Converse and A.H. Twichell. Mr. Twichell was the first secretary-treasurer and was the company's second president. During the years of operations, there were only four presidents: Dexter Converse (1880-1890); A.H. Twichell (1899-1916); J. Choice Evins (1916-1945); and Stanley Converse (1945-1971).

The first mill began operation in the summer of 1881. The Clifton Manufacturing Company drew heavily upon northern financial support, northern textile experience, and northern textile machinery. The Mill No. 1's plans were drawn by A. D. Lockwood, of Providence, Rhode Island and the machinery was purchased from the Kitson Machine Company of Lowell, Massachusetts and the Saco Water Power Machine Company of Biddeford, Maine. The first mill superintendent was J. Longee, of Providence, Rhode Island, formerly at the Fitchville Manufacturing Company of Connecticut.

In 1893 the Clifton Manufacturing Company employed 1,500 people to manufacture cotton cloth, notably sheetings, shirtings, and drills. The company's selling agents were Wheelwright, Eldredge and Co. and O. H. Simpson and Co. (Davidsons' *The Blue Textile Directory*, 1893-1894). The second mill was built in 1896, and the third mill, called the Converse Mill was built in 1896; though the 1903 flood waters swept it away and damaged No. 1 Mill and No. 2 Mill. The company repaired the other two mills and completely rebuilt the Converse mill on higher grounds. By 1919, the company had three mills in operation, employing approximately 1,000 people working 86,800 spindles and 2,600 looms, driven by water, steam, and electricity. The combined mill village population that same year was 2,500 people (*Southern Textile Bulletin*, December 25,

1919). A fourth mill was added in 1949, a fifth mill for weaving was added in 1952, and a sixth mill was built in 1957.

During its history, unions made a number of attempts to organize the employees of the Company. The Knights of Labor were active during the 1880s. The 1930s brought another upswing in union activism with the Company signing union contracts during the 1940s. The Textile Workers Union of America organized a major strike at Clifton during 1949-1950.

The Clifton Manufacturing Company was profitable until the 1960's when the combination of new manufacturing technology and foreign competition squeezed its profits. In 1965 Dan River Mills bought the Clifton Manufacturing Company, and it became a division of the Dan River Mills. Stanley Converse stayed as president of the Clifton Division of the Dan River Mills until retiring in 1969.

In addition to the sources cited above, information for this corporate history is from *A Place Called Clifton, South Carolina* by Michael Hembree and David Moore (Jacobs Press, 1987) and *Clifton: a River of Memories a Companion Volume* by the same authors (Jacobs Press, 1988) as well as from a historical note prepared by the Museum of American Textile History.

Scope and Content

The Clifton Manufacturing Company Records at Clemson University span nearly a century, beginning with the founding of the first mill in 1880. A chronology of important dates in the company's history is included in this finding aid. While there are substantial records from the Company's early years, the bulk of the material is dated from the 1920s through the 1950s.

The organization of the collection reflects the operations of the Company. The records have been placed into six series: Community Relations; Correspondence; Financial; Mill Village; Operations and Production; and Personnel and Employee Relations. Because the bulk of the material was retrieved from a warehouse floor, original order was largely non-existent. There is a substantial amount of overlap which reflects both the interrelationship of various aspects of the firm's operations as well as the fact that a number of different individuals organized the collection. With the exception of the small Community Relations and Mill Village series, material in the series is arranged first into subseries and then alphabetically by folder title and chronologically thereafter. The series descriptions can be found at the beginning of each container listing for the six series.

The records include a great deal of information about the routine activities involved in textile manufacturing including the construction and renovation of the physical plant, purchase of raw cotton, relations with agents and brokers, and the daily operations of production. A variety of records pertain to the firm's employees and concern their health and safety, wages and labor relations, and community affairs. There are substantial records concerning the 1948-1950 strikes at Clifton. The records include a variety of material related to the textile industry as a whole, which is found primarily in the correspondence series.

MSS 136

Clifton Manufacturing Company

CHRONOLOGY OF IMPORTANT DATES, 1870-1971

1870	Dexter Converse founds his first cotton company, Glendale Cotton Mills.
1880	Converse buys Pacolet River site; builds Clifton Manufacturing Co.
1881	First mill opens.
1886-1887	Union organizing efforts at Clifton Mills.
1888	Second mill opens.
1889	Converse College opens.
August 1889	Clifton Mill Incorporates.
1894	Draper "Northrop" automatic loom invented.
1895	Third mill opens.
October 4, 1899	Dexter Converse dies.
1899-1900	A. H. Twichell becomes president.
1903	Flood hits Clifton Mills.
1914	Strike at Clifton Mills.
1916	A.H. Twichell dies; J. Choice Evans becomes president.
1921	Draper Tyon Loom introduced.
1928	Flood hits Clifton Mills.
1930	Introduction of Draper High-speed loom.
1933-1935	General strike in the region.
1940	Possible strike at #2 mill village.
June 29, 1942	Strike at #1 Mill.
1945	J. Choice Evans retires; Stanley Converse becomes president.
1948-1950	Strikes at Clifton Mills.
1949	Mill #4 opens.
1950	Sale of mill houses begins.
1952	School becomes part of the Spartanburg county system.
1952	Mill #5 opens.
1957	Mill #6 opens.
1958	Company begins paying operatives in check instead of cash.
September, 1965	Company sold to Dan River Mills, Incorporated.
July, 1968	1000 looms eliminated, #4 closed.
1969	#1, #2, and #6 closed.
1971	#3 and #5 closed.