

## **Book Review: *Textile Town: Spartanburg County, South Carolina***

*Textile Town* was published in 2002 by the Hub City Writers Project. It is a definitive anthology with photos and interviews, and it pulls no punches. If you are looking for a romanticized version of mill life you will be disappointed, although it includes some of the good times.

In the main, it is a story of low wages and long hours, 12-hour days, 6 days a week in the beginning. Women were paid less than men, and African-Americans were excluded altogether except for outside or domestic work. Child labor was common, sometimes required. Legislation eventually limited hours and eliminated child labor. It was not until the 1960's that blacks were hired to work in the mill.

Some mills provided schools for their workers; there was at one time a kindergarten at Beaumont.

Living conditions varied from mill to mill, and distinctions between the city and the mill villages grew. While the owners built mansions on East Main, South Pine, and Church streets in the city, mill people were looked down upon and often referred to as 'lintheads'.

Wages were so low that most families had a garden and possibly kept chickens and a cow out of necessity. (In Beaumont this was in "the woods," where Phifer Road is today.)

In case someone has not noticed, the textile mills are gone; *Textile Town* is in many ways an epitaph. Only some skeletons remain. We are fortunate that some of those old mill buildings are being re-purposed, Beaumont as office space for the hospital system, Drayton as loft apartments.

Our mill *village* is a different story, and it is that continuing story at Beaumont that we are concerned with.

There is some information here on Beaumont Mill specifically, but apparently there is not much archival information available. Share your old photos in February.

**Yes, the Village is on FACEBOOK!**  
Look for the Beaumont Village Association

**The mill village was the heart of the cotton mill industry.** Since Southerners were mostly farmers, they had lived separated from one another, and their towns and villages had been small and few. There were no concentrations of population to constitute a workforce for a mill. Before steam power, mill builders needed water to power their machinery so they had to build their mills on rivers and construct nearby villages to house their workers. (page 43)

...Labor recruiters went to the mountain regions of western North Carolina and especially eastern Tennessee, where they found many mountain people eager for steady employment. The meager wages of the cotton mill industry seemed to them a blessing. (p. 42) [editor's note: whole families came to Beaumont from Polk County, NC]

One thing that did not change, one habit that transferred directly from the farm to the mill floor, was a dedication to work....In that agricultural life a work ethic had developed that went hand in hand with the ethos of evangelical Protestantism. People were put on this earth to work, and they would reap what they had sown. (p. 46)

Initially, workers chose to live in the mill village because of the lure of a steady income. In 1910, 87 percent of the South's mill workers lived in mill villages. Once in the village, however, workers actually had little choice. The low or non-existent rent was necessary because of the low wages. (p. 47).

**from *Textile Town: Spartanburg County, South Carolina*, by the Hub City Writers Project, Betsy Wakefield Teter, editor. Available from Hub City Books**