

Russell and Simmons Factory, 1873-1977  
Goodrich Street  
Augusta  
Richmond County  
Georgia

HAER GA-34

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GA,  
123-AUG.  
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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Engineering Record  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D. C. 20243

## HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

RUSSELL AND SIMMONS FACTORY

HAER GA-34

Location: Goodrich Street  
Augusta, Georgia  
UTM:  
Quad:

Date of Construction: 1873  
1977 (Demolished)

Present Owner: Unknown

Present Use: Vacant Lot

Significance: Construction of the factory began during the enlargement of the Augusta Canal, making it the first industry to build on the banks of the expanded canal. It otherwise lacks significance.

Historian: Robert C. Jorgensen, 1977

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## RUSSELL AND SIMMONS FACTORY

With the enlargement of the Augusta Canal,<sup>1</sup> more interest was taken in the establishment of new industries along it. In 1873, while the canal enlargement was under construction, Henry F. Russell of Augusta and C.W. Simmons of Providence, Rhode Island purchased a ten acre site north of the old Confederate Powder Works<sup>2</sup> and between the canal and the Savannah River from the city for a factory devoted exclusively to the manufacture of cotton rope, yarn and twine.<sup>3</sup>

Excavation on the Russell and Simmons Factory began on 1 July 1873, and construction was completed by the year's end, \$42,000 being expended on the building and machinery. Workmen first blasted a tailrace through solid rock between the wheel pit to a natural channel leading to the river. A sixty foot headrace terminated with a thirty-two foot fall into the turbine pit where the turbine generated power sufficient to operate a much larger factory. The one and a half story building, exclusive of its basement, was constructed of brick, a portion of which was taken from one of the powder works' buildings which was also purchased from the city. The dimensions of the main room containing the principal machinery were 50x104 feet. The building was designed for the construction of additional stories to increase the mill's capacity so cotton goods could also be manufactured in the future.<sup>4</sup>

The factory commenced operation on 1 January 1874 under the superintendency of L.B. Armstrong, formerly of Providence, Rhode Island. Russell and Simmons purchased the mill's machinery from English manufacturers. The products were made from a mixture of bailed and waste cotton, all of them finding ready markets throughout the country's major cities.<sup>5</sup> The owners established the

net profits of their factory to be approximately \$25,000 per year, more than a 50% annual interest on their investment.

The factory employed thirty-five operatives a month after its operations began; the work force increased as production grew. Several tenements were built north of the factory to house the workers.

Conditions did not continue to be favorable for the new factory. In the late 1870's, the factory was under the control of the Augusta Canal Manufacturing Company which also failed.<sup>6</sup> In June 1879 James A. Gray and George P. Curry, both of Augusta, petitioned to become incorporated, and they procured a charter under the name of the Summerville Mills to operate a cotton factory at the site.<sup>7</sup>

The new owners immediately enlarged and expanded the main building to three stories, including the basement, with overall dimensions of 50x212 feet. A central stair and water tank tower was placed at its center. A dye house 35x72 feet and a picker house 35x60 feet were added on the south side of the factory while a total of ten tenements of four rooms each were located north of it. The cloth room was located in the basement, the spinning and carding on the first floor, and the weaving and reeling on the second. The mill was lighted by oil in safety lamps.<sup>8</sup> These arrangements and plans were drawn by A.D. Lockwood of Providence, Rhode Island. Further plans were made to cultivate the remaining acreage between the mill and the river. The new machinery consisted of 4000 spindles and 150 looms. The spinning machinery was manufactured at Biddeford, Maine, the looms and shafting at Lewiston, Maine and the "Hercules" wheel capable of generating 300 horsepower, and pumps at Holyoke, Massachusetts.<sup>9</sup> Operation of the refitted mill started in February 1880 with 100 operatives employed in the manufacture of checks, stripes and cottonades. The superintendent was C.W. Holbrook of Lowell, Massachusetts.

Several months later on 29 June 1880 James A. Gray died, his partner George Curry purchasing Gray's half interest in the mill for \$7500.<sup>10</sup> For the next several years twenty percent profits were made, but the depression of 1884 made it impossible for Curry to meet his bond payments causing the mill to fail.

In May 1884, Stewart Phinizy, president of Augusta Factory,<sup>11</sup> purchased the mill at a receivers sale, subsequently renaming it the Algernon Mill.<sup>12</sup> The operation of the Algernon was intermittent with D.E. McGaw serving as superintendent in the early 1890's. In 1887 the mill had 4,244 spindles, 150 looms and 165 operatives and manufactured similar products as its predecessors: checks, plaids, seersuckers, wrapping twine and three-ply rope. The yearly product was 234,000 yards of cloth and 143,000 pounds of rope and twine valued at \$213,823.<sup>13</sup> A one story warehouse and office building 115x35 feet was constructed near the tailrace.

Phinizy shut down the operation in August 1892 and planned to entirely refit the mill and make a complete change in the product manufactured.<sup>14</sup> After a brief interlude of several months when new machinery was installed, the mill again began operation.<sup>15</sup>

Algernon, like its predecessors, succumbed in 1893 the victim of that years panic and was sold. The incorporation on 29 December 1894 of the Isaetta Mills marked the third re-emergence of the mill and its fourth owner in twenty years.<sup>16</sup> The mill suffered from neglect standing idle most of the time until it was purchased in 1906 and operated under the name Murray Mill or the Singleton Silk Company. This company refitted the plant and produced silk until 1929. Between 1930 and 1940, approximately, it was operated as the Augusta Silk Manufacturing Company. Various owners operated the plant as a tannery, warehouse and waste plant between 1940 and 1975 when it burned.

The remaining remnants of the mill were bulldozed under during the summer of 1977.

The Russell and Simmons Factory is a good example of the small mill that cannot adequately respond to the economic fluctuations of the business world. For most of its owners, the mill did not constitute their primary business interest and took a secondary position in their affairs. Because of its size the mill could not operate at the scale of larger mills and competition was more difficult. It was not until the factory was converted into a silk mill that a company was somewhat successful in its industrial attempts.

Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>Historic American Engineering Record (HAER), Report No. 1, Augusta Canal.

<sup>2</sup>HAER, Report No. 3, Sibley Manufacturing Company.

<sup>3</sup>Augusta Chronicle and Sentinel, 2 July 1873. (Later referred to as A.C.&S., A.C.&C. A.C. as its name changes.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 22 February 1874.

<sup>5</sup>The rope manufactured here was primarily used for plow lines.

<sup>6</sup>A.C.&C., 20 June 1879.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid. Capital stock of \$100,000 was employed to get the mill in operation, \$40,000 of it for the purchase of real estate and the remainder for the additions and machinery. \$60,000 worth of bonds bearing 7% interest were issued.

<sup>8</sup>A.C.&C., 2 June 1880.

<sup>9</sup>1884 Sanborn Fire Insurance maps.

<sup>10</sup>A.C.&C., 30 June 1880 and 6 October 1880.

<sup>11</sup>HAER, Report No. 12, Augusta Factory.

<sup>12</sup>The Augusta Exchange Club, compiler, The Industrial Advantage of Augusta, Georgia (Augusta: Akehurst Publishing Co., 1893), p. 83.

<sup>13</sup>Charles Colcock Jones and Salem Dutcher, Memorial History of Augusta, Georgia (Syracuse: D. Mason and Company, 1890).

<sup>14</sup>Textile World 13 (August 1892), p. 279.

<sup>15</sup>What change took place in the products manufactured is not known.

<sup>16</sup>The incorporators were James Brothentan, E.F. Smith, Stewart Phiniza, R.T. Woodward, A.S. Morris, George H. Gercke, and A.F. Crambe. Capital was set at \$25,000 and could be increased to \$100,000. Richmond County Superior Court clerk's office, "Charters," Book 1, 1889-1900, pp. 290-292.

Selected Bibliography

Augusta Chronicle and Sentinel (and its successors the Augusta Chronicle and Constitutionalist and the Augusta Chronicle).

Contains several articles on the mills, their machinery and operation.

Jones, Charles Colcock and Dutcher, Salem. Memorial History of Augusta, Georgia.  
Syracuse: D. Mason and Co., 1890.

A very brief description of the Algernon mill is included.

Sanborn Fire Insurance maps of 1884, 1890, 1904, 1923.

Valuable in seeing the physical layout of the different mills and their expansion over the years.

Whatley, William L. "A History of the Textile Development of Augusta, Georgia, 1865-1883." M.S. thesis, University of South Carolina, 1964.

Good footnote source material.