



Arkadelphia Cotton Mills

In 1889 the Arkadelphia Cotton Mills (also known as Ouachita Cotton Mills) began its short-lived, but impressive existence in Arkadelphia. The manufacturing concern had previously operated at Royston from the mid-1870s, but was moved to Clark County. The facility sat on the bank of the Ouachita River, and was initially managed by J.W. Garrison, who had run the mill in Royston and was also a large stockholder. When the factory opened, it gave Arkadelphia the privilege of having one of the most popular and profitable industries in the South at the time. And certainly, the large building atop the bank of the Ouachita River presented quite an impressive appearance to those traveling by train across the river.

In November of 1889, the *Arkansas State Register* described the business this way: *The factory building sits upon a high, rocky point, immediately upon the bank of the river and about two hundred yards from the Iron Mountain Railroad bridge. It has a floor surface of 60 x 180 feet, is three stories high, beside the basement story. On the first story are 22,080 spindles, on the second are fifty-two looms, also bailing, presses, and other attachments. Sixty persons are employed and the capacity of the mills is 3,900 yards per day or three bales of 4 x 4 three-yard sheeting, and the three stories and basement lighted by incandescent electric lights.*

During the first six weeks of 1894, over 80,000 yards of cloth were sold and shipped. At the time, some forty-five employees consumed from fifteen to eighteen bales of cotton per week as they created their finished products.

According to local legend, cotton prices soon went too high to justify the mill's existence: cotton went to five and one-half cents per pound in 1899, and the factory closed shortly thereafter. A decade later, the spools there were reportedly still covered with thread just as they were the last day the facility was in operation. After the mill closed, the old factory building stood several years before it was finally razed and space made for an ice plant. The location of nearby houses built for workers on the bluff was still known by long-time residents as "Factory Hill" when it was cleared for the construction of Riverwood Nursing Home years later. As many remember today, the nursing home was seriously damaged during the tornado that hit Arkadelphia in 1997.