

Vass Cotton Mill
Name of Property
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

Moore, North Carolina
County and State

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

1. Name of Property

Historic name: Vass Cotton Mill
Other names/site number: Textron, Jones Inc., Angus Behar
Name of related multiple property listing:
N/A

2. Location

Street & number: 340 Seaboard Street
City or town: Vass State: NC County: Moore
Not For Publication: ☐ N/A Vicinity: ☐ N/A

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this ☒ nomination ☐ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property ☒ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

☐ national ☐ statewide ☒ local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

☒ A ☐ B ☐ C ☐ D

Signature of certifying official/Title: State Historic Preservation Officer Date
North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

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In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official:

Date

Title :

State or Federal agency/bureau
or Tribal Government

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- ___ entered in the National Register
___ determined eligible for the National Register
___ determined not eligible for the National Register
___ removed from the National Register
___ other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

Private:

☒

Public – Local

☐

Public – State

☐

Public – Federal

☐

Category of Property

Building(s)

☒

District

☐

Site

☐

Structure

☐

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Object



Number of Resources within Property

Contributing

2

Noncontributing

3

buildings

0

0

sites

0

0

structures

0

0

objects

2

3

Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register N/A

6. Function or Use
Historic Functions

INDUSTRY/PROCESSING/EXTRACTION: manufacturing facility

INDUSTRY/PROCESSING/EXTRACTION: industrial storage

Current Functions

VACANT/NOT IN USE

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7. Description

Architectural Classification

OTHER: slow-burn construction

Materials:

Foundation: BRICK

Walls: BRICK

Roof: METAL

Narrative Description

Summary Paragraph

Located southwest of downtown Vass, between the former Seaboard Air Line Railroad line and US Highway 1 Business, the Vass Cotton Mill property includes a historic mill building, a cotton warehouse, and three small, non-contributing, late twentieth century auxiliary buildings. The former mill village is located across the railroad tracks to the south and southeast of the mill. The mill is a one-story, brick building with an entrance tower and a metal gable roof. Its slow-burn construction features brick walls; large, three-part wooden windows; and heavy timber post and beam interiors. Although the south elevation has been altered, the remaining elevations have a regular progression of segmentally-arched masonry openings housing 8/8 double-hung, wooden sash windows each topped by an arched, eight-light pivot window. The southeast elevation has a shad-roofed addition begun by 1923 and completed by 1970. The four-bay, one-story cotton warehouse has a shed roof. Each of its bays is separated by a brick fire wall.

Narrative Description

The Vass Cotton Mill property comprises two adjacent parcels located southwest of downtown Vass, North Carolina. The parcels are northeast of James Street and southeast of U.S. Highway 1 Business. The parcels contain the mill, a frame shed to its east, an open gable-roofed shelter (pole barn) to its west, a gable-roofed shed to its north, and a cotton warehouse to its northwest. The open shelter, gable-roofed metal shed, and frame shed date to the late twentieth century. The main mill building suffered a serious fire in 2021, and some fire damage remains evident.

Mill, 1909, Contributing Building

Exterior

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The mill building is masonry with a gable-roofed core measuring approximately 78' x 228'. Roughly centered on the northwest and southeast elevations are projecting brick projections or towers. The south tower has been enveloped by shed-roofed additions that extend along most of the southeast elevation. The northwest and southwest elevations have concrete loading docks with metal shed roofs. The original exterior walls are laid in six-course American bond. The extant roofing on the original portion of the building has broad eaves and carved exposed rafter tails.

The northwest elevation has a series of regularly spaced combination windows set in masonry openings that are topped by three-course rowlock segmental arches and have rowlock sills. The windows have a lower 8/8 wooden sash topped by an eight-light, arched, pivoting window. Centered under each window is a small, arched, metal basement vent topped by a three-course, rowlock segmental arch. This repeating fenestration pattern is found for ten windows south of the projecting tower. North of the tower it repeats thirteen times to a parapet wall with one masonry opening altered to house a door at a concrete loading dock. North of the parapet wall were three additional windows; however, these three bays have been fire-damaged—the windows are missing, and the exterior walls are shored up with exterior wooden bracing.

The brick projection on the northwest elevation has a shed roof. It has two small arched openings on its west elevation at roughly mid-height. They appear to have been larger at one point and partially enclosed, now housing two-light windows that are painted over. The north and south elevations each have one arched opening centered on the upper level, housing rectangular six-light windows that have been painted over. At the juncture of the tower with the main portion of the building is a vertical strip of framing. Its basement level has arched openings on the south and west side; the southern opening houses a grate and the western opening has been bricked up.

The northeast elevation of the mill has at its western end three bays with arched openings shored up by wooden bracing, in a stepped parapet wall exposed for only those three bays. A square tower with corbelling near its cap sits at the juncture of the parapet wall and the engine room, a narrow section of the building set back from and adjacent to the main section. The engine room has only its northern corner exposed. Its northeast side has the three-part window typical of the building, and its northwest side has an arched opening adapted for a double-leaf, six-panel door with an arched plywood panel above. The boiler room section is at the far northeast corner of the building and is set back slightly from the adjacent engine room. It has a shed roof descending to the southeast. On its northwest elevation is a large, modern garage door beneath two small arched openings that house eight-light windows. Its northeast elevation has four arched openings with rowlock sills set high under the eaves and a small rectangular opening at grade with a wooden lintel. At least one historic photograph suggests there may have been a small frame addition on this elevation at some point.

The southeast elevation of the building presents in three sections. The northern two (the boiler room and engine room) are laid in six-course American bond and are divided by a parapet wall that partially extends forward of the wall plane, supported by corbelling. To the north of the parapet wall at the boiler room are two large arched openings with three-course rowlock segmental arches. They have been infilled with plywood, and the southern one has a modern

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single-leaf door. The two bays south of the parapet wall at the engine room also have arched openings. The northern one has been adapted to a garage door with a wooden panel above; the southern one has been bricked in with a plywood panel above. To the south of these two sections is a slightly projecting, shed-roofed addition to the main building built between 1952 and the mid 1970s, laid in running bond brick veneer. At its north is a double-leaf door beyond which, extending to the south, is a series of eight two-light windows with rowlock sills. This pattern is interrupted by the original brick entrance tower, which has been altered. It contains a single-leaf door with an awning. South of the entrance tower bay is a two-bay section with two windows covered with grills built between 1923 and 1946. Beyond that section is a continuing shed-roofed addition of running bond brick with no masonry openings that extends to the southwest elevation, built between 1952 and the mid-1970s.

The southwest elevation of the shed-roofed addition has no masonry openings. The southwest elevation of the original section of the building had nine, regularly-spaced arched openings. The three western masonry openings continue to have variations of the predominant combination window pattern. The center opening has been adapted to fit a metal utility door. It is flanked on the west by one bricked opening, and on the east by two. The eastern two bays of the original elevation contain a single-leaf door at the west and a bricked-up panel with a vent above to the east. A concrete loading dock extends from the central bay southeast along the exterior wall to the extent of the original building and is sheltered by a shed-roofed metal awning supported by metal pipes. The loading dock replaced an earlier, uncovered landing with masonry steps that descended to the southeast and northwest, respectively. The loading dock was installed between 1952 and 1984 and the metal awning sometime thereafter, per photos.

Interior

The interior of the main portion of the mill has its original wood floors and paired central heavy timber wood posts supporting rafters. Walls are exposed brick. All machinery has been removed revealing a large volume of open space. Some portions of the masonry openings along the southeast wall that had been exterior windows have been infilled with concrete block.

A room north of the main mill floor and divided from it by a brick parapet fire wall is accessed through arched masonry openings at the east and west sides of the dividing wall, each with a suspended hanging door on an exposed track. This room has a wooden floor with planks laid on a diagonal, and exposed brick walls. Its roof is severely fire-damaged and only portions of its framing members remain.

A masonry opening leads to the engine room immediately to the north. It has poured concrete floors and exposed brick walls with no trim, as does the boiler room at its north, accessed by a single-leaf, five-panel door. In the boiler room framing for infilled masonry openings is exposed. As with the main mill room, all machinery has been removed, and the rooms are empty.

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The south tower is accessed from the mill interior by a single-leaf metal door. The tower's exterior door is either missing or boarded up. The tower room has plywood paneling on its walls and a broken tile floor. There are doors at its north and south that lead to the shed-roofed additions.

The north addition has significant fire damage, and a portion of its roof is missing. Its western walls are exposed brick and two of the formerly exterior windows have been converted to doors into this space. The floor is poured concrete. Its eastern wall is concrete block and has an exterior masonry opening at the north, once served by a hanging door that has been replaced with a double metal door. Its northern wall is a concrete block extension from what was an exterior brick wall with a window that has been partially infilled. Like the northern wall, the southern wall is a concrete block extension from what was an exterior brick wall. This brick wall was a portion of the projecting tower and has a large exposed arched brick opening that has been partially infilled to include the door to the tower section.

The addition south of the tower is subdivided and the earlier portion, adjacent to the tower, does not connect directly to the extension at its south. The section adjacent to the tower has a concrete floor and plywood paneling. The southernmost section of the addition is accessed from the main mill floor by a sliding metal door installed in the lower level of what had been a window. The room's western and northern walls are brick and its eastern and southern interior walls are concrete block. The floor is poured concrete.

Cotton Warehouse, 1909, Contributing Building

The cotton warehouse is four bays wide. At the south side of each bay is a protruding brick dividing/fire wall, including the south end wall. The north end wall is clad in metal panels and does not extend above the roof line as the fire walls do. Its lower portion is exposed showing a brick foundation. A concrete loading dock extends across the east elevation and services entrances in each of the bays. All the entrances are sheltered by fixed metal awnings. The northern two bays have sliding metal doors and the southern two have retrofitted bays with single-leaf doors. The exterior is largely clad in metal paneling, except the brick south elevation. The west elevation has a painted mural of livestock. The interior features wooden plank floors and walls, brick walls, and large wooden transverse roof beams.

Frame Shed, 1993, Noncontributing Building

The frame shed east of the mill has a shed roof. It is clad in vinyl siding and appears to be set on piers. It has a single-leaf door on its northwest elevation. The interior was not accessed.

Open Shelter (aka Pole Barn), ca. 1995, Noncontributing Building

The open shelter is 11 bays long and two bays wide. Its metal gable roof is supported by wooden posts.

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Gable-Roofed Shed, ca. 1990, Noncontributing Building

The gable-roofed shed north of the mill sits on concrete piers. It is clad in metal panels and has a metal panel roof. The east elevation has a wooden stoop servicing a double-leaf door clad in metal. The interior was not accessed. Like the cotton warehouse, it has a mural of livestock on its west elevation.

Evolution of site

The first announcement of the mill is found in the *Manufacturer's Record* in August 1908.¹ It was anticipated to be completed in early 1909.² There seems to have been some delay in operations, as a notice about the order for mill machinery was published in the summer of 1910.³ The cotton warehouse or cotton house is thought to be contemporaneous, as it is mentioned along with the mill in a 1910 article in a trade journal.⁴

By 1912 there was a cotton gin on-site.⁵ A 1923 article in *The Charlotte Observer* shows it as a collection of frame buildings located northeast of the mill.⁶ It was destroyed in a 1935 fire.⁷ The site also once had a cotton seed house (precise location unknown), which was destroyed by a storm in 1939.⁸ Neither the cotton gin nor the cotton seed house was rebuilt. From as early as 1923 to as late as 1952, according to newspaper photographs, the site had a freestanding metal, elevated water tank that is no longer extant. What appears to be an in-ground reservoir is seen in photos from 1960-1999.

In advertising photographs from as early as 1923, a portion of the shed-roofed addition to the mill existed adjacent and southwest of the entrance tower. Aerial photos housed at NCDOT have varying degrees of resolution. The 1960 images are unclear, but by 1970 they show that the addition along the south elevation was complete. By 1984 and perhaps as early as 1970, the exterior of the tower had been altered and the crenellations removed.

The three noncontributing buildings were erected ca. 1990-1995.

Integrity

The Vass Cotton Mill and associated warehouse have not been moved, thus retain integrity of location. Though the site has evolved somewhat, its environs—namely the proximity to the

¹ "A 5000 Spindle Mill," *Manufacturers Record*, August 27, 1908.

² "Vass, NC," *News and Record*, September 2, 1908.

³ "Local Briefs," *The Sanford Express*, July 29, 1910.

⁴ "Mill News," *Textile World Record*, v 38 Oct 1909 - Mar 1910, 178.

⁵ "Local Briefs," *The Sanford Express*, December 20, 1912.

⁶ "Vass Wants More Manufacturers," *The Charlotte Observer*, October 7, 1923.

⁷ "Vass Cotton Mills Loses Ginning Plant By Fire," *The Pilot*, December 13, 1935.

⁸ "Seed House is Destroyed," *The Moore County News*, July 6, 1939.

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railroad, to US 1 Business, and the mill village—are little changed, and larger new developments in the vicinity are screened by a landscape buffer. Thus, it retains a high degree of integrity of setting. The mill has a relatively high degree of integrity of materials despite some fire damage. A large percentage of original wood windows remain, the exterior brickwork has been little altered, and wooden floors and structural members are in good condition. The integrity of design is impacted by the extension of the addition on the south side and alterations to the entrance tower between 1952 and 1984. These impacts are mitigated by the fact that the building retains its general form, fenestration, interior plan and materials, parapet fire walls, and exposed rafter tails. The lack of any substantial alterations to the extant historic fabric, particularly the brickwork of the exterior walls and the wooden interior posts, supports the integrity of workmanship. The mill is directly connected with textile production history of Vass and Moore County; thus, the integrity of association is strong. The Vass Cotton Mill displays many of the typical physical features of an early twentieth-century textile mill, giving it strong integrity of feeling.

Statement of Archaeological Potential

The Vass Cotton Mill is closely related to the surrounding environment and landscape. Archaeological deposits, such as debris that accumulated during operation of the mill, underground infrastructural components such as water pipes and drainage features, and other remains which may be present, can provide information valuable to the understanding and interpretation of the property. Information concerning worker health, nutrition, and quality of life, environmental transformations during industrial development, and the effects of technological change on work culture and daily life, as well as details of construction processes and the operation of the mill can be obtained from the archaeological record. Therefore, archaeological remains may well be an important component of the significance of the property. At this time no investigation has been carried out to discover these remains, but it is likely that they exist, and this should be considered in any development of the property.

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

- ☒ A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☐ C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

- ☐ A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- ☐ B. Removed from its original location
- ☐ C. A birthplace or grave
- ☐ D. A cemetery
- ☐ E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- ☐ F. A commemorative property
- ☐ G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

Areas of Significance

INDUSTRY

Period of Significance

1909-1952

Significant Dates

N/A

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Significant Person

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Creel, T. B.

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph

The Vass Cotton Mill is locally significant under Criterion A in the area of Industry. The mill is typical of a wave of textile mills built at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries in North Carolina during the Cotton Mill Campaign, which promoted industry as part of the New South movement. Vass Cotton Mill exhibits hallmarks of slow-burn construction that are characteristic for this period. Electricity allowed textile mills like the Vass Cotton Mill to proliferate through the state, no longer directly dependent on waterpower. The Vass Cotton Mill and its operation mirrored other textile trends seen throughout the state, notably the connection to a mill village, the move to vertical integration, and ultimately the transition to synthetics.⁹ The small town of Vass grew up with the mill, which employed a large percentage of the populace. The period of significance begins in 1909, when the mill and cotton warehouse were constructed, and continues to 1952, when the mill was sold to a conglomerate and converted to synthetic textile production.

Narrative Statement of Significance

In the post-Reconstruction era, the “New South” movement embraced changes such as investments in infrastructure, improvement in education, and a shift from agriculture toward industry. Industry would no longer be a peripheral adjunct to agriculture but instead become the powerhouse that supported Southern agriculture by creating a thriving market for raw materials. In North Carolina, the New South philosophy was seen in what became known as the Cotton Mill Campaign. An organized movement began in the 1880s, promoted by Daniel A. Tompkins and others, to capitalize on the relatively cheap labor (some of which was leaving the sharecropping system) to make new agricultural markets by creating value-added products. By processing agricultural crops, southern communities retained profits that had previously gone to New England mill towns and leveraged that revenue for economic growth and urban development. During this period, the growth in textile mills through the state was promoted by expanded media coverage in newspapers and periodicals, by the establishment of a School of

⁹ An adjacent mill village is under separate ownership and is not part of this nomination, however its continued existence reinforces the mill’s integrity of setting.

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Textiles (at what is now North Carolina State University), and by publications that outlined mill financing and construction plans.

Brent Glass, in his publication *The Textile Industry in North Carolina*, notes that between 1885 and 1915 the number of North Carolina textile mills grew from 60 to 318; the number of spindles from 200,000 to 3.88 million; and the number of mill workers from 10,000 to 51,000.¹⁰ The introduction of electrical power freed mill owners to develop new plants throughout the state, as they no longer depended on water power to operate equipment. The transition to electrical power and subsequent contracts were promoted in the *Manufacturer's Record*.¹¹ In September 1907 it observed,

it has been evident for several years to the most casual observer of the trend of development in the manufacturing world that electricity is being more and more adopted for power purposes in all kinds of industrial plants. Managers of cotton mills have been notably active in installing electrical equipments, especially where the primal power is the flow of water. Many southern cotton factories are now operated by electricity, and more now being constructed will use electricity for driving their machinery.¹²

This late nineteenth- to early twentieth-century wave of textile mill buildings generally used a slow-burn construction method with brick walls, large windows, heavy timber interiors, brick interior fire walls, water tanks, and electrical power to replace lanterns. Glass noted that stair towers and water towers were generally the sole locus for architectural whimsy such as crenellations and corbelling.¹³ Many of these late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century mills had adjacent mill villages that housed workers in modest homes with standard designs.

The growth of textile mills came concurrently with expansion of the railroad system, which allowed relatively small communities to have access to markets for their products, making them competitive with larger communities and mills. In some areas the textile concerns themselves spurred the expansion of rail infrastructure.¹⁴

World War I increased demand for textiles, and the industry sought ways to increase revenue and cut expenses by developing and installing new machinery that was more efficient and that mechanized tasks, reducing the need for human capital. Despite these innovations, the postwar ebb in demand and the national economic depression had a negative impact on the industry, as did the state's overconcentration in yarns and coarse goods, which had lower profit margins than other textiles. Yarn producers were particularly dependent on the brokers that marketed their wares to weavers and finishers.

¹⁰ Brent D. Glass, *The Textile Industry in North Carolina: A History* (Division of Archives and History, North Carolina Dept. of Cultural Resources, 1992), 35.

¹¹ "Big Electric Power Contracts," *Manufacturers Record*, November 1, 1906, 396.

¹² "Electric Power for Cotton Mills," *Manufacturers Record*, September 5, 1907, 197.

¹³ Glass, *The Textile Industry*, 38.

¹⁴ Glass, *The Textile Industry*, 42.

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Some textile concerns merged and consolidated operations to achieve economies of scale.

Others achieved vertical integration by buying or creating operations that processed raw materials for the mills or that continued to improve output toward a finished product.¹⁵

The introduction of synthetic fabrics and their growing popularity at midcentury prompted many mills to close or to convert their operations to the production of synthetic fibers. Textile mills generally suffered into the late twentieth century with more a sophisticated and demanding labor force, increased regulation, and foreign competition.

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The town of Vass was incorporated in 1907.¹⁶ It was originally named for an early resident, Joseph Bynum, though subsequent namesakes were officials with the Seaboard Air Line Railway. The Seaboard Air Line Railroad came through the area in the late nineteenth century, providing transit for material and boosting economic growth. Prior to this point, transportation and commerce were limited by poor roads. With the introduction of rail, production and sale of raw agricultural products and naval stores gave way to processed items, and mills and manufacturing grew.

Angus Cameron (1851-1928), who moved to Vass from Harnett County, built the Vass Cotton Mill in 1909.¹⁷ The mill was described as measuring 78 x 228 feet with an engine room that was 20 x 54 feet, a boiler room 30 x 40 feet, and a cotton warehouse that was 42 x 101 feet. The mill was built by T. B. Creel of nearby Aberdeen, North Carolina. It was intended to create #20 to 30 cotton yarn with 5,000 spindles.¹⁸ The entity formed to operate the mill was incorporated the following year. The mill and its output were represented by Forest Brothers of Philadelphia.

Cameron's Vass Cotton Mill was built during a wave of construction that was a departure from most nineteenth-century mills. The availability of electricity and rail connections allowed for mills that were no longer tied to waterways that had provided power and shipping access for earlier mills. The mill was built immediately adjacent to the Seaboard Air Line rails. An electric powerplant was constructed off-site at nearby Lakeview by J.R. McQueen and J. B. Eastwood to service the mill as well as greater Vass, Lakeview, and Cameron.¹⁹

This phenomenon of the shift of mills away from streams and being powered by electricity was profiled in a 1915 article in *The Farmer and Mechanic* that specifically cites the Vass mill.

Then John McQueen and some others put a little plant in on the little stream at Lakeview, and they hung up some electric lights, and presently they went farther and built a bigger dam over about Lobelia and hooked on the Vass cotton mill. That is the way these little things work. They start out with a few lights and then some other folks want to get on the

¹⁵ Glass, *The Textile Industry*, 79.

¹⁶ Previously known as Winder, and before that Bynum.

¹⁷ "A 5000 Spindle Mill," *Manufacturers Record*, August 27, 1908.

¹⁸ "The A. Cameron Cotton Mill," *Manufacturers Record*, November 26, 1908, 59.

¹⁹ "Electric-Light and Power Plants," *Manufacturers Record*, August 27, 1908, 51; , "Hydro-electric Power Plant for Vass," *Fayetteville Weekly Observer*, April 21, 1910.

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line and another little dam is built . . . Cameron at Vass and Upchurch at Raeford had been saw mill men before they built cotton mills, and they viewed with alarm the check book stubs that had “wood” marked on the line that says what for. Cameron got a stranglehold on Little River . . . then one day a man pulled down a big black handle on a shiny brass affair on the wall, and the engine at the Vass mill stopped and a little shriek of a pulley and a whirr of belts and the mill was running with electric power from a little stream down in Hoke County.²⁰

The mill itself was built of slow-burn construction. Like many other mills of the period, it has brick walls, large windows, heavy timber interiors, and brick interior fire walls, powered by electricity. The south entrance tower, now altered, had an arched entrance with a fanlight over the door, a corbelled cornice, and crenellations.

By 1912 the complex included a cotton gin with a steam plant (destroyed by fire in 1935) that provided additional incentive for local farmers to sell and process their cotton at the Vass mill.²¹ By ginning and storing farmers’ cotton on-site, the Vass mill nearly cornered the local cotton market. The ginning and storage capacity gave farmers convenience and the option to sell immediately or to store their cotton in anticipation of better prices. Around this time, an additional 1,400 spindles and new card room machinery were added.²² By all accounts, the relationship of the mill to the local cotton farmers was good. An article in *The Weekly Pilot* described the connection:

no place in the South has had a better reputation as a cotton market than Vass has enjoyed since the cotton mill was built . . . But always Vass has been ready to receive cotton and pay for it . . . and always the price has been a little better than anywhere else that local cotton could be marketed. For Vass mills have had in mind to encourage the production of cotton in this vicinity, and have figured that it is fair to pay here the same price that is paid at bigger markets of the state. So Vass pays the price that is quoted day by day at the big markets and the cotton farmer get here at fast the same price he would get if he sent his cotton to Raleigh or Charlotte, and sometimes a little more, for he does not have to pay freight to get his cotton to market, and he has no intermediary charge or Commission to pay.²³

Local reporting suggests that the mill had intermittent lull periods from 1920 through the 1940s.²⁴ However, the ginning and storage operations continued even when the mill was quiet.²⁵ Unlike other textile mills in North Carolina, the Vass mill had no labor unrest or strikes. *The Moore County News* noted in 1937,

²⁰ Bion H. Butler, “Thousands of Horse Power on State’s Little Streams,” *The Farmer and Mechanic*, March 2, 1915

²¹ “Vass Cotton Mills Loses Ginning Plant By Fire,” *The Pilot*, December 13, 1935; , “Local Briefs,” *The Sanford Express*, December 20, 2012.

²² “Late Mill News,” *The Charlotte News*, July 19, 1912.

²³ “Vass as a Cotton Market,” *The Weekly Pilot*, September 8, 1922.

²⁴ “Cotton Mill Resumes Operation,” *The Pilot*, July 8, 1949.

²⁵ “Keeping Things Going,” *The Weekly Pilot*, January 28, 1921.

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during the long years of the existence of the Vass Cotton Mill company the mill has never been troubled with a strike or labor troubles in any way. Nothing but friendliness and good will has ever existed between the officials and employees of the mill, and both parties are very appreciative of the fact. The mill has always paid a living wage and has acted in a very humanitarian way towards its employees.²⁶

Despite intermittent closures during the Depression, mill workers were allowed to remain in their housing with electrical service for free while the mill was closed.

After his father's death in 1928, A.M. Cameron took on the leadership of the mill. In 1945 A.M. Cameron and the Forest brothers, brokers who had represented the Vass Mills in the sale of yarn, opened a second, separate operation in Vass known as Angus Mills, which made cloth from yarn provided by the Vass Cotton Mill and others.²⁷ The establishment of this mill extended the local vertical integration that up to this point had included ginning, cotton storage, and yarn production, and to actual fabric manufacturing through a separate but allied concern. This continuation and extension of the process from farm to finished product created economies of scale that benefited the local market and the corporate owners.

The period of initial cotton yarn production at the Vass Cotton Mill ended in 1952. In that year, the textile conglomerate Textron bought the mill. In the years prior to sale, A.M. Cameron and his siblings had purchased the outstanding shares of the mill so that the sale was a Cameron family transaction. Textron announced that it would be converting the mill to process rayon. Textron closed the mill in 1953 and sold it to a family concern, Jones, Inc., which operated mills in Humboldt, Tennessee. The mill was converted back to cotton production, making coarse cotton yarns. The property ultimately passed to a successor of the Angus Mills known as Angus Behar, which operated into the 1990s.

Throughout its early history, the Vass Cotton Mill was central to the life and economic vitality of Vass. A 1928 article in *The Pilot* stated that "the cotton mill is the life of Vass. It affords that diversification of industry that balances the agricultural phase, and through its wise management from its beginning it has been a source of continuous income to the people of the village, a market for the farms of the surrounding neighborhood, not only as to their cotton but to much of their other production."²⁸ It reiterated its stance a few years later, noting, "Vass is built largely on the efforts of the mill. It has to show for its product the homes, the neighborhood, the schools, the churches, the air of comfort that abides, and which is making good men and women, thrift, and in these days of financial depression in many places, still holding a line of reasonable prosperity in spite of the general conditions over much of the country."²⁹ From 1910 to 1950, the period roughly corresponding to the ownership and operation of the mill by the Vass Cotton Mill Company, the population of Vass grew from 273 to 757. Employment statistics found in

²⁶ "Upright Business," *The Moore County News*, January 14, 1937.

²⁷ Angus Mills began in a building erected in the 1920s by R.P. Beasley which appears to be 120 East Maple Street in the commercial downtown area of Vass approximately .4 miles northeast.

²⁸ "Following the Father," *The Pilot*, February 17, 1928.

²⁹ "A Home Industry," *The Pilot*, May 29, 1931.

Vass Cotton Mill

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newspapers report that the mill employed anywhere from 75 people in 1935 to 100 in 1946, or up to seven percent of the town's population.

The mill was one of a handful of textile concerns in a county that focused on agriculture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It appears to be the only extant spinning mill in Moore County. The High Falls Manufacturing Company established a water-powered mill on the Deep River that appears to be gone, and the Pinehurst Silk Mills was burned and destroyed in 2008.

Vass Cotton Mill
Name of Property

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9. Major Bibliographical References

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Vass Cotton Mill
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Moore, North Carolina
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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- ☒ State Historic Preservation Office
- ☐ Other State agency
- ☐ Federal agency
- ☐ Local government
- ☐ University
- ☐ Other

Name of repository: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): MR1438

10. Geographical Data

Vass Cotton Mill
Name of Property

Moore, North Carolina
County and State

Acreage of Property 3.58

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: _____

1. Latitude: 35.250058° Longitude: -79.287908°

Verbal Boundary Description

All of Moore County tax parcels 00041122 and 20060260 save for a noncontiguous narrow strip of parcel 20060260 located east of Seaboard Street, as depicted on the map labeled National Register Boundary Map,

Boundary Justification

The boundary includes all of that property associated with the mill save for a noncontiguous narrow strip of parcel 20060260 located east of Seaboard Street, that NC HPO has determined does not directly contribute to the significance of the property.

11. Form Prepared By

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telephone: 919.828.1905
date: October 11, 2024

Vass Cotton Mill

Name of Property

Moore, North Carolina

County and State

Photo Log

All photos:
Vass Cotton Mill
Vass North Carolina
Moore County
Mary Ruffin Hanbury (photographer)

Date Photographed: October 9, 2024
Mill, west corner, view to east
1 of 19.

Date Photographed: October 9, 2024
Mill, west corner, view to northeast
2 of 19.

Date Photographed: July 12, 2024
Mill, northwest elevation, view to southwest
3 of 19.

Date Photographed: July 12, 2024
Mill, northwest elevation, view to southeast
4 of 19.

Date Photographed: July 12, 2024
Mill, engine room tower, view to west-southwest
5 of 19.

Date Photographed: July 12, 2024
Mill, northeast elevation, view to southwest
6 of 19.

Date Photographed: July 12, 2024
Mill, southeast elevation, view to west
7 of 19.

Date Photographed: October 9, 2024
Mill, southeast elevation, view to southwest
8 of 19.

Date Photographed: July 12, 2024
Mill, southeast elevation, view to northeast
9 of 19.

Date Photographed: July 12, 2024
Mill, interior, main room, view to northeast
10 of 19.

Date Photographed: July 12, 2024
Mill, interior, main room, view to west
11 of 19.

Date Photographed: July 12, 2024
Mill, interior, main room, view to east
12 of 19.

Date Photographed: July 12, 2024
Mill, interior, room north of main room, view to northwest
13 of 19.

Date Photographed: July 12, 2024
Mill, interior, engine room, view to northwest
14 of 19.

Vass Cotton Mill

Name of Property

Date Photographed: July 12, 2024

Mill, interior, shed-roofed addition north
of entry tower, view to northeast
15 of 19.

Date Photographed: July 12, 2024

Mill, interior, southern section of shed-
roofed addition, view to northeast
16 of 19.

Moore, North Carolina

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Date Photographed: October 9, 2024

Pole barn, cotton warehouse, & gable-
roofed shed, view to northeast
17 of 19.

Date Photographed: October 9, 2024

Pole barn, cotton warehouse, & gable-
roofed shed, view to southwest
18 of 19.

Date Photographed: October 9, 2024

Mill, pole barn, cotton warehouse, &
gable-roofed shed, view to east
19 of 19.

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for nominations to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.). We may not conduct or sponsor and you are not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number.

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for each response using this form is estimated to be between the Tier 1 and Tier 4 levels with the estimate of the time for each tier as follows:

Tier 1 – 60-100 hours

Tier 2 – 120 hours

Tier 3 – 230 hours

Tier 4 – 280 hours

The above estimates include time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and preparing and transmitting nominations. Send comments regarding these estimates or any other aspect of the requirement(s) to the Service Information Collection Clearance Officer, National Park Service, 1201 Oakridge Drive Fort Collins, CO 80525.