

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**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 PropertyHistoric name: Rhodhiss Mill No. 2Other names/site number: E. A. Smith Manufacturing Company; Pacific Mills;
Burlington Industrial Fabrics Rhodhiss Plant; Old Glory MillName of related multiple property listing: N/A

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

2. LocationStreet & number: 100 Burke StreetCity or town: Rhodhiss State: NC County: BurkeNot 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 X 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 X 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 X local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

X A B C D**Signature of certifying official/Title:****Date**North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources**State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government**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**

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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

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private: ☒
Public – Local ☐
Public – State ☐
Public – Federal ☐

Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

- Building(s) ☒
District ☐
Site ☐
Structure ☐
Object ☐

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Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>2</u>	<u>0</u>	buildings
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>3</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

INDUSTRY/manufacturing
INDUSTRY/pump house
INDUSTRY/water tank

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

INDUSTRY/warehouse

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7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Other: Heavy-timber mill construction

Other: Steel-framed, load-bearing-brick-wall
mill construction

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property:

Foundation: concrete

brick

Walls: brick

concrete block

Roof: membrane

metal

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

Charlotte textile industrialist E. A. Smith, in partnership with George B. Hiss of the Rhodhiss Manufacturing Company, organized the E. A. Smith Manufacturing Company in 1912 and erected a three-story brick cotton mill on the south bank of the Catawba River in eastern Burke County. George Hiss previously organized the Rhodhiss Manufacturing Company with partner John M. Rhodes and built a mill on the north bank of the river in Caldwell County in 1902. After the two plants merged to form the Rhodhiss Mills Company, the E. A. Smith facility in Burke County became known as Mill No. 2. The three-story water-powered mill was one of a number of textile plants organized and constructed in Burke, Caldwell, and Catawba counties during a period of the textile industry's rapid expansion in North Carolina throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The two mills in Rhodhiss—one in Burke County and one across the river in Caldwell County—each had their own village of worker housing and were linked by a steel truss bridge spanning the river. The mills were acquired by Duke Power in 1919, which built a dam and hydroelectric plant just upstream of the two factories in 1924. Pacific Mills acquired the two facilities in 1945, but the company and its properties were later

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absorbed by Burlington Industries in 1954. Burlington operated Mill No. 2 through its Industrial Fabrics Division from 1964 to 1983 and upgraded and enlarged the plant to accommodate heavier machinery for specialized synthetics it supplied to the United States government and major corporations. Mill No. 2 produced fabrics utilized by the nation's space program, by tire manufacturers, and by the military. The mill also served as one of four designated fallout shelters in Burke County in the Cold War period. By the early 1980s, the mill ceased its major operations. In addition to its long association with the region's textile industry, Rhodhiss Mill No. 2 reflects the significant period of modern development under Burlington Industries and its contributions to significant events of the 1960s and 1970s.

Narrative Description

Rhodhiss Mill No. 2 occupies a 14.42-acre site in the Town of Rhodhiss on the south side of the Catawba River, which forms the line between Burke and Caldwell counties. The riparian site in eastern Burke County is located just a few miles upstream of the City of Hickory and approximately four miles north and two miles south of rail lines. The mill site is roughly bounded by the river on the north, Burke Street (SR 1611) on the east, Carolina Avenue on the south, and a municipal park on the west. The site contains the imposing three-story brick textile mill designed for the E. A. Smith Manufacturing Company by South Carolina mill architect and engineer Gadsden E. Shand in 1912, as well as a water tank and pump house likely added to the site in the 1940s after the town installed a water and sewer system. The property is surrounded on three sides by chain-link fences, and paved parking areas are located to the southeast and southwest of the mill building; the fencing and paving were added after the facility was purchased by Pacific Mills in 1945. Entrance gates were established on the east side at Burke Street and to the southwest at Carolina Avenue. The mill's former village of operatives' housing is located to the south.

Rhodhiss Mill No. 2, 1912-14, ca. 1945, 1955, ca. 1969, 1972

Contributing building

Originally built for the E. A. Smith Manufacturing Company in 1912-1914, the water-powered three-story brick textile mill served to complement the three-story cotton mill on the north side of the Catawba River erected by the Rhodhiss Manufacturing Company a decade earlier. The two plants were consolidated as the Rhodhiss Mills Company in 1920, and the facility in Burke County on the south side of the Catawba River became known as Rhodhiss Mill No. 2. The building has a simple rectangular plan, low-pitched gable roof, and interior stair towers at the northeast and southwest corners. The east elevation, for many years the building's front façade, features nine 3-story window bays, which are all bricked up. The original three-part wood-sash windows were set within slightly recessed bays, rested on cast concrete sills, and were topped by segmental arches on the third story formed by four courses of rowlock brick. A one-story gable-roof wing projected to the east from the southeast corner of the mill and overlapped the first bay of the south elevation. A one-story-plus-basement flat-

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roof wing at the northwest corner contained the mill's powerhouse. An exterior tower near the center of the south elevation contained an elevator and restrooms on each floor. The one-story wing at the front of the mill is three bays wide on its east elevation and seven bays on its south elevation. The low-pitched gable roof of this wing has deep overhanging eaves with heavy, carved wood modillion blocks. The window openings, which are all bricked in, rest on cast concrete sills and are topped by segmental arches formed by four courses of rowlock brick. A modern, aluminum-frame glazed entry door with plate glass sidelights and transom has been installed in one of the window bays on the east elevation. A flat corrugated metal canopy is suspended by metal rods attached to the façade and shelters the east elevation of the wing.

The interior of the 1912 mill, both the one- and three-story sections are typically large open spaces originally supported by rows of round wooden posts. The interior of the one-story section is subdivided by a single row of wooden posts carrying chamfered wooden beams. The exposed ceiling is the base layer of the low-pitched gable roof and is finished with tongue-and-groove boards. The floor has several layers of built-up wooden flooring. Doors on the west wall of the one-story wing open into tiled employee restrooms, which were constructed in a flat-roof block added in the 1960s. The interior of the three-story mill was similarly finished with circular wooden posts, thick wooden beams, exposed wood ceilings, and wooden floors throughout. On the first floor of the mill, approximately half of original wood posts and beams remain in place; the rest have been replaced by either steel or concrete construction added by Burlington in the 1960s to support larger and heavier machinery used in the production of advanced synthetics. The space is subdivided by three long rows of columns supporting the upper floors, and the use of concrete structural elements is concentrated at the western end of the mill.

The upper floors of the 1912 mill are accessed from stairwells located in the northeast and southwest corners of the building. The stairwells are typically finished with wood stairs and landings, boxed newel posts and stacked square caps, and solid wood balustrades with molded handrails. The first-floor landing in the northeast corner stairwell has a patterned ceramic tile floor and glazed tile walls rising approximately six feet above the floor. Glazed-and-paneled single-leaf wooden doors open from the stairwell onto the mill floors, and the doorways are topped by a segmental arch opening. The second and third work floors are similarly finished with wood floors, exposed wood ceilings, and replacement steel posts carrying the beams. Some of the original wood beams remain in place, some have been replaced, and a few have been combined with additional steel beams (most common on the second floor). A two-level, partially enclosed workspace has been erected at the east end of the third floor, and a set of wooden steps rise against the east wall to the upper level of the partitioned workspace.

A one-story block projecting from the northwest corner of the building extends to the edge of the river and originally housed the power plant when the mill ran on water power. A waterwheel turned a direct drive shaft connected to belts that, in turn, powered each of the looms. After Duke Power (formerly Southern Power) built the Rhodhiss Hydroelectric Station upstream, the Rhodhiss mills converted to electricity, rendering the waterpower apparatus unnecessary. The wing rises from a concrete base and has low parapet end walls. The main

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level of the wing served as the mill's workshop and maintenance department. It has a wood floor, exposed wood ceiling, and heavy timber ceiling beams. The lower levels of the wing are largely unfinished, although there is access to both the river and a freshwater spring discovered in the 1960s, which would have supplied the fallout shelter with uncontaminated drinking water in case of a nuclear disaster.

Mill additions

The original mill stood relatively unaltered from the time of its construction until the mid-1940s, when the plant was purchased by Pacific Mills. The first enlargement of the mill occurred in 1955, when a one-story brick and steel wing was added to the east elevation. The new wing, which was extended to its present size around 1969, measured 65 feet by 100 feet and housed 32 new looms. At the time, the plant was air conditioned, and a new heating system was installed for the entire building.¹ The space is similar to the first floor of the main mill with wood floors, exposed wood ceilings, and steel post and beam supports. The window bays of the original mill's east elevation were removed to create open passageways between the mill and the 1955 wing. On the exterior, however, the windowless walls of the 1955 wing are identified by shallow pilasters on the north elevation. This wing was enlarged around 1969 with plain brick, windowless walls and a flat roof.

The majority of significant additions and alterations to Mill No. 2 took place between 1964 and 1972, corresponding to the plant's initial operation under the Industrial Fabrics Division of Burlington Industries and subsequent upgrades. The changes included extending the 1955 wing further to the east, constructing an air conditioning tower on the south elevation, and adding bathrooms to the west side of the one-story wing from 1912. A three-story addition on the west elevation housed offices and a multi-level conveyor system for moving large rolls of cloth and material between floors. The windowless brick addition included a loading platform on its west side and extended far enough beyond the original mill to now engage a previously detached one-story structure that likely served as a boiler house.

A number of additions were attached to the south elevation of the original 1912 mill over the years, adding layers of new interior space. A one-story brick block with a stepped parapet and terra cotta tile coping was attached to the west end of the 1912 one-story wing. The exterior is relatively plain with several square metal vents positioned in the upper portions of the walls, and a set of double-leaf metal entry doors are located on the south elevation. The interior of this addition is accessible from the 1912 wing and contains restrooms and an employee break room.

A large three-story brick tower containing the air conditioning equipment dominates a portion of the south elevation. It is a plain brick box on the exterior with a single metal vent piercing the wall on the second story of the south elevation. Double-leaf entrance doors are positioned at ground level at the far west end of the south elevation. The doors, which have a concrete stoop and sill, are metal-frame and composed of six lights over a single panel.

¹ Ed Martin, "Business, Booms, Firm Erecting Plant Addition," *Hickory Daily Record*, June 8, 1955, 13.

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A cluster of additions to the west of the air conditioning tower are built around an early three-story brick tower that contains the early restrooms for each of the mill floors. The south face of the two upper floors remains visible and displays three window bays on each floor with two larger openings flanking a narrow center opening; the windows have been removed and the openings bricked in. The openings all have cast-concrete sills and segmental arch lintels composed of four courses of rowlock brick, but the four larger openings have small, vented openings. A brick elevator shaft rises against the west wall of the restroom tower and projects above the roof line of the original 1912 mill. The elevator shaft is capped by a flat roof with overhanging eaves and exposed purlin brackets.

Extending out from the restroom tower and elevator shaft is a one-story, flat-roof brick wing that contained offices and a canteen. The exterior walls are blind except for an entrance on the east elevation. The entrance contains double-leaf metal doors with a three-light upper window. A concrete slab stoop in front of the entrance has metal pipe railings. A flat metal canopy shelters the entrance doors and stoop and is supported by three metal rods attached to the upper wall. The interior is organized around a central hall running straight into the adjoining warehouse addition. Two offices open on the north side of the hallway, and the canteen occupies the south side of the building. The interior displays terrazzo floors and wood paneled walls.

The largest addition on the south side of the mill is a tall one-story brick warehouse, which was one of the last additions in the early 1970s. The east elevation is blind and abuts the one-story office and canteen addition. The south elevation of the warehouse is eight-bays wide and exhibits nine-light metal-frame windows positioned in the upper portion of the wall. The windows rest on a concrete sill, and the upper two-thirds of the sash is operable as a louver. The west elevation of the warehouse has five loading bays with roll-up metal doors. The two northern bays have a concrete slab platform extending outward, which is sheltered by a flat roof supported by slender metal columns. One bay is enclosed with plywood-clad walls and the other is accessed by a long concrete ramp leading to the loading bay. The interior of the warehouse has utilitarian finished with concrete floors, exposed brick and concrete block walls, and steel I-beam posts supporting the steel roof beams and exposed metal roof decking.

Similar to the south elevation, the west side of the mill consists of several added blocks extending outward, and the additions eventually engaged a formerly freestanding brick boiler house. The early structure is distinguished by its brickwork, terra cotta tile coping, and infilled segmental arch openings with four-course rowlock arches. On the south side, a large opening contains double-leaf solid metal door surrounded by a louvered vent. A modern metal carport structure is attached to the west side of the old boiler house.

The major component of the west end additions is a large brick box that rises nearly the full three stories of the 1912 mill. The structure primarily provides an envelope for a conveyor system on the interior that transported heavy fabric rolls between the three mill floors. A one-story flat-roof wing on the south side of this structure has three square plate-glass windows and a single-leaf entry door from the warehouse loading dock. The windows, along with two

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other on the west side of the conveyor block, illuminate offices on the interior. Two other one-story brick additions, one with a flat roof and one with a wood-frame shed roof, connect the conveyor and office wings to the formerly freestanding boiler house. A second loading platform is located on the lower level of the conveyor block and consists of a concrete slab on a brick base. It is sheltered by a corrugated metal canopy suspended from the building by metal tie rods attached to the exterior wall. A loading bay opening is entered through double-leaf sliding metal doors attached to an overhead track. The interior of the main conveyor block and office wing is plainly finished with concrete floors, concrete block walls, and steel I-beam posts and beams. The offices are entered through single-leaf metal doors with a large single light.

Water tank, ca. 1948²

Contributing structure

A 21,000-gallon steel water tank stands on a concrete slab base approximately 120 feet west of the mill building and is capped by a low metal dome. A metal ladder rises on the exterior of the tank, and a square hatch in the dome at the top of the ladder is sealed by a steel cover. A circular opening at the base of the tank near the ladder is sealed with a riveted steel cover. A flat-roof brick connector encloses the pipes linking the water tank with the adjacent pump house.

Pump House, ca. 1948

Contributing building

Located immediately east of the water tank, the one-story masonry pump house is a plain square building with a flat roof. It appears to have been built at the same time as the water tank. The pump house rests on a concrete slab foundation, and the brick veneer exterior is laid in running bond. The slab roof is bordered by a low parapet with terra cotta coping and supported by metal decking and steel beams on the interior. The building is entered from the east elevation through a set of double-leaf metal doors. The north and south side elevations are each pierced by a single four-light metal-sash window with a cast concrete sill.

On the interior, the utilitarian building exhibits a concrete floor and concrete block walls. The main cast iron pipe from the water tank enters through the west wall and is connected to electric pump equipment. A series of valves and pipes appear to have delivered water to the site's sprinkler system. A standpipe projects from the east wall of the pump house.

² According to tax records, the water tank was added to the site around 1929, but historical information and discussion among former mill employees recorded in Sherrie Sigmon's book *Weaving the Heart Threads* (2023) suggest that the tank was more likely erected in the late 1940s shortly after Pacific Mills acquired the plants. Beginning in late 1947, Pacific Mills contributed \$200,000 for construction of a water line and sewer system for the town. Tom Ross, office manager for Pacific Mills, recalled this was the time period when a "20,000-gallon tank [was put] out there in front of number one mill." See Sherrie Hartsoe Sigmon, *Weaving the Heart Threads of a Mill Village: Rhodhiss, North Carolina* (Hickory, NC: Redhawk Publications, 2023), 381-382.

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Integrity Statement

Begun in 1912 and altered in the second half of the twentieth century, the Rhodhiss Mill No. 2 retains a high degree of integrity as a fully realized example of an early-twentieth century brick cotton mill that was updated and modernized after World War II to manufacture more sophisticated synthetic fibers and fabrics. The two mills at Rhodhiss—Mill No. 1 no longer stands—gave rise to the eponymous town on the Catawba River in Burke and Caldwell counties. The original Mill No. 2, designed by South Carolina mill architect Gadsden E. Shand, generally retains good architectural integrity, though it was altered under later ownership in the period from 1955 to 1972. Early changes include a one-story wing built on the east elevation in two stages in the 1950s and 1960s and removal of original windows. A tower for air conditioning and restrooms, a one-story canteen, a block for a three-story conveyor system on the west elevation, and a large warehouse were all added from approximately 1964 to 1975. The mill, however, retains significant elements of its original design, including much of the heavy timber construction and its rhythmic pattern of segmental-arch window openings, which are now bricked in but clearly defined. The integrity of the mill's design, materials, and workmanship is affected by later changes, but these changes reflect the evolution of textile production through the mid-twentieth century with the introduction of improved fire suppression and sprinkler systems, air conditioning, and interior lighting. The material alterations and additions to Rhodhiss Mill No. 2, which occurred within the period of significance for its association with Burlington Industries, illustrate common developments in textile production during the twentieth century and do not obscure the original form and architectural features of the building. On the interior, the removal of original wooden posts and beams for replacement concrete and steel structural supports allowed for wider looms and heavier equipment needed in the production of specialized industrial fabrics.

The site collectively retains integrity of location, setting, feeling, and association. The setting and feeling of Rhodhiss Mill No. 2 have evolved over time as the mill building and operation changed with new owners and product lines. Site changes such as paving and security fences are common to textile mills and industrial sites and do not diminish the overall integrity of the property.

[Archaeological statement]

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- ☒ 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

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- ☐ 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

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Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Industry

Period of Significance

1912-1976

Significant Dates

1912
1964

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Shand, Gadsden E. – mill architect

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Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The locally significant Rhodhiss Mill No. 2 is eligible for the National Register under Criterion A in the area of industry as an important Burke County textile plant that evolved under the ownership of Burlington Industries to produce advanced synthetic fabrics used in space travel, military applications, and law enforcement. The plant was also utilized for civil defense programs during the Cold War. Originally built for the E. A. Smith Manufacturing Company by South Carolina architect and engineer Gadsden E. Shand, Rhodhiss Mill No. 2 complemented an earlier mill (no longer extant) developed by John M. Rhodes and George B. Hiss on the north side of the Catawba River in neighboring Caldwell County. Duke Power purchased the two mills in 1919 in order to secure water rights for a hydroelectric station and, after a period of leased operations, sold the plants to Boston-based Pacific Mills, which invested heavily in upgrading the mills and mill villages. Burlington Industries acquired the mills in 1954 and operated Mill No. 2 as part of its Industrial Fabrics Division from 1964 to 1983 where it manufactured materials used in heat shields for missiles and spacecraft, space suits, tire treads, and bullet-proof Kevlar for the military during the Vietnam War. Popular lore holds that the material for the American flag placed on the moon by Apollo 11 astronauts during the first lunar landing was manufactured at Rhodhiss Mill No. 2. The mill also served as one of the county's four fallout shelters during the Cold War and was equipped to house and support more than 2,000 people in case of a nuclear emergency. The three-story brick mill began as a water-powered facility and converted to electric power in 1925. Subsequent alterations to the mill in the period from 1955 to 1975 have diminished the architectural integrity of the early mill structure but reflect modernization techniques, including bricked window openings, fluorescent lighting, air conditioning, and warehouse additions, common to textile plants in the second half of the twentieth century. The period of significance begins in 1912 with the initial development of the E. A. Smith Manufacturing Company and construction of the original mill and ends in 1976 with the continued operation of the mill by Burlington Industrial Fabrics into the late twentieth century. Under Burlington's Industrial Fabrics Division, Rhodhiss Mill No. 2 directly contributed advanced synthetic materials used during significant events of the 1960s and 1970s.

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Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

Industrial and Textile Manufacturing Context

Burke County, like much of North Carolina, underwent a significant transformation in the aftermath of the Civil War as the old agrarian economy supported by enslaved laborers was replaced by greater industrialization and urbanization. Located in the western Piedmont region of the state, Burke County had been formed in 1777, and the county seat established at Morganton in 1785. The county's population and agricultural economy grew slowly through the nineteenth century until the Western North Carolina Railroad (WNCRR) was completed to Morganton in 1867. Burke County began to evolve beyond farming and expand its economic base in the late nineteenth century beginning with the railroad connection and construction of two major state institutions in Morganton: Western North Carolina Insane Asylum and the North Carolina School for the Deaf.³

Across the state, the primary areas of industrial expansion after 1880 were cotton textiles, tobacco, and furniture. Of these, the textile industry had perhaps the most profound impact in North Carolina. The production and use of timber products had been a component of Burke County's economy for many years, and the number of tanneries and sawmills increased following the Civil War. The Morganton Woodworking Company and Morganton Furniture Manufacturing Company formed in 1885, but large-scale furniture manufacturing did not develop significantly until the early twentieth century.⁴

Cotton production, either growing cotton or manufacturing cotton goods, was the largest single industry in the world prior to the Civil War, and cotton helped the United States establish its place on the global economic stage in the early nineteenth century. The young nation came to dominate global cotton production due to critical factors such as colonized land, ideal growing conditions across the South, and enslaved labor. By 1860, raw cotton was the dominant national export, and the United States became one of the world's top producers of manufactured cotton goods. Although the majority of cotton was grown in the South, manufacturing remained concentrated in the North. Some small-scale textile plants operated across the South in the first half of the nineteenth century, but large, industrial-scale mills existed primarily in northern states. Massachusetts and Rhode Island alone accounted for nearly 50 percent of all cotton mill spindles in the country.⁵

³ Edward W. Phifer, Jr., *Burke: The History of a North Carolina County, 1777-1920* (Morganton, NC: E. W. Phifer, 1982), 219-220; Catherine W. Bishir, Michael T. Southern, and Jennifer F. Martin, *A Guide to the Historic Architecture of Western North Carolina* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 148.

⁴ Phifer, *Burke*, 238-242.

⁵ Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2015), 242-243; Jacqueline Dowd Hall, James Leloudis, Robert Korstad, Mary Murphy, Lu Ann Jones, and Christopher B.

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A confluence of factors following the Civil War contributed to the dramatic increase in the number of textile mills built in North Carolina and across the South. During Reconstruction, Congress enacted incentives exempting federal taxes on cotton goods manufactured in the same district where the cotton was grown. As a result, from 1880 to 1910, a tremendous wave of mill construction took place across the Piedmont region of the South, from Virginia to Alabama, with the greatest concentration occurring in North Carolina, followed by South Carolina and Georgia.⁶ Proximity to raw materials, abundant waterpower, and lower taxes all contributed to the transfer of northern capital into southern mills, but perhaps the most significant factor was the availability of cheap labor. Between 1900 and 1930 thousands of families in Piedmont and western North Carolina left their hardscrabble farms for mill towns and new villages. For many, promises of a livelihood and a better life were replaced by the realities of low wages, long hours, and loss of autonomy.⁷

In North Carolina, many of the early mills were built along the Piedmont's numerous creeks and rivers to take advantage of water power. The expansive watershed of the Catawba River powered many early industries, including the Mountain Island Mill, a wood-frame cotton factory, in Gaston County. As the use of steam power began to dominate, the mills became more efficient and less bound to water-powered sites. Industrial corridors developed along railroad lines and major transportation routes. The number of cotton mills more than quadrupled between 1875 and 1900, when North Carolina claimed 177 cotton mills producing more than \$28,000,000 worth of goods annually and employing more than 30,000 individuals.⁸ Over the next 22 years, the number of mills more than doubled again, and in 1922, the state had 377 cotton mills producing more than \$237,000,000 worth of goods and employing more than 73,000 people.⁹ Charlotte, located on the border between North and South Carolina at the nexus of several rail lines, emerged as the southern hub for the textile industry, becoming North Carolina's largest city by 1910.¹⁰

Daly, *Like a Family: The Making of a Southern Cotton Mill World* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 24-25; Rachel Alison, Kate Singleton, and Charlotte Adams, "Waldensian Swiss Embroidery Company – Valdese Weavers Inc. Mill" National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form (Post Oak Preservation Solutions, Austin, TX, 2023), 21-23.

⁶ Brent D. Glass, Kelly Kress, Gene Purcell, and Douglas A. Wait, "Textiles – Part II: The Rise of the North Carolina Textile Industry," NCpedia, Library of NC, 2006, <https://www.ncpedia.org/textiles-part-2-rise-north-carolina>, accessed April 24, 2026.

⁷ Ronald D. Eller, *Miners, Millhands and Mountaineers* (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 2015), 124-126.

⁸ Hugh Talmage Lefler and Albert Ray Newsome, *North Carolina: The History of a Southern State* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1954), 479-480.

⁹ *The North Carolina Yearbook* (Raleigh, NC: The News and Observer, 1922), 86; Alison, et al, "Waldensian Swiss" NRHP Nomination, 23.

¹⁰ Catherine W. Bishir and Michael T. Southern, *A Guide to the Historic Architecture of Piedmont North Carolina* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 62-65.

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The rise of cotton mills and textile production in the Carolinas was greatly assisted by the efforts of mill designer and builder Daniel A. Tompkins (1851-1914), a tireless promoter of the southern textile industry whose book, *Cotton Mill: Commercial Features*, published in 1899, became highly influential. Tompkins settled in Charlotte in 1883 as an agent for the Westinghouse Machine Company to install steam engines in the Carolinas. By the late 1880s, he had formed the D. A. Tompkins Company to design and build textile mills and power plants, repair mill machinery, and produce and sell cottonseed oil. Tompkins, the owner of three cotton mills, used his controlling interest in three newspapers, the *Daily Observer* and *Evening News* of Charlotte and the *Greenville News* in South Carolina, to further promote the textile industry.¹¹

The first textile mill to open in Burke County began operation in 1889 near the Morganton depot and railroad tracks just south of downtown. Samuel D. Dunavant, Hardy Hicks, E. F. Reid, and James W. Wilson comprised the founding partners of the enterprise, which was incorporated as the Dunavant Cotton Manufacturing Company. Any success of the Dunavant Mill was short-lived because the company was in receivership by 1894 and reorganized as Alpine Cotton Mill No. 1 by William A. Erwin of Durham. Erwin, a prominent leader of the "Cotton Mill Campaign," owned mills in Durham, and the purchase of the Dunavant Mill allowed the company to expand its operations into the western part of the state.¹²

Following the Dunavant mill, other textile companies organized and began operating in Burke County after 1900. Beginning in 1901, members of the Aderholdt and Rudisill families of Gaston County began acquiring land along the Henry River in eastern Burke County for the construction of a cotton mill. Their decision to build a water-powered mill helped determine its isolated, rural location.¹³ Through the 1910s and 1920s the town of Valdese, east of Morganton, developed a variety of textile plants, including the Waldensian Hosiery Mills and Valdese Manufacturing Company, and rivaled Morganton for manufacturing prominence in the county. Other plants included the Drexel Knitting Mill in Drexel, the Icard Cordage Company, formed in 1917, which manufactured cotton braided sash cord and clothesline, and the Glen Alpine Knitting Mill in Glen Alpine, which operated from 1920 to 1948.¹⁴

¹¹ "Daniel Augustus Tompkins" in William S. Powell, ed., *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*, Vol. 6, T-Z (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 42-43.

¹² Sybil Argintar, "Dunavant Cotton Manufacturing Company" National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form (Southeastern Preservation Services, Asheville, NC, 2013), 10-12.

¹³ Clay Griffith, "Henry River Mill Village" National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form (Acme Preservation Services, Asheville, NC, 2019), 24-25.

¹⁴ Phifer, *Burke*, 244-249; "Burke County," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, October 2, 1932, B7; Sybil Argintar, "Pineburr Hosiery Mill" National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form (Southeastern Preservation Services, Asheville, NC, 2024), 14-15; Alison, "Waldensian Swiss," 24-27. In 1960, Burke County was home to 25 textile mills, more than any other county in western North Carolina and more than double the number in both Buncombe and McDowell counties, which each had 12. Philip Clark, "WNC Textile Payroll Totals \$89 Million Yearly," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, January 31, 1960, 8:1.

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Concurrent with the organization of the Henry River Mill and Waldensian Hosiery in Burke County, John M. Rhodes of Gaston County and George B. Hiss of Mecklenburg County selected a site on the Catawba River to build a cotton mill. Rhodes, who had attended school in Burke County, came to the area looking for a site in 1900 and made his first purchase of 50 acres in Caldwell County and 25 acres in Burke County on August 6, 1900.¹⁵ He bought an additional 30 acres a week later and another 75 acres shortly thereafter.¹⁶ Rhodhiss Manufacturing Company opened in 1902, after the partners built a horseshoe-shaped dam on the Catawba River and established a general store and mill village in Caldwell County, just across the river from Burke. The town of Rhodhiss, which now straddles the Burke-Caldwell county line, was incorporated in 1903 around the textile mill on the Caldwell side.¹⁷

A 700-foot-long steel bridge was built across the river in 1904 at a cost of \$12,000, connecting the town to Burke County. The following year, a severe storm lifted the two steel trusses off their supports and dropped them in the river. Soon after, the Virginia Bridge Company erected a new structure. The Rhodhiss Mill suffered damage from the storm, which was described as a cyclone of rain and hail, but there was little damage to the machinery and repairs were covered by insurance. In 1905, John Rhodes and his son, Caleb, sold their stock in the company to other shareholders, leaving the company in the hands of George Hiss, and departed the Rhodhiss area.¹⁸

Rhodhiss founder George B. Hiss (1858-1928), a Baltimore native, moved to Charlotte in the late 1890s and organized an oil company that sold lubricants to textile mills in the Carolinas. He joined the Southern Cotton Spinners' Association and served as secretary-treasurer at the turn of the century. With his knowledge of the textile industry, he teamed with John Rhodes to organize the Rhodhiss Manufacturing Company in 1902, and served as the company's president until 1920, when he sold his interests and retired.¹⁹

In early 1907, George Hiss convinced his brother, Charles, recently retired from the dry goods business, to visit Charlotte and to invest with him in the purchase of "a large cotton mill."²⁰ After returning home to Baltimore, Charles Hiss, in the face of severely declining health, took his own life in April 1907.²¹ Another Charlotte textile industry entrepreneur originally from

¹⁵ Deed book 33, page 44, Caldwell County Register of Deeds, Lenoir, NC.

¹⁶ Deed book 33, pages 47 and 63, Caldwell County Register of Deeds, Lenoir, NC; Sigmon, *Weaving the Heart Threads*, 15.

¹⁷ J. Randall Cotton, *Historic Burke: An Architectural Inventory of Burke County, North Carolina* (Morganton, NC: Historic Burke Foundation, Inc., 1987), 71-72; "History," Town of Rhodhiss, website, <http://www.townofrhodhiss.com/history/>, retrieved January 2026.

¹⁸ "\$12,000 Bridge Destroyed," *The News-Herald* (Morganton, NC), August 3, 1905, 3; "Chips From Granite," *The Weekly News* (Lenoir, NC), October 20, 1905, 3; Sigmon, *Weaving the Heart Threads*, 17-18.

¹⁹ "Mr. George B. Hiss Chairman," *Charlotte Daily Observer*, July 30, 1902, 5; "R. W. Smith Succeeds Mullen," *Charlotte Daily Observer*, February 13, 1903, 1; "Oil Business Closed Out," *The Charlotte News*, March 2, 1910, 2; "Former Mill Magnate Dies," *The Charlotte Observer*, December 9, 1928, 15.

²⁰ "Cut Throat With Razor," *The Baltimore Sun*, April 8, 1907, 14.

²¹ "Chas. A. Hiss," *Charlotte Daily Observer*, April 8, 1907, 7.

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Baltimore, Edward Arthur Smith (1862-1933), acquired the holdings of Charles Hiss' estate, including his interests in the Rhodhiss Manufacturing Company, and together with George Hiss began developing plans for a new mill on the Burke County side of the river at Rhodhiss.²²

E. A. Smith got his start in 1889 organizing the Charlotte Supply Company, which provided Southern manufacturers with parts and machinery and reduced their reliance on Northern sources. Smith founded the company along with textile leader D. A. Tompkins and went on to build several mills in the Charlotte area including Atherton Mills in the 1890s, Chadwick-Hoskins in 1903, and Alpha Cotton Mill in 1908. Smith organized the E. A. Smith Manufacturing Company in 1912 with George Hiss and Walter S. Taylor of the Rhodhiss Manufacturing Company on board, as well as investors from Philadelphia, New Jersey, South Carolina, and Virginia. It was considered a significant loss to Charlotte that Smith chose to build his new enterprise outside of the Charlotte area, but he specifically sought a site for a water powered mill. The company engaged the Shand Engineering Company of Columbia, South Carolina, to prepare plans for the mill, which was to have 15,000 spindles and 450 looms.²³

In 1912, Shand Engineering was the newly organized firm of experienced architect and engineer Gadsden Edwards Shand (1868-1948). A native of Columbia, Shand studied engineering at South Carolina College and pursued further studies at the Columbia University School of Mines in New York. He returned to his hometown and designed textiles mills for the W. B. Smith Whaley & Co. in South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, and North Carolina. Shand launched his own company in 1912 to pursue the development of industrial plants, hydroelectric projects, and municipal works.²⁴

The new mill began operating in 1914 in Burke County and was called the E. A. Smith Manufacturing Company. The Smith company, which organized with \$300,000 stock, contracted with the Howard & Bullough American Machine Company of Pawtucket, Rhode Island, for pickers, cards, and drawing and roving machinery. Fales & Jenks of Pawtucket supplied the spinning machinery. The Smith mill manufactured export and domestic sheeting and drills, a type of durable cotton twill. J. W. Kidd served as superintendent of both mills—E. A. Smith Manufacturing and Rhodhiss Manufacturing—and Walter S. Taylor was secretary for both companies.²⁵

²² "Will Locate Smith Mill at Rhodhiss," *Evening Chronicle* (Charlotte, NC), March 18, 1912, 1.

²³ "New Mill at Rhodhiss," *The Charlotte Daily Observer*, March 19, 1912, 7.

²⁴ John E Wells and Robert E. Dalton, *The South Carolina Architects 1885-1935: A Biographical Dictionary* (Richmond, VA: New South Architectural Press, 1992), 156-158 and 198-199; Jennifer F. Martin, Nicholas G. Theos, and Sarah a. Woodard, "Olympia Mill and Village, Upper Richland County, South Carolina, Historical and Architectural Inventory" (Edwards-Pitman Environmental, Inc., Raleigh, NC, June 2002), 8-10 and 15-17.

²⁵ "New Mill at Rhodhiss," *The Charlotte Daily Observer*, March 19, 1912, 1; *Dockham's American Report and Directory of the Textile Manufacture and Dry Goods Trade, United States and Canada 1913-14* (Boston, MA: Dockham Publishing Company, 1914), 269.

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To entice rural residents to join the industrial workforce, mill owners typically constructed housing for their employees.²⁶ In the case of Rhodhiss and other rural mill sites, company-owned housing not only helped attract potential workers but also alleviated the complications of transportation in areas where road conditions were primitive at best. The design and features of textile mill villages in the first decades of the twentieth century were heavily influenced by D. A. Tompkins' 1889 book *Cotton Mill: Commercial Features*.²⁷ At Rhodhiss, separate villages were associated with each of the two mills: Rhodhiss Mill Village in Burke County and Rhodhill Mill Village in Caldwell County. The two villages were informally arranged on hills around the mill sites, and houses lined both sides of an irregular network of streets. The houses in the Rhodhiss Mill Village were most commonly one-and-a-half-story side-gable frame dwellings with engaged full-width porches, while the Rhodhill mill houses typically had attached partial-width front porches. The houses in both villages were predominantly single-family dwellings although a hotel and boarding house served workers who lived further away and traveled into Rhodhiss for the work week.²⁸

In 1917, Smith sold his interests at Rhodhiss to George B. Hiss and consolidated his holdings in the Phenix Mills Company at Kings Mountain, where he was president and treasurer. With the acquisition, Hiss had ownership of both the E. A. Smith and Rhodhiss manufacturing companies in Rhodhiss, as well as the Thrift Manufacturing Company near Charlotte.²⁹ He was elected president of all three cotton mills.³⁰

George Hiss began planning for his retirement in 1919 and early 1920, when he and secretary-treasurer Walter S. Taylor coordinated sale of the two mills at Rhodhiss to the Southern Power Company, which acquired the mills exclusively for the water rights on the Catawba River.³¹ Southern Power immediately transferred operation of the mills back to its investors, including Robert C. Moore (1874-1951) and his nephew Clarkson Jones. The two plants were consolidated into the Rhodhiss Mills Company with 30,000 spindles and more than 900 looms. The mills continued to operate with water power although Southern Power was developing plans for a hydroelectric plant just upstream.³² Just over a month after the sale, Hiss announced his retirement from the textile business and resigned his position at his other company, Thrift Manufacturing. At the same time, R. C. Moore resigned his position as

²⁶ Hall, et al, *Like a Family*, 114-119.

²⁷ Cotton, *Historic Burke*, 35-36.

²⁸ Cotton, *Historic Burke*, 71-72; Sigmon, *Weaving the Heart Threads*, 43-45.

²⁹ Hiss and Smith jointly organized the Thrift Manufacturing Company in 1913 in Paw Creek, northwest of Charlotte. See "New Cotton Mill Company Organized," *Charlotte Daily Observer*, May 18, 1913, 3.

³⁰ "Mr. Hiss Acquires Rhodhiss Mills," *Hickory Daily Record*, June 30, 1917, 1; Dockham's *American Report and Directory of the Textile Manufacture and Dry Goods Trade, United States and Canada 1918-19* (Boston, MA: Dockham Publishing Company, 1919), 281.

³¹ Deed book L-4, pages 424 and 426, Burke County Register of Deeds, Morganton, NC.

³² "Duke Interests By Rhodhiss Mills," *Hickory Daily Record*, January 6, 1920, 1; Sigmon, *Weaving the Heart Threads*, 258-261.

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secretary-treasurer of the Thrift Mill to become president, secretary, and treasurer of the newly formed Rhodhiss Mills Company.³³

At the beginning of the twentieth century, James B. Duke (1856-1905), the prominent American Tobacco Company executive, became interested in harnessing the rivers of Piedmont North Carolina to produce energy and formed the Southern Power Company in 1905, along with Dr. W. Gill Wylie and William S. Lee. The partners dammed the Catawba River at Great Falls in South Carolina below Charlotte to begin generating electricity. The company then dammed the Catawba River, or acquired existing facilities, at other locations; erected long-distance transmission lines; and began supplying electricity to Piedmont towns and textile mills in North and South Carolina.³⁴ Southern Power envisioned a comprehensive plan for the Catawba-Wateree system from the Bridgewater development in western Burke County, built by the Western Carolina Power Company in 1919, to the Wateree development near Camden, South Carolina. In addition to upgrading existing facilities, Southern Power proposed three new stations at Mountain Island, Oxford, and Rhodhiss. Located on the upper Catawba River, the Rhodhiss and Oxford stations led to the impoundment of Rhodhiss Lake and Lake Hickory, respectively.³⁵

Southern Power's concrete gravity dam at Rhodhiss measures more than 1,500 feet long and 72 feet high, and the brick powerhouse at the north end is located in Caldwell County. The Rhodhiss Hydroelectric Station went into service in 1925, the year after the utility company's name was changed to Duke Power. The original horseshoe dam was removed once the station was completed, and the two Rhodhiss mills were converted to electric power. At the same time, power lines were extended to the mill houses. The mill company furnished the electricity, not Duke Power, and it was included in the rent, although electricity was shut off during daylight hours. Years later, after the mill company sold its housing, Duke Power purchased the electric power lines in Rhodhiss in order to begin selling electricity to homeowners in town.³⁶

Rhodhiss Mills enjoyed an extended period of relative stability in the years between the wars, although the work was demanding, life was hard, and conditions were meager. The town's population peaked in the late 1930s at around 1,000 residents, and a new school was built in 1938. Immediately following World War II, Pacific Mills of Boston approached the Rhodhiss Mills stockholders about a buyout. Founded in 1850, Pacific Mills' facilities in

³³ "Textile News from Over the Carolinas," *The Gastonia Gazette*, February 28, 1920, 7; *Dockham's American Report and Directory of the Textile Manufacture and Dry Goods Trade, United States and Canada 1922* (Boston, MA: Dockham Publishing Company, 1922), 275.

³⁴ Mary Kratt, *Charlotte, North Carolina: A Brief History* (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2009), 84-88; Bishir and Southern, *Piedmont*, 55-57.

³⁵ Michael J. Solender, "The Idea That Transformed the Carolinas," Duke Energy Illumination, January 9, 2018, <https://illumination.duke-energy.com/articles/the-idea-that-transformed-the-carolinas>, accessed May 18, 2026.

³⁶ M. Todd Cleveland and Jeffrey L. Holland, "National Register of Historic Places Assessment for the Catawba-Wateree Hydroelectric Project, FERC Project No. 2232," TRC Garrow and Associates, Atlanta, GA, July 2005, 16-26; Sigmon, *Weaving the Heart Threads*, 270-272.

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Lawrence, Massachusetts, became obsolete during the 1930s, and the company liquidated its manufacturing plants in 1941. They continued to buy unfinished rayon and convert it to finished products through printing or dyeing. Sensing great potential in the market and not content to remain strictly a finishing operation, Pacific Mills began scouting southern locations for manufacturing facilities to complement its finishing plants in Columbia and Lyman, South Carolina. The company intended to convert one of the Rhodhiss mills to produce rayon and the other a rayon-wool blend. The shift from cotton to synthetics was indicative of the many progressive changes to come over the next 40 years. Pacific Mills purchased all of Rhodhiss' common stock in September 1945, although it was another five years before they acquired all of its capital stock and formally purchased all the property.³⁷

The change of ownership introduced an even greater period of prosperity and improvement than the one that preceded it. Pacific Mills was able to purchase the Rhodhiss mills for pennies on the dollar and, as a result, invested heavily in improvements to the mills, machinery, property, and housing, as much as \$5,000,000 in total. Pacific Mills removed some of the interior columns at the mills to bring in new equipment and wider looms as part of the change to synthetics. The company installed air conditioning and fluorescent lighting and added restrooms and a canteen at each mill. A new laboratory and experiment room was created at Mill No. 2. The roads and parking areas were paved and security fences erected around the mills. Pacific Mills contributed \$200,000 for the town's water and sewer system. Derelict mill houses were demolished, some houses were relocated for road work, and 42 new houses were built; all of the mill houses were underpinned and had indoor plumbing installed. In addition to the many physical improvements, Pacific Mills implemented a number of enhancements for employees including a profit-sharing plan, eight-hour shifts, overtime wages, vacation days, and health insurance. Pacific earned reputation among textile workers for its good paying positions and extensive employee benefits.³⁸

Burlington Mills of Greensboro, North Carolina, an ascendant force in the textile industry, absorbed Pacific Mills in 1954 as part of its expansion plan. J. Spencer Love founded Burlington Mills in 1923 as a cotton manufacturer, but he soon turned to manufacturing low-cost rayon as an alternative. Love sought to build the company by diversifying its products and continually planning for its growth. As the demand for synthetics grew after World War II, Burlington already had 20 years' experience developing and producing rayon and similar man-made fabrics. Burlington Mills grew exponentially through the 1940s by buying smaller companies for their various product lines and expertise such that the corporate name was changed to Burlington Industries in 1955. Burlington acquired a controlling interest in Pacific in 1954, and the two companies later merged in 1959. By the time of Love's unexpected death in

³⁷ "Pacific Mills Is Noting 100th Anniversary Event," *Hickory Daily Record*, January 16, 1950, 3; "Rhodhiss Mill Stock Is Sold," *Hickory Daily Record*, September 15, 1945, 1; Deed book 318, page 29, Caldwell County Register of Deeds, Lenoir, NC; Sigmon, *Weaving the Heart Threads*, 364-366.

³⁸ Sigmon, *Weaving the Heart Threads*, 361-386.

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1962, Burlington was the dominant manufacturer in the textile industry with 110 plants and more than 50,000 employees.³⁹

Following the death of founder J. Spencer Love, Burlington's new management team responded to the tremendous growth of the previous decades by shifting focus to internal expansion and plant modernization. The pace of expansion through acquisitions under Love resulted in less reinvestment in the corporation's existing facilities. New president Charles F. Myers, Jr., applied his background in corporate finance to redirect Burlington's into a program of internal expansion and improvement. The Rhodhiss mills operated under Burlington's Men's Wear Division from the time of their acquisition until 1964 when Rhodhiss Mill No. 2 was moved into the Industrial Fabrics Division, which manufactured fabrics of man-made fibers, yarns, and blends for industrial applications.⁴⁰

As part of Burlington Industrial Fabrics, Rhodhiss Mill No. 2 manufactured a wide range of fibers and materials that were sold to a diverse roster of customers. Cords and fiberglass for use in tires and rubber products was one of Burlington's strongest product lines, and the materials were sold to Goodyear, Firestone, Uniroyal, and numerous other corporations. Textiles woven at Rhodhiss included nylon for tents and flags, automobile upholstery, seat belt webbing, filter fabrics, and crowd-control and erosion-control fencing. Fibers and fabrics woven at Rhodhiss were sent to the division's finishing plant in Kernersville, North Carolina. In the mid-1960s Burlington worked with DuPont to develop Kevlar, a lightweight heat-resistant synthetic fiber with exceptional tensile strength, which was first used to replace steel in tires. It was soon discovered that Kevlar could be used for bullet proof vests and personal armor, and Burlington began producing the material for Kevlar vests and combat helmets for U.S. soldiers in Vietnam, as well as body armor for use by the Secret Service and law enforcement agencies. By the early 1970s, Kevlar protective gear was a major component of the Industrial Fabrics Division's output.⁴¹

Another aspect of Mill No. 2's conversion to Burlington's Industrial Fabrics Division was the physical changes to the mill itself. To manufacture these highly specialized synthetics, the old weaving machinery—cards, spinning frames, winders, twistors, and looms—were removed. New concrete footings and steel posts and beams were installed to support heavier equipment. A new slasher, considerably larger and heavier than the previous one, was placed on the third

³⁹ "Bur-Mills Buys Big Block in Pacific Mills," *Hickory Daily Record*, July 9, 1954, 1; "Burlington Mills Corporation 30th Annual Report" (Greensboro, NC: Burlington Mills Corporation, 1954), 4-5; "Burlington Industries, World's Largest Textile Producers Today," *The E.S.C. Quarterly*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (Winter-Spring 1959), 56-59; Vishwa N. Tahal, "A History of Burlington Industries, Incorporated," Master's thesis, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 1973, 39-41.

⁴⁰ "Rhodhiss Mills Contribute to Burlington's Success," *The News-Herald* (Morganton, NC), March 27, 1964; "Mill Shift at Rhodhiss to Be Slow," *Hickory Daily-Record*, January 21, 1965, 1; Tahal, "A History of Burlington," 65-67.

⁴¹ Tahal, "A History of Burlington," 79-80; "Burlington Products Varied," *Hickory Daily Record*, February 1, 1971, 22; Vera Glaser, "Even Bad Guys Want Vests Like Ford's," *The Charlotte Observer*, September 21, 1975, 4C; Sigmon, *Weaving the Heart Threads*, 446-451.

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floor. Burlington brought in 150 new looms, one warper, one winder, four twisters, and other equipment to produce the new fibers and fabrics. Additions were made on the east and west sides of the mill, another boiler was added to the heating system, and the air conditioning was improved.⁴²

By the late 1960s, Burlington's Industrial Fabrics Division began developing a number of specialized fabrics for use by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). Some of the fabrics were deployed on NASA's weather balloons and the Goodyear Blimp. The company manufactured a fabric used in the nose cones and heat shields of the US Navy's Polaris and Trident missiles. The space suits of NASA astronauts incorporated Burlington fabrics. The company produced a "carbonized" rayon that was coated with epoxy to create rigid forms used in spacecraft. The process super-heated the woven rayon fabric to burn off the non-carbon atoms, leaving a material that actually absorbed heat and energy. The heat absorbing properties made it preferable to metals, and the material was used extensively in NASA's Space Shuttle program, which was developed through the 1970s.⁴³

One of the Rhodhiss Mill's most significant accomplishments, or certainly the one remembered most fondly and with the most pride, was the production of fabric used in the American flag planted on the moon during the first lunar landing on July 20, 1969. Although the specific origin of the moon flag cannot be fully verified, certain facts are undisputed. Approximately three months before the launch of the Apollo 11 mission that would send American astronauts to the moon, plans were devised to place a 3-foot by 5-foot flag on the lunar surface as part of the mission's extravehicular activity. Due to space and weight constraints on the module and the lack of atmosphere at the lunar surface, engineers designed a telescoping flagpole and rigid crossbar that could be assembled by astronauts while wearing pressurized spacesuits. Reportedly three flags were purchased for the mission, either at a Sears store near Johnson Space Center in Houston or through a government supply catalog. The bindings and labels were reportedly removed in order to mount the flag to the pole and crossbar assembly. Uncertainty around the flag's source means there is uncertainty about the flag's manufacturer and fabric supplier. Nonetheless, in August 1969, following the successful moon mission, a note from Burlington officials was posted in the lobby of Mill No. 2 stating that the moon flag had been made from fabric woven in Rhodhiss.⁴⁴

The collective memory of former mill employees resoundingly concurs that the material for the moon flag was woven at Rhodhiss. Burlington had been producing flag fabrics for over 20 years by the time of the lunar landing and by the late 1960s was the largest textile

⁴² Sigmon, *Weaving the Heart Threads*, 446-451.

⁴³ Sigmon, *Weaving the Heart Threads*, 446-451; "Burlington Products Varied," *Hickory Daily Record*, February 1, 1971, 22.

⁴⁴ Anne M. Platoff, "Where No Flag Has Gone Before: Political and Technical Aspects of Placing a Flag on the Moon," NASA Contractor Report 188251, Lyndon B. Johnson Space Center, Houston, TX, August 1993; Jeremy Markovich, "Apollo 11, an American Flag, a Small Town, and a Mystery," *Our State* (July 2016), 30-35; "First Flag on Moon Woven at Rhodhiss," *Granite Falls Press*, August 1969; Sigmon, *Weaving the Heart Threads*, 449-455.

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manufacturer in the world. The company was the largest supplier of fabrics to the flag making industry and sold three constructions manufactured to federal government specifications—nylon, acrylic, and cotton—to flag makers, as well as commercial companies and individuals. While the origin of the first flag planted on the moon has some gaps in its details, the employees at Rhodhiss Mill No. 2 were told (and had no reason to doubt) that the flag was manufactured from material woven at the mill. Although the story was not immediately reported, except by the tiny *Granite Falls Press* in Caldwell County, it began to appear somewhat regularly on the anniversary of the moon landing beginning in 1976, when Burlington's in-house magazine, *The Burlington Look*, published an article about the Rhodhiss plant's contribution to the moon landing as part its Bicentennial celebrations. The claim has become, for good reason, a point of great pride and a significant part of the community's identity. In 1995, NASA recognized the town and acknowledged its "many contributions to this nation's space program."⁴⁵

In addition to the manufacturing work at Rhodhiss Mill No. 2, the plant was designated as a fallout shelter in 1964. American civil defense programs had been active since World War I and became more focused during World War II. The rise of the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union in the 1950s led to fears of a possible nuclear catastrophe. Immediately following the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, President John F. Kennedy initiated an ambitious campaign for a network of fallout shelters across the country. Burlington, in a spirit of patriotic duty, offered Rhodhiss Mill No. 2 to be one of four fallout shelters in Burke County. Calvin Jones, plant engineer, was placed in charge of the shelter. Jones and mill employees Lacy Knight and Elmer Yoder completed the required Civil Defense training course, which required spending 36 hours in a shelter simulation; women were trained in the Medical Self-Help class. The mill was equipped to accommodate 2,300 people in case of a nuclear emergency. The federal government provided a two-week supply of food and necessities, and a spring discovered under the mill in the 1960s during additions to its west end provided a source of clean water. The shelter remained stocked until shortly after Calvin Jones retired in 1975.⁴⁶

The textile industry in the 1970s began a steady decline along with other types of manufacturing in the United States. In Rhodhiss, the decade began with the completion of a new bridge over the Catawba River. The bridge resulted from more than 10 years of planning and anticipation. Prior to its replacement, trucks and other heavy vehicles had to take a circuitous route through Hickory just to get from one mill to the other. The celebratory mood surrounding the bridge's completion lasted a few years before Burlington announced plans to close Mill No. 1 in 1975, putting approximately 140 people out of work. In 1982, the Rhodhiss School closed, which was followed by the announcement that Burlington would close Mill No. 2

⁴⁵ Sigmon, *Weaving the Heart Threads*, 451-462; "Rhodhiss Notes Anniversary," *The News-Herald* (Morganton, NC), July 21, 1995, 7; Cathy Tuttle, "Town Celebrates Giant Leap Into History," *Hickory Daily Record*, July 23, 1995, 1.

⁴⁶ "Burke Fallout Shelter Areas Being Marked," *Hickory Daily Record*, January 24, 1963, 26; "Supplies Arrive for Burke Shelters," *Hickory Daily Record*, February 21, 1963, 1; "9 Persons Complete Course for Burke Shelter Managers," *Hickory Daily Record*, May 24, 1963, 3; Sigmon, *Weaving the Heart Threads*, 436-440.

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in 1983. When the second plant closed, another 250 people found themselves out of work; Burlington moved operations to its James Fabric Plant in Cheraw, South Carolina. The town lost not only the jobs of its major employer, but also an average of \$30,000 in annual taxes paid by the company. The scene in Rhodhiss continued to shift as the vacant school, under renovation at the time, was destroyed by fire in 1992. Mill No. 1 suffered a similar fate in 2005, when an arsonist set fire to the building. The ruinous shell of the structure was razed in 2006.⁴⁷

After Burlington closed the plant, Rhodhiss Mill No. 2 stood empty for a little over six months before Premiere Hosiery of Morganton acquired the property to serve as the company's central distribution facility. Premiere, a cut-and-sew operation, distributed its products to outlet stores across the country. After five years the plant was sold to another firm, B&D Fisher. The current owners purchased the mill in 2006 and have used it primarily for warehousing. The Town of Rhodhiss presently seeks to acquire the mill for redevelopment and recognition of its vital role in the history of the community.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Sigmon, *Weaving the Heart Threads*, 463-466 and 483-491; Charles B. Pegram, "Burlington Mills Begins to Close 1 Rhodhiss Plant," *Hickory Daily Record*, February 13, 1975, 1; Jane Jefferies, "Textile Plant Closing Double-Edged Blow to Tiny Rhodhiss," *The Charlotte Observer*, April 28, 1983, 69; Joshua Harris, "Old Mill Comes Down," *Lenoir News Topic*, February 23, 2006, 1.

⁴⁸ Susan Marschalk, "Idled Plant Renovated in Rhodhiss," *Hickory Daily Record*, February 15, 1984, 1; Deed book 1605, page 712, Burke County Register of Deeds, Morganton, NC.

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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): BK0242

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10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 14.42 acres

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates (decimal degrees)

Datum if other than WGS84: _____

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

A. Latitude: 35.772029 Longitude: -81.430926

B. Latitude: 35.771596 Longitude: -81.430989

C. Latitude: 35.770783 Longitude: -81.431366

D. Latitude: 35.770756 Longitude: -81.431504

E. Latitude: 35.771065 Longitude: -81.433193

F. Latitude: 35.770360 Longitude: -81.433995

G. Latitude: 35.771850 Longitude: -81.433643

H. Latitude: 35.771923 Longitude: -81.433204

I. Latitude: 35.772098 Longitude: -81.431440

Or

UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

☐

NAD 1927

or

☐

NAD 1983

1. Zone: 17	Easting:	Northing:
2. Zone: 17	Easting:	Northing:
3. Zone: 17	Easting:	Northing:
4. Zone: 17	Easting:	Northing:

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The eligible boundary is shown by a heavy solid line on the accompanying National Register boundary map. The boundary encompasses full extent of the 14.42-acre Burke County tax parcel [PIN 2774-84-5514] containing the mill, pump house, and water tank, as well as the paved parking areas and fencing associated with the site.

Rhodhiss Mill No. 2
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Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The eligible boundary for Rhodhiss Mill No. 2 encompasses the full extent of the tax parcel associated with the mill and associated structures. The northern edge of the boundary is defined by the bank of the Catawba River, while the western edge follows the legal property line. The south and east boundaries follow the legal property lines and curves along the adjoining roads, Carolina Avenue and Burke Street, respectively. The south and east boundaries are generally understood to run concurrent with the road right-of-way. The property and resources associated with Mill No. 2 generally retain sufficient integrity to convey the function and development of the locally significant textile production facility.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Clay Griffith
organization: Acme Preservation Services
street & number: 825 Merrimon Avenue, Ste. C, #345
city or town: Asheville state: NC zip code: 28804
e-mail: cgriffith.acme@gmail.com
telephone: 828-281-3852
date: May 28, 2026

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

Rhodhiss Mill No. 2

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Photographs

The following information pertains to each of the photographs:

Name of Property: Rhodhiss Mill No. 2
Location: 100 Burke Street, Rhodhiss, North Carolina
County: Burke
Name of Photographer: Clay Griffith / Acme Preservation Services
Date of Photographs: July 28 and December 8, 2025 (unless otherwise noted)
Location of Digital Master: Historic Preservation Office
North Carolina Division of Archives and History
109 E. Jones Street
Raleigh, North Carolina 27601-2807

Photographs:

1. Rhodhiss Mill No. 2, overall view to northwest. Photo date: December 8, 2025
2. Rhodhiss Mill No. 2, front view of 1912 mill buildings, view to west. Photo date: December 8, 2025
3. Rhodhiss Mill No. 2, north elevation, view south from Caldwell County side of Catawba River. Photo date: December 8, 2025
4. Rhodhiss Mill No. 2, office and conveyor additions, view to northeast. Photo date: December 8, 2025
5. Rhodhiss Mill No. 2, warehouse exterior, west elevation, view to east. Photo date: December 8, 2025
6. Rhodhiss Mill No. 2, southeast corner of warehouse, view to northwest. Photo date: December 8, 2025
7. Rhodhiss Mill No. 2, office/canteen addition and air conditioning tower, view to northwest. Photo date: December 8, 2025
8. Rhodhiss Mill No. 2, overall view to northwest. Photo date: December 8, 2025
9. Rhodhiss Mill No. 2, original 1912 wing, interior, view to east. Photo date: December 8, 2025
10. Rhodhiss Mill No. 2, 1912 mill, first floor interior, view to east. Photo date: December 8, 2025
11. Rhodhiss Mill No. 2, 1912 mill, first floor interior, view to west. Photo date: July 28, 2025
12. Rhodhiss Mill No. 2, 1955 / ca. 1969 addition, interior, view to east. Photo date: December 8, 2025

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13. Rhodhiss Mill No. 2, workshop, first floor interior, view to west. Photo date: December 8, 2025
14. Rhodhiss Mill No. 2, office and conveyor addition, first floor interior, view to south. Photo date: December 8, 2025
15. Rhodhiss Mill No. 2, ca. 1972 warehouse interior, view to southeast. Photo date: December 8, 2025
16. Rhodhiss Mill No. 2, 1912 mill, northeast corner stair, view to south. Photo date: December 8, 2025
17. Rhodhiss Mill No. 2, 1912 mill, second floor interior, view to west. Photo date: July 28, 2025
18. Rhodhiss Mill No. 2, 1912 mill, third floor interior, view to east. Photo date: July 28, 2025
19. Rhodhiss Mill No. 2, 1912 mill, third floor interior, view to west. Photo date: July 28, 2025
20. Water Tank and Pump House, exterior, view to north. Photo date: July 28, 2025
21. Pump House, exterior, view to southwest. Photo date: July 28, 2025

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications 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.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.