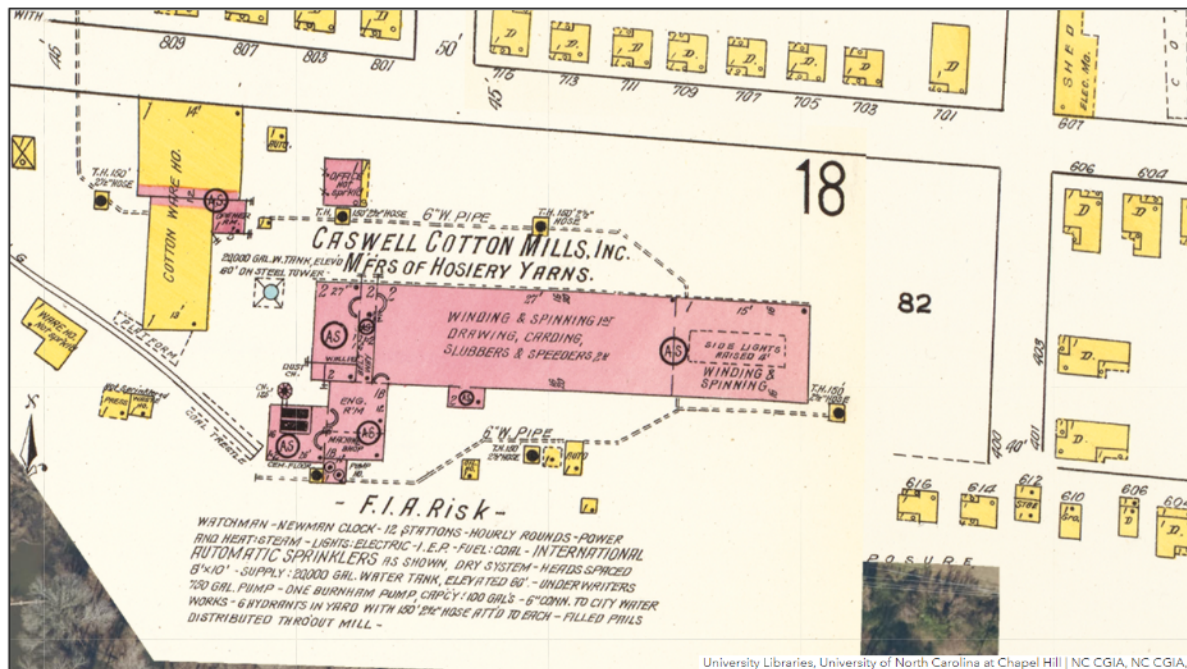


Mill History

Provided by John Wood, NC State Historic Preservation Office

The Caswell Cotton Mills, a spinning mill enterprise that produced soft hosiery yarns, was incorporated in 1907. In 1939 Caswell Cotton Mills was purchased by Glen Raven Mills of Alamance County and the name changed at that time. According to the Sanborn Maps, the foundation for the Caswell Cotton Mill building was in place by 1908, but the footprint of the building featured on the 1908 map was based on architectural plans. Construction of the mill complex was completed shortly thereafter, and the mill put into operation.



1914 Sanborn Map

As is shown on the 1914 Sanborn Map, the building consisted of a two-story structure that housed winding and spinning operations on the first floor and drawing, carding, slubbing, and speeding operations on the second floor. An internal beltway and rooms for opening and picking were all contained within the main block of the building. A contemporaneous wing attached to the south elevation housed an engine room, a boiler room, a machine shop, and a pump house. When constructed the mill was state-of-the-art for its time, including a 750 gallon-per-minute sprinkler system with automatic sprinklers throughout the building and a two-story tower housing bathrooms for each floor. A brick office building, large free-standing smokestack, two large, connected cotton warehouses, several small ancillary buildings including an oil house, waste house, valve house, and cistern, as well as a metal water tower and a railroad spur line also occupied the site.

Associated with the mill was a mill village of more than forty houses, some of which remain extant today. The mill village also included a non-denominational chapel that was used as meeting place for anything pertinent to the advancement of the village or the people. The company officers believed in a clean mill village and pleasant surroundings for the

employees. To this end the ground in front of the mill and office included a large fountain, a goldfish pool, several playground fixtures, and manicured park-like grounds. This area was freely used by mill employees and residents of the mill village. The infilled goldfish pond/fountain is still visible on the site.



Mill village at intersection of Mitchell and Blount Streets

By 1920, Caswell Mills employed 125 people running 48 cards and 16,200 ring spindles as part of the spinning operations. Between 1914 and 1924 the mill was enlarged with a one-story brick addition being added the east end of the building, providing additional space for winding and spinning machinery. In addition to the windows, this new space was lighted by a monitor roof. During this same period a large, one-story, free-standing brick storage building was constructed immediately south of the mill, a small addition was added to the cotton warehouses, and several small ancillary buildings were constructed on site. The addition with the monitor roof is seen in a 1924 photograph.

The period between 1925 and 1930 saw no physical change to the buildings in the mill complex. In the early-to-mid 1930s an addition was added to the east end of the earlier addition, providing even more space for winding and spinning machinery. In 1939 Caswell Cotton Mills was purchased by Glen Raven Mills of Alamance County who acquired the mill for additional yarn capacity. The Glen Raven Company changed the name of the facility to Glen Raven Mills, Plant No. 2 and by 1948 the product line had changed to the production of awning stripe and rayon fabrics. Also, by 1948 additions to the cotton warehouses had been made and a couple more, small ancillary buildings had been constructed.

In the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s Glen Raven greatly expanded the square footage of mill building with a series of additions. Like most mills of this period the earlier portions of the mill were altered to accommodate changes in production technology and amenities such as air conditioning. Glen Raven added an addition that covered the entire south side of the two-story original building and the two eastern additions. This large addition extended to the north wall of the free-standing storage building, connecting it to the main mill building. A large loading dock and warehouse addition was added to the eastern end of the building, wrapping around to encompass the east end of the free-standing storage building. Another addition was added to the west end of the

free-standing storage building and two additions were added to the mill's north elevation to house equipment. All of this construction more than doubled the building's footprint.



Glen Raven Mill

Other Glen Raven alterations included infilling some of the original window openings with brick and eventually covering two elevations of the original two-story portion of the mill, the 1914-1924 addition, and its monitor roof with metal cladding. The porch on the façade of the office was removed and replaced with a large brick addition. The water tower and many of the small ancillary buildings were demolished. The park area on the mill grounds was removed and the foundation and goldfish pool were filled in. The last of the alterations were made prior to 1979. Glenn Raven operated the mill until its closure in 2003.

Caswell Mills is one of only small number of textile mills that existed historically in the eastern part of the state. Other towns that had textile mills include Edenton, Elizabeth City, Roanoke Rapids, Rocky Mount, and Weldon. Caswell Mills is the only textile mill remaining in Lenoir County.