

ATHENS FACTORY



UGA SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

In 1833, the Athens Factory (also known as “Athens Cotton & Wool” and later as the Athens Manufacturing Company) opened for business, and it continued in operation for approximately 100 years. The building later served as a warehouse, a call center, a gymnasium, and a saloon (before being renovated in 2008 to house UGA’s Medical Partnership. Since 2015, it has been the home of the UGA School of Social Work. In the years before the Civil War, both enslaved and free laborers—men, women, and children—operated the mill’s looms and spindles. In June of 1836, “seven negroes”—Bob, Cuffee, and Charles, along with Ezekiel and Dinah and their two children—are listed alongside the other assets of the company, including “lands, water privileges, mills, factory buildings...smith tools, wagon and team and the stock of wool.”

Augustin S. Clayton, William Dearing, John Nisbet, and Abraham Walker were the original local partners in the Athens Factory, and over the 19th century, many leaders of Athens and UGA—including Dr. Henry Hull, Thomas Baxter, and William L. Mitchell—were involved as trustees and directors.

During its first decades, the factory endured multiple fires and floods. After a devastating fire destroyed the factory in 1857, the current brick building was erected in 1858. The School of Social Work combines the old wool building (under which the millrace runs) with the cotton building, which sits at a right angle to the river. It remains an excellent example of an early cotton factory in Georgia.

The Factory prospered during the Civil War, as it produced flannel, wool jeans, cotton duck and more for the Confederate war effort. After the war, in 1870, the Athens Manufacturing Company expanded into the former Confederate Armory just up the river, and the fabric produced there won the award for “best gingham” at the 1876 Southern States Exposition. The old Athens Factory became known as “the lower mill” and it was used for spinning thread and storage. Johnson & Johnson purchased the Athens Manufacturing Company in 1950, and their Chicopee plant, located in the former armory, operated until 1979.



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