

Rosenbaum inverts his own likeness to pretend so. Note, too, that musical instruments stand in for an artist's palette and brush as if they were the means of this production.

The richly variegated colors of Rosenbaum's camouflage jacket pick up all the hues of the surrounding landscape. They literally and metaphorically merge figure into ground to cement the artist's intimate connection with his locale. For me, the composition's most intriguing aspect involves the two groups of mobile signboards in the background. Humorously, they point directly at Rosenbaum's head before heading away "over the hill." Surrounded by such portentous symbols, the image of the artist looms large on the canvas. Turning his back on the slings and arrows of time's misfortunes, his head is shifted to engage eye-to-eye with the audience. While readying a chord on his fiddle, he lifts the bow to begin again.

I often thought about this painting during the weeks in which Art's health steadily worsened. Its details, at least in my interpretation, seemed ever more poignant. Yet I always returned to the defiant and authoritative deportment I saw in that nimble portrayal of his ageing self.

Then too, in recalling our remote communications, I was reminded of Rosenbaum's username for email. Not surprisingly it was a clever play on words: ARTSPARK. Although I knew it derived from his first and middle names, I always perceived it as referring to the creative spark that lay within him, and which he shared so generously. That spark was self-evident in his fiddler's portrait and throughout the vast body of work he left behind. May it continue to kindle new beginnings.

Dennis Harper is a visual artist, former exhibition designer at the Georgia Museum of Art, Co-Curator of the 2006 Art Rosenbaum exhibition at the GMA.

The View from Easley's Mill, Present and Past

by Jane McPherson

My office at the University of Georgia (UGA) School of Social Work is located in the old Athens Factory, an antebellum cotton mill that was the first industrial mill in the City of Athens.¹ (See Figure 1.) Looking out of my window at the North Oconee River, I see turtles sunning themselves on the rocks below. The river is a pleasant roar in my ears, and I hope to see a blue heron light.



Figure 1. *The Athens Factory (circa 1880) as seen from the east side of the North Oconee River. From the Georgia Photograph File (MS3705) at the Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia Libraries.*

Looking out, I'm also looking back in time: Water still rushes over the remnants of the Athens Factory's dam and, across the river on the east bank, the remains of Daniel Easley's pre-industrial mills are just visible. In the winter, with the leaves fallen from the trees, I glimpse the Easley Mill Overlook that Athens-Clarke County opened on the Firefly Trail in Fall 2022—an overlook that tempts me to escape into the warm January afternoon and into the antebellum history of this portion of the river.

Easley Mill Overlook and Cedar Shoals

The Easley Mill Overlook perches above a rocky shoals where it's quite possible that explorer and naturalist William Bartram visited during his 1786 meander through Georgia. In *Bartram's Travels*, he described the "Ocone" as

¹ Michael J. Gagnon. *Transition to an Industrial South: Athens, Georgia 1830-1870*. Louisiana State University Press, 2012, 29.

a “beautiful” river and wrote of coming to a spot where the waters were “still and shoal, and flowed over a bed of gravel just beneath a rocky rapid.”² Before Athens was Athens, this spot was known as Cedar Shoals.

By 1796, Daniel Easley had purchased title to Cedar Shoals and built a water-powered mill—quite likely on the site that became the Athens Factory—before setting up shop more permanently on the east side of the river near his future eponymous overlook.³ As Dr. Henry Hull, whose own memories of Athens begin in 1803, reports in *Annals of Athens*, Easley “slightly dammed” the rapids to operate “an excellent flour mill... a saw and common grist mill” and with the “intention to add a cotton machine.” In those days, the river was full of fish, including shad which ascended the river “in great perfection.” Though the ascending shad have vanished, the intrepid can scramble down to the riverbank and see the ruins of Easley’s mills and dip a toe into what was likely Easley’s mill race. In 1801, John Milledge and a committee of university trustees came to Cedar Shoals scouting to locate the University of Georgia. The site they chose belonged to Daniel Easley, who sold Milledge 633 acres, but kept plum land on both sides of the river, including Cedar Shoals, for himself.⁴

Easley’s mills and landholdings passed into the hands of William Carr in 1820⁵ and, though not a miller himself, Carr rented the mills to other operators, including Noah Philips who advertised “wool carding” services at ten cents per pound in 1829.⁶ During this period, Hull remembers the area just downriver from Easley’s mills as “the most beautiful place for small boys to bathe and learn to swim that was ever made.” As I imagine the hoots and splashes from those swimming boys, I am drawn away by the boom that came next: “the blasting” that created “the waterway for the cotton mill” in the early 1830s destroyed that splendid swimming hole.⁷

² William Bartram (1739-1823), and Mark Van Doren. *The Travels of William Bartram*. [New York]: Macy-Masius, 1928, 60-61. HathiTrust Digital Library. [https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.\\$b281934](https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.$b281934) (Accessed 23 January 2023.)

³ Greg Yoder, personal communication, 29 November 2022.

⁴ Augustus Longstreet Hull. *Annals of Athens, Georgia, 1801-1901*, 1906, 2-4. <https://archive.org/details/annalsofathens00hull/> (Accessed 23 January 2023.)

⁵ Charlotte Thomas Marshall. *Oconee Hill Cemetery of Athens, Georgia, Volume 1*. Athens, GA, Athens Historical Society, 2009, 346.

⁶ “Wool carding.” *The Athenian* [Athens, Georgia], 13 October 1829, 3.

⁷ Hull, *Annals*, 78-79.



Figure 2: A detail from the 1832 plat of the property sold by William Carr to Augustin Clayton, William Dearing, John Nisbet, and Abraham Walker shows three pre-existing mills on the east side of the North Oconee River. This hand-drawn map is included in the *Chicopee Manufacturing Company records (MS1664)* at Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia Libraries.

The Athens Factory

In 1832, Augustin Clayton, William Dearing, John Nisbet, and Abraham Walker bought 55 acres straddling both sides of the river at Cedar Shoals from William Carr (see Figure 2) for the purpose of building a cotton and wool mill. When the Athens Factory (first known as the Athens Cotton and Wool Mill) opened its doors in 1833, it brought industrial-scale thread and cloth manufacturing to the City of Athens, and continued the recent local shift into manufacturing cotton products that had begun in Whitehall in 1830.⁸ Fittingly, the land purchase included the riverside field where Daniel Easley had tended Athens’ first cotton patch a few decades before. Today, the Easley Mill Overlook—with its excellent view of the former factory (now UGA School of Social Work)—is a perfect spot to consider a few of the Factory’s stories and characters. (See the author’s photograph of this view in the *Athens Photogravure* on page 31.)

One such character was Augustin Clayton. Clayton, an original investor in the Athens Factory, was a member of UGA’s first 1804 graduating class and

⁸ Gagnon, *Transition*, 29.

went on to become a Judge and political leader. He was instrumental in expelling indigenous peoples from Georgia and was a lifelong patron of UGA.⁹ Clayton Street in downtown Athens bears his name, and when he died “each of the three churches of Athens [Presbyterian, Methodist, and Baptist] suspended their regular [Sunday] morning worship for the purpose of uniting their respective congregations in one.”¹⁰

Clayton and his partners were also enslavers who imagined a Southern manufacturing system whose enslaved laborers (unlike those in the North) “could neither strike nor quit.”¹¹ After the factory reorganized as the Athens Manufacturing Company in 1835, several enslaved individuals—Bob, Cuffee, Charles, Ezekiel, and Dinah—were mentioned in the company’s minutes by name, while others—including Ezekiel and Dinah’s two children and a person known only as “yellow boy” are simply referenced; still others are merely enumerated.¹² In 1863, in the midst of Civil War, the factory agent was authorized “to sell the negroes belonging to the company.”¹³

We get another picture of the Athens Factory workforce from British chronicler James Silk Buckingham, who visited Athens in 1839, when the mill at Whitehall and the Athens Factory had been joined by a third mill in Princeton (near today’s Five Points). In Buckingham’s telling, the workforce at all three factories was a mixture of enslaved Black and free white individuals, both adults and children:

[There] are three cotton factories, all worked by water-power, and used for spinning yarn, and weaving cloth of coarse qualities for local consumption only. I visited one of these, and ascertained that the other two were very similar to it in size and operations. In each of them there are employed from 80 to 100 persons, and about an

⁹ Claudio Saunt, *Unworthy Republic: The Dispossession of Native Americans and the Road to Indian Territory*. W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2021, 98, 163-165.

James Silk Buckingham, *The Slave States of America*. London: Fisher, Son & Co., 1842, 60. HathiTrust Digital Library. <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015018024474> (Accessed 23 January 2023.)

¹⁰ Buckingham, *The Slave States of America*, 61.

¹¹ Gagnon, *Transition*, 20.

¹² *Athens Manufacturing Company. Minute Book. 1835-1904*. June 1836 and May 1843. Chicopee Manufacturing Company records, MS 1664, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia Libraries, Athens, Georgia.

¹³ *Athens Manufacturing Company*, June 1863. Chicopee Manufacturing Company records, MS 1664, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia Libraries, Athens, Georgia.

equal number of white and black. In one of them, the blacks are the property of the mill-owner, but in the other two they are the slaves of planters, hired out at monthly wages to work in the factory. There is no difficulty among them on account of colour, the white girls working in the same room and at the same loom with the black girls; and boys of each colour, as well as men and women, working together without apparent repugnance or objection.¹⁴

According to Buckingham, “The white families engaged in these factories live in log huts clustered about the establishment on the river’s bank, and the negroes repair to the huts allowed them by their owners when they are near, or stay at the mill, when their master’s plantation is far off.”¹⁵

George Cooke, an artist who was also likely an investor in the Athens Factory,¹⁶ painted *The View of Athens from Carr’s Hill* in 1845 as a wedding gift for Augustin Clayton’s daughter, Augusta.¹⁷ (See this image in the *Athens Photogravure* on page 31.) The painting depicts the mid-century manufacturing complex—factory buildings, dam, pond, and what appear to be factory workers’ lodgings—situated on the west bank of the North Oconee. The workers’ houses are situated in what is now the School of Social Work’s vast parking lot. If these “log huts,” as Buckingham called them, were reserved for the white millworkers, where did Ezekiel and Dinah’s family live? As I look out at the antebellum mill, I wonder how these enslaved and free laborers rested and nourished themselves.

As Buckingham recounts, the plan to rely exclusively on enslaved labor for the mills failed because enslaved labor proved more expensive than free:

[Enslaved] labour is dearer than that of the whites, for whilst the free boys and girls employed receive about 700 dollars per month, out of which they find themselves [food and lodging], the slaves are paid the same wages (which is handed over to their owners),

¹⁴ Buckingham, *The Slave States of America*, 112.

¹⁵ Buckingham, *The Slave States of America*, 113.

¹⁶ *Athens Manufacturing Company*, August 1848. Chicopee Manufacturing Company records, MS 1664, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia Libraries, Athens, Georgia.

¹⁷ M. A. Rudolph, *George Cooke and His Paintings*, in *The Georgia Historical Quarterly*, June, 1960, Vol. 44, No. 2 (June, 1960), 117-153.

and the mill-owner has to feed them all in addition; so that the free labour is much cheaper to him than the slave.¹⁸

Whoever performed the work, it seems to have been both unhealthy and unsafe. Buckingham complained about the “unavoidable confinement in a heated temperature” and wrote that the whites looked “miserably pale and unhealthy.” Local newspapers carried tales of danger, reporting, for example, the case of Mr. McDonald, whose hand was torn off above the wrist when it was caught in the cotton picker.¹⁹

Looking back at the *Carr’s Hill* painting, careful observers will note that the current building is not present in the painting. (See page 31.) Indeed, the Athens Factory was destroyed by flood or fire three times during its first 25 years, and the current structure opened in 1858, after a fire completely gutted the previous structure.²⁰ The 1858 mill was a state-of-the-art facility which allowed the Factory to robustly support the Confederacy in the Civil War, supplying the thread, flannel, jeans, and cotton duck needed for everything from underwear to tents. The war also left the Factory flush with profits and able to purchase and expand into the former Confederate Armory (now UGA’s Chicopee Building) just up the river.²¹ The gingham fabrics produced at the newly-renovated “Check Factory” were prize-winning.²²

There are many more stories to tell, but space is short and I need to get back to my office. Walking across the Oconee Street Bridge, I look down at the river and think of Robert Shepherd, an emancipated Athenian who earned 68 cents per day for his services ferrying cotton, thread, and cloth on a barge that once traveled this stretch of the North Oconee between the Athens Factory and the Check Factory.²³ I wonder how Athens will preserve this river and its histories for the future.

¹⁸ Buckingham, *The Slave States of America*, 112-113.

¹⁹ “An Unfortunate Accident.” *Southern Banner* (Athens, Georgia), 6 September 1834, 2.

²⁰ “The Athens Factory.” *Southern Banner*, 9 December 1858, 3.

²¹ Gagnon, *Transition*, 195.

²² *Best Display of Ginghams*. Chicopee Manufacturing Company records, MS 1664, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia Libraries, Athens, Georgia.

²³ *Federal Writers’ Project: Slave Narrative Project, Vol. 4, Part 3, Kendricks-Styles* (1936), Robert Shepherd, 246-263. Library of Congress, Manuscript/Mixed Material. <https://www.loc.gov/item/mesn043/>.

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Dr. Jane McPherson is Associate Professor and Director of Global Engagement at the University of Georgia School of Social Work. She conducts archival research exploring how local Georgia histories of charity and social work entwine with ideologies of white supremacy and capitalism, and asks questions about how these histories echo in social work practice today.

More on Dr. McPherson’s Complex Cloth project, which locates these histories of the Athens Factory, can be found at <https://complexcloth.org/>.