

Summer 2010

Troup Factory: Archaeological Investigations of a Nineteenth Century Mill Site in LaGrange, Georgia.

Lindsey R. Moates
Kennesaw State University

Greg J. Hansen
Kennesaw State University

Patrick Severts
Brockington and Associates, Inc.

Terry G. Powis
Kennesaw State University, tpowis@kennesaw.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/facpubs>

 Part of the [Other History of Art, Architecture, and Archaeology Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Moats, L. R., Hansen, G. J., Severts, P., & Powis, T. G. (2010). Troup factory: Archaeological investigations of a nineteenth century mill site in lagrange, georgia. *Georgia Journal of Science*, 68(2), 104-118. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/865339230?accountid=11824>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@Kennesaw State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Kennesaw State University. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@kennesaw.edu.

TROUP FACTORY: ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS OF A NINETEENTH CENTURY MILL SITE IN LAGRANGE, GEORGIA

Lindsey R. Moats, Greg J. Hansen
 Department of Geography and Anthropology
 Kennesaw State University
 Kennesaw, GA 30144

Patrick Severts
 Brockington and Associates, Inc.
 6611 Bay Circle, Suite 220
 Norcross, GA 30071

and

Terry G. Powis*
 Department of Geography and Anthropology
 Kennesaw State University
 Kennesaw, GA 30144

*corresponding author (tpowis@kennesaw.edu)

ABSTRACT

Troup Factory, the first cotton mill in Troup County, and the second such plant in Georgia, was established in 1846 on Flat Shoal's Creek. The mill was in operation throughout the latter half of the 19th century before being relocated to the city of LaGrange. Troup Factory sheetings and homespun were standards of excellence across a widespread area of Georgia. The purpose of this paper is to document the history of the mill site through archival research and archaeological survey. Through these means a better understanding of a once prestigious mill site was obtained in order to illuminate an important period of Georgia history.

Keywords: Troup Factory, cotton mill, 19th century, LaGrange, archival history, archaeological survey

INTRODUCTION

The Antebellum cotton era was a thriving and prosperous period in the South. It ended the dominance of New England in cotton manufacturing and elevated the South to a new level of production and industrialization. Georgia would follow this trend and become a leader in the cotton industry. Troup Factory was one such industry that would find profit in the crop. Once a thriving mill, the site is now privately owned and few structures remain standing. The site has changed over time from a grist mill, to a cotton mill, to a County Park, and now is included in the property holdings of Mrs. Julia

Corles Swetnam. Troup Factory was one of the first such enterprises in the county and its social and economic impact remains on local residents.

History of Troup Factory

Troup Factory is located on Flat Shoal's Creek ten miles from the modern city of LaGrange on Highway 27 in Troup County (Figure 1). Mr. Maxey Brooks established Brooks' Mill in 1829 on the east side of Flat Shoal's Creek (1). There he ran a grist mill where corn and wheat were ground. The mill sat on considerable acreage and with the rise of cotton as a substantial cash crop, cotton began to be planted on the property around the mill. In 1843, a wool carding machinery was installed outfitting the grist mill to manufacture the growing crop. This set the way for Robertson, Leslie, and Company to buy the grist mill from Brooks in 1846 and continue the process of converting it into a cotton mill. Robertson, Leslie, and Company consisted of James Madison Creed Robertson, Thomas Leslie, and David E. Beeman. Robertson was a settler and planter from Meriwether County, Georgia and Leslie was from Wilkes County, Georgia. Beeman was originally from New Jersey but settled in Greenville, Georgia. These men dubbed "Merchants and Manufacturers" pooled their resources to acquire the mill from Brooks and were said to have pioneered new dimensions that "added to the economic life of a purely agricultural community" (1).

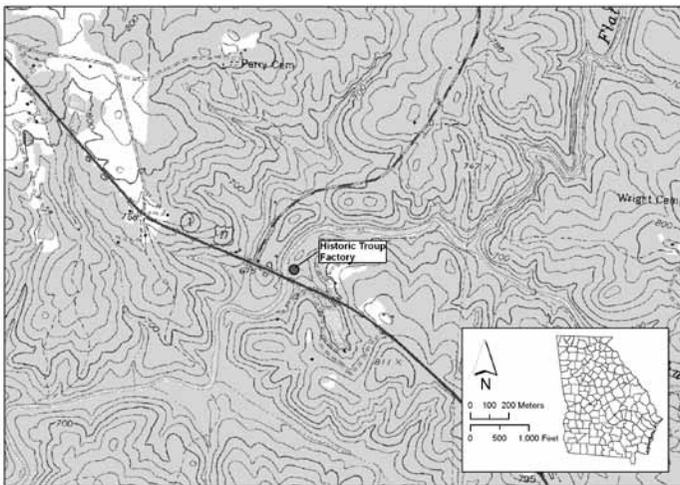


Figure 1. Map of location of Troup Factory in LaGrange, Troup County, Georgia.

Maxey Brooks continued to work at the mill and constructed many of the structures that were used in its operations. In 1846, Brooks successfully built the cotton mill separate from the grist mill that had previously been used for cotton production. In 1847, he constructed the dye house to further process

the cotton products and a raceway to supply the mill with more power. When Troup Factory began its operations in August of 1847, it included a two-story grist mill, a four-story factory building that measured seventy-six by seventy-six feet (Figure 2), a dye house, a rock dam, and a raceway running from Flat Shoal's Creek to the Factory. The Spindle Room housed one thousand spindles which were able to produce six hundred pounds of cotton daily. In the beginning the Factory employed thirty-five operatives but was soon advertising in the *Columbus Enquirer*, a local newspaper, for additional employees to operate the new equipment being installed to enhance production to one thousand pounds of cotton daily (2).

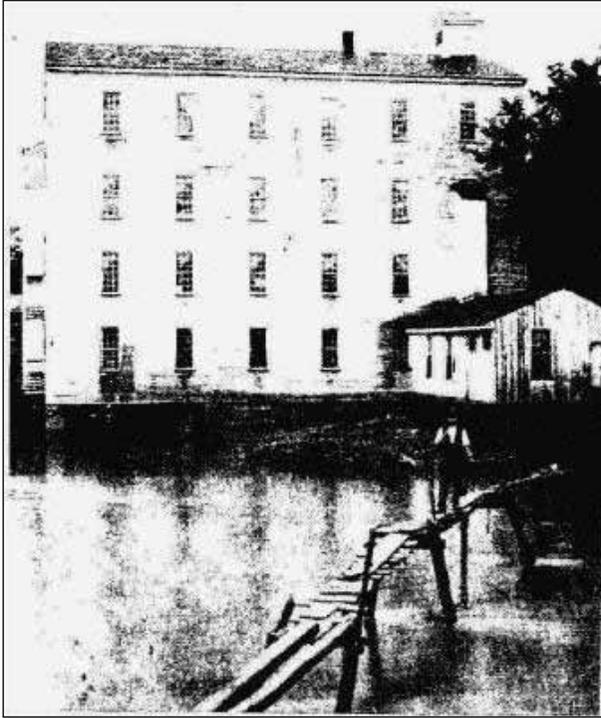


Figure 2. Troup Factory Four-Story Factory Building, Troup Factory, LaGrange, Georgia (after Davidson 1971).

Many people flocked to the cotton industry because of the economic stability that it offered. Agriculture was the most popular way of life prior to the rise of cotton manufacturing in the area. With an agricultural way of life people had to rely on credit given from merchants or plantation owners indebting themselves to others in order to make a living. Profit from farming was unpredictable depending on various factors like soil quality, rain, and other environmental variables. In contrast, work in a factory provided a stable income no matter the weather. Even though wages were low in the factories

people no longer had to depend on creditors and could provide more securely for their families. However, factory work was not easy. Hours were long, usually extending from “dark to dark” and machinery was heavy, loud, and dangerous but despite this, generations of families held onto the lives they had created. Troup Factory pooled its labor from a group of “poor whites” and “piney wood” folks and did not use slave labor. No slaves were known to have ever been used in operations at Troup Factory (1).

By 1849, the mill was showing promise. The capital exceeded \$42,000 and its employees had almost doubled to sixty-five operatives. The factory produced nine hundred yards of Osnaburg, a coarse cotton fabric used to make work clothes, sacking, bagging, and general purpose items, and one hundred bunches of yarn daily. Troup Factory also produced bats of cotton, a cotton and wool mix used in quilt making, and cotton used in mattresses. The Osnaburg products were sold in Savannah and other markets for 8 1/2¢ to 10 1/2¢ per yard and the cotton products sold for 7 7/8¢ to 8 1/4¢ a yard (1). Along with these goods, Troup Factory was producing woolens and yarns in large quantities and with this advancement a demand for a better system of transportation arose. A railroad was suggested for shipping products and Robertson, Leslie, and Company drew up plans for a projected line in December 1857. The LaGrange and Troup Factory Rail Road was planned to join the factory to the city of LaGrange (3). There it would connect to the Atlanta & West Point Rail Road and disperse the goods of Troup Factory to a broader market than had previously been available. This expansion would mean an increased production and profit for Troup Factory, but the development of the railroad was slow and construction was halted when the Civil War broke out. The railroad never saw completion and all that remains today is the rock rail bed extending from the Factory toward LaGrange.

This is not the only way Troup Factory was affected by the Civil War. The Factory produced goods for the Confederacy, including a material called “duck,” a coarse fabric used to make tents. It was feared that the Yankees would come to the Factory to steal various goods, supplies, machinery, and cotton for the war effort. The factory operatives decided to hide these materials in the nearby swamps around Flat Shoal’s Creek. Despite the precautions however the Yankees did in fact raid the Factory and made off with a shipment of several loom pickers. Robertson, Leslie, and Company posted a reward in the LaGrange Reporter of \$100.00 for their return (1). The stolen loom pickers were never recovered.

During this time, Robertson, Leslie, and Company saw it necessary to establish a town on the east side of Flat Shoal’s Creek to accommodate the expanding population and popularity of their developing factory. Between the town and the Factory all the necessary amenities were incorporated to keep the community operating to the best of its ability. A woodshop, blacksmith shop, sawmill, and tanyard were in operation as well as a store that provided the necessary provisions for the community. The store was commented on as being “one of the largest and nicest stock of goods that was ever imported

into a country store” (1). A church with a Sunday school was also established where a mixture of Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, Episcopalian, and Roman Catholic denominations were practiced in a form of what they called Universalism. A Masonic Lodge was also built for the use of the townspeople. Together, the Universalist Church, the Masonic Lodge, and the other shops built by Robertson, Leslie, and Company, served to meet the communal, spiritual, and individual needs of the operatives and their families working at Troup Factory (4).

The establishment of the town allowed a way of life to develop that was inseparable from the work at the Factory. In 1869, this way of life began to be documented by an anonymous writer who sent articles for publication in the *LaGrange Reporter*. He signed all of his writings “Factory Boy”. Factory Boy felt that the newspapers were neglecting the people and happenings of the Factory and it needed to be known how well the town and factory were progressing. The subjects of his articles ranged from the prosperity of the factory to various biographies of different members of the community. He spoke highly of everyone and made frequent poignant assertions about the progress of the factory. His identity was never discovered but it is because of him that much remains about the history of the Factory. It is obvious of the fondness he had for the area and how important he believed the factory to be to the community and to the county. In one article he states: “For virtue and simplicity, industrious and talented young men, beautiful and charming lasses, noble sires and exemplary dames, the society of Troup Factory, and vicinity, is unsurpassed and beyond emulation” (1). The articles submitted to the newspaper by Factory Boy give insight into the way of life at Troup Factory. His writings included events such as marriages, deaths, birthdays, and celebrations. This left a historical legacy that documented the highs and lows of the factory as well as the people involved in its operations. His writings gave a personal aspect to the history of the Factory.

The advancements in the Factory and the construction of the town with its commodities helped to sustain Troup Factory. By 1875, capital was \$100,000 a year and by 1876 the factory employed a hundred operatives and the town supported a population of two hundred and fifty. By 1877, more power was required to operate the businesses in and around the mill. Perry and Sons built a millrace the same year fifteen hundred yards along the east side of Flat Shoal’s Creek to bring the desired power to the saws of the cotton ginnery and for the tanyard. The mill race reached its apex at twenty feet above Perry Creek and was constructed of clay lined ditches, rock walls, and timber troughs.

Despite the apparent prosperity of the Factory hard times would soon be felt. A recession fell upon Troup Factory in 1878 and on June 5th Robertson, Leslie, and Company listed the factory for sale in various newspapers in *LaGrange* and *Columbus*. The newspaper stated that “owing to the advanced age and failing health of the proprietors and owners of Troup Factory, the partners decided to sell out and retire from business” (1, 5).

property was once again for sale (6). The article reported that the property consisted of one four-story cotton mill building with a stone Picker Room detached, one storage house, one cotton warehouse, a Dye House (Figure 4), one rock store house (general store), one two-story Grist Mill, and nine hundred and thirty acres of land with a portion in cultivation. The property also consisted of ample tenant houses, and a rock dam with a wheel and water house (Figure 5) (6).

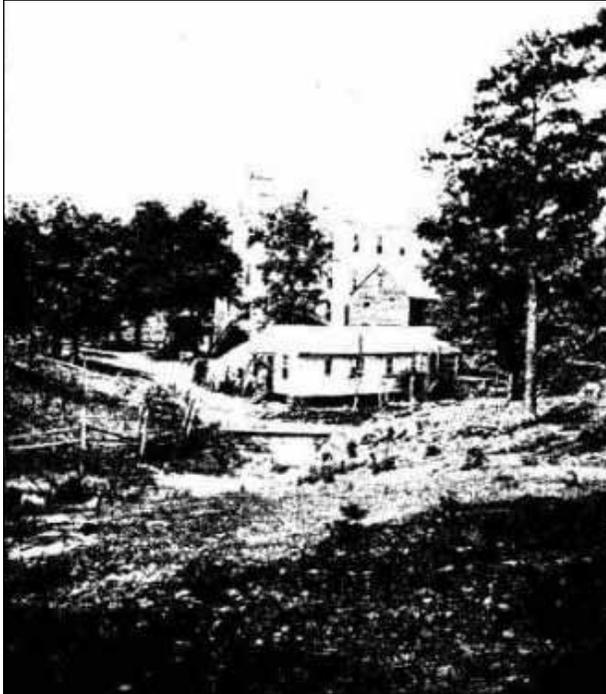


Figure 4. Dye House, Troup Factory, LaGrange, Georgia (after Major and Johnson 1994).

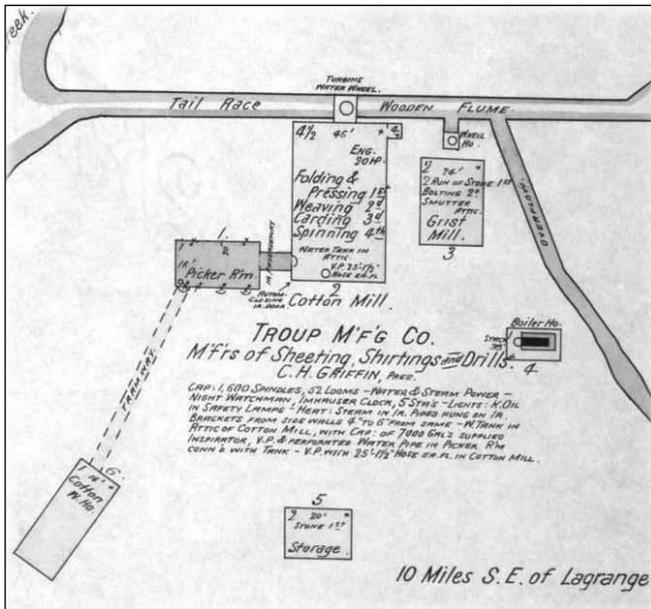


Figure 5. Troup Factory Map, Sanborn Map, 1889.

The article caught the attention of L.M. Park and he bought the factory at public auction for \$7,550.10 on the first Tuesday of January 1899 (7). Park would continue to operate the mill on the banks of Flat Shoal's Creek for three years until he moved the factory to LaGrange where the name was changed to Park Mill. In February 1900, the Lagrange Reporter ran an article stating that "high water is doing considerable damage at Troup Factory. The first floor is flooded. Water is nine feet higher than ever known. Considerable loss to owner" (1). In 1902, flooding was reported again. It had washed away the "longest and most expensive bridge in the county", which spanned the creek to Troup Factory as well as the dam built in 1886. The factory flooded eight or nine times under the ownership of Park and it was the flood of 1902 that was the deciding factor to move the factory into the city of LaGrange. This brought the total number of cotton factories in LaGrange to four (1). The original Troup Factory located on Flat Shoal's Creek would remain abandoned throughout the twentieth century.

Troup Factory Today

Today little remains of the factory and the trees have almost completely hidden it from sight (Figure 6). A Historical Marker shows its location on Highway 27 and a dirt road leads down to one of the few remaining structures. The Stone Picker room is the best preserved structure at the site and all four walls are still standing at varying heights. Adjacent to this structure are the almost completely engulfed remains of the rock Storage Room. Here the

walls are less prominent and in most areas are less than a meter in height. This structure has been damaged by the construction of the modern bridge over Highway 27, and many of the stones from its walls were used in the building of the bridge. Along with these two structures a rock chimney type structure is still standing south of the Picker Room. This structure was originally thought to be associated with the Dye House but our investigations have been unable to identify its exact purpose. A large millstone lays to the east of the Picker Room very near its original location on the raceway. Alongside the millstone are large berms that are believed to be where the remains of the factory building were buried. While we did not conduct any sub-surface testing, we believe this raised area to be the remains of the four-story factory building. The ruins of the raceway and associated overflow area are also still visible throughout the entire quarter mile journey from their source. Along with the raceway the stone walls that once enclosed it can be seen at varying heights and while they are dilapidated their purpose is still discernable.

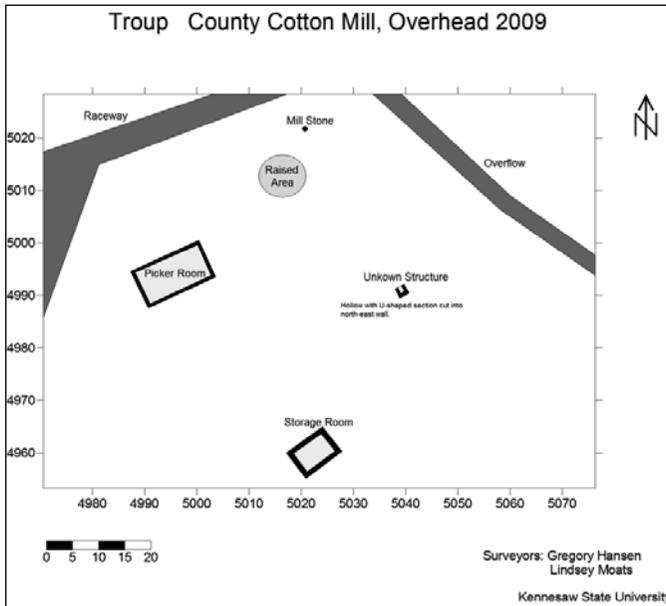


Figure 6. Troup Factory Map, 2009, showing remaining structures.

Other remains located near the mill include a graveyard associated with the overseer's house, the dam at the head of the raceway, rock piles associated with the rail bed for the railroad that was to be built to the factory, the survey points laid out ahead of the rail bed, and the foundation of the overseer's house. These few structures are all that remain of the once prominent Troup Factory. Below we provide a detailed description of the extant structures at Troup Factory.

SURVEY AND METHODOLOGY

The archaeological survey of Troup Factory was conducted in January 2009. The goal of the survey was to create a two-dimensional topographic and three-dimensional surface map of standing architectural features at the Factory using a Leica TS300 Total Station. The mill site is bounded by Flat Shoal's Creek to the west, the raceway to the north and east, and Highway 27 to the south. We decided to use these as the boundaries for the first stage of mapping. The area within these boundaries is very flat and level with no major changes in elevation outside of the raised road bed to the south of the site. The dense vegetation of the area made the survey difficult as large areas needed to be cleared by hand in order to give us the adequate space to operate. The close proximity of the site to Highway 27 also posed a problem when it came to clearing. The current landowners wanted us to keep the mill site concealed from passing traffic on Highway 27. As a result, we opted not to clear the vegetation within ten meters of the highway in order to help prevent treasure hunting at Troup factory.

Due to these limitations we decided to only clear a small pathway around each structure of a width of roughly one and a half meters to connect each structure and feature. The pathways would be shot into the total station as topographic points and provided us with enough data of the area surrounding the features to not require any further clearing for additional topographic points. The structures were shot into the total station using a system of points that were taken at roughly one meter intervals along the base, mid-point, and top of each wall on both the exterior and interior. These points, while overlapping on the two-dimensional map, provide a good indication of height on the three-dimensional surface map. The current map includes all buildings located inside the set boundaries we had chosen for the site, including the Picker Room, Storage Room, the unidentified structure thought to be associated with the Boiler Room, the northern section of the raceway, and the raised mound area that is believed to contain the remains of the cotton factory building (Figure 7).



Figure 7. Walls of the Picker Room, Troup Factory, LaGrange, Georgia.

We also surveyed the raceway that ran along two of the borders of the site. We shot points along both banks at intervals of approximately one meter as well as points at the lowest point in the raceway. At most places the raceway is approximately four meters wide and one and a half meters deep. The survey of the raceway was the biggest complication because of constraints we faced. Due to time constraints and poor weather conditions, we were able to survey only a portion of the raceway (Figure 8). We had originally planned to survey the entire raceway, however when it rains the raceway holds water for a long period of time, up to one week in duration. As a consequence, the flooding of the raceway affected the survey of this feature in its entirety. It is hoped that future survey will involve the completion of the raceway to Flat Shoal's Creek.



Figure 8. Flooding of the raceway, Troup Factory, LaGrange, Georgia.

RESULTS

Upon completion of the two dimensional map, the 1889 Sanborn map (Figure 5) was correctly scaled and overlaid onto the two dimensional map. The 1889 map was chosen for the overlay because it represents the Factory at its height of operation before the sale in 1899 and subsequent decline by 1902. We used the 1889 Sanborn map to check the placement of structures, the contents of the mound we believed contained the remains of the factory building, and the unidentified structure we associated with the Boiler Room. The results are presented in Figure 9.

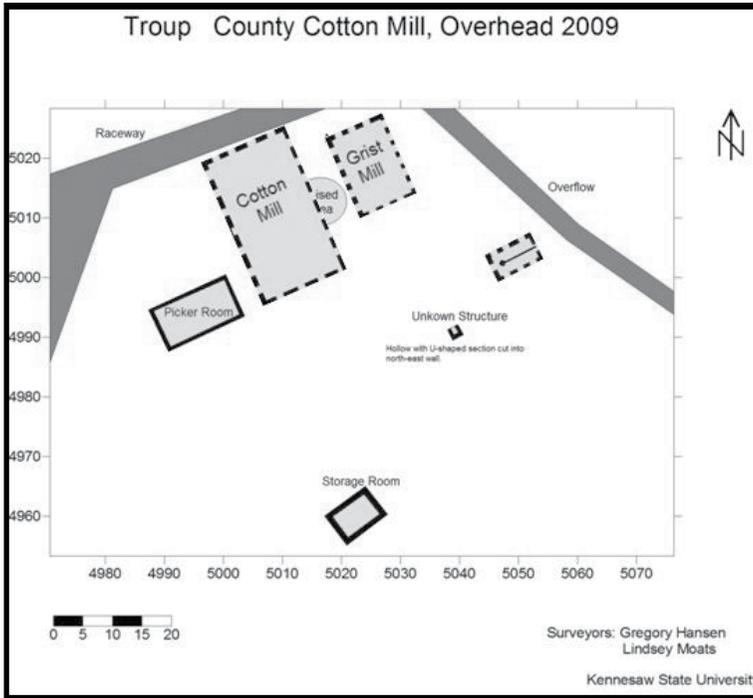


Figure 9. Overlay of Troup Factory Map, 2009.

The cotton factory and grist mill buildings are located in the exact area we believed they would be before the survey was conducted. The raised mound area sits just under the eastern wall of the cotton factory and the mill stone sits well within the walls of the grist mill. This supports our original theory that the mound may contain the remnants of the cotton factory, however, this warrants further sub-surface testing. The most interesting piece of information gained from the examination of the 1889 Sanborn map is the unidentified structure which we believed to be part of the Boiler Room. According to the map, the structure is located too far from the boiler room to be contained within its remains (Figure 10). As this structure is not represented on any of the known maps further research will need to be conducted to see if this structure is contemporaneous with the other buildings.



Figure 10. Unidentified Structure, Troup Factory, LaGrange, Georgia.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Troup Factory would leave its legacy in LaGrange by bringing an industry that would benefit the lives and futures of hundreds of people. It took advantage of a growing enterprise to expand the livelihoods of a rural town in southeast Georgia. The exported products of Troup Factory reached as far as China and elevated the status of LaGrange to a world recognized manufacturer. The State of Georgia also wished to share in the growing industry and had the planned railroad seen fruition the entire State would have been

able to share in its prosperity. Troup Factory is not remembered for what remains now but for what it brought to LaGrange throughout the latter half of the 19th century. It brought with it not only an expanding industry but also a hallmark way of life that continues to define the antebellum South.

Troup Factory was an important facet in the history of not only Troup County but also Georgia. The growth and manufacturing of cotton was a vital staple to the economic and cultural development of the state and is a significant identifier in the industrial history of the South. The impact that the factory had makes it essential that it be preserved under Georgia State Law for future generations of Georgians.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to thank the Swetnam Family for allowing us to conduct the survey work of Troup Factory as well as allowing us access to their property. We would also like to thank the volunteers of the Troup County Archives. Their knowledge and assistance greatly aided in completing the research for this article. Bobbi Hohmann is thanked for reading an earlier version of this paper. Any omissions or errors in fact are solely the responsibility of the authors.

REFERENCES

1. Davidson WH: Brooks of honey and butter: Plantations and people of Meriwether County Georgia, Volume II. Atlanta: Outlook Publishing Company, 1971.
2. Columbus Enquirer: Columbus, Georgia, September 21, 1847.
3. Georgia Genealogy: Troup Factory. www.georgiagenealogy.org/troup/mills/troup_factory.htm. Accessed 2009 October 27.
4. Major GR, Johnson III CF, and Minchew LK: Images of America: Troup County. Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2007.
5. The LaGrange Reporter: Troup County Archives, LaGrange, GA, 1878 June 5.
6. The LaGrange Reporter: Troup County Archives, LaGrange, GA, 1898 October 27.
7. The LaGrange Reporter: Troup County Archives, LaGrange, GA, 1899 January.
8. Major GR and Johnson III CF: Treasures of Troup County. LaGrange: Troup County Historical Society, 1994.
9. Sanborn maps, LaGrange, GA, 1889, Sheet 3. <http://dlg.galileo.usg.edu/sanborn/CityCounty/LaGrange1889/Sheet3.html?Welcome>. Accessed 2009 October 27.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.