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## THE OF COTTON IN FLORIDA BEFORE AND DURING THE CIVIL WAR

By DOROTHY DODD

The fluctuating price of cotton in the 1840's caused the cotton planters of Florida, like their brethren in other parts of the South, to consider ways in which they might stabilize the price of their staple crop in order to stave off economic ruin.<sup>1</sup> Numerous proposals were made to this end,<sup>2</sup> but none met with more widespread response throughout the South than that of bringing the cotton mill to the cotton field by establishing cotton manufactories throughout the cotton producing regions.

The arguments in favor of the southern manufacture of cotton were largely economic, though social and political reasons were also urged. John Finlayson, of Jefferson county, writing in 1854, estimated that the cost of production and conveyance of cotton to market in that county was about four and one-half cents a pound. This estimate, which apparently did not include factors' commissions, demonstrated, according to Finlayson, "what all cotton planters know: that disastrous seasons, or low prices, leave but scanty profits, a continuation of which must inevitably drive them to the rearing of

<sup>1</sup> The average price per pound of cotton produced in the United States from 1841 to 1850, inclusive, ranged from a low of 5.92 cents in 1845 to a high of 11.3 cents in 1850. The average for the ten year period was 7.89 cents. J. B. D. DeBow, *The Industrial Resources, Etc., of the Southern and Western States*, I, 149.

<sup>2</sup> A convention of the cotton planters of Middle Florida, which met at the court house in Tallahassee late in 1850 or early in 1851, recommended the formation of a Cotton Planter's Association, chartered by the states of South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Louisiana, and Florida, with a capitalization of \$20,000,000, which should seek to secure a monopoly of the southern cotton crop and to maintain prices at a level of about 11 cents a pound by withholding surplus cotton from sale. *Ibid.*, 128-134.

factories by which they can convert the raw material into yarn or cloth."<sup>3</sup>

Proximity to the raw cotton was the chief economic advantage of the South, though abundant water power was a close second.<sup>4</sup> The editor of the *Pensacola Gazette*,<sup>5</sup> stated that "when cotton is 6 cents per lb. at Pensacola; it is worth 7 1-2 cents, laid down at Lowell—a difference then of just one-fifth, or twenty cents in the dollar."<sup>6</sup> This difference in the price of the raw material was due to freight and insurance charges and factors' commissions. As the planter repurchased the manufactured product, he would also save the profit of the labor<sup>7</sup> and capital employed in the manufacture, as well as the cost of returning the manufactured product to the plantation.<sup>8</sup> Since "there is no part of the south that has not abundant water power for machinery," the *Gazette* concluded, "let then a cotton factory be established in every county."<sup>9</sup>

J. G. Gamble, of Leon county, also thought that a factory should be erected in every county in the cotton states. These factories, he said, should begin by spinning yarn and should afterwards take up the

<sup>3</sup> "Statement of John Finlayson, of Aucilla, Jefferson county, Florida," in "Report of the Commissioner of Patents for the Year 1854. Agriculture." House Executive Document, No. 59, 33 Cong., 2 Sess., 189.

<sup>4</sup> In writing of southern cotton manufactories during this period, Victor S. Clark, in his *History of Manufactures in the United States*, Vol. I, 1607-1860, 558, states: "The site of most of these enterprises continued to be in the tier of counties along the fall line of rivers, where power and navigation joined, although railroads were already beginning to modify this distribution. The James, the Savannah, the Chattahoochee, the Alabama, and the Tennessee were the principal streams of the cotton states that afforded both power and transportation to distant markets."

<sup>5</sup> Probably written by Benjamin D. Wright.

<sup>6</sup> *Pensacola Gazette*, April 8, 1848.

<sup>7</sup> The *Gazette* contemplated the use of slave labor in manufacturing.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, April 18, 1846.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, Sept. 13, 1845.

business of weaving. Until the mills were prepared for weaving, their yarn could be woven into cloth on the neighboring plantations by slaves unfit for heavy labor, enabling the planter to clothe his hands better at less expense. The difference in cost of raw material to the southern manufacturer and his northern and English competitor, Gamble thought, would shortly result in a southern monopoly of both the home and foreign markets. He argued further that the mills would occupy as many laborers as were engaged in the production of cotton, and that these operatives, by affording a market for bread-stuffs, would enable the southern planter to diversify his crops. He also saw in the proposed cotton mills a means of improving the condition of the southern poor whites, whom he expected to find employment in the mills. Gathered in villages around the mills, he said, they could be supplied with schools and churches.<sup>10</sup>

The *Pensacola Gazette*, which was a Whig journal, saw in southern manufacturing "the true way in which for the south to get rid of what our loco-foco friends call the 'grinding influence of the Tariff'-instead of keeping up a puling cry against northern enterprise and northern industry."<sup>11</sup> "The industry and capital which are really protected," it declared, "belong to no clime exclusively, or-if they do, it is to the south-to the cotton growing region-that they belong."<sup>12</sup>

The bitterness and excitement attendant upon the Compromise of 1850 presented another political motive for manufactories which made their agitation

<sup>10</sup> Gamble presented his ideas in the form of a resolution to the Cotton Planters Convention which met in Macon, Georgia, in October, 1851, but left the convention in displeasure before his resolution had been acted upon. DeBow, *Industrial Resources, Etc.*, I, 137-139.

<sup>11</sup> Sept. 13, 1845.

<sup>12</sup> April 8, 1848.

in the South very popular during the early 50's. It was generally realized that the political domination which the South had long exercised was seriously threatened, and there were many who argued that the only way in which southern political equality could be maintained was through industrial independence. Let the South but take advantage of her cheap raw material and abundant water power by developing cotton manufactories, and the North would leave her undisturbed in her constitutional rights.<sup>13</sup> That this political motive was operative in Florida is shown by the fact that the cotton mill at Monticello was erected by the Southern Rights Manufacturing Association.

Although Florida cotton planters failed to erect a mill in every cotton producing county, they did experiment with the manufacture of cotton. There were three mills erected in Florida before the Civil War.<sup>14</sup> The first of these was at Arcadia,<sup>15</sup> near

<sup>13</sup> Arthur Charles Cole, *The Whig Party in the South*, 209.

<sup>14</sup> R. W. Williams, Joseph Clisby, R. A. Shine, Robert Lyon, A. E. Maxwell, Bryan Croom, Edward Houston, and Thomas Randall composed a committee appointed at a meeting in Tallahassee on February 15, 1850, to investigate the feasibility of a cotton factory for Tallahassee, but nothing came of the project. Tallahassee *Sentinel*, Feb. 19, 1850.

DeBow's *Compendium of the Seventh Census*, 180, gives data on cotton manufacturing in Florida in 1850 which do not correspond with data from other sources concerning the Arcadia factory, the only mill recorded as being in operation at that date. The number of establishments to which the figures apply unfortunately is not given. The capitalization of \$80,000 is too high for the Arcadia factory, and the average monthly wages paid to 93 male and female employees would not apply to a factory using slave labor. There seems to be no satisfactory explanation of these data.

<sup>15</sup> Arcadia seems to have been a flourishing little place with a lumber mill, pail factory, and experimental silk cocoonery, as well as a cotton factory. Between 1838 and August, 1840, a private railroad, three miles long, was constructed to run between Arcadia and the Black Water river. The railroad was taken up before 1852.

Milton, in West Florida, while the other two were at Monticello and Madison in Middle Florida.<sup>16</sup>

The Escambia Manufacturing Company was incorporated by act of the legislative council of February 14, 1835, for "the manufacture of Cotton, Wool, and other materials, into thread, yarn, or cloth, or other manufactures of like character, and the building and erection of works and machinery necessary to carry on the operations of such machinery." A capital stock of \$30,000, which might be increased to \$60,000, with shares of \$500 each, was authorized. The incorporators were Joseph Forsyth, A. P. Simpson, Ezekial E. Simpson, George Willis, and Henry Ahrens.<sup>17</sup> The name of the company was changed in 1845 to the Arcadia Manufacturing Company and the value of the shares was reduced to \$100.<sup>18</sup> It is probable that an act of 1848 exempting the shares and capital stock of manufacturing companies from taxation<sup>19</sup> was passed in the interest of the Arcadia Company, for it was introduced into the Senate by Charles A. Tweed, of Santa Rosa county.<sup>20</sup>

The legal basis of the other two companies is uncertain. In 1852 the legislature overcame its hostility to corporations so far as to pass a general law for the incorporation of manufacturing companies. In conformity with the Constitution of 1838, one-half

<sup>16</sup> The Tallahassee *Floridian* of Dec. 3, 1853, speaking of the Monticello mill, states that this was "the third manufacturing enterprise in Middle Florida" that presented itself for southern support. The Madison mill was the second enterprise referred to, and it is possible that the other one was a shoe factory, also located at Madison. This factory, situated ten miles west of Madison, employed 26 slaves in the manufacture of some 11,000 pairs of shoes annually, which were sold in Middle Florida. The factory also made wagon and buggy harness and other leather goods required on plantations.

<sup>17</sup> Florida *Session Laws, 1835, 286-87.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 1845, 139.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 1848, 24.

<sup>20</sup> Florida Senate *Journal, 1848, 111.*

of the incorporators were required to be residents of Florida,<sup>21</sup> and the "trustees" in whom the management of such corporations was vested had all to be residents of the state.<sup>22</sup> The Southern Rights Manufacturing Association certainly was a stock-company, though the names of only two of the stockholders, John Finlayson and General William Bailey, both of Jefferson county, are known.<sup>23</sup> The Association was not incorporated by special act, but it may have been incorporated under the Act of 1852. The Madison mill almost certainly was the private enterprise of Captain N. P. Willard.

Although the Escambia Manufacturing Company was chartered in 1835, it does not seem to have begun operations until 1845, the year in which it was reorganized. The *Pensacola Gazette* of September 13, 1845, stated that the factory building was then under construction, machinery had been ordered from the North, and manufacturing was expected to begin by January 1. The machinery did not arrive until the middle of December, however, and it was April before the factory actually was in operation. The mill, which was run by water power, was equipped to produce 1,000 yards of heavy cotton cloth a day. The installation of additional machinery later increased its production to 1,300 yards a day. In order to avoid possible labor troubles with white operatives, the owners purchased some 100 negro slaves in Virginia, who operated the mill under the supervision of three white men.<sup>24</sup> The factory was reported to be in a flourishing condition

<sup>21</sup> F. N. Thorpe, ed., *The Federal and State Constitutions, etc.*, House Document No. 357, 59 Cong., 2 Sess., 678.

<sup>22</sup> *Florida Session Laws*, 1852, 62-65.

<sup>23</sup> William Bailey to John Finlayson, November 3, 1854; MS in private possession.

<sup>24</sup> *Pensacola Gazette*, Dec. 13, 1845; April 8 and 18, Oct. 10, 1846; March 17, 1849. *St. Augustine Ancient City*, Jan. 5, 1840.

as late as July, 1851,<sup>25</sup> but it was closed before the beginning of the Civil War.

Construction of both the Madison and Monticello mills was begun in 1851. Willard's mill, which was devoted entirely to the spinning of yarn, was ready for production by December, 1852.<sup>26</sup> It was erected at a cost of \$30,000 and had 1,000 spindles capable of turning out 1,000 pounds of twist yarn a day. Captain Willard employed in his mill 30 white boys and girls between the ages of 10 and 18 years, whose wages averaged from \$8.00 to \$15.00 a month. A large part of his output was consumed locally, but he shipped his surplus to New York where his product was said to command a good price. A visitor to the mill in December, 1853, reported that it had "communicated new life to the village by creating a better market for small farmers, who raise from one to a dozen bags of cotton, and who have other articles, the produce of their farms, for sale."<sup>27</sup> Captain Willard operated his mill until February 5, 1857, when it was destroyed by fire. He suffered a total loss, since he had allowed his insurance policy to expire a few days before the fire, and the white families which had come to rely on the mill for their livelihood were reported to be "in a very destitute condition."<sup>28</sup>

The owners of the Monticello mill had foreseen the danger, and sought to guard against the possibility of a disaster such as that which overtook the Madison enterprise. The factory, located on the state road to Alligator about a mile and a quarter east of Monticello, was "of brick, and made fire proof as near as may be, covered with tin, and all wood

<sup>25</sup> Tallahassee *Sentinel*, July 15, 1851.

<sup>26</sup> Tallahassee *Floridian*, Dec. 18, 1852.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, Dec. 3, 1853.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, Feb. 14, 1857.



work painted with fire proof paint.“<sup>29</sup> The building, three stories and an attic, was 75 by 40 feet, and the smoke stack, standing on an independent base, was 56 feet high, “a model in miniature of the Bunker Hill Monument.” All material and labor for erecting the mill were furnished locally, but it was necessary to send North for machinery and an experienced superintendent. A Mr. Moran, of Wilmington, Delaware, was employed as superintendent, while the machinery was purchased in Patterson, New Jersey. Motive power was furnished by a wood-burning 35 horse-power steam engine purchased in Jersey City. The mill was surrounded by cottages built by the Company for the operatives, who, presumably, were white.<sup>30</sup>

The mill was completed by December, 1853.<sup>31</sup> It was designed for the manufacture of both yarn and cloth and was equipped with 1,500 spindles and 50 looms, which were expected to manufacture 400,000 pounds of cotton into 600,000 yards of osnaburg and 100,000 pounds of yarn annually.<sup>32</sup> By May, 1856, the factory had installed machinery for the manufacture of wool and had added wool yarn and plain wool kersey to its products. It was preparing also to manufacture twilled cloth.

The new machinery inspired some one connected with the mill to the following rhymed effusion which is amusingly different from the stereotyped advertisements commonly found in the papers of the period.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, Dec. 24, 1853.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, Dec. 24, 1853; April 1, 1854.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, Dec. 3, 1853.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, Dec. 24, 1853.

**To Wool Growers  
Florida and Georgia**

A FACTORY, in want of wool,  
To feed its Burr extracting 'tool',  
Would ask the *Farmers* far and near  
To send their *Tangled fleeces here*.  
If, free from dirt, the wool they wash,  
'Twill card, spin, weave it, in a flash,  
Near Monticello this is done,  
Where, Cotton warp and Filling's spun.  
Where Osnaburg, (that none excels)  
Once seen to buy, at once compels.  
A list of prices here we add,  
Send on your wool and make us glad.  
Bold, for the *rights of Southern men*,  
This 'FACTORY' still *leads the Van*,  
In *quality*, there's few can dare,<sup>33</sup>  
(In fabric) with it to compare.<sup>33</sup>

The factory charged a cash fee to planters who wished to have their cotton and wool manufactured for their own use. It also was willing to take one half of the cloth manufactured in payment for the service, or wool at the market price. It would accept cotton in payment only when the market price was 8 cents or less. Yarn and cloth which were not manufactured on these terms or sold locally were shipped as far afield as New York, New Orleans, and Texas.<sup>34</sup>

The factory did not prosper, partly because of poor management and partly because of a lack of local support. As General Bailey explained several years later, there was "no sale for yarns or osnaburgs of consequence, as the merchants could buy yarns and osnaburgs cheaper in New York-and while buying other goods would lay in a supply of

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, May 3, 1856.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, May 3, 1856.

those goods, buy cotton, send it on [to New York], and pay there."<sup>35</sup> When the debts of the Company had mounted to \$20,000 the stockholders decided to close the mill. General Bailey, however, "disliked to see it stopped," and agreed to pay the debts of the Company and to give the stockholders "a certain amount" for their holdings. He put an agent in charge and carried on the business at a loss for two years, until the outbreak of the Civil War created a demand for its products. At that time the mill was employing 40 men and 25 women in the manufacture of products of an annual value of \$40,000.<sup>36</sup>

The shortage of yarn and cloth was felt in Florida early in the war. In December, 1862, the legislature appropriated \$20,000 for the purchase abroad of cotton and wool cards to be distributed free to the poor in each county.<sup>37</sup> This gesture toward encouraging home manufacturing apparently came to nothing, for in December, 1864, the legislature passed an act requiring the Governor to purchase cotton cards for free distribution, as specified in the Act of 1862. This time it appropriated \$50,000 for the purpose.<sup>38</sup> It is probable that the Governor found it impossible to bring the cards in past the Union blockade.

Instead of taking advantage of the situation to recoup his losses, General Bailey kept his prices down and devoted the output of the factory to supplying the needs of Florida troops and to alleviating the distress of poor families. He sent bales of yarn and cloth to "the most interior counties" to be distributed by the county commissioners to the neediest persons. He estimated! in June, 1864, that he had

<sup>35</sup> Bailey to John Milton, June 15, 1864, *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* [cited hereafter as O. R.], Series IV, Vol. III, 500.

<sup>36</sup> Census of the United States, 1860. Manufacturing. 58.

<sup>37</sup> *Florida Session Laws, 1862*, 65.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 1864, 27.

forgone profits of at least \$300,000 by pursuing this policy,<sup>39</sup> and Governor John Milton stated at the same time that the state could purchase supplies from the mill at 50 per cent less than the prevailing prices.<sup>40</sup>

The legislature, recognizing the value of the mill to the state and fearing that its efficiency might be impaired by an amendment to the Confederate Conscription Act of April, 1862, in 1863 urged the Florida representatives in the Confederate Congress to endeavor "to have exempted [from conscription] the workmen and persons employed in the Jefferson Manufacturing Company, their services being indispensable in conducting this useful and important work."<sup>41</sup> The same legislature expressed the gratitude of the people of Florida to General Bailey "for the liberal and enlightened manner in which he is dispensing his means, and [the] zeal and efficiency with which he supports the cause in which we are engaged."<sup>42</sup> Governor Milton, too, wrote in 1864 that Bailey was "perhaps not only the wealthiest man in this State, but one of the most wealthy and patriotic and generous gentlemen in the Confederate States."<sup>43</sup>

General Bailey's control of his mill was threatened in the summer of 1864, when the Commissary Department of the Confederate government attempted to commandeer it for the supply of Confederate troops. In the early years of the war it had been necessary for each state to equip its own soldiers, but it had been intended that the central government should assume that function as soon as its supply department could be organized. The states were not

<sup>39</sup> Bailey to Milton, June 15, 1864, O. R., Series IV, Vol III, 500.

<sup>40</sup> Milton to James A. Seddon, June 17, 1864, *ibid.*, 499.

<sup>41</sup> Florida *Session Laws*, 1863, 59.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>43</sup> Milton to Seddon, June 17, 1864, O. R., Series IV, Vol. III. 499.

willing to relinquish the business of supplying their troops when the Confederate government was ready for the task, since each feared that its soldiers would fare worse if the limited supplies were distributed by a common agent. Governor Milton, who throughout the war evidenced the greatest willingness to co-operate with the Confederate government, saw the value of a central supply system, but the selfish policy of monopolizing their resources, pursued by the neighboring states of North Carolina, Georgia, and Alabama, compelled him to insist that the operation of the Monticello mill be left in local hands.<sup>44</sup> The fine spirit which Milton had shown in relation to other potential grounds for conflict between the state and the Confederacy inclined the Confederate Secretary of War to accede to his request, and Bailey retained control of his mill to the close of the war.<sup>45</sup>

The correspondence between Milton and the Confederate authorities relative to the control of the mill is the last positive evidence we have concerning it. There remains a bit of negative evidence. A list of all the states in the United States in which there were cotton manufactories in 1868 does not include Florida.<sup>46</sup> A similar list of southern states for 1869 also fails to mention Florida.<sup>47</sup> From this it seems safe to conclude that a very minor result of the downfall of the Confederacy was the closing of the little Florida cotton factory whose motto had been "Southern Rights."

The failure of the southern states to establish

<sup>44</sup> Frank Lawrence Owsley, *State Rights in the Confederacy*, 115. For a full discussion of the problem of military supplies and the conflict between state and Confederate authorities concerning it, see *ibid.*, 110-27.

<sup>45</sup> Endorsement of James A. Seddon on Milton's letter of June 17, 1864, *O. R.*, Series IV, Vol. III, 449.

<sup>46</sup> *Report of the Commissioner of Agriculture for the Year 1868*, 23.  
<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 1869, 9, 24.

their independence cannot be held responsible, however, for the failure of cotton manufacturing in Florida. Indeed, it is probable that the Civil War and the extraordinary demands of a war-time economy lengthened the life of the Monticello mill by several years. The reasons for the failure of these ventures is to be found rather in the lack of water power and the inefficiency of a planter-management which made competition with northern mills impossible, and in the difficulty of breaking through the well established North-South channels of trade in order to find a local market for their products.