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ARCADIA AND BAGDAD: INDUSTRIAL PARKS OF ANTEBELLUM FLORIDA

by BRIAN RUCKER

INDUSTRIAL development in antebellum Florida was rare; the new state's economy was based primarily on agriculture, as were the other southern states. Two exceptions, however, are the interconnected industrial complexes of Arcadia and Bagdad, located in northwest Florida approximately twenty-five miles from Pensacola. Arcadia had its origins in 1817 and operated as an industrial site until 1855. Bagdad began in 1840 and became one of the world's largest producers and exporters of yellow pine lumber until its lumber mill closed in 1939.

The Spanish realized the commercial value of Florida's pine forest as early as 1743 when they shipped several masts of yellow pine to Cuba.¹ Timber was also exported by the British, and during the second Spanish era timber took on an increasing importance in west Florida's economy.²

In 1817, four years before the American acquisition of Florida, Juan de la Rua made the first attempt at beginning an industry on what is now the Arcadia site. De la Rua was born in Martinique in 1789, and came to Pensacola when his family fled from a slave uprising in 1791. The de la Ruas were prominent members of the Pensacola community, and in 1810 Juan married Margarita Bonifay, a member of another prosperous and important family in the area.³ In 1817, Juan de la Rua received

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1. William Gober, "Lumbering in Florida," *Southern Lumberman* (December 1956), 104.
2. C. N. Howard, "Some Economic Aspects of British West Florida, 1763-1768," *Journal of Southern History* 6 (May 1940), 217; Philip Keyes Yonge, "The Lumber Industry of West Florida," Florida Historical Society, *Makers of America*, 4 vols. (Atlanta, 1909-1911), I, 72.
3. William S. Coker and G. Douglas Inglis, *The Spanish Censuses of Pensacola, 1784-1820: A Genealogical Guide to Spanish Pensacola* (Pensacola, 1980), 107; Jack D. L. Holmes, "Pensacola Settlers, 1781-1821," unpublished mss., item no. 224, 64-65, West Florida Collection, John C. Pace Library, University of West Florida, Pensacola; Celia Myrover Robinson, *The Crown Jewel: Fabulous Families of Old Pensacola* (Pensacola, 1948), 50-56.

a large Spanish land grant— 800 arpents— located three miles up Pond Creek in present-day Santa Rosa County. Pond Creek empties into Blackwater River approximately twenty-five miles northeast of Pensacola. Pond Creek, actually a small river, is navigable for two miles. De la Rua's grant, one mile farther, was located in a small valley at a spot where the stream flows swiftly through a narrow channel. The area surrounding the site consisted of abundant stands of virgin pine, the physical makeup of the stream created an ideal place to establish a waterpowered sawmill, and it was not far from the port of Pensacola.⁴

From 1817 to 1819, de la Rua cleared the land and made necessary improvements.⁵ However, his interest in a sawmill seemed to be only an incidental concern. De la Rua was a colonel in the Spanish army, owned much land in the area, and was financially involved in a number of Pensacola businesses. In 1822, he was elected mayor of Pensacola, and in the same year his house at Gull Point on Escambia Bay served as the meeting site of the first legislative council of territorial Florida.⁶ A yellow fever epidemic struck, killing two delegates and forcing the council to abandon de la Rua's home.⁷ He was chosen to replace one of the members, and he was elected a member of the territorial council again in 1824 and 1825.⁸ In 1825 de la Rua also served on the Pensacola city council as alderman, and two years later was appointed colonel of the Florida Militia's First Regiment.⁹

Though de la Rua began work at the mill site, the development of his Pond Creek land grant was hampered by his diverse interests and commitments. Labor problems also arose. Hostile bands of Indians in the area prevented him from maintaining dependable labor.¹⁰ De la Rua apparently lost interest in his

4. *American State Papers*, 38 vols. (Washington, DC, 1832-1861), *Public Lands*, IV, 181. An arpent is equal to approximately 0.85 of an acre. Pond Creek was earlier known under different names (Black Water Creek, Clear Water Creek).

5. *Ibid.*

6. Robinson, *Crown Jewel*, 51-55.

7. Charlton W. Tebeau, *A History of Florida* (Coral Gables, 1971), 122.

8. Clarence Edwin Carter, ed., *Territorial Papers of the United States: The Territory of Florida, 1821-1824*, 28 vols. (Washington, DC, 1934-1975), XXII, 489-90; Robinson, *Crown Jewel*, 54.

9. Carter, *Territorial Papers*, XXIII, 781; Holmes, "Pensacola Settlers," 65.

10. Martin Luther King, *History of Santa Rosa County: A King's Country* (N.P. 1972), 28. These Indians were probably disorganized groups of Red Sticks

plans for this site, and instead of lumber, he increasingly became involved with the production of bricks. His wife's family was in the brickmaking business, and by 1828, de la Rua was shipping approximately 110,000 bricks a year to New Orleans.¹¹ In that same year, he sold his Pond Creek land grant to Joseph Forsyth.¹²

Little is known about Joseph Forsyth's early life. Born in Connecticut in 1802, he and his family later lived in New Orleans before settling in Pensacola by the early 1820s. Evidence indicates that his father was captain of a vessel which ran regularly between Pensacola and New Orleans. In 1824 Joseph Forsyth established his own general goods store in Pensacola. Four years later he purchased de la Rua's Pond Creek tract.¹³

Forsyth erected a large dam across Pond Creek to provide waterpower for a sawmill. However, his capital was limited, and there was still a shortage of laborers because of the fear of In-

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- migrating from southern Alabama into Florida. Pensacola newspapers of the 1820s and 1830s often mention Indians in the area, along with the fears and worries of local white inhabitants. For further information on the Indians in northwest Florida during this time period, see Jane E. Dysart, "Another Road to Disappearance: Assimilation of Creek Indians in Pensacola, Florida, During the Nineteenth Century," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 61 (July 1982), 37-48, and Tebeau, *History of Florida*, 151-70.
11. William C. Lazarus, "A Study of Dated Bricks in the Vicinity of Pensacola, Fla.," *Florida Anthropologist* 18 (September 1965), 69-84; James Knox Polk, "Pensacola Commerce and Industry 1821-1860" (master's thesis, University of West Florida, 1971), 82; Robinson, *Crown Jewel*, 51; Leora M. Sutton, *Mariana Bonifay* (Pensacola, 1964), 10-16.
 12. Escambia County, *Escambia County Deed Book B*, Escambia County Courthouse, Pensacola, 65; C. H. Overman, "After 111 Years, Bagdad Reaches the End," *The Southern Lumber Journal*, Part 1 (March 1939), 16.
 13. U.S. Census Office, *Florida Census, 1850: Santa Rosa County* (Jacksonville, 1973), 13 (hereinafter cited as *Florida Census, 1850*); Overman, "Bagdad Reaches the End," 16; *Pensacola Gazette*, September 4, 1824, June 10, 1848, July 8, 1848; Carter, *Territorial Papers*, XXII, 740; tombstone inscription of James Forsyth, Jr., St. Michael's Cemetery, Pensacola; United States Bureau of the Census, Third Census: 1810, manuscript returns for New London County, CT, on microfilm at the Florida State Archives, Tallahassee, Florida; United States Bureau of the Census, Population Schedules, Fifth Census: 1830, manuscript returns for Escambia County; United States Bureau of the Census Population Schedules, Sixth Census: 1840, manuscript returns for Escambia County, on microfilm at the Robert Manning Strozier Library, Florida State University, Tallahassee, Florida. Local tradition has it that Joseph Forsyth killed a man in New Orleans and fled to Pensacola around 1825; he then supposedly secured a job at John Hunt's brickyard on Blackwater Bay. However, there is no substantial evidence to verify this background.

dians in the area. Fortunately Ezekiel E. Simpson and Andrew P. Simpson joined him as partners and provided the needed capital.¹⁴

The Simpson family came to Florida from South Carolina around 1814. John Simpson built a mill on Simpson River at the head of Escambia Bay around 1820. When he died in 1825, the waterpowered sawmill, known as Woodbine, was taken over by his two sons, John and James Simpson. Two other sons, Ezekiel and Andrew, entered into partnership with Forsyth in 1830, and together with Forsyth, they completed the Pond Creek mill.¹⁵ The mill site was named Arcadia. A new channel for the creek was excavated, and the mill machinery was set into place. A dam was built across the original streambed, diverting the water into the new channel and through the newly-constructed waterwheel of the sawmill. The completed dam created a large holding pond for the logs which flowed downstream. The dam extended nearly a quarter of a mile across the small valley. Constructed from earth and slabs of local ironstone, it stood approximately fifteen feet high. The large holding pond was probably the origin of Pond Creek's name.¹⁶

To the north, narrow ditches were dug which extended as far as eighteen miles. These straight ditches, approximately three feet wide, were lined with wood and served as log flumes. The lumbermen working in the thick virgin woods to the north chopped down the pines, trimmed the branches, and placed the logs into the flume where the natural water flow took them to the Arcadia holding pond. Dogs, or short metal chains, were often attached to the logs as they were placed in the flume. This process created a single file chain of logs, sometimes extending over a mile in length, which descended quickly to the mill site. After the logs were taken from the holding pond, the water-

14. Overman, "Bagdad Reaches the End," 16.

15. *American State Papers*, IV, 182; *Escambia County Deed Book B*, 303; *ibid.*; *Pensacola Gazette*, October 22, 1825, January 9, 1836, March 28, 1846; Simpson Family genealogical file collection, in possession of Brian Rucker, Tallahassee. Ezekiel and James Simpson were the grandsons of the Revolutionary War hero, General Andrew Pickens, for whom Fort Pickens on Pensacola Bay is named. The mill site at Woodbine is approximately five miles west of the Pond Creek tract.

16. Personal field trips to the Arcadia mill site with local historian Warren Weekes, December 30, 1986, and December 29-30, 1987. After the site was abandoned in the mid 1800s, dense vegetation quickly covered it. Mr. Weekes rediscovered the site in the early 1960s.



Ezekiel E. Simpson, ca. 1860. Courtesy of Florida State Archives, Tallahassee.

powered saws transformed them into lumber. The lumber was then taken by water to Pensacola where it was shipped to New Orleans and other Gulf coast ports.¹⁷

17. Ibid. Forsyth and Simpson purchased a number of slaves at this time to do much of the work at the mill. See Escambia County, *Escambia County Deed Book C*, 475.

The early 1830s was a period of intense development along the shores of Escambia and Blackwater bays, and the Forsyth and Simpson Company is reflective of this increased activity. The Arcadia mill had at least two saws by 1835 to supply the increasing demand for lumber.¹⁸ The company, however, was considering diversification, and was interested in establishing a cotton mill on this property. Many Southerners argued that the region should not be sending its cotton to the New England textile mills; cotton factories should be located near the cotton plantations.¹⁹ Southern Alabama and Georgia were beginning to produce large amounts of cotton, and there was an increase in cotton production in northwest Florida. Forsyth and the Simpson brothers saw the Arcadia site as a good location for a cotton mill.

They were further encouraged by the talk of a possible railroad connecting Pensacola with Columbus, Georgia. Pensacola's fine harbor was of little commercial value without a navigable river to provide access to the interior. A railroad would be invaluable for Pensacola's growth and commercial development. Plans for a Pensacola-Columbus railroad began in December 1833. Florida and Alabama charters were granted for the railroad in 1834, authorizing the construction of a line from Columbus to Pensacola.²⁰

The proposed route for the railroad no doubt delighted Forsyth and his associates; the route would place it only a few miles from Arcadia.²¹ With the implementation of such a railroad, Arcadia's products would no longer be limited strictly to water transportation. The proposal for the railroad added impetus to the establishment of a cotton mill at Arcadia. Shipments of cotton from Georgia and Alabama could be delivered to Arcadia by rail, spun into cloth, and then shipped back north. Arcadia could thus serve customers from both land and sea. It is not surprising then for Joseph Forsyth, as one of the commissioners,

18. *Pensacola Gazette*, May 9, 1835.

19. Richard W. Griffin, "The Cotton Mill Campaign in Florida, 1828-1863," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 40 (January 1962), 261-63.

20. Dorothy Dodd, "Railroad Projects in Territorial Florida" (master's thesis, Florida State College for Women, 1929), 45-46.

21. *Banks of Pensacola and Alabama, Georgia, and Florida Railroad Company Charters* (New York, 1835), n.p.

to take stock subscriptions for the railroad in 1834.²² The following year work began on the line under the name of the Alabama, Florida, and Georgia Railroad Company.²³

In 1833, Forsyth began organizing plans for a cotton mill at Arcadia. The Florida territorial legislature incorporated the Escambia Manufacturing Company which consisted of Joseph Forsyth, Andrew P. Simpson, Ezekiel E. Simpson, George Willis, and Henry Ahrens. The company was allowed a capital stock of \$60,000, and the purpose of the corporation was 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 manufactory."²⁴

At the same time, measures were being taken to improve the transportation network at the Arcadia site. Forsyth, Ezekiel Simpson, and Timothy Twitchell formed the Pond Creek and Blackwater River Canal Company, with a capital stock of \$10,000, for the purpose of constructing a canal to connect Pond Creek with Blackwater River.²⁵ The canal was to be dug east to west across a swampy piece of land a short distance north of Pond Creek's lower course.²⁶ Not only would this canal aid in the shipping of cotton and textiles in the future, but it would also aid in the transportation of lumber to the river.

Work on these two projects was slow, but the high production at the Arcadia sawmill provided the necessary capital. Approximately 3,000 feet of lumber a week were being shipped by the Forsyth and Simpson Company in 1836.²⁷ The firm also added a planing and lathing machine and a gristmill to their operation.²⁸ However, the financial panic in 1837 probably re-

22. Dodd, "Railroad Projects in Territorial Florida," 46, 63. Jackson Morton, John Hunt, and Henry Hyer were also listed as commissioners. Morton owned a local brickyard, Hunt operated a nearby sawmill and brickyard, and Henry Hyer later invested in the Arcadia Manufacturing Company.

23. *Ibid.*, 46-47.

24. Florida, *Laws of the Territory of Florida*, 1835, 286-87. George Willis and Henry Ahrens were prominent Pensacola businessmen who were mentioned frequently in the *Pensacola Gazette* during the 1830s.

25. Florida, *Laws of the Territory of Florida*, 1835, 291-93.

26. Carter, *Territorial Papers*, XXV, 85-86.

27. *Pensacola Gazette*, April 30, 1836.

28. *Ibid.*, November 17, 1838.

tarded the development of the company's enterprises, especially the plans for a textile mill.²⁹

In 1838 plans for the canal at Arcadia were also cancelled, and the name of the canal company was changed to the Arcadia Railroad Company.³⁰ This railroad, one of the first in territorial Florida, was designed to connect Arcadia with the mouth of Pond Creek at Blackwater River.³¹ A three-mile route along the west bank of Pond Creek was developed and much grading was done. At some places, solid rock had to be removed to facilitate the construction. The work was completed, and the Arcadia Railroad was in operation by August 1840.³² The wooden rails were covered with flat strips of iron, and the cars were pulled by mules.³³ Though primitive, it proved useful in transporting the lumber from Arcadia to Blackwater River.

The Arcadia complex was also developing other industries which could utilize the railroad. As early as 1826, the land around the Arcadia mill site was being used for its outcroppings of ironstone. The harbor defense forts being constructed around Pensacola Bay by the federal government called for foundation stone, and a number of quarries were begun at Arcadia.³⁴ By 1841, the Arcadia stone quarries had furnished the Pensacola Navy Yard with nearly \$30,000 worth of ironstone.³⁵ The Pensacola Wharf Company also used Arcadia's stone, paying Forsyth over \$3,000 for foundation materials.³⁶

Also located at Arcadia were the business investments of Timothy Twitchell. A New Hampshire native, Twitchell had arrived in northwest Florida in the early 1820s.³⁷ In 1830 he purchased a quarter of the Arcadia tract to set up his own enterprises.³⁸ He built a sawmill and a shingle mill, and then a few

29. Polk, "Pensacola Commerce and Industry, 1821-1860," 117.

30. There is little to indicate whether or not any work was done on the proposed canal. Canal Street, in the nearby city of Milton, was supposedly given its name because it was built to lead to this canal.

31. Florida, *Laws of the Territory of Florida, 1838*, 47-48.

32. *Pensacola Gazette*, August 1, 1840.

33. King, *History of Santa Rosa County*, 28; Overman, "Bagdad Reaches the End," 16.

34. Ernest F. Dibble, *Ante-Bellum Pensacola and the Military Presence* (Pensacola, 1974), 12, 23-24; *Pensacola Gazette*, June 30, 1827.

35. *Pensacola Gazette*, September 25, 1841.

36. *Ibid.*, July 31, 1830.

37. *Florida Census, 1850*, 12; *Pensacola Floridian*, September 8, 1821.

38. Santa Rosa County; *Santa Rosa County Deed Book A-1* (Santa Rosa County Courthouse, Milton), 12-13. Twitchell had been appointed judge of the Escambia County Court in 1825. See Carter, *Territorial Papers*, XXIII, 1005.

years later he established the Arcadia Pail Factory.³⁹ Using juniper wood for his buckets, Twitchell achieved a good reputation for his quality work. The editor of the *Pensacola Gazette* made note of the factory's operation: "The wood for half a dozen pails was put into the machine in blocks a foot long— the staves were sawed out, shaped, tongued and grooved, adjusted and smoothed, the bottoms made and inserted, and the hoops and bales prepared and adjusted— all by machinery, and the whole occupying scarcely half an hour."⁴⁰

Twitchell was involved in both the Arcadia canal and railroad projects. He was also interested in horticulture; at his Arcadia residence he raised grapes, figs, quinces, peaches, and nectarines. Twitchell experimented with silk culture and had eight acres planted in mulberry trees, with approximately 400,000 silkworms feeding upon the trees. An experimental cocoonery was erected, two stories tall and 100 feet long, in anticipation of a great silk boom.⁴¹

Growth and development at the Arcadia complex was slowed when the Alabama, Florida, and Georgia Railroad failed. Work began on the project in 1835-1836, but the Panic of 1837 ended the land speculation boom in the Pensacola area. The Bank of Pensacola, which was heavily involved in the interstate project, was forced to close in June 1837. The Alabama, Florida, and Georgia Railroad proved to be an expensive failure, and in 1838 the project was abandoned. Twenty-five miles of grading had been completed, and some trestles had been erected by the time the project was abandoned. The route of the railroad, only a few miles from Arcadia, would have proved an important boon to the Arcadia complex.⁴²

By 1840 Arcadia was a prosperous and growing community, but little if any work had been done on the proposed cotton textile mill. A reason for this delay seems to be the Forsyth and Simpson Company's preoccupation with the timber industry. In 1840 the partners of this firm included Joseph Forsyth, Ezekiel E. Simpson, James E. Simpson, and Benjamin Overman.⁴³ It

39. *Pensacola Gazette*, November 17, 1838, December 31, 1842.

40. *Ibid.*, December 31, 1842.

41. *Ibid.*, September 25, 1841. Twitchell left Arcadia in 1851 because of his brother's death in the North. *Ibid.*, January 11, 1851.

42. Dodd, "Railroad Projects in Territorial Florida," 47-59; Sidney Walter Martin, *Florida During the Territorial Days* (Athens, 1944), 142-43.

43. Overman, "Bagdad Reaches the End," 16.

was at this time that Forsyth decided to move his timber operations from Arcadia to Blackwater River. The three-mile Arcadia railroad had proved to be an inadequate form of transportation for heavy loads of lumber. The rails were subject to wear, and the mule power was not dependable. Forsyth viewed the southern terminus of the railroad, where Pond Creek enters Blackwater River, as an ideal location for a new sawmill. It was here that the company had their lumber beds and docking facilities. Such a move would also allow modernization through the use of efficient steam engines instead of waterpower. Construction began at the new site, and Ezekiel Simpson recruited a number of skilled northern workers to aid in establishing the new mill.⁴⁴

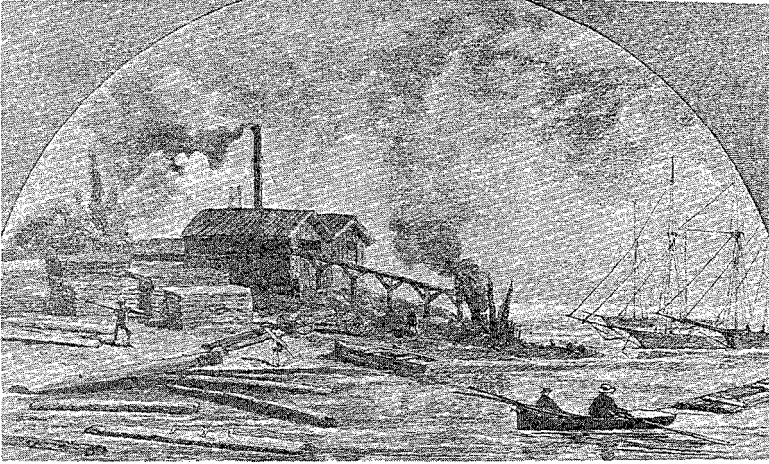
Forsyth named the new mill site Bagdad, perhaps because it was located at the confluence of Pond Creek and Blackwater River, just as the Middle East city was situated between two large rivers of the region.⁴⁵ Problems, however, soon arose. There was no waterpower at Bagdad as there was at Arcadia, and the proposed use of steam for driving the mill was complicated by the brackish water near the site. The salt content of the water would have quickly destroyed any steam boilers, and the small freshwater surface springs were not capable of providing sufficient water. An ingenious engineering feat solved the problem. A dam was constructed to hold water from several springheads a mile and one-half above the site. The dam furnished power to an overshot waterwheel which forced the water from the dam to Bagdad. The pipes used were wooden logs, each about twenty feet long. Four-inch holes were bored lengthwise through the center of the logs, and the logs were then fastened together by iron nipples and ferrules.⁴⁶ The fresh water thus provided enabled Forsyth and his associates to establish a steam sawmill at Bagdad. By 1842 the company was producing over \$100,000 worth of lumber a year.⁴⁷

44. Ibid. James Creary of New York and R. M. Bushnell of Connecticut were brought to Florida by E. E. Simpson. Other important individuals brought into the company during this time period were Benjamin Overman of North Carolina and Benjamin W. Thompson of Kentucky.

45. King, *History of Santa Rosa County*, 27.

46. Ibid., 28-29; Overman, "Bagdad Reaches the End," 16. Nipples are pipe couplings consisting of short pieces of threaded tubing. Ferrules are short tubes or bushings designed for tightening joints between pipes.

47. *Pensacola Gazette*, September 3, 1842.



“A Saw-mill at Bagdad,” a woodcut engraving from *Lippincott’s Magazine* 29 (February 1882). Photograph is courtesy of John C. Pace Library, University of West Florida, Pensacola.

With the move to Bagdad, the mill facilities at Arcadia were temporarily abandoned. Forsyth and his partners planned to use the Arcadia waterpowered mill site for their long delayed cotton mill. In 1845 work on the mill began. Even though cotton prices fell extremely low that same year, the Arcadia cotton mill project was enthusiastically pursued.⁴⁸ The name of the Escambia Manufacturing Company was officially changed to the Arcadia Manufacturing Company, and the value of the shares was reduced to \$100.⁴⁹

In September 1845, a two-story building, ninety-four by thirty-eight feet, was constructed to house the textile equipment, and manufacturing was expected to begin by January 1846. One of the owners traveled to Virginia to buy slaves for the labor

48. Griffin, “The Cotton Mill Campaign in Florida,” 264.

49. Florida, *Laws of the Slate of Florida*, 1845, 139. The six subscribers at this time were Joseph Forsyth, E. E. Simpson, William A. Jones, Henry Hyer, Henry Ahrens, and George Willis. Each held ten shares worth \$500 apiece. See *Escambia County Circuit Court Records, Arcadia Manufacturing Company v. George Willis*, File X-1327, Escambia County Courthouse, Pensacola. In 1842, both Arcadia and Bagdad came under the jurisdiction of Santa Rosa County, newly-formed from the eastern portion of Escambia County. Many of the early records and documents relating to Arcadia and Bagdad were destroyed when the Santa Rosa County courthouse burned in 1869.

force; it was intended that the cotton mill would be operated by slave labor, particularly young females.⁵⁰ The textile machinery arrived from Rhode Island in December 1845, but it was not until the following April that the factory was in full operation. By May 1846, cloth was being shipped to New Orleans.⁵¹

The Arcadia Manufacturing Company elicited favorable response locally and even received attention throughout the South.⁵² Attempts at industrialization in the South were rare, but the editor of the *Pensacola Gazette* realized the worth of such projects. It was apparent to him that the South suffered from its colonial status as a producer of raw materials and a buyer of finished products.⁵³ The optimistic editorialist saw the Arcadia cotton factory as an effort to liberate the South from its dependence on the North: "The time is fast coming when the slumbering south will be awakened to the unwelcome truth, that she must manufacture her own clothes and raise her own provisions, or her people must become the bond slaves of the north and the west."⁵⁴

Others were less enthusiastic about the growth of a southern industrial system. One editorialist of a Tallahassee paper warned his readers that the promotion of industry was merely a plot of northern protectionists to win adherents for their unfair tariff views in the South. The editor was especially fearful of the use of slave labor in such factories because the success of such an enterprise would negate the belief that blacks were incapable of such advanced training.⁵⁵

In its first year the Arcadia cotton mill operated 960 spindles and twenty-four looms, and 4,000 to 5,000 yards of cotton cloth were produced each week. The total investment in the factory was estimated at \$60,000. Forty black female slaves, all between the ages of fifteen and twenty, were acquired to work in the mill. It was thought that young girls would be more adept at working with the textile machinery.⁵⁶ A reporter from the *Pensacola Gazette* observed the operation and noticed that the slaves

50. *Hunt's Merchants' Magazine* 15 (October 1846), 417; *Pensacola Gazette*, September 13, 1845.

51. *Pensacola Gazette*, December 6, 13, 1845, April 18, May 23, August 15, 1846.

52. Griffin, "The Cotton Mill Campaign in Florida," 262-69.

53. *Ibid.*, 263.

54. *Pensacola Gazette*, February 13, 1841.

55. Griffin, "The Cotton Mill Campaign in Florida," 265-66.

56. *Pensacola Gazette*, August 15, October 10, 1846, April 8, 1848.

were “as happy and contented with their vocation as it has been our lot to see any where; they are comfortably lodged, well fed, well clothed and kindly treated.”⁵⁷

Production reached 6,000 yards of cloth a week in 1848, and 1,000 pounds of cotton were consumed daily.⁵⁸ The number of slave laborers increased to 100 the following year, and the factory produced 1,300 yards of cloth a day.⁵⁹ The mill’s capital investment rose to \$80,000 in 1850, with an annual output value of approximately \$50,000.⁶⁰ By 1853, the Arcadia Manufacturing Company was producing 624,000 yards of cloth annually and was the largest and most successful antebellum cotton factory in Florida.⁶¹

Though the Arcadia mill received much attention, it was financially shadowed by Forsyth and Simpson’s Bagdad lumber mill. By 1849, Bagdad was the largest sawmill in the area, producing up to 20,000 feet of lumber a day. The Bagdad complex contained five gangs of saws, powered by a steam engine, with one to ten saws in each gang. The waste sawdust from the mill operation was efficiently converted to wood fuel for the steam engine. The Bagdad mill also had a planing, mortising, and tonguing and grooving machine. This machine, also powered by steam, produced panel doors, blinds, and sashes.⁶²

In contrast to the Arcadia Manufacturing Company, the employees of the Bagdad mill were mostly skilled laborers from the North.⁶³ By 1850, Forsyth and Simpson’s Bagdad mill employed seventy-five workers and had an annual production value of nearly \$100,000.⁶⁴ The mill town of Bagdad grew along with the mill, with the various owners and workers of the lumber

57. *Ibid.*, August 15, 1846.

58. Griffin, “The Cotton Mill Campaign in Florida,” 268.

59. *Pensacola Gazette*, March 29, 1849.

60. United States Bureau of the Census, manuscript returns of the Assistant Marshall, Seventh Census: 1850; Products of Industry, Santa Rosa County, Florida, on microfilm at Robert Manning Stozier Library, Florida State University, Tallahassee, Florida (hereinafter cited as Seventh Census: 1850 with appropriate schedules).

61. *DeBow’s Review* 14 (April 1853), 329; Griffin, “The Cotton Mill Campaign in Florida,” 269.

62. *Pensacola Gazette*, March 17, 1849.

63. *Ibid.*; John Anthony Eisterhold, “Lumber and Trade in the Seaboard Cities of the Old South: 1607-1860” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Mississippi, 1970), 157.

64. Seventh Census: 1850, Products of Industry, Santa Rosa County.

mill building their homes there. One contemporary described the small community as “a handsome village, . . . built up in a beautiful style.” The inhabitants of Bagdad were reported to “live in style and enjoy themselves accordingly. They are kind and accommodating to strangers who happen among them. The society is very agreeable; and the young ladies can entertain their guests with excellent music on the piano, guitar or violin.”⁶⁵

Joseph Forsyth and Ezekiel Simpson became well-known leaders in the community, and Forsyth was elected state senator in 1852.⁶⁶ These two men were the driving force behind both companies, but their primary interest continued to be in the more profitable Bagdad mill. Though seemingly successful and productive, the Arcadia cotton mill was not a financial success as a manufacturing enterprise. By 1850, after four years of operation, the Arcadia Manufacturing Company only showed a rate of return of five percent, compared to Bagdad’s 102 percent rate of return.⁶⁷ From 1846 to 1852, the cotton mill’s disbursements totaled \$290,107.55, while the company’s receipts only equaled \$242,808.72. This shows an average annual deficit of nearly \$8,000.⁶⁸ A setback also occurred in 1853, when a yellow fever epidemic struck Santa Rosa County, killing two of the female superintendents of the Arcadia mill.⁶⁹ It is not known if there were other deaths among the mill workers. Despite these problems, however, the mill continued to operate.

The end of the Arcadia cotton mill began with the death of Joseph Forsyth. In October 1854, Forsyth resigned from the state senate because of poor health.⁷⁰ A stockholder’s meeting

65. *Pensacola Gazette*, March 17, 1849.

66. Allen Morris, comp., *The People of Lawmaking in Florida 1822/1985* (Tallahassee, 1985). 48.

67. Fred Bateman and Thomas Weiss, *A Deplorable Scarcity: The Failure of Industrialization in the Slave Economy* (Chapel Hill, 1981), 105, 187.

68. Escambia County, *Escambia County Circuit Court Records, Arcadia Manufacturing Company v. George Willis*.

69. The identification of these two women, hired to supervise the black female slaves at the Arcadia mill, is uncertain. Overman refers to them as the Dennison sisters from Newburgh, New York, and he states that they married Ezekiel Simpson and James Creary and later died in a yellow fever epidemic in 1852. A serious yellow fever epidemic struck in 1853, and Mrs. Mary Creary (wife of James Creary) and Mrs. Ann Hanley (wife of James Hanley) both died in October 1853. The two were sisters and natives of New York, and they were possibly the Arcadia superintendents. See Overman, “Bagdad Reaches the End,” 16; *Pensacola Gazette*, October 8, 15, 1853.

70. *Pensacola Gazette*, October 21, 1854, March 17, 1855.

was held at the Arcadia mill on December 1, 1854, to decide the future of the company.⁷¹ It is uncertain what plans were made for the mill at this meeting. Forsyth, frontier entrepreneur and the primary architect of both Arcadia and Bagdad, died at the age of fifty-three on March 10, 1855.⁷² The editor of the *Pensacola Gazette* lamented the passing of a talented and enterprising individual who had contributed so much to west Florida. Forsyth was buried in the cemetery overlooking Bagdad, and a large granite obelisk was placed over his grave.⁷³

The year 1855 proved to be a tragic year for the firm. Less than two months after Forsyth's death, the Arcadia cotton factory was destroyed by a fire on May 25.⁷⁴ This loss was followed a month later by another fire; this time the firm's "Sash and Door Factory" in Bagdad was destroyed.⁷⁵ Despite this string of unfortunate events, the company remained intact.

On September 1, 1855, Forsyth's five-twelfths share in the Forsyth and Simpson Company was auctioned off for the benefit of his young children.⁷⁶ Ezekiel E. Simpson took over the leadership of the company, and the name was changed to E. E. Simpson and Company.⁷⁷

In October 1855, twenty-five of Forsyth's slaves were sold. These were the young women who had been trained in the Arcadia cotton mill. The other owners of the Arcadia Manufacturing Company evidently sold their slaves as well. The newspaper notice of the sale states that "from Thirty to Forty other slaves of like description will be also offered if not previously disposed of at private sale."⁷⁸ There was evidently no decision to rebuild the textile mill, and in March 1856, the directors of the Arcadia Manufacturing Company offered the tract of land

71. *Ibid.*, October 28, 1854.

72. *Ibid.*, March 17, 1855.

73. *Ibid.* Tradition has it that Forsyth was buried in a standing position so he could always watch over his beloved Bagdad and Blackwater River.

74. *Pensacola Gazette* June 2, 1855.

75. *Ibid.*, June 30, 1855.

76. *Ibid.*, June 23, July 21, 1855. The executors of the estate were Ezekiel Simpson and Benjamin Drake Wright. Wright was the son-in-law of Juan de la Rúa. See Robinson, *The Crown Jewel*, 55-56.

77. Eisterhold, "Lumber and Trade in the Seaboard Cities of the Old South," 158; Overman, "Bagdad Reaches the End," 16; *Pensacola Gazette*, March 24, 1855.

78. *Pensacola Gazette*, August 11, 1855.

for public sale. The offer included 510 acres, "together with all the improvements thereon, comprising Dwelling Houses, Store House, Negro Quarters, Kitchen, &c., and a valuable water privilege."⁷⁹

The fate of the Arcadia Railroad is unknown, but it was still in operation as late as 1841.⁸⁰ It seems logical that the Arcadia Manufacturing Company would have used such a transportation network in the shipping of their material from the mill site to the Bagdad docks. The rails and cars may have been taken up earlier, but the roadbed was probably utilized for transportation up to 1855.

There was little interest expressed in the Arcadia mill site, and the industrial complex appears to have been abandoned after 1855. Economic growth and development instead centered around E. E. Simpson and Company's mill town of Bagdad. The Sash and Door Factory was rebuilt, shipyards were constructed at Bagdad, and schooners were built to handle the lumber trade with New Orleans.⁸¹ An important ship repair facility was built in 1858 by William Ollinger and Martin Bruce. Ollinger, an immigrant from Luxembourg, formed a partnership with Bruce, a Wisconsin native, and the two constructed a commercial floating dry dock which was finally completed in 1860.⁸² In that same year, on the eve of the Civil War, the Simpson Company had a capital investment of \$175,000 and an annual production value of \$250,000.⁸³

The following year, 1861, E. E. Simpson represented Santa Rosa County in the Florida Secession Convention, and when war broke out a few months later, Bagdad became an important resource for the Confederacy.⁸⁴ The Ollinger & Bruce firm re-

79. *Ibid.*, February 16, 1856.

80. *Ibid.*, September 25, 1841

81. Overman, "Bagdad Reaches the End," 71; *Pensacola Gazette*, November 8, 1856.

82. Alan Gantzhorn, "The Ollingers: Panhandle Entrepreneurs and Their Pine Street Home," *Santa Rosa Historical Society Newsletter* (June/July 1986), 1; Nathan Woolsey, "More About the Ollingers, Part I," *Santa Rosa Historical Society Newsletter* (October 1986), 1-3.

83. United States Bureau of the Census, manuscript returns of the Assistant Marshall, Eighth Census: 1860; Schedule 5: Products of Industry, Santa Rosa County, on microfilm, Robert Manning Stozier Library, Florida State University, Tallahassee, Florida.

84. Ralph A. Wooster, "The Florida Secession Convention," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 36 (April 1958), 375.

ceived a contract from the Confederate Navy Department for the construction of a 110-foot, twin screw, Hampton Class gunboat. This vessel at Bagdad was nearing completion by March 1862. Confederate forces, however, withdrew from the Pensacola area the same month, and orders were given to destroy all uncompleted boats, timber, and mill facilities in the region to prevent them from falling into Federal hands. The gunboat at Bagdad was burned, along with the Bagdad mill facilities. E. E. Simpson's own house, because of its proximity to the mill, was accidentally burned. James Creary, one of the partners in the Simpson Company, remained in Bagdad to look after affairs, but the other partners in the firm took their families and slaves to Alabama. For the remainder of the war, they operated a plantation to raise food to support themselves and their slaves.⁸⁵

From 1862 to 1865, a number of skirmishes occurred in Bagdad and Arcadia between Federal patrols and roaming Confederate cavalry units. Federal patrols searched for contraband and Confederate forces at Bagdad several times during this period.⁸⁶ Action was also seen at Arcadia. The Arcadia community was still inhabited by both blacks and whites, and a small Confederate cavalry force frequently used it as a base. In March 1863, a Federal unit from Pensacola made an expedition there; a skirmish between the two forces occurred in the early morning hours of March 7, and the Confederate cavalry hastily retreated

85. Articles of Agreement, November 4, 1861— a contract between the Confederate Navy Department and Ollinger & Bruce, Thomas A. Johnson Papers, Special Collections, Item no. 67-6, Box 91 Folder 2, John C. Pace Library, University of West Florida, Pensacola; Naval History Division, Navy Department, comp., *Civil War Naval Chronology 1861-1865* (Washington, DC, 1961-1966), appendix 6, 186; Overman, "Bagdad Reaches the End," 16; United States War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, 70 vols. (Washington, DC, 1880-1901), series 1, VI, 846-47, 859-66 (hereinafter cited as *O.R.*). Another gunboat was under construction at nearby Milton; it was also destroyed by retreating Confederate forces in 1862.

86. Henry A. Shorey, *The Story of the Maine Fifteenth; Being a Brief Narrative of the More Important Events in the History of the Fifteenth Maine Regiment* (Bridgton, 1890), 27-33; United States War Department, *War of the Rebellion*, series 1, XV, 108-11, 126-28; XXXV, 442-43, 445-50; series 4, I 49-50, 71-72; William Edward Seaver Whitman and Charles H. True, *Maine in the War for the Union: A History of the Part Borne by Maine Troops in the Suppression of the American Rebellion* (Lewiston, 1865), 335-38.

from the area.⁸⁷ In August 1864, another expedition was sent to the Arcadia area. A bridge across Pond Creek, which had been destroyed, was rebuilt by the Union forces.⁸⁸ Though abandoned at the time, the Arcadia facilities were probably considered too valuable to fall into enemy hands.⁸⁹

After the war, the Bagdad owners returned to the abandoned mill town, a new mill was built, and E. E. Simpson and Company once more prospered.⁹⁰ The Arcadia complex, however, was never revived.⁹¹ Bagdad grew and prospered for the next seventy years and became the world's largest producer and exporter of yellow pine lumber. Ships from South America, Italy, England, and Scandinavia sailed to northwest Florida to load the yellow pine sawed at the Bagdad mill. It was not until 1939 that the mill closed, due largely to the regrettable deforestation of the region.⁹²

Arcadia and Bagdad were the most important industrial complexes of antebellum northwest Florida. The nucleus of this development was Juan de la Rúa's land grant of 1817, which after 1828 was successfully developed by Joseph Forsyth and Ezekiel E. Simpson. The diverse Arcadia industrial park was instrumental in leading to the development of the Bagdad mill and community. Though the Arcadia site itself fell into disuse

87. Shorey, *The Story of the Maine Fifteenth*, 32-33; Whitman and True, *Maine in the War for the Union*, 335-38.

88. *O.R.*, series 1, XXXV, 442-43.

89. The large dam across Pond Creek also appears to have been destroyed during the Civil War. In the middle of the dam is a large, deep gap. Whether this opening is the result of natural forces or deliberate destruction is unknown. Growing in the base of this gap, however, is a large tree. In the early 1960s a forestry expert judged the tree to be approximately 80-100 years old (conversation with Warren Weekes, November 1985). This could place the destruction of the dam within the Civil War period, lending support to the idea of deliberate destruction by either Confederate or Federal forces.

90. Overman, "Bagdad Reaches the End," 16. Ezekiel E. Simpson died in 1875. The company was known as Simpson & Company until it was sold in 1903.

91. In 1882, the Arcadia mill site was considered a prime location for a new industry to be located. The Pensacola and Atlantic Railroad had recently opened, and the Arcadia site was only a short distance from this major railroad. Nothing came of this proposal, and the Arcadia mill site was quickly reclaimed by the surrounding forest. See Benjamin Robinson, *An Historical Sketch of Pensacola, Florida, Embracing a Brief Retrospect of the Part and a View of the Present* (Pensacola, 1882), 69, 71.

92. King, *History of Santa Rosa County*, 29-33; Overman, "Bagdad Reaches the End," part 1, March 1939, 16, '71; part 2, April 1939, 44-45.

by the time of the Civil War, it nevertheless contributed greatly to the rise of Bagdad, a successful industrial community which lasted well into the twentieth century.

The Arcadia mill site today (1988) is located in a thickly-wooded area in Santa Rosa County. Numerous physical remains can be found on the site, including the rock quarries, the railroad bed, earthworks, stone walls, and wooden timbers. In July 1987, the Arcadia site was placed on the National Register of Historic Places, and in December 1987, approximately ten acres of the mill site were purchased through state funds. The site now belongs to the Santa Rosa Historical Society and there are plans to develop the area into a historical/recreational park.

The community of Bagdad continues as a quiet, charming village containing a large number of the original mill houses. There are several restored antebellum homes along Bagdad's oak-lined streets. The original mill site is occupied by a pre-stressed concrete plant. The Bagdad Village Preservation Association was formed in 1986, and a year later Bagdad was placed on the National Register as a historic district.