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National Park Service

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National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Odell-Locke Randolph Cotton Mill

and/or common Locke Mill

2. Location

street & number area bounded by Buffalo St., Church St., N.E.,
Peachtree Ave. and Locust St., N.W. not for publication

city, town Concord vicinity of ~~Congressional district~~

state North Carolina code 037 county Cabarrus code 025

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Concord-Kannapolis Investment Company
c/o C. J. Moss Real Estate Company

street & number 1401 S. Main St.

city, town Kannapolis vicinity of state N. C. 28081

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Cabarrus County Courthouse

street & number

city, town Concord state N. C.

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

Historic American Engineering Record, *The Historic Architecture of Cabarrus County, North Carolina*, by Peter Kaplan has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date 1981 federal state county local

depository for survey records Survey and Planning Branch, N. C. Division of Archives and History

city, town Raleigh state N. C.

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date _____
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The extensive Odell-Locke Randolph Cotton Mill complex stands on high ground at the north end of Concord's Union Street, the city's principal thoroughfare. An ample lawn separates the buildings from Buffalo and Union Streets, further enhancing their setting. The mill's commanding position within the town is quite fitting, for the plant generated the revival and spectacular growth of the Cabarrus textile industry during the fifty years following Reconstruction.

The complex has been the site of four textile enterprises that operated--with an interruption of only four years--from 1840 until 1974. The surviving complex has three principal buildings, which date from 1882, 1899, and 1909, along with nine supporting structures. The complex is an excellent and relatively unaltered example of late nineteenth and early twentieth century textile mill design.

The original mill on this site was erected by the Concord Manufacturing Company, a corporation formed by a group of prominent Cabarrus County merchants and farmers in 1840. An extant engraving of this building shows it to have been a brick, three-story, gable-roofed structure with a stair tower and belfry dominating its gable end facade.¹ A nineteenth century Sanborn fire insurance map indicates that the building had about 9,000 square feet of space.² The plant operated until 1873, when adverse conditions created by the national financial panic of 1873 closed the mill. It remained vacant until 1877, when John Milton Odell purchased the property and reopened the mill.³

Odell's reopening of the plant set into motion the expansion of the mill into one of the state's largest industrial complexes. Odell erected a second mill building east of the original structure in 1882. This is the oldest building still standing in the complex and is indeed the oldest remaining textile building in Cabarrus County.⁴

The 1882 mill is a three-story structure, fourteen bays wide by five bays deep, of brick laid up in 1:5 common bond. Like nearly every other building in the complex, its overall character and specific features typify fireproof mill construction of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The windows retain triple-hung sash on the first floor, and double-hung sash on the upper stories, set in segmental-arched openings. The building has a low pitched gable roof typical of mill construction dictated by insurance requirements;⁵ the overhanging eaves are supported by simple rafter brackets. At the center of the south elevation is a four-story tower, two bays wide by two deep, which encloses the stair and may also have contained machinery belts at one time. The placement of the stair in a separate structure was another practice required by factory insurance companies and was intended to prevent the spread of fire between the floors of the mill.⁶ A door with two four-panel leaves at the base of the tower is the building's principal entrance. The tower has a corbeled cornice above its fourth story; a mansard roof crowned the tower for many years, but it was removed around 1960.⁷ The interior of the 1882 mill building, with about 9,000 square feet on each floor, is unpartitioned. Each floor has two rows of wooden octagonal posts supporting a series of broad, thick wooden beams. This structure is typical of late nineteenth and early twentieth century mill design and was intended to burn slowly in case of fire.⁸ The first floor windows on the north elevation were apparently closed when the 1909 mill building, the third major structure in the complex, was erected along the building's north wall. Two brick elevator shafts were erected at the northwest and southwest corners of the building at undetermined, mid-twentieth century dates.

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In 1886 John Milton Odell erected a two-story mill building, somewhat smaller than the 1882 mill, between the original building and the 1882 structure.⁹ Three years later, he erected another building to produce seamless bags and to expand production of his now well-known Forest Hill plaids, named for the community that had grown up around the mill. The construction of the 1889 building, which appears to have contained over 100,000 feet of space, made Odell's plant one of the premier textile operations in North Carolina.¹⁰ This building occupied the space where the 1909 mill building now stands.

Odell's enterprise remained highly profitable through the 1890s, and in 1899 Odell erected a fifth building to house additional looms for the plant. This is the second major surviving building at the complex; a railroad siding separates it from the 1882 and 1909 mills. The 1899 structure is a one-story brick building with a basement, twenty-five bays long by ten bays wide, laid up in 1:5 common bond. The first floor windows are tall segmental-arched openings with triple-hung sash. The basement windows along the northern portions of the building have double-hung sash set in segmental-arched openings. Like the other buildings in the complex, the 1899 structure has a low-pitched gable roof, and its projecting eaves are supported by simple brackets. A monitor-style clerestory provides additional light for the broad interior of the structure. The interior was originally a single room, but some wood and glass partitions were later added. The building has a structure of broad wooden beams resting on two rows of chamfered posts. The first floor has an area of roughly 24,000 square feet.

A three-stage tower, one of the most impressive architectural features of the entire complex, dominates the western (principal) elevation of the 1899 building. The first stage of the tower contains the building's main entrance, which consists of a door with two five-panel leafs and a segmental-arched transom. The tower's second stage, which is relatively plain, has a double-hung window set in a segmental arch on each of its four sides, and it terminates in a corbeled cornice. The third, most elaborate stage of the tower has broad semi-circular windows with raised brick arches on all four sides; below the windows are rectangular panels. Pilaster strips rise from the corners of the third stage to a corbeled cornice and the tower's castellated cap, which is embellished with stone inserts at the corners. The semi-circular windows reveal a water tank contained in the tower's second and third stages. The tank was built to store one of the plant's emergency water supplies, to be used in case of fire.¹¹

A major fire struck the plant in August, 1908, which destroyed the original 1840 mill, the 1886 building, and the large mill structure erected in 1889. The following year the newly formed Locke Cotton Mills Company, which had purchased the property from creditors of John Milton Odell, erected the third major surviving building at the complex and by far the largest. It stands on the site previously occupied by the 1840 and 1889 buildings. It has one-story and a basement; its long side faces Buffalo Street. Because the site slopes gently down to the west, the western portions of the basement level stand above ground. The building has over 100,000 square feet and is full forty bays wide by eighteen bays deep. It originally had a full complement of tall, triple-hung sash windows set in segmental-arched openings. These windows remain intact on the eastern half of the building, but those of the western half have been replaced with rectangular industrial sash windows. The building is laid up in common bond and has a low-pitched gable roof. Thirteen rows of sawtooth skylights provide additional illumination

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for the vast first floor space.

At the center of the building's south side, facing Buffalo Street, near its intersection with Union Street, is a handsome, two-stage tower, another of the complex's most prominent architectural features. The square-in-section tower contains the entrance to the 1909 mill building and probably contained a stair to the basement at one time (access to the basement is now obtained by a set of concrete stairs located along the eastern portion of the building's south elevation). The first stage of the tower has tall window openings, some of which have been filled, which originally contained triple-hung sash. The segmental-arched openings are embellished with raised hoodmolds. The first stage terminates in a narrow corbeled cornice. The tower's second stage is considerably more elaborate. It is laid up in 1:5 common bond, with black brick used for the header courses; the black brick is also used at the corners to create the appearance of quoins. The second stage has pilaster strips at the corners which frame the two tall, narrow, triple-hung sash windows on each of the tower's four sides. These windows, like those of the first stage, are set in segmental-arched openings and have raised hoodmolds. A concrete panel beneath the windows on the south elevation has raised letters with the inscription "Locke Cotton Mills Co.". The pilaster strips rise to a simply corbeled cornice. Between the pilaster strips and below this simple corbeling are rows of twelve corbels on all four sides of the tower. Like the tower of the 1882 building, the first floor and basement of the 1909 mill are unpartitioned. Their broad beams are supported by four rows of wooden posts; some of the posts in the basement have been replaced with steel girders.

There are a number of other structures in the complex which have varying degrees of significance and integrity.

Located in the rear yard behind the 1909 mill building is a set of six one-story warehouses originally built to store cotton. Sanborn maps indicate that these warehouses were erected by 1892; they are considered the earliest such warehouses still standing in Cabarrus County.¹² The warehouses are one-story cells with corbeled brick firewalls on two sides and board-and-batten walls at the front and rear. This design is also typical of later warehouses, which were generally constructed in larger groupings.

Situated at the southeast corner of the 1882 mill, at the intersection of Buffalo and Church streets, is the one-story mill office and store building that may have housed a store operated by the Odell Manufacturing Company at one time. Sanborn maps do not clearly indicate a date of construction; the building was certainly erected before 1920. It is a one-story, gable-roofed building of brick construction with a veneer of scored stucco. The south (principal) elevation facing Buffalo Street is divided by three pilaster strips which rise to a corbeled cornice. The four windows on this elevation have double-hung windows whose upper panes have ornamental flashed

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glass. At the rear of the building facing Church Street is a small, simple storefront. Adjoining the building on its west side is an addition to the office built of concrete blocks. The interior of the office building retains a line of cashiers' windows and a walk-in safe, both of which date from the early twentieth century.

A two-story gable-roofed structure of approximately 13,000 square feet (4) stands adjacent to the western end of the 1909 mill building. This structure appears on the 1892 Sanborn map, and was probably constructed as an appendage to the 1889 mill building. It is a typical mill structure with common bond brick construction, a low gable roof, and tall double-hung sash windows set in segmental-arched openings. The building is eight bays wide and an undetermined number of bays deep; it is deteriorated and overgrown. Adjoining this building are two small buildings of recent vintage (4A and 4B) that possess no architectural significance.

At the rear of the 1909 mill building, and near its eastern end, is a two-story structure erected at about the same time. This building, which has roughly 18,000 square feet, is fourteen bays wide and six deep, and is laid up in common bond. Its broad windows consist of paired double-hung windows with transoms above and are set in segmental-arched openings. The building has a low gable roof and a square tower at its southwest corner. Directly adjoining its western wall is a twenty-five by eighty foot concrete reservoir.

To the rear of the 1882 mill building is the former dye house, erected at about the same time as the 1909 mill. This building is the most severely deteriorated structure in the complex. It is a one-story brick structure, eight bays long and a single bay deep. It has tall clerestories at alternating bays which not only provided illumination but furnished space for overhead cranes.

Adjoining the rear of the 1882 mill along Church Street are a series of frame and brick storage buildings. The building closest to the 1882 mill is a one-story brick structure which Sanborn maps indicate was erected after 1927. It possesses no architectural significance. Behind it is a set of three typical early twentieth century cotton warehouses of frame construction with brick firewalls. Sanborn maps indicate a construction date between 1911 and 1921. Behind these warehouses is a larger warehouse structure erected after 1927 that possesses no significance.

A final group of three significant structures is located just west of the previously described concrete reservoir at the rear of the 1909 mill building. The most notable of these is a tapered and corbeled boiler stack which Sanborn maps indicate was standing in 1892. The stack rises to a height of one hundred twenty-five feet and is one of the complex's most impressive architectural features. Just west of the stack is a large boiler house of brick and concrete construction, which Sanborn maps indicate was erected between 1921 and 1927. Adjoining the reservoir just east of the brick boiler stack is a tall steel water tank, which Sanborn maps suggest was built at the time the 1909 mill was erected. It is supported by steel channel posts and crossbars and rests on a concrete foundation. Like the brick baler stack, the water tank is about one-hundred-twenty-five feet tall.

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Footnotes:

¹This engraving is reproduced in Gary Richard Freeze, "Master Mill Man: John Milton Odell and Industrial Development in Concord, N. C., 1877-1907" (Master's thesis, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1980), p. 34.

²This estimate of the mill's square footage was derived from an 1885 fire insurance map. Sanborn Map and Publishing Company, "Insurance Map of Concord, N. C., July 1885" (New York: Sanborn Map and Publishing Company, 1885), sheet 2.

³Freeze, "Master Mill Man", p. 20.

⁴Peter R. Kaplan, The Historic Architecture of Cabarrus County, North Carolina (Concord: Historic Cabarrus, Inc., 1980), p. 123.

⁵Kaplan, Historic Architecture of Cabarrus County, p. 30.

⁶Kaplan, Historic Architecture of Cabarrus County, p. 29.

⁷Photograph furnished to the author by Mr. Walter Clark, former owner, Randolph Mills Company.

⁸Kaplan, Historic Architecture of Cabarrus County, p. 30

⁹Freeze, "Master Mill Man", p. 39.

¹⁰Freeze, "Master Mill Man", pp. 45-46.

¹¹Sanborn Map Company, "Insurance Map for Concord, N. C." (New York: Sanborn Map Company, 1902), sheet 15.

¹²Kaplan, Historic Architecture of Cabarrus County, p. 29.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/ humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		

Specific dates 1882, 1899, 1909 **Builder/Architect** Unknown

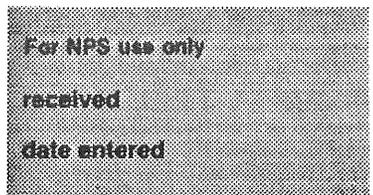
Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Odell-Locke-Randolph Cotton Mill, the birthplace of the Cabarrus County textile industry, is historically and architecturally Cabarrus County's most significant historic industrial site. The county's first textile mill, one of the earliest steam-powered cotton mills in the state, was erected here following the incorporation of the Concord Manufacturing Company in 1839. This mill operated throughout the antebellum period and the Civil War, but closed in the wake of the national financial panic of 1873. John Milton Odell purchased the mill four years later and resumed production. Odell's reopening of the mill began a fifty year period of industrial development during which Cabarrus County grew to become one of North Carolina's major textile centers and gave birth to Cannon Mills Company, which remains one of the nation's largest textile firms. Odell expanded his plant rapidly and during the 1890s it was among the largest cotton mills in the state. After 1900 Odell suffered from a glut in the northeastern yarn market and the failure of a mill he owned in Gaston County, and he was forced into bankruptcy in 1908. Two firms, the Locke Cotton Mills Company and Randolph Mills, maintained textile operations in the complex until 1974; it has stood vacant since that time. There are three major mill buildings on the site, dating from 1882, 1899, and 1909, as well as another nine related structures. The complex is an excellent and relatively unaltered specimen of late nineteenth and early twentieth century textile mill design.

Criteria Assessment:

- A. Associated with the antebellum industrial development of piedmont North Carolina, and especially with the late nineteenth and early twentieth century development of that region. Associated with the late nineteenth and early twentieth century development of Cabarrus County, one of North Carolina's major textile centers.
- B. Associated with John Milton Odell (1831-1910), an important North Carolina industrialist who initiated Cabarrus County's development into a major textile center and played a dominant role in the community's civic and political life during the last two decades of the nineteenth century. Odell's broad investments in textiles were not confined to Concord but included enterprises from Durham to Gaston County. Also associated with Odell's son, William R. Odell (1855-1938), Concord industrialist, state senator, and leader in Cabarrus County education.
- C. Excellent, relatively unaltered example of late nineteenth and early twentieth century textile mill design. The complex comprises three main mill buildings and nine supporting structures.

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The Odell-Locke-Randolph cotton mill complex, the birthplace of Cabarrus County's textile industry, was the site of four textile enterprises that operated with an interruption of only four years between 1840, when the Concord Manufacturing Company was founded by a group of Cabarrus County merchants and farmers, and 1974, when Randolph Mills closed the plant for the last time. The original 1840 factory was destroyed during a 1908 fire. The oldest building in the complex is the three-story structure erected by John Milton Odell five years after he reopened the plant and founded the Odell Manufacturing Company in 1877. It was Odell's reopening of the plant that began a fifty-year period of spectacular growth during which Cabarrus County rose to become one of the nation's major textile centers and gave birth to the Cannon Mills Company which remains one of the country's largest textile firms.

During the 1830s, emigration from North Carolina reached alarming proportions, and there was much agitation for new industry to retain and attract wealth and population. The low agricultural prices of the decade also prompted men with capital to consider investments other than land and slaves. The campaign for economic development and depressed farm prices stimulated the state's nascent textile industry. Twenty cotton mills sprang up in North Carolina between 1830 and 1840, fifteen of them in a four-year period between 1835 and 1840.¹

The Cabarrus County town of Concord became the site of one such cotton mill in 1839, when a group of Cabarrus merchants and farmers chartered the Concord Manufacturing Company to produce items of cotton, wool, hemp, flax, and iron.² The subscribers of capital to the operation were among the wealthier individuals in Cabarrus County. Paul Barringer, the president, was a prominent planter and general of the militia district. Caleb Phifer, the secretary, was one of Concord's most successful merchants and owned one of the largest farms in the county. Kiah P. Harris, the treasurer, was a physician who later operated a local hotel, and Christopher Melcher, one of the directors was a prominent farmer who served in the legislature in 1829.³

The subscribers bought a piece of land on a rise a short distance north of Concord, where Barringer is said to have trained his militia, and erected a three-story brick structure of approximately 9,000 square feet.⁴ A stair tower surmounted by a belfry dominated the building's gable end facade.⁵ A noteworthy feature of the Concord plant was its use of a steam engine to propel the machinery. It was one of the first North Carolina textile mills to employ steam as a power source, and the engine attracted widespread comment and awestruck visitors.⁶

The investors imported spinning machinery and a manager from Pennsylvania and later installed looms. The mill produced cotton twine as well as yarn and cloth.⁷ The factory's output was sold, or bartered in exchange for food, to local families who made finished goods in their homes. Despite initial problems with poor machinery and incompetent management, the mill survived to post impressive profits just before the Civil War.⁸

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The mill owed its antebellum success to John McDonald, an industrialist from Norristown, Pennsylvania who succeeded William Jencks, the first manager, not long after the plant opened in 1842. McDonald, who came from an area of early Northern textile development, purchased the Concord plant in 1856. After the Civil War began, McDonald converted his operation to the production of uniform material.⁹

The plant was reportedly still turning out material in 1865 when it was threatened by the raiders of General George Stoneman in 1865. Union troops burned a former textile mill in Salisbury that had been converted into a Confederate prison, but they were prevented from destroying the Concord factory.¹⁰ According to historian Gary Richard Freeze, "the survival of the McDonald plant proved to be one of the key factors in the revival of the textile industry in North Carolina after the Civil War.¹¹ In 1866 a business observer found it to be one of only six mills still operating in the state. By 1870 North Carolinians were running 39 mills, and the Concord plant thus bridged the transition period from Civil War devastation to postbellum prosperity.¹³

Although the McDonald mill survived the Civil War, it could not surmount the economic problems of Reconstruction and the national financial panic of 1873. Production during the early postbellum years never reached the levels attained before the Civil War, and as the economic outlook darkened in 1873, McDonald obtained a mortgage on the mill property. The mortgage was foreclosed when profits failed to materialize, and by the end of the year the plant had been closed.¹⁴

The closure of the Concord plant was, however, to be only temporary. The completion of the North Carolina Railroad had laid part of the foundation necessary for Concord's industrial growth. The railroad greatly increased the amount of cotton that could be shipped from Concord and reduced the cost of its transportation. Soon large numbers of Cabarrus farmers were bringing their cotton to Concord for shipment on the rails. After the Civil War a new generation of Concord merchants, most of whom had come to the town from elsewhere in the state, realized that they could attract many more farmers to sell their cotton in the town by offering to purchase the fiber at a higher price than could cotton buyers in settlements without a railroad. The merchants applied this tactic so successfully that they eventually attracted cotton sales away from Charlotte and Salisbury, towns that like Concord enjoyed good rail connections. Concord thus became the major cotton market for an area that stretched from Mecklenburg to eastern Stanly County, a role the town was able to play until well after 1900. The profits of Concord's successful cotton buyers enabled them to furnish much of the capital for the revival and unprecedented growth of the county's textile industry that took place after 1877.¹⁵ Among the ablest of the cotton buyers was the man who would direct much of the industrial development to come--John Milton Odell.

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Odell (1831-1910) was born and raised in the Cedar Falls area of eastern Randolph County. Eastern Randolph was the site of several successful antebellum cotton mills that drew their power from the Deep River--one of these mills was located at Cedar Falls. Odell began work as a clerk at the Cedar Falls Mill in 1854 and had become manager of the enterprise by the time he left Randolph County for Concord in 1869. Odell established a cotton-buying firm on Concord's Union Street in the latter year, left in 1873 to do business with his brother in Greensboro, and moved back to Concord four years later.¹⁶ Upon his return Odell purchased Concord's 1840 cotton mill, located at the north end of Union Street.¹⁷

Odell's reopening of the 1840 mill began Cabarrus County's industrial resurgence. Odell erected a second three-story structure at the site in 1882, and constructed a third building between the first two mills in 1886.¹⁸ Three years later Odell built another building to produce seamless bags and to expand production of his now well-known Forest Hill plaids, named for the community that had grown up around the mill. The construction of the two-and-a-half story structure, which contained over 100,000 square feet of space, made Odell's plant one of the premier textile operations in North Carolina. Its 21,000 spindles outnumbered those of any mill in the state and its 868 looms ranked second to a factory in Rutherford County.¹⁹

The year Odell greatly expanded his original facility he also began construction of a second major plant, the Kerr Bleachery, located about a mile southwest of the main mill.²⁰ Kerr Bleachery became the first facility in the South equipped to finish cloth and prepare it for market. Odell made the first break with the universal southern practice of shipping woven cloth to northern finishing plants for final processing. Odell considerably enlarged the Bleachery in 1897 to finish all of the lines of cloth he manufactured in Concord.²¹ In 1895 Odell erected a third plant, the Buffalo Cotton Mill, located a half mile west of the main plant, to produce yarn for the looms at the Forest Hill facility. Two years later Odell built a fifth building at Forest Hill to house an additional five hundred looms.²²

Like nearly every other North Carolina textile mill of the period, Odell's Forest Hill plant engendered the development of a mill village to house the work force. The beginnings of a mill village emerged during the antebellum years, when workers at the Concord Manufacturing Company lived in log cabins just north of town.²³ When Odell reopened the plant in 1877, many returning workers lived in houses along Union and Church streets, the two major thoroughfares connecting the center of Concord with the Forest Hill plant. During the 1880s Odell moved to a fine residence at the head of Union Street just opposite the yard of the Forest Hill plant.²⁴ Most of the families who found work in the mill after 1877 settled in company-built houses just north of the mill. By 1889, when the Forest Hill neighborhood was annexed to Concord, it had a distinct identity. The plant formed its core, with workers housing to the north, new stores along Church Street to the east, a church and school to the west, and the homes of Odell and his managers to the south.²⁵

The impact of John Milton Odell on Concord was not confined to his Forest Hill plant and his other mills in the town. Freeze's study of Odell demonstrates that "little of industrial, commercial importance developed in post-Reconstruction Concord with (Odell's) guidance."²⁶ In 1886 Odell led the successful effort to found Concord National Bank and was elected president of the bank, the community's first lending institution.

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Odell installed Concord's first streetlights, and was a major backer of the town's other utilities.²⁷ Odell and his son, W. R. Odell (1855-1938) were instrumental in founding Forest Hill Methodist Church, a congregation that drew most of its members from the mill village to the north of the plant. In 1889 the Odells erected a handsome brick church for the Forest Hill congregation that still stands opposite the mill on Buffalo Street.²⁸ The devoutly Methodist Odells also waged a passionate and eventually successful campaign to ban consumption of alcoholic beverages in Concord.²⁹

Odell achieved statewide prominence that came not only from the ambitious scale of his Concord operations but from his association with textile ventures elsewhere in North Carolina. The Odell family played an important role in the operation of Durham's earliest textile enterprises and owned two other mills in Chatham and Gaston counties. By 1890 Odell was also serving as president of mills in Salisbury and Pittsboro.³⁰

The second of Cabarrus County's industrial stewards, James William Cannon (1852-1921) drew upon the experience and prestige of John Milton Odell to start his own firm, whose output eventually surpassed that of Odell's enterprise. With his own savings, the support of his business partners, and some Northern capital, Cannon established the Cannon Manufacturing Company in 1887. John Milton Odell was made titular head of the firm, and his reputation helped the new enterprise to quickly attract orders. Cannon, like Odell, played a key role in the other textile ventures, both within Cabarrus and in other piedmont counties. By the early years of the twentieth century Cannon's textile interests were as extensive as Odell's holdings. The capstone of Cannon's career came in the fifteen years following 1905, when he founded and built the town of Kannapolis along the Cabarrus-Rowan county line. By the time of Cannon's death the new community, barely a decade old, boasted two huge mills and a population of nearly 5,000.³²

As a result of John Milton Odell's leadership, Concord had grown from a small courthouse town of less than 2,000 inhabitants into one of North Carolina's leading industrial centers by the turn of the century. The city's population certainly reflected its relative importance, for in 1900 it had a greater number of inhabitants than Durham, Burlington, or Gastonia.³³ Even more impressive was the level of textile production and the investment in Concord's cotton mills. Holland Thompson did not exaggerate greatly when he said that many towns twice the size of Concord "could not boast an equal volume of business."³⁴ Although Concord ranked eighth in population among North Carolina cities, with a population of 7,910, its capital investment of two million dollars was exceeded only by Charlotte and Winston.³⁵ In the production of cloth and yarn Concord ranked second only to Charlotte.³⁶

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The career of John Milton Odell, however, was drawing to a tragic close. After 1900, financial problems plagued textile mills across the piedmont when yarn glutted the north-eastern market.³⁷ Odell gave no indication of financial problems during the first years of the new century, but Concord received a major shock in early 1907 when it was revealed that the failure of Odell's Southern Cotton Mills of Bessemer City in Gaston County might force Odell to sell all of his Concord holdings except the Kerr Bleachery. For over a year Odell and his stockholders negotiated with the company's creditors to pay the Bessemer City mill's debts without giving up the Concord properties, but no such arrangement proved feasible and the sale of the plants was scheduled for September, 1908.³⁸

Incredibly, not long after the stockholders and creditors agreed upon the sale, both the Kerr Bleachery and the huge 1889 mill at Forest Hill were destroyed by accidental blazes within a period of three weeks.³⁹ Ironically, the insurance payments received by the Odell interests raised hopes that the sales of the Concord properties might be prevented, but the hopes proved unfounded. In November, 1908 the creditors of the Southern Cotton Mill bought Odell's Concord plants.⁴⁰

The following month George Washington Watts, an associate of the Duke family, purchased the Forest Hill complex from the Southern Cotton Mills creditors for \$182,000. Concord citizens believed that the Duke family of Durham, which had held a sizeable block of stock in the Odell Manufacturing Company, had furnished the money for the purchase.⁴¹ J. Locke Erwin, who managed a Duke-owned mill in Oxford, North Carolina, moved to Concord to operate the new factory. Watts announced plans to spend \$300,000 on a new plant to replace the 1889 mill and install new electric-powered machinery.⁴² Watts named his new firm Locke Mills, after Erwin. The rebuilding of the 1889 mill was accomplished in 1909.⁴³

Although the newly opened Locke Mill was nearly as large as Odell's facility, its automatic machinery required a much smaller work force, and the surrounding Forest Hill community, already decimated by the economic uncertainties of the previous few years, never regained its former population.

John Milton Odell and his son William R. Odell rebuilt the Kerr Bleachery in 1909, and William operated the plant for another three decades.⁴⁵ John Milton Odell suffered a stroke in late 1909, recovered briefly, and died from a second stroke in 1910.⁴⁶ William R. Odell was like his father active in Concord's civic affairs. He served in the state senate from 1905 to 1907, but is best remembered in Cabarrus County for his role in promoting public education. Odell served as chairman of the Cabarrus County Board of Education from 1913 until his death; one of the county's rural high schools was named for him in 1929.⁴⁷

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Locke Cotton Mills operated on the site of the Odell plant until the firm went bankrupt during the late 1930s.⁴⁸ In 1939 Randolph Mills, a Franklinville firm owned by John W. Clark, obtained the property through a purchase of stock and ran the mill until 1974.⁴⁹ When Randolph Mills ceased operations, a 135-year history of textile production at the site came to an end.

The Odell-Locke-Randolph Cotton Mill has stood vacant for nearly eight years, but there are promising signs that the complex may have a new role to play in Concord's economy. In November, 1979, a group of Cabarrus County realtors purchased the complex at auction. At the suggestion of local preservationists, they are actively exploring how they can use the federal historic preservation tax incentives to rehabilitate the property for residential or commercial use.

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FOOTNOTES

¹Richard W. Griffin and Diffie W. Standard, "The Cotton Textile Industry in Antebellum North Carolina, Part II: An Era of Boom and Consolidation, 1830-1860," North Carolina Historical Review (April, 1957), pp. 131-133.

²Gary Richard Freeze, "Master Mill Man: John Milton Odell and Industrial Development in Concord, North Carolina, 1877-1907" (Master's thesis, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1980), p. 17.

³Freeze, "Master Mill Man," p. 17, and Peter R. Kaplan, The Historic Architecture of Cabarrus County, North Carolina (Concord: Historic Cabarrus, Inc., 1981), p. 254.

⁴This estimate of the mill's square footage was derived from an 1885 fire insurance map. Sanborn Map and Publishing Company. "Insurance Map of Concord, N. C., July 1885 (New York: Sanborn Map and Publishing Company, 1885), sheet 2.

⁵Freeze, "Master Mill Man," p. 34.

⁶Freeze, "Master Mill Man," p. 18.

⁷Freeze, "Master Mill Man", pp. 18-19 and Griffin and Standard, "The Cotton Textile Industry in Antebellum North Carolina, Part II, p. 149.

⁸Freeze, "Master Mill Man," pp. 19-20.

⁹Freeze, "Master Mill Man," pp. 18, 20.

¹⁰Freeze, "Master Mill Man," p. 20.

¹¹Freeze, "Master Mill Man," p. 20.

¹²Levi H. Branson, Branson and Farrar's North Carolina Business Directory for 1866-67, Containing Facts, Figures, Names, and Locations (Raleigh, N. C.: Branson and Farrar, 1866), cited in Freeze, "Master Mill Man," p. 20.

¹³Freeze, "Master Mill Man," p. 20.

¹⁴Freeze, "Master Mill Man," p. 21.

¹⁵Freeze, "Master Mill Man," pp. 12-16.

¹⁶Freeze, "Master Mill Man," pp. 26-32.

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¹⁷Freeze, "Master Mill Man," pp. 20-21.

¹⁸Freeze, "Master Mill Man," pp. 37 and 39.

¹⁹Freeze, "Master Mill Man," pp. 45-46.

²⁰Kerr Bleachery remained in operation for nine decades on the same site, during which time the early buildings were enlarged and considerably altered. The complex was destroyed by fire in January, 1979, only days after a comprehensive survey of the county's historic architecture had begun.

²¹Freeze, "Master Mill Man," pp. 91-92.

²²Freeze, "Master Mill Man," pp. 92-93.

²³Freeze, "Master Mill Man," pp. 59-60.

²⁴This house still stands and will be nominated as part of a North Union Street Historic District. The nomination will be submitted to the Register early in 1983. See Kaplan, Historic Architecture of Cabarrus County, pp. 52, 105-106.

²⁵Freeze, "Master Mill Man," p. 60.

²⁶Freeze, "Master Mill Man," p. 35.

²⁷Freeze, "Master Mill Man," pp. 46 and 50.

²⁸Freeze, "Master Mill Man," pp. 64-68. The church will be nominated to the National Register as part of the North Union Street Historic District. The nomination will be submitted to the Register early in 1983. See Kaplan, Historic Architecture of Cabarrus County, pp. 46, 120.

²⁹Freeze, "Master Mill Man," pp. 52-57.

³⁰Freeze, "Master Mill Man," pp. 100-101.

³¹Freeze, "Master Mill Man," p. 91.

³²Kaplan, Historic Architecture of Cabarrus County, p. 27.

³³Freeze, "Master Mill Man," p. 96.

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³⁴Holland Thompson, "Life In a Southern Mill Town," Political Science Quarterly, 15 (March, 1900), p. 2.

³⁵Freeze, "Master Mill Man," p. 97.

³⁶Freeze, "Master Mill Man," p. 97.

³⁷Freeze, "Master Mill Man," p. 98.

³⁸Freeze, "Master Mill Man," p. 107.

³⁹Freeze, "Master Mill Man," pp. 107-108.

⁴⁰Freeze, "Master Mill Man," pp. 109-110.

⁴¹Freeze, "Master Mill Man," p. 111.

⁴²Freeze, "Master Mill Man," p. 112.

⁴³Freeze, "Master Mill Man," p. 111.

⁴⁴Freeze, "Master Mill Man," pp. 111-112.

⁴⁵Freeze, "Master Mill Man," p. 114.

⁴⁶Freeze, "Master Mill Man," p. 113.

⁴⁷Kaplan, Historic Architecture of Cabarrus County, p. 173.

⁴⁸Freeze, "Master Mill Man," p. 114.

⁴⁹Freeze, "Master Mill Man," p. 114.

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