# Salem Cotton Manufacturing Company and Arista Cotton Mill (Fries Mill Complex)

## LOCATION

**200 Brookstown Avenue (S.E. of juct. of Cherry Street and Brookstown Avenue)**

### CITY, TOWN, STATE
- **Winston-Salem**, **North Carolina**

### ADDITIONAL LOCATION
- **Code**: 37
- **County**: Forsyth
- **Code**: 67

## CLASSIFICATION

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### STATUS
- _PUBLIC_ _OCCUPIED_
- _PRIVATE_ _UNOCCUPIED_

### PRESENT USE
- _PUBLIC_ _AGRICULTURE_
- _PRIVATE_ _MUSEUM_

### OWNER OF PROPERTY
- **Occupied by**: Lentz Transfer & Storage c/o Sam Sanders
- **Address**: 200 Brookstown Avenue

### LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION
- **Courthouse, Registry of Deeds, etc.**: Forsyth County Courthouse
- **Street & Number**: 1025 South Hawthorne Road
- **City, Town, State**: Winston-Salem, N.C. 27101

### REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS
- **Title**: Historic American Engineering Record
- **Date**: 1974
- ** Depository for Survey Records**: National Park Service
- **City, Town**: Washington, D.C.
DESCRIPTION

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DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Arista Cotton Mill in Winston-Salem consists of two buildings. One building is the original home of the Salem Cotton Manufacturing Company, a brick building built in 1836 by part of the Moravian congregation of Salem, and the other is the original Arista Mill, built in 1880 by F. and H. Fries Cotton Arista Mills.1

The Fries Mill complex (F. and H. Fries Cotton Arista Mills, and F. and H. Fries Custom and Merchant Mill) also includes a two-story roughly triangular brick building (a ca. 1900 transformer station). There were formerly in the complex a two-story, gable roofed warehouse (demolished), a wagon shed (demolished), a wood yard, a reservoir, an ice plant and a power station (demolished) and a gas works (demolished).

The remaining portion of the 1836 Salem Cotton Mill is a three-story, one to five common bond brick building with a monitor roof. The original section is six bays long. Probably in the late nineteenth century, a four-story facade was added to the building, as well as an extension of the west side. The facade addition has a corbeled cornice, bracketed eaves, and brick pilasters. The Sanborn Insurance Map of 1890 indicates that the later facade portion was used by the Wachovia Flouring Mills for wheat and corn storage and that the extension on the west side included a grain elevator and offices.2 The floors of the 1836 mill are wooden, the walls are brick, and the exposed wooden joists are upheld by squared, wooden posts which are chamfered, ending in lambs' tongues. On the first floor, a few joists have been cut out to form arches, apparently to accommodate flour milling machinery. On the second floor, the chamfered wooden posts are much smaller in width than those on the first floor. Windows of the 1836 building remain on the east side, although most are boarded over and some are painted.

The main block of the 1880 "F. and H. Fries Cotton Arista Mills" is a three-story building, fourteen bays long, of brick laid in one to five common bond; it has bracketed eaves with timber supports. At the front of the building is a two-story stair tower with a pyramidal roof and iron cresting, and west of the stair tower is an adjoining one-story building which originally housed the engine, according to the Sanborn Insurance Map of 1890. The front entrance door, located in the stair tower, is double with raised panels and is surmounted by an arched transom of three panes. The segmental-arched windows of the building are sixteen-over-sixteen. At the back and to the west of the main structure is a two-story brick building, originally connected to the main block by a small passageway. In later years, this passageway has been enlarged to accommodate heavy freight elevators. The floors of the Arista Mill are wooden, the walls are brick, and the exposed wooden joists are upheld by columnar wooden posts. On the top floors of both the main building and the back wing, the ceiling is slightly arched. According to the Sanborn Insurance Map of 1890, weaving took place on the first floor of Arista Mill's main building, carding took place on the second, and spinning took place on the third. Two-thirds of the smaller adjoining building was used for storage and pickers, and one-third was used as a "dusting room" on the first floor and a "mixing room" on the second.3

Around the turn of the century, the Arista Mill was enlarged; additions were made to the back of the former Wachovia Flouring Mills in 1912.4 It is apparent today that large, arched openings which probably served as entrances for horse-drawn wagons have been filled in with brick. Many window and door openings have also been long since ricked over.
Footnotes


3. Ibid.

The Fries Industrial complex is the oldest physical reminder of three forgotten elements in the history of Winston-Salem. Although the development and reputation of this city has been dominated by tobacco manufacturing, its industrial foundations were laid by the textile industry. The Moravian town of Salem is celebrated today for its craft traditions, but it played an equally significant role in the industrial revolution and the transition to industries of mass production. Finally, although the contributions of well known families such as Hanes, Gray, Babcock, and Reynolds have long been recognized, the achievements in manufacturing, banking, and transportation of the Fries family of Salem were also vital to the development and growth of this Piedmont city.

The roots of Salem's textile tradition go back to the establishment of the town in 1766. In that year Gottfried Praezel, a weaver, set up a hand loom in the first house built on Salem's main street and took two apprentices to assist him. Weaving continued as an important craft in the village throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. A 1782 roster of residents in the Single Brothers House listed six weavers and a similar roster made in 1794 in the Single Sisters House noted five weavers. Other sisters supported themselves by spinning.

The intention and perfection of the cotton gin in the 1790s increased the supply of lint cotton for spinning and weaving. Textile production in Salem, however, remained a cottage industry until 1815 when Van Nieman Zeveley, a cabinet maker by trade, constructed a dam across Peter's Creek (near the North Cherry Street extension) and installed a water-powered wool-carding machine for custom carding. This woolen "mill" was later used as housing for a foundry.  

The transition to mass production of textiles did not come until 1835 when Francis Levan Fries and other local businessmen organized the Salem Manufacturing Company. In some ways, Fries was not a likely candidate for pioneering work in manufacturing. He was a descendant of German Lutherans who had joined the Moravian church at Herrnhut, Saxony, in the eighteenth century and migrated to Salem, North Carolina in 1809. Fries was born in 1812, attended Salem Boys School, prepared for the Moravian ministry at Nazareth Hall in Pennsylvania and came back to Salem in the 1830s planning to teach and study law.

Instead, he shifted his attention to the industrial development of Salem. The stockholders of the Salem Manufacturing Company held their first meeting on July 9, 1836, and decided to build a factory on the western edge of Salem, south of New Shallowford Street (now Brookstown Avenue). Before the factory was constructed, however, Francis Fries was dispatched to New England for a year to study textile manufacturing processes and
techniques. He returned to supervise the construction of a mill building with "a foundation of rough stone laid in lime mortar and brick walls above." The building was a three-story brick structure with a monitor roof and a cupola on the north end. The mill was equipped with spinning frames and engine purchased from Baltimore. Sometime later thirty-six looms were installed for weaving cotton cloth. Houses were built for the mill families, for the single men and women, and for the agent and chief machinist.3

For about sixteen years the fortunes of Francis Fries and the Salem mill ran on separate courses. Fries, who had served as agent and general superintendent of the mill from 1837 to 1840, resigned to build a woolen mill on Brookstown Avenue one block east of the Salem Manufacturing Company. Perhaps as a result, the fortunes of the Salem mill took a decided turn for the worse in the 1840s and 1850s. Inexperienced management, competition from other mills, and an irregular supply of skilled labor made it difficult for the company to show a profit. Local banks became reluctant to lend additional funds for capital improvements. Undercapitalized from the start, the company could not dispose of large inventories easily in the glutted yarn market of the 1840s and was constantly short of cash resources. By 1849 the directors became convinced that "the establishment must be sold, and without much delay." In 1850 the property was advertised for sale but it was not until 1854 that the directors finally agreed to a sale of the property to former Governor John M. Morehead. The entire capital stock of the mill was liquidated. The cloth on hand was placed in a Salem store to be sold on commission. Francis Fries (who by this time was successfully operating a cotton and woolen complex across town) bought the mill supplies not included in the sale to Morehead.4

In contrast to the Salem Manufacturing Company's decline, Fries was flourishing. Francis Fries had organized a woolen mill company in 1839 and began manufacturing Salem janes (or jeans, wool filling on cotton warp) in 1840.5 Fries was joined by his brother, Henry, in 1846, and established the F. & H. Fries Manufacturing Company. A cotton factory was built in 1848 adjoining the woolen mill. Then, in 1856 the Fries brothers obtained control of the old Salem Manufacturing Company and fitted the mill up with flour milling machinery. A gas plant was installed in 1858 to provide lights for the mills and a new Corliss engine was set in place in 1860.6

During this period Fries attempted to stay well-informed about developments in industry in the North. Because travel was expensive, he worked out an arrangement with fellow manufacturer Edwin M. Holt of Alamance County "by which they took alternate trips to Northern cities and upon the return of either . . . a conference was held and report made of all improvements in machinery, of trade conditions and of all other matters of special interest to them in their work."7 Thus these men provided vital elements in the industrial development of North Carolina as well as their own villages. In the case of Salem, which had been established as a center for domestic industry, Fries' contribution was to transform the tradition from eighteenth century craft industries to nineteenth century mass production.
By the time of the Civil War, Francis Fries had established an industrial base in Salem upon which his sons, John W., Francis H., and Henry E. could build. (Fries' brother, Henry, never married and had no heirs.) The war, however, proved costly to the family enterprise. The woolen mill had supplied two Salem military units with Salem jeans. During Stoneman's raid through North Carolina, 1700 bales of Fries cotton, stored in High Point, were burned. In addition, the company's supply of wool, stored in a Texas warehouse, was stolen. This loss, along with the value of forty emancipated slaves, represented a million dollars in property. Added to this was the death of Francis Fries in 1863 at the age of 51.  

Following the war the family slowly rebuilt its industrial empire. The sons of Francis Fries entered the partnership, devoting their careers to the essential elements of growth and development in the Piedmont—industry, finance, and transportation. It was not until 1880, however, that the Fries company could undertake a new manufacturing project. In that year Francis H. Fries supervised the construction of a spinning and weaving mill known as Arista.

The Arista Cotton Mill was located just one block west of the original Fries woolen and cotton factory and next door to the Salem Manufacturing Company (refitted in 1856 as Wachovia Flour Mills). From the outset the mill was an important factor in the prosperity of the city (Winston and Salem were still separate entities until 1913). A publication of 1888 described the mill as "a decided achievement in modern manufacturing. This structure was erected on the most approved plans of the successful New England cotton mills at a cost for building and equipment of about $125,000."  

The mill was among the first in the South to use electric lights. It was first equipped with 3312 spindles but within five years the number of spindles doubled and 180 looms were added for the manufacture of chambray cloth for work clothing. This machinery was powered by a 200 horsepower Corliss engine built in Chester, Pennsylvania. "The massive motor," exuded the 1888 Chamber of Commerce publication, "weighs 26 tons but works as smoothly and steadily as a sewing machine. The fly wheel is 20 feet in diameter... the face of the rim is 28 inches in width and turns the machinery by aid of a belt 130 feet in length."  

The mill provided employment for about 150 workers, about 70 men and 80 women. It also anchored a small industrial complex that included the Wachovia Flour Mills (ca.1856, 1880); a cotton warehouse (ca. 1850); an ice plant (ca. 1905); Indera Cotton Mills (1914); and a transformer station (1899) which supplied electricity to the complex and to other manufacturing and transportation outlets in Winston-Salem. A 750,000 gallon reservoir, located just south of the complex, provided water for the boilers and the fire protection systems.

The Arista Mill was only the first of several textile and manufacturing enterprises undertaken by the sons of Francis Fries. Colonel Francis H. Fries (honored
for his services on the staff of Governor A.M. Scales) built the Indera Cotton Mill (1914) in Winston-Salem, the Mayo (1896) and Avalon (1899) Mills in Rockingham County, and the Washington Mills (1902) in Fries, Virginia. He also served as president of the Brown and Williamson Tobacco Company. Henry E. Fries organized the South Side Cotton Mills (1885) in Winston-Salem. John W. Fries, an inventor as well as a businessman, developed the design for the centrifugal dehumidifier for textile mills which led to the creation of the Normalair Company (later part of the Bahnson Company of Winston-Salem).

In addition to their role as industrial leaders, the Fries brothers made enormous contributions in the field of finance and transportation. John W. Fries served as president of the Fealty Building and Loan Association and the National Bank of Winston-Salem. Francis H. Fries supervised the construction of the Roanoke & Southern Railway (now part of the Norfolk & Western system) which connected Winston-Salem with Roanoke, Virginia. He also served as president of Wachovia Loan and Trust Company which later merged with Wachovia National Bank to form Wachovia Bank and Trust Company, now the largest bank in the South. Henry E. Fries supervised construction of the Winston-Salem Southbound Railway to Wadesboro and organized the Fries Manufacturing and Power Company which constructed the first hydroelectric facility in North Carolina at Idols on the Yadkin River in 1899. Various industries in Salem and the electric railway system in Winston ran by power from this station. A substation at the Arista Mill was built to distribute current.

The impressive range of activity by this family has led many local historians of Winston-Salem to challenge the idea that the city's development was tied solely to the fortunes of its tobacco interests. "The industrial tradition," concluded one historian, "indeed Winston-Salem's very existence as an industrial center of importance, is not so much the result of the efforts of the tobacco interests as it is the product of earlier work by Francis Levan Fries and his three sons." As the Fries economic empire grew in size and scope, the remnants of its nineteenth century origins declined in importance. The antebellum woolen and cotton factory ceased operation around 1900 and was later destroyed. The Arista Mill, which operated from 1880 through the mid-1920s, remained a relatively small operation never exceeding 7700 spindles and 450 looms at its peak. The Wachovia Flour Mill suspended operations around the turn of the century and was converted for use by the Arista Mill. It continues to serve as a warehouse today for the Lentz Transfer and Storage Company of Winston-Salem. The ice plant and the old cotton warehouse have been destroyed but the transformer station and Wachovia Mills, are still standing, in addition to the main cotton mill. The complex is a visible reminder of North Carolina's foremost industry and one of her foremost families.
Footnotes

1. Adelaide Fries, "One Hundred Years of Textiles in Salem," North Carolina Historical Review, January, 1950, 1-9 (hereinafter cited as "One Hundred Years of Textiles").


3. Fries, "One Hundred Years of Textiles," 11.

4. Ibid., 12-14.


7. Fries Papers, 147.

8. Ibid., 156.


14. Davis, "Forgotten Legacy."

15. Winston Tobacco Fair, November 2, 1898; The dam and power facility itself was a major development in North Carolina's industrial and engineering history. A detailed description can be found in Joseph A. Homes, Waterpowers in North Carolina, North Carolina Geological Survey, Bulletin 8, 1899, 349-350.

16. Davis, "Forgotten Legacy."
CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8  PAGE five

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA
ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY Less than 1 Acre
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VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME/TITLE Gwynne S. Taylor, consultant, description; Brent D. Glass, consultant, significance.
ORGANIZATION Division of Archives and History Survey and Planning Branch
STREET & NUMBER 109 East Jones Street
CITY OR TOWN Raleigh
STATE North Carolina
TELEPHONE 919/829-4763

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:
NATIONAL ___ STATE X LOCAL ___

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

TITLE
DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY
I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER
DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION
ATTEST:
DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER
Fries Family Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina.
Fries Family Papers. State Archives, Raleigh.
Arista Mill Complex
Forsyth County, North Carolina

UTM References
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B--17/567930/3993930
C--17/567840/3993980
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