UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY – NOMINATION FORM

(Type all entries – complete applicable sections)

1. NAME

COMMON:

Great Falls Mill

AND/OR HISTORIC:

Richmond Manufacturing Company

2. LOCATION

STREET AND NUMBER:

West Washington and Broad Avenue

CITY OR TOWN:

Rockingham (Congressional District Eight, the Hon. Earl B. Ruth)

STATE:

North Carolina

3. CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY (Check One)

District Site Building

Site Structure

Object

OWNERSHIP

Public Private Both

Public Acquisition:

In Process Being Considered

STATUS

Occupied Unoccupied

Preservation work in progress

ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC

Yes:

Restricted Unrestricted

No

PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

☐ Agricultural ☐ Government ☐ Park

☐ Commercial ☐ Industrial ☐ Private Residence

☐ Educational ☐ Military ☐ Religious

☐ Entertainment ☐ Museum ☐ Other (Specify)

☐ Transportation ☐ Comments

☐ (not in use)

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

OWNER'S NAME:

Heirs of Claude Gore, c/o Mrs. E. R. Tull

STREET AND NUMBER:

1610 Plum-Nelly Road

CITY OR TOWN:

Rockingham

STATE:

North Carolina

5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC:

Richmond County Courthouse

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN:

Rockingham

STATE:

North Carolina

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE OF SURVEY:

DATE OF SURVEY:

☐ Federal ☐ State ☐ County ☐ Local

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN:

STATE:

CODE:

FOR NPS USE ONLY

ENTRY NUMBER

DATE
The Great Falls Mill is situated on one slope of the ravine created by Falling Creek, the stream that powered the mill. The industrial complex consists of a large gable-roof main building with attached towers of unequal size on either side, and a smaller adjacent building. All are built in the Romanesque Revival style. Constructed of brick laid in common bond, the buildings feature the arched windows and arcaded corbel cornices characteristic of the Italian Romanesque buildings from which the style is primarily derived.

The main building is quite large, rising four stories above a raised basement and measuring 76 2/3 feet by 146 feet. It is entered from the east gable end, which is four bays wide with each bay at the four levels marked by windows set in segmental-arched openings. Most of the windows have lost their sash and are now covered by wooden shutters. In the third story, which is on the same level as the present road, a window in the north bay has been converted into a door reached by a trestle-like footbridge across the ravine. In the gable is a large oculus. Each corner is marked by wide pilaster strips, and are all corners of the building. Above the arcing at the roofline is a narrow corbel cornice consisting of two rows of projecting bricks. The west end of the building is similar to the east, except that it has no door and because of the slope of the land, there is a row of windows at the raised basement level.

A large square central stair tower divides the north facade into two expanses of seven bays each, marked at all levels including the raised basement by windows in segmental-arched openings. (At the second level, a door in the third bay from the east end opens into a small wooden enclosed passage way that serves as a bridge to the secondary building.) Terminating the facade is an arcaded corbel cornice that runs the full length of the building.

The stair tower which dominates the composition is modeled on an Italian Romanesque campanile and is six stories high, one bay wide, and one bay deep. It consists of two stages: the first five stories provide a base for the sixth, which resembles a belfry. Each face of the lower portion is framed by continuous pilaster strips which support an arcaded corbel cornice at the top of the fifth story. The east and west faces of the tower are marked at each of the first five levels by tall narrow segmental-arched windows. The north (main) face features in each of the first four stories a larger segmental-arched opening containing a tripled-arched window. In the fifth story the design is varied by the institution of a pair of round-headed windows. The top story of the tower is separated from the lower ones by a heavy molded corbel cornice. Each face of this final stage of the tower features a pair of tall round-headed arched windows (now filled in) flanked by somewhat smaller blind arches. The tower terminates in an arcaded corbel cornice and is capped by a shallow pyramidal roof.

The south facade is similar to the north, except that here the stair tower takes the form of a four-story projection one bay wide and one bay deep with a gable roof running perpendicular to that of the main block. Its south face, repeating the pattern of the pilaster strips and arcaded corbel cornice, has no windows. The east and west faces, marked at each level by
single narrow windows in segmental-arched openings, repeat the pattern of the north and south facades of the main block.

The vast interior of the main building is empty. The space in each story is interrupted only by a central row of massive chamfered posts that runs the length of the building, with a post occurring between every bay to provide central support for the framing. At each level, doors lead into the north and south towers, each of which contains a stair.

The secondary building, across the ravine, consists of a two-story main block and a one-story wing, each with a gable roof. Between the two sections rises a small windowless tower. The ornament of the secondary buildings repeats in simplified fashion that of the main one.
Richmond Manufacturing Company (later the Great Falls Manufacturing Company) was the first cotton mill in Richmond County and is thought to have been the fifth of its kind to operate in North Carolina. The mill, powered by the waters of Falling Creek, was built by Walter F. Leak near Rockingham on a 100-acre tract formerly owned by William Deffie. Walter F. Leak, who served as president of Richmond Manufacturing Company until 1869 when it was reorganized as Great Falls Manufacturing Company, was a member of the House of Commons in 1831, a member of the state senate in 1832, and a trustee of the University of North Carolina from 1846 to 1868.

In 1833 the General Assembly of North Carolina ratified an act to incorporate the Richmond Manufacturing Company, authorizing Walter F. Leak, William Cole, and Francis T. Leak to open books in Rockingham and receive subscriptions for shares of the company. The shares sold for one hundred dollars each, and the firm was capitalized at $50,000.

The mill began operation about 1837, producing cotton yarn. This was sold to customers who came from all over the area and are said to have camped with their wagons near the mill to wait for a load of the yarn. Later the operation was expanded to include wool yarn.

The Richmond Manufacturing Company was burned on March 8, 1865, by bummers from Sherman's army then moving through North Carolina. After the war, on November 1, 1868, the company president, Walter Leak, sold 22½ acres including all the buildings and equipment of Richmond Manufacturing Company to the stockholders of the company for $1,000. The company was reorganized under a legislative act of April 20, 1869, and its name was changed to the Great Falls Manufacturing Company.

The mill was rebuilt in its present form, and operations were resumed about 1870, this time on a much larger scale, employing 100 looms and 3,000 spindles. John Leak served as president of Great Falls Manufacturing Company until his death in 1873 when he was succeeded by Robert T. Steele. During Steele's presidency the charter of the Great Falls Manufacturing Company was revised. The capital was raised to $500,000 and the board of directors was expanded to include up to seven members. Steele died in 1895 and was replaced as president by W. I. Everett, who continued in the position until his death in 1911. Everett was general superintendent of the Western North Carolina Railroad from 1866 to 1870 and state senator from 1885 through 1887 and in 1905. On November 27, 1911, the property was sold at public

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### Statement of Significance

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### Table: Period

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### Table: Specific Dates

- 1870

### Table: Areas of Significance

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auction for $37,000. The mill continued to operate until 1930 when it was closed as a result of the Depression. The building was last used by John W. Gore as a bonded cotton warehouse.

In the early nineteenth century, almost all North Carolinians, including those in Richmond County, were farmers. There was very little industry in the state; the people depended on the factories of the other states for nearly all manufactured goods. Among the few native efforts at manufacturing were water-powered cotton mills that served the local cotton planters and a local market. Richmond County, where the growing of cotton began well before it became the dominant crop in the South, was a logical site for one of the first of these mills. The Richmond Manufacturing Company is significant as an early example of the small local industries that would later, on a larger scale, enable North Carolina to move from an almost totally agrarian economy to a more balanced one. From just such meager beginnings the textile industry has grown to become a major contributor to the present economy of North Carolina.

In the larger context of the nineteenth century as a whole, it is interesting to note that the Great Falls Mill embodies the two opposing currents that provided one of the central conflicts of the century: the Industrial Revolution and the Romantic Movement. The mill is historically significant as an early example of the rather tardy coming of the Industrial Revolution to the state, while its architectural style came into popular use primarily as part of the revivalism of the Romantic Movement, which in reaction against the depersonalization of the Industrial Revolution sought inspiration in the styles of the pre-industrial medieval period.
As the designated State Liaison 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. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:

- National [ ]
- State [X]
- Local [ ]

Name: H. G. Jones
Title: Director, State Department of Archives and History
Date: 13 August 1971
Great Falls Mill
West Washington and Broad Avenue
Rochingham, North Carolina

City of Rockingham: Street Map
Berry Liles, Surveyor
Scale: 1"/600'
May, 1971 (revised)

Latitude     Longitude
degrees minutes seconds degrees minutes seconds
34° 56' 14"      79° 74' 10"
Great Falls Mill
West Washington and Broad Avenue
Rockingham, North Carolina

Richmond County Map, State Highway Commission
Scale: 3/8" : 1 mile
July 1, 1957

Latitude: 34° 56' 14"
Longitude: 79° 74' 10"