United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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 Falls of the Neuse Manufacturing Company

and/or common Manteo Manufacturing Company, Forest Manufacturing Company

2. Location

street & number West bank of Neuse River at SR 2000

city, town Falls

state North Carolina  code 37  county Wake  code 183

3. Classification

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Present Use

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4. Owner of Property

name River Mill, Inc.

street & number P.O. Box 1104

city, town Durham, 27702

state North Carolina

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc.  Wake County Courthouse

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title None

has this property been determined eligible? x yes no

date

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depository for survey records

city, town

state
In 1855 the mill at the Falls of the Neuse was described as a "massive stone building, two hundred and one feet long and fifty-five feet wide, two and a half stories high and...covered with a tin roof." At this time, too, was a dam 6 feet, 3 inches high, extending 400 feet across the river, backing up water for 10 miles. Supportive buildings also existed. Following a fire in 1871, reference was made to the "large three-story building." In 1959 the main stone building was described as being three stories high, 54 feet wide, and 195 feet long. Despite the discrepancies in length and width, it seems likely that the "massive stone building" built of native granite in 1854-1855 is the shell of the great granite building that stands near the bank of the Neuse River today. It is part of an impressive milling complex active for over a century, with remains from its many phases of operations.

The raison d'etre, of course, for the operation is a natural feature, the falls of the great Neuse River. Upstream about 1,000 feet from the mill is a natural falls, formed of a smooth rock outcropping that extends across the wide river, about 400 feet wide at this point. To either side the terrain slopes upward fairly abruptly beyond the bottomland.

Taking advantage of the natural rock formation is the stone dam. It may be that which was built before 1855. About 400 feet wide and roughly 6 feet tall, it is an impressive stone construction. Quarried stone blocks of varying sizes form the long dam, which is topped by a rough coping. While the straightforward construction—a simple vertical face on its downstream side—resembles the construction of the nineteenth century stone dams associated with grist mills on many of the tributaries of the Neuse, this one is notable for its exceptional span.

The mill complex itself is located on the north side of the river, several yards from the water. The complex is essentially as recorded in 1959 when Erwin Mills, its last operator, closed down. It consists of the following buildings.

1. Main Mill. 3-story stone, 54 feet by 195 feet.
2. Picker room. 1-story stone ("with dust pit in crawls space"), 53 feet by 53 feet.

Dominating the mill complex is the great stone building, described during its construction in 1854 as "the Paper Mills ... built of substantial and beautiful granite, of which there is a very extensive quarry upon the spot." It is the beauty and substantial character of this granite building that create the impact of the mill. About 200 feet long and 54 feet wide, the long, simple rectangular structure is three stories high, with the height of the first story varying greatly because of the character of the terrain, which slopes considerably downstream. The building is topped by a very shallow gable roof, which is punctuated by a series of vents at the ridge line. The long walls are of coursed, slightly irregular ashlar, pierced by long, rhythmic lines of tall windows at all three levels. The building is 23 bays long; the windows, 4 feet
wide and 9 feet high, contain rather large panes of glass in eight-over-sixteen sash. Windows are defined by sills and usually lintels of heavy, horizontal blocks of stone. The windows stop well short of the ends of the buildings, leaving a substantial corner of solid masonry. At the river side of the building, beneath the first-story windows, are filled-in small rectangular openings. A single larger door-sized opening gives access to the inner workings of the mill race. The mill race enters under the building at the upstream end and emerges through a beautiful stone arch at the downstream end of the building. Thence it is channeled back to the Neuse, a handsome quarried stone wall survives on the upper side of this tailrace.

Some alterations have been made to the main building. Midway along the river side of the building rises a simple exterior wooden stair tower. There is some evidence that the roofline and roof construction have been altered: the upper windows do not have stone lintels, but instead bricked heads, and the roof—resting except at the ends on exposed steel I-beams—sits disproportionately far down on the walls. There is a well-proportioned space between each story's windows, but this stops abruptly at the low-placed roof.

The floor of the first level of this large building is of concrete, but those of the second and third stories are of wood supported on wooden beams. Simple chamfered posts support each floor, and the large spaces are open. Fire and flood have required rebuilding, and retooling has replaced early equipment. An electric traction elevator was installed in 1946, and an interior stair exists as well. This building first housed the paper mill machinery (until 1897), and was later the main building of the Neuse River Cotton Mill.

The second stone structure is much smaller, measuring 53 feet square. Also of coursed ashlar, it was used as a stock room in the nineteenth century and converted to a picker room during the textile mill era.
The Falls of the Neuse Mill complex includes a massive three-story granite building and a one-story granite secondary building evidently built in 1854-1855 as the paper mill of the Manteo Manufacturing Company, organized by James F. Jordan. Secondary buildings survive from later phases of operation as paper and textile mills. Powered by water held in a 400-foot wide stone dam and conveyed by a millrace, the complex is strategically located at the natural falls of the Neuse River. The mill, under several owners, was variously known as the Forest Manufacturing Company, Falls of the Neuse Manufacturing Company, Neuse River Manufacturing Company, Neuse River Cotton Mill, and last was part of Erwin Mills. Its chief period of significance was its 1855-1896 operation as a paper mill. The mill was described in this era as the only significant producer of paper in eastern North Carolina and one of the largest in the state. Producing rag paper of high quality under the supervision of W. F. Askew, the mill supplied state government and most eastern North Carolina printers.

The buildings at Falls of the Neuse in Wake County stand at one of the oldest manufacturing sites in North Carolina. The location itself had attained a measure of historical significance long before its use as power source for various industrial enterprises. One of the first white visitors to this area of North Carolina, John Lawson, reported stopping "at the Falls of a large Creek, where lay mighty rocks, the Water making a strange noise, as if a great many Water-Mills were going at once. I take this to be the Falls of Neus-Creek, called by the Indians Wee-quo-Whom.." This was in February, 1701. It would be several years before the sound of "Water-Mills" was actually heard at the Falls. Local tradition holds that a powder-making factory operated at the Falls during the Revolutionary War.

The potential of the site attracted investment and construction; the earliest mill use is not known, but an operation was under way by 1835, as evident in the following advertisement which ran in the Raleigh Register on November 27, 1846, and again on January 15, 1847:
GREAT FALLS OF NEUSE RIVER. Important to Capitalists. The undersigned wishing to sell his property at this place, now offers for sale the Mill tract, containing one hundred and thirteen acres, on which is situated his Grist Mills, Saw Mills, Tan Yard, and Store House, etc. The Grist Mills are in a large house, sixty feet long and forty feet wide, and consists of three Corn Mills, and one pair of Burr Mill Stones, for grinding wheat, and with Smutt Mill Elevators, Bolting cloths, and all fixtures for making first rate flour... machinery... entirely new, having been put up last year... The Tan Yard containing upwards of Twenty Vats... fixtures and tools.

The water power at this place is immense, embracing from head to foot a fall of upwards of thirty feet, and sufficient to run any amounts of machinery that might be desired... situated in a Co..Longrowing region, and within less than four miles of either Huntsville or Forestville Depots, on the Raleigh and Gaston Rail Road, and 13 miles North of Raleigh on the road leading to Oxford. I have owned this property since 1835, since which time these mills have never been stopped by either high or low water... devote most of my time to other pursuits...

James D. Newsom. Forestville, Wake County.

The legislative records of North Carolina document the incorporation of the Neuse River Manufacturing Company in January, 1851, for the purpose of manufacturing cotton, wool, iron, grain and other articles. However, there is no further documentation for either of these industrial enterprises.

The first paper manufacturing of record at the Falls began in 1854. The Manteo Manufacturing Company, organized by James F. Jordan, had operated a paper-making concern on Crabtree Creek beginning in 1851. In 1854 Jordan sought the greater water power of the Falls of the Neuse and transferred his property to that location. In September, 1854, the Raleigh Register reported paying a visit to "the splendid Mills at present in progress of construction at the Falls of the Neuse in this County." This report described a sawmill, flour mill, and a paper mill, adding that the Paper Mills are built of substantial and beautiful granite, of which there is a very extensive quarry upon the spot. [The paper mills] are supplied with every convenience necessary to an establishment of the sort and the latest improvements have been consulted in their construction. When completed (which will be in a few weeks) they will be fitted up with the most perfect machinery now employed in paper-making.
The report concluded with an evaluation of the company and its ownership: "The owners are men of enterprise and improvement, . . . the enterprise . . . will certainly prove a public blessing. The benefits . . . are already visible in the air of business which prevails there."

Despite these optimistic projections, Jordan's company failed to prosper. Ownership of the property was transferred to Daniel G. Fowle as trustee for the Manteo Manufacturing Company. In December, 1855, Fowle announced the sale of the property which included the paper mill, described as a "massive stone building, two hundred and one feet long and fifty-five feet wide, two and a half stories high, and . . . covered with a tin roof." The mill was equipped with four steam engines "of great power," one Rotary Boiler, one Fourdinier machine "of excellent quality," all driven by Blake water wheels under a head of water 18 feet high. The power was created by a dam which extended about 400 feet across the river. This dam was 6 feet, 3 inches in height and backed up the river for about 10 miles. The mill race was 1,000 feet long, 14 feet wide, and about 5 feet deep. It was estimated that as much as 300 horsepower could be created at this site. The stone mill produced 3,400 pounds of paper each day. The water power also operated a grist mill (40 feet long and 32 feet wide, four stories, with three pairs of stones each driven by a Blake water wheel) and a sawmill. There was also a large stock house, an office, a blacksmith's shop, a carpenter's shop, and eleven houses for operatives at the site. The entire mill property covered 369 acres.

The property was purchased by William R. Poole in 1856 and the name of the company changed to the Forest Manufacturing Company. Poole continued to produce paper at this site, one of five paper making factories in operation in North Carolina as of 1860. The Forest Manufacturing Company employed nineteen men and twelve women, producing 52,000 pounds of rag paper annually. The mill apparently operated for some time during the Civil War but was dismantled when
General Sherman's army approached the Raleigh area. According to a history of Wake County (1920), the machinery was hidden and saved. Sherman's army somehow overlooked the mill at Falls although it did set fire to a small paper mill at Milburnie and a powder plant at Crabtree Creek.

Following the war the mill resumed operation as the Forest Manufacturing Company under the direction of William B. Allegre. Allegre continued to operate the sawmill and flour mill at the site. The paper mill then had a daily capacity of 3 1/2 tons and was powered by a Blake waterwheel developing only 40 horsepower out of the potential 300 horsepower. The labor force consisted of twenty men, ten women and two children.

Allegre's success was short-lived, however. On March 21, 1871, the Raleigh Sentinel reported,

The paper mill of the Forest Manufacturing Company near Forestville was totally destroyed by fire on Sunday night. We have not ascertained the amount of loss, but understand it to be covered by $15,000 insurance.

Two previous attempts were made to fire this property but were fortunately frustrated. On this occasion the flames had gained such headway before being discovered that nothing could be done to extinguish them.

Since the foregoing was written we learn that only about one half of the paper mill was burnt, and that the loss is some $20,000, with a small amount of insurance. The mill is owned by Mr. W. E. Allegre and W. F. Askew.

On March 24, the Sentinel followed up the story:

The proprietors of the Forestville Paper Mill (Messrs. W. B. Allegre and W. F. Askew) in the destruction of one half of their paper mill, at the Falls of the Neuse, by fire, on last Sunday night about one o'clock, are actual loosers (sic) to the amount of $10,500 on their stock and fixtures and $10,000 on their large three story building. They are insured for only $10,000, one-third in each of the following companies: Albemarle Insurance Co., of Charlottesville, Va.; National Fire Insurance Co., of Baltimore, Md.; and the Merchants and Mechanics Fire Insurance Co. of Baltimore, Md.
It is not certain precisely what was the effect of the fire upon the massive three-story stone building, but the description of "only half the paper mill" being "burnt," the nature of the construction, the similarity of the present building to that described, plus the reference in deed (below) to the mills suggest that the shell of the great three-story stone building survived the blaze. Allegre's investment, however, was not so lucky, for within less than two months he sold out his interest in the operation to William F. Askew. On May 4, 1871, Allegre sold his entire interest to Askew for $10,000 and a convenant by Askew to "pay all the outstanding liabilities of the Forest Manufacturing Company amounting to about $7,798.49. Allegre's interest in the company included 329 acres at the Falls of the Neuse "whereupon are the mills (Paper, Grist and Saw) of said Company," plus "10 mules, 1 horse, 5 wagons and harness, forty thousand pounds of Rags; a lot of paper estimated to be worth $2,000, the money ($10,000) due for the insurance of the property of said Company recently destroyed by fire," about $9,800 in debts due the company, and about $4,000 upon deposit to the credit of the company.

William F. Askew soon put the mill back in working order. He had been a wealthy slavetrader before the Civil War but lost his fortune as a result of the defeat of the Confederacy. He developed the Falls paper mill into a well-respected and profitable producer of paper goods. In 1872 Askew reincorporated the paper mill company as the Falls of the Neuse Manufacturing Company the property bought of Allegre, plus improvements for $45,834. While Askew retained control of the everyday operations, financial and corporate control of the company rested with Rufus Y. McAden, George W. Swepson, and George Rosenthal, all prominent entrepreneurs of Raleigh.

For many years Askew's paper mill ran at less than full capacity. The industrial census of 1880 noted that the mill was in operation only six months of the year. Nevertheless a government publication of 1883 listed the Falls-Neuse mill as the largest producer of paper in the state with a capacity of one ton every twelve hours of operation. By the late 1880s Askew had put his mill into continuous operation and had gained recognition as a producer of quality paper. Rag paper had been produced in North Carolina as early as 1777. As Quion Johnson states in Ante-bellum North Carolina, "Although the manufacture of paper from rags was a more expensive process than from straw fiber, ground wool, or chemical wood, it made a more durable product."

The paper produced at Falls of the Neuse was used for books, newsprint, government printing, and wrapping. Askew supplied nearly all the newspapers in eastern North Carolina as well as the printing office of the state government. The process utilized at Askew's mill was described by Josephus Daniels, well-known Raleigh editor, who paid a visit to the mill in 1887.
"It is interesting," he wrote, "to see the rag pickers begin to separate the good from the bad; the rag cutter and duster making the good still better; the tremendous rotating boiler in which the rags are steamed and started on the cleaning process; the washers which take up and continue the cleaning; the converting of rags into cotton; the carrying the converted rags—cleansed—into the perfect (Fourdiniere) machine and the turning out of the purest white paper, at the rate of 3000 pounds in 18 hours."

The mill was finally operating at full capacity with two twelve-hour shifts at work. Twenty men and women were employed, with men paid from $.50 to $2 a day and women from $.40 to $.50 a day.

According to Daniels the mill at the Falls "is the only place east of Charlotte where paper is made in the State, and no better paper is made anywhere, as the readers of the (State Chronicle) can testify." Daniels was equally lavish in his praise of William F. Askew. In his autobiography Daniels recalled that

"[Askew] had given me credit when I needed it and in assuming editorship of the State Chronicle I continued to buy paper made of rags from the same mill. A newspaper printed on rag paper is both beautiful and durable. [Askew] invited me to pay a visit to the mill and see the processes of converting rag to paper. It was a beautiful location and Colonel Askew took pride in the operation of his mill... He was a man of remarkable vitality and an interesting talker, and I enjoyed his stories."

After Askew died in November, 1887, supervision of the mill passed to his son, James Askew, and his son-in-law, J. Newton Holding. In 1890 the Falls of the Neuse Company announced the purchase of new pulp machines and the expectation of making "paper cheaper than any mills north of Mason's and Dixon's line." The corporation operating the mills was reorganized under the Raleigh Paper Company. For the next six years the company enjoyed moderate success until the fall of 1896 when a flood wrecked the plant. Two floors collapsed and the machinery was ruined. The Raleigh Paper Company went into receivership. The building was bought in 1899 by Charles Latta who organized the Neuse River Manufacturing Company. The building was remodeled to process cotton and manufacture white sheetings and bed ticking.

The demands of new machinery and new processes were too great for the water power developed at the Falls. Even in the days of simpler technology the water power was not always reliable. A report of 1899 issued by the North Carolina
Geological Survey stated that "the power used is said to be 300 horsepower, but it is evident that this power can only be obtained during eight or nine months of the year." Latta supplemented the water power with steam engines. He operated the mill with some success until he was killed in a subway accident in New York in 1912.

Later in 1912 Kenneth Gant purchased the mill and operated it as the Neuse River Cotton Mill. Gant was the son of John Q. Gant, a prominent textile manufacturer of Alamance County. The mill operated until 1936 when it was closed, a victim of the Great Depression. A New York businessman, Samuel Levine, reopened the mill in 1939 under the name of Diana cotton Mills. Within a year, however, he was sued by employees claiming he owed $2,000 in back wages. Again the mill was placed in receivership until 1948 when it was purchased by Erwin Mills, Inc. It was reopened as Plant #7 and equipped with modern machinery to produce synthetic yarns, principally gabardines and suitings.

In 1959 Erwin Mills suspended operations at Plant #7. One reason given for the shutdown was that the old granite structure would not yield for easy expansion of the plant. The Falls-Neuse property, which consisted of two original granite buildings as well as newer brick mill buildings and warehouses, was purchased by W. W. Holding and Company and was used as a cotton warehouse. In 1983 River Mill, Inc. purchased the buildings from W. W. Holding with the intention of converting the original granite buildings into residences. The new owners intend to observe the Secretary's guidelines for certified historic rehabilitation.

FOOTNOTES

1Hugh T. Lefler (ed.), Lawson's a Voyage to Carolina, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1967), 64. Lefler notes that Lawson is referring to Falls of the Neuse in Wake County.


3Private Laws of North Carolina, 1850-1851, 573.

4Charles E. Johnson to J. H. Bryan, January 21, 1858, J. H. Bryan Papers, East Carolina University Library (Johnson was involved in a lawsuit against Jordan and Company charging that the machinery and other property of the Manteo Manufacturing Company had been illegally transferred to Falls of the Neuse. His letters to Bryan document a complex series of ownership changes during the 1850s. There is no record of the outcome of Johnson's suit.)
5 Raleigh Register, September 27, 1854.

6 Raleigh Register, December 12, 1855; see State Chronicle (Raleigh), April 28, 1887 for description of the dam.


8 Eighth Census of the United States, 1860: Wake County, North Carolina, Industrial Schedule, 2, microfilm of National Archives manuscript copy, State Archives, Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina. It is of interest that of those seeking employment at the paper mill, one was Cornelius Edwards, later of Edwards & Broughton, the leading publishing house of Raleigh. Edwards was unsuccessful in his application at Falls-Neuse and was forced to move on to Milburnie. See G.W. Paschal, History of Printing in North Carolina, (Raleigh: Edwards and Broughton, 1946), 147.


12 Wake County Deed Book 32, 250.

13 Wake County Deed Book 33, 387-388.

14 For evidence of McAden's and Swepson's involvement in the paper mill, see also Wake County Deed Book 70, 556 and biographical sketch of McAden in Samuel Ashe and others (eds.), Biographical History of North Carolina: From Colonial Times to the Present (Greensboro: Charles L. Van Noppen, 8 volumes, 1905-1917), volume 5, 198.

15 Tenth census of the United States, 1880: Wake County, North Carolina, Industrial Schedule, microfilm of National Archives manuscript copy, State Archives, Division of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina.
Daniels commented on the difference in pay between men and women as follows: "It is a crying shame. Here (Falls-Neuse) their work is different and lighter than that performed by men. When this is the case, they don't expect the same pay. It is against the inequality in wages when there is equality in labor that I protest."


State Chronicle (Raleigh) November 17, 1887; Asheville Democrat, June 19, 1890.

Crosswell, op. cit.  

*News & Observer* (Raleigh) March 28, 1897.


Crosswell, op. cit.


Crosswell, op. cit.


Polk, Leonidas, ed. A Handbook of North Carolina. Raleigh; North Carolina Board of Agriculture. 1883


Raleigh Register. September 27, 1854. December 12, 1855.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

Continuation sheet  Significance  Item number  8  Page 10


Young, Majorie, ed. Textile Leaders of the South. Anderson, South Carolina: James R. Young. 1963
9. Major Bibliographical References

10. Geographical Data
Acreage of nominated property 4 acres +

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Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UTM References

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Verbal boundary description and justification
See survey map - property being nominated is outlined in red

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

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11. Form Prepared By
Description prepared by Catherine W. Bishir, Survey Supervisor; Brent D. Glass
name/title Asst. Director for Preservation Programs. Significance by Brent D. Glass

organization Division of Archives and History
date

street & number 109 East Jones Street
telephone 733-4763

city or town Raleigh
state North Carolina

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification
The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national x state 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.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

state Historic Preservation Officer date July 26, 1983

For NPS use only
I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

date

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:
date

Chief of Registration